STICKS & STONES:

USING PHOTOVOICE TO EXAMINE LGBTQ YOUTHS’ EXPERIENCES WITH BULLYING

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Arts
in Sociology

By

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August 2013
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank my parents, John and Alice Anderson, and my grandmother, Joan Anderson, for always supporting my educational goals. Their continuous desire to push me forward has always helped me. They have never wanted anything but the best for me and they have truly worked to help make that happen.

To California State University Northridge, in particular the Sociology graduate program, thanks for helping to shape me into a better researcher and educator. The faculty is among the best and my fellow graduate students and I are forever bonded by our experience in the program. I am incredibly grateful to have been part of the CSUN Sociology Master’s program.

I would like to thank my thesis committee members, Dr. Karen Morgaine and Dr. Ana Prata. Their guidance has truly helped my research skills. Having the opportunities to experience Dr. Morgaine and Dr. Prata as both a student and a co-researching graduate student has been a phenomenal experience. Their willingness to help me throughout this process has been greatly appreciated.

I would lastly like to thank Dr. Moshoula Capous-Desyllas. As the chair of my thesis committee, she has remained incredibly supportive of my research from the very beginning. Indeed, it was her passion for arts-based and social justice research that led me to conduct this study. She has truly been an amazing mentor. I could not have asked for a better collaborator for this thesis project. Her unwavering support, including her willingness to read multiple drafts while 14,000 miles away on another continent, simply cannot be questioned.
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ABSTRACT

“STICKS AND STONES”:
USING PHOTOVOICE TO EXAMINE LGBTQ YOUTHS’ EXPERIENCES WITH BULLYING

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Master of Arts in Sociology

Bullying/harassment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) students is a major crisis. Using the photovoice methodology, seven junior high and high school students were recruited for a combination of visual sociology (photographs) and one-on-one / group dialogue sessions used to examine LGBTQ youth bullying in a Los Angeles, California suburb. Six themes emerged: (1) what the contemporary form of bullying is; (2) a lack of understanding on various levels - the disconnect between youth from other youth, youth from their parents, youth from their school faculty/administration, and youth from their community/city; (3) the notion of spaces - those that youth find negative and those they find safe; (4) the role of Gay-Straight Alliances; (5) common lack of motivations to seek help; and (6) proposed solutions to address the problem. This study aims to highlight the youths’ voices as part of the discourse surrounding their lived experiences of bullying, as well as incorporating their suggestions into the discussion of how the problem should be addressed.
1. INTRODUCTION

It is crucial that issues of discrimination and violence related to sexual orientation and expression of gender identity are addressed and systemically resolved. The protection of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) students from harassment or even violence is a growing problem in the U.S. (Nichols 1999). Research has shown around twenty-five percent of junior high and high school youth in the United States are bullied (Whitted & Dupper 2005). The percentage of bullied youth increases to thirty to sixty percent for LGBTQ youth (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz & Bartkiewicz 2010 and Rivers & Noret 2008). Attention must be paid to the site of this bullying – the schools. For sexual minority students, schools are not always places to learn and socially develop, but “places where they are abused, terrorized and oppressed for being different” (Short 2010:350). Bullying of LGBTQ children and youth is no longer just a problem or an issue; it has evolved into a dire crisis.

While issues about safety and attitudes regarding the rights of LGBTQ adults within the broader society has gained awareness over time, there is still a problem with social stigma, harassment, and even violence for LGBTQ youth, or for those who do not display “traditional” gender roles (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar & Azrael 2009 and Mishna, Newman, Daley & Solomon 2008). In a time when millions of kids are bullied for their actual or perceived sexual orientation, we must not only acknowledge and raise awareness regarding the severity of this crisis, but also work to resolve it (Swearer, Turner, Givens, & Pollack 2008).

Even though bullying and harassment occurs in elementary and junior high schools, we have come to see that bullying around sexual orientation and gender identity
is not only more frequent in high schools, but more virulent. High schools are often described as “toxic” social environments for LGBTQ students, and even considered to be the most homophobic of all institutions in the U.S. (Espelage, Aragon & Birkett 2008; Hackford-Peer 2010; Mishna, Newman, Daley & Solomon 2008 and Muñoz-Plaza, Quinn & Rounds 2002). Some refer to schools as social battlegrounds or “a fucked-up place to be queer” (Kilman 2007 and Savage & Miller 2011). Schools are institutions that have responsibilities and obligations to protect all students from harm and discrimination. It is noted that blanket “zero tolerance bullying” policies are rarely effective when dealing with bullying towards stigmatized individuals, such as queer youth.

My research aims fall in line with several other studies that strive to restore the voices of LGBTQ youth (Mishna, Newman, Daley & Solomon 2008 and Muñoz-Plaza, Quinn & Rounds 2002). Rather than doing research on or about LGBTQ youth, I desire to do research with and for LGBTQ youth. While the knowledge that is given to youth and adolescents is often created by adults, this project is a way for the youth themselves to create knowledge through photography. The purpose of this project is to use the photovoice method to highlight the visions and voices of LGBTQ youth, their experiences of bullying and their proposed solutions to this social problem.

_Literature Review_

Defining the Bullying Crisis

Bullying is described as “the outcome of intolerant actions and speech by peers, parents, teachers, and clergy” (Young 2011:36). However, it should be noted that what constitutes as bullying, is often relative. It can become difficult when deciding how to
operationally define the term. Common definitions and uses of the term bullying have been static: “the common perception of a bully is a single individual or a group of so-called mini-mafia bullies who are feared and loathed by most in the school” (Bishop & Casida 2011:134). However, this fails to take into account the more common forms and experiences of bullying that occur in schools regularly, especially towards sexual minority youth. While the more traditional conceptualization of bullying certainly takes place, bullying has evolved much like most social aspects of society.

Bullying is often “conceptualized and studied as a cognitive and behavioral ‘moment’ rather than the expected outcomes of cultural and ideological factors” (Short 2010:331). This is the main reason for the consistent limitations and drawbacks from most of the previous studies done on LGBTQ kids and teens. Looking at bullying in this way encourages an analysis that rests on the false notion of picking out bullies from the environment, rather than looking at the role of the environment itself. As Gerald Walton (2005) states, this approach is like “pulling noxious weeds from an otherwise aesthetically-pleasing garden” (p.91). Failure to look at structural or more macro-level aspects is a huge limitation to further the understanding of bullying and of creating more systemic social change.

This research study is informed by the definition of student/school bullying set forth by Whitted and Dupper (2005). According to their framework, bullying is defined as “the unprovoked physical and/or psychological abuse of an individual [or group of individuals] by one student or group of students over time to create an ongoing pattern of harassment and abuse” (p.168). It is suggested that there are different types of bullying: direct (verbal and physical) and indirect (name calling, turning others against someone,
spreading rumors, threats, etc.) [Ibid.]. Bullying in these forms is meant to establish dominance and to bolster higher status over a certain student or group of students (Smokowski & Kopasz 2005). This definition is more equipped to define contemporary forms of youth bullying related to sexual or gender identities. Queer youth bullying is often enacted by groups of students and not by single individuals. This ranges from groups of students who all equally engage in certain behavior, to those who have varying “roles” with bullying behaviors – i.e. those that actively harass or those that “help” out the bully – or those who encourage or watch the bullying (Poteat 2008 and Poteat & Rivers 2009).

Many acknowledge that this type of social crisis is difficult to resolve. But there is an understanding that the methods and tactics previously and currently applied to address bullying in schools are ineffective. The unique setting of schools has many different characteristics to consider, including issues regarding safe spaces. Bullied youth tend to avoid certain areas of schools where bullying seems to be most prevalent (Whitted & Dupper 2005). These locations range from P.E. locker rooms, crowded lunch rooms, quads, and bathrooms (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz & Bartkiewicz 2010). However, technological advances have extended the prevalence of bullying to youths’ online social media accounts and their cell phones (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz 2010). All forms of bullying need to be taken into account.

Sexual minority youth face higher amounts of family disapproval, neglect, and violence (Walls, Kane & Wisneksi 2010), disproportionately represent a higher number of youth in the foster system (Ibid.), face social isolation from peers and teachers who disagree with their sexual orientation and/or gender expression (Williams, Connolly,
Pepler & Craig 2005), are less likely to attend college (Pearson, Muller & Wilkinson 2007), have higher rates of frequent school transfers and/or drop-outs (Mishna, Newman, Daley, & Solomon 2008), suffer long-time psychological stress (Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz & Sanchez 2011), and are more likely to skip class/school for feeling unsafe (Kosciw, Greystak, Diaz & Bartkiewicz 2010). Sexual minority youth also have alarming rates of suicide, which is still one of the leading causes of death for LGBTQ kids and teens (Button, O'Connell & Gealt 2012 and Eisenberg & Resnick 2006). Often, it takes the suicides of youth for these stories of bullying to garner any significant attention. However, these suicides, while common enough, are often viewed as sporadic tragedies which further adds to the lack of a systemic analysis. These types of tragedies then become framed as individualized phenomenon. Relegating these suicides to a micro-level analysis takes the focus away from any institutional or environmental factors that are related to the motivations behind these suicides.

Youth that are questioning their sexuality seem to endure the most victimization and bullying, and in some cases even more so than their LGBTQ counterparts. Questioning youth have also been found to have a higher tendency of drug use, truancy, suicidal thoughts, depression, and less parental support (Birkett, Espleage, & Koenig 2009; Bishop & Casida 2011; Espelage, Aragon & Birkett 2008 and Button, O'Connell & Gealt 2012). Furthermore, transgender students also face more harassment than their lesbian, gay, or bisexual peers. They face additional struggles with gender-specific/segregated areas of campuses, such as locker rooms and bathrooms. Between 50-90% of transgender students are verbally and/or physically harassed in U.S. schools (Greystak, Kosciw & Diaz 2009 and Kosciw, Greystak, Diaz & Bartkiewicz 2010).
As a response, queer youth have developed many passive forms of resistance to their harassment – many of which I have engaged in myself as a teenager. Oliver and Candappa (2007) found that simply ignoring bullies was the most common strategy used by those being tormented. I do not find this surprising since most of my junior high and high school years were full of learning new techniques to pretend that I did not hear what was clearly being said about me. However, in Oliver and Candappa’s study, appropriately titled “Bullying and the Politics of Telling,” it is suggested that the idea around *if* and *how* to tell adults about bullying is far more complex than commonly believed. Kids and teens risk peer-group rejection, the possibilities of increased harassment as the result of ineffective intervention, parental rejection, and fear of not being believed. Some students also do not tell for fear of “outing” themselves or being falsely perceived as LGBTQ. Being falsely perceived as LGBTQ is typically displayed in two forms, both involving anger. The anger sometimes stems from disapproval of LGBTQ identities thus leading to a false perception as insulting. The anger also stems from simply wanting to be identified correctly.

Lack of Support from Adults and Institutions

School administrators and lawmakers are denying youth and students their rights to resources regarding sex and sexuality, while actively working to deny the biological fact that youth have sexualities (Hackford-Peer 2010 and Vicars 2006). It is commonplace for schools to tiptoe around the topic of sexuality, claiming it to be an issue to be discussed at home. However, this logic becomes doubly ineffective because it is often just as common for most parents to leave the teaching of this subject matter to the
schools. Neither the schools nor the parents seem to want to take responsibility for providing youth with factual and comprehensive information on sex and sexuality.

Interviews conducted with junior high and high school students showed that they feel both hindered and lied to in the form of “protection and safety.” Parents have the luxury and power of deciding when their kids are ready to learn and be informed about sex and sexuality (Button, O’Connell & Gealt 2012; Kilman, 2007; Ryan & Rivers 2003 and Zack, Mannheim & Alfano 2010). There are many examples of the institutional obstacles that queer youth have to overcome to get information, let alone representation. Health care professionals are severely under-informed or, in some cases, highly restricted in what resources and services they can provide (Scourfield, Roen & McDermott 2008).

Youth sexuality – and again, notably, same-sex youth sexuality – is still one of the nation’s “hot button” social issues. We see national resistance to comprehensive sex education, and more specifically, to a curriculum that would provide students with additional information regarding same-sex sexual behavior. This is another way that the adults of this country are playing politics with their children’s education – and even their lives (Button, O’Connell & Gealt 2012). The politics of this argument, that crosses both religious and political lines, is never about the youth under discussion, but about the attitudes, values, and opinions of the parents (Rienzo, Button, Sheu & Li 2006). The politics of this “battle” are never for or even about the kids; “public schools have become a battleground within the culture war conflicts in the U.S.” (Ibid:94). As Nichols (1999) asserts: “schools should consider that students are social beings [as well as] academic learners” (p.509). Hiding kids and teens from comprehensive information and resources
about sexuality hinders their natural development and their knowledge of how to practice safe sex. There is an institutional responsibility that is not being met.

Youth have the capacity to construct their own meanings about the world. To deny youth the opportunities and methods in which to create and utilize their own knowledge is a form of adultism (oppression of youth by favoring adults). It is undeniable that schools are institutions of socialization where students are heavily influenced as they create and shape their own morals, norms, and values. Youth spend the majority of their school days around the teachers at these schools. This implies not only the schools’ responsibilities, but also the teachers’ responsibilities towards fostering a more compassionate environment free of physical and verbal harassment and violence (Kosciw, Greytak & Diaz 2009).

There is a lack of diversity when “comprehensive” sexual education is administered in schools. Heterosexual sex is still the core focus of most sex-ed curricula, thus failing to provide detailed and useful information for students who do not identify as such (Nichols 1999). Organizations such as the National Education Association (NEA) have been calling attention to this issue for almost twenty years. As early as 1991, the NEA’s educator training handbook stressed the need for changes, including accurate portrayals of LGBTQ people throughout history and the elimination of sexual orientation name-calling, stereotyping, and exclusionary policies and practices (Szalacha 2003). Therefore, to deny LGBTQ youth the opportunity for representation and the dissemination of accurate information is problematic (Ellis & High 2004 and Pearson, Muller & Wilkinson 2007).
A recent study by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) (2011a) found that almost ninety percent of students were taught absolutely nothing about LGBTQ people, history, or events. Even when homosexuality may be mentioned in schools, it is often negatively portrayed (Van Wormer & McKinney 2003). It is not until college when students get their first exposure regarding LGBTQ history or relevant studies, and even this knowledge is often only in specified elective courses and non-typical fields of study (Fetner & Kush 2008). There is a “systematic exclusion [that] serves to suppress and silence positive role models, messages, and images of queer people and makes queer people invisible in curriculum” (Hackford-Peer 2010 and Rienzo, Button, Sheu & Li 2006). These types of institutional actions influence the culture and perpetuation of bullying in schools.

Time and time again, studies show that schools with LGBTQ inclusive curricula foster environments that students find more comfortable in which to speak to their teachers and counselors about personal issues. Additionally, support for LGBTQ students sharply increases among the general student body with an inclusive curriculum, in addition to increased feelings of safety while at school and improved feelings of school “belonging” (Chesir-Teran & Hughes 2009 and Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz & Bartkiewicz 2010). Students are more than twice as likely to be accepting of LGBTQ people when attending a school with an inclusive curriculum (GLSEN 2011a).

Difficulties also arise in “proving” that harassment and bullying is taking place, particularly if there is no “visible” proof. Without visible signs of harassment, bullying often goes unnoticed and/or unpunished (Smokowski & Kopasz 2005). This facilitates the lack of awareness of bullying by most school staff and faculty (Mishna, Newman,
Daley & Solomon 2008 and Whitted & Dupper 2005). Some researchers have found, through talking to LGBTQ youth, that there are times when teachers appear to only *pretend* to help or offer (ineffective) change only when the students’ parents get involved (Vicars 2006). This is related to the relatively higher number of students who are afraid or unwilling to report incidents of harassment or violence to teachers and administrators. Reported results can include situations becoming worse for the bullied student for telling, judgmental and discriminatory reactions from teachers and staff, and even no action or help taking place (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz & Bartkiewicz 2010 and Mishna, Newman, Daley & Solomon 2008).

The sheer number of complaints and lawsuits brought against school districts by sexual minority youth for issues regarding harassment, bullying, and violence that were not dealt with, acknowledged, or handled effectively has been significantly increasing over the past decade (Bishop & Casida 2011). At a school in Atlanta, Georgia, six students went unpunished after ambushing a student, tying a rope around his neck and chanting: “tie the faggot to the back of the truck.” The only action that was taken by the administration of the school was against the LGBTQ student who was attacked. He was instructed not to talk about his sexuality to other students (Blackburn & McCready 2009). We must also remind ourselves of Clint McCance – the man who once served on a school district board in Arkansas before being compelled to step down in 2010 after wishing AIDS and death upon the LGBTQ students he represented. These harmful attitudes and behaviors of school “role models” – those who are there to lead and represent students – not only normalize these anti-LGBTQ environments, but also often foster and even create them. Some students even admit: “NO ONE did anything about it. It just seems pointless
to try and get help now” (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz & Bartkiewicz 2010:33, emphasis in original). It is a sad reality regarding the statistics of how often teachers fail to do anything (Blackburn & McCready 2009; Savage & Miller 2011 and Swearer, Turner, Givens & Pollack 2008). When students are told simply to “ignore it” or even “to be less ‘flamboyant’” or “in-your-face” with their “alternative” sexualities, the necessary course of action becomes very clear (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz & Bartkiewicz 2010; Zack, Mannheim & Alfano 2011 and Savage & Miller, 2011). This is certainly an area to be focused on as this issue becomes more effectively addressed.

Reasons for Bullying

Some research studies have explored the reasons for why bullying occurs. Boys bullied for being gay – and often bullied merely for being perceived as gay – have much higher risks of psychological distress than boys bullied for different reasons (Bishop & Casida 2011). Poteat (2008) asserts that displaying homophobic behavior is a common and seemingly effective method for (young) males to assure others of their heterosexuality and masculinity. The revered form of masculinity in teens and adulthood in Western society pertains to heterosexuality. Gay males who exude characteristics and mannerisms rendered “feminine” (and the same goes for lesbians who exude those rendered “masculine”) typically face higher rates of negative attitudes and harassment. This implies that homophobia is rooted in sexism (Button, O’Connell & Gealt 2010; Kosciw, Greytak & Diaz 2009; Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz 2010; Pearson, Muller & Wilkinson 2007; Osborne & Wagner 2007; Poteat, Espelage, & Koenig 2009;
Gender roles and gender expression are often found to be directly related to youth bullying, especially for LGBTQ students. This relates to the gender gaps in homophobic attitudes. In nearly every study, women and girls are always less likely to hold negative views towards LGBTQ people than men and boys (Button, O’Connell & Gealt 2012). In one recent study by Poteat, Espelage & Koenig (2009), boys reported to be less willing to remain friends with a fellow student if they knew them to be gay or lesbian. GLSEN (2011a) has found that the vast majority of anti-LGBTQ remarks were in regards to gender expression. I agree with Horn, Kosciw & Russell (2009) when they assert that “it is unconscionable for bullying programs not to consider how gender expression and gender non-conforming behaviors are key in bullying and harassment” (p.865). Gender gaps in both the perception and experiences with this type of bullying are key.

While boys are more often bullied than girls, boys are statistically known to be the bullies as well (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar & Azrael 2009 and Oliver & Candappa 2007). Ricki Wilchins, the Executive Director of the Gender Public Advocacy Coalition, states, “boys who do not measure up to someone else’s idea of a ‘real man’ are under the constant scrutiny and criticism of their peers…the old ‘boys will be boys’ attitude toward bullying and harassment is just not going to cut it anymore” (Swearer, Turner, Givens & Pollack 2008:161-162). Merely because most of the queer youth bullying is happening to boys by boys does not mean we can simply dismiss it as expected child’s play.
The feminist study of masculinities is central to this project. The literature has depicted how most of the bullying of queer youth is to boys and by boys. Stemming from the notion of norms, there is a relation of masculinity to specific constructed ideals. Masculinity is a status group, a position that is literally unachievable, yet many men are compelled to continuously strive towards it. Connell (1987) describes “fantasy figures” that are created as models to follow. But the very usage of the term “fantasy” implies that these figures do not exist in reality. It is merely a standard to follow even if the creation is completely unrealistic. There are various levels of achieved masculinity, but what men are ultimately compelled to aspire to is the dominant form that has been described: hegemonic masculinity. Hegemony is described as an achievement reached, not necessarily by violence or force, but “ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion” (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005:832). One of the central characteristics of the ideal male is strict heterosexuality. This type of masculinity is not merely the ideal, but the form that holds significant social, political, and economic power and authority in society. Hegemonic masculinity is the gold standard with many specific characteristics, including but not limited to: removal or non-display of emotion; direct and unquestionable authority; control over the bodies over women, girls, and even “lesser” men; and the tacit understanding that men are the most rational and logical people. The hegemony aspect is all about “removing [the] dominant form of masculinity from censure” (Ibid.:834). Displaying these dominant masculine characteristics is accepted while all others are not. Thus, we assume that most of the bullying portrayed by boys is an act of gender-policing, which has more direct connections to gender expression than on other’s sexual identities.
The obvious lack of literature of bullying for LGBTQ girls is significant. While one could assume that girls missing from prior research may imply that they are not bullied to any significant extent, this is not the case. Bullying of LGBTQ girls could be less frequent considering that girls who cross or subvert “proper” gender lines do not endure as much scrutiny as boys - in terms of both gender expression and sexual orientation. My research study aims to address this gap in the research and highlight the experiences of bullying among young girls and women.

Youth voice/empowerment through Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA’s)

While the purposes of gay-straight alliances (GSAs) certainly vary based on specific student populations, most GSAs are created and serve students with the same broad purpose. Generally speaking, a GSA is “a student-club, open to youth of all sexual orientations with the purpose of supporting sexual minority students and their heterosexual allies and also reducing prejudice, discrimination, and harassment within the school” (Goodenow, Szalacha & Westheimer 2006:575). These organizations are a source of empowerment for LGBTQ youth. Queer youth have typically been excluded from larger LGBTQ culture that is predominantly centered on adult issues. The issues faced by queer youth often go unaddressed in lieu of larger LGBTQ issues that garner more attention, such as marriage or hospital visitation rights (Fetner & Kush 2008).

GSAs are one method utilized by LGBTQ youth to engage in activism towards positive changes for themselves and their fellow students in their schools, and even within their communities (Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam & Laub 2009). GSAs are significant for influencing teenagers’ to feel more comfortable speaking to their school
counselors and faculty about bullying and harassment (Szalacha 2003). Additionally, they aid in informing administrative staff with how to address the needs of queer students. Currently, there are over 4,000 GSAs nationwide and the number of organizations continues to grow (Bishop & Casida 2011). Some describe GSAs as a way in which kids and teens have taken the gay rights movement into their own hands (Young 2011).

GSAs provide a significant number of positive results for those students actively engaged in these clubs. Research on GSAs has shown that youth who attend schools with an active GSA have better academic performances, increased school attendance, better peer relations, improved student-faculty relations, improved general campus safety, a generally higher level of LGBTQ-friendly education, improved attitude, and a greater sense of truly “belonging” to their schools (Lee 2002; GLSEN 2007; Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz & Bartkiewicz 2010 and Walls et al. 2010).

However, there is a resistance to GSAs throughout the nation. A common fear is that GSAs will “recruit young and impressionable teenagers into adopting a lesbian, gay, or bisexual lifestyle” (Szalacha 2003:61). Also, GSAs are not always so easy to start and there has been an institutional backlash against their development. In Georgia and Utah, several school districts banned all extracurricular clubs merely to avoid having to permit a GSA in some of their high schools (Kilman 2007 and Fetner & Kush 2008). One method that discriminatory school districts utilize to prevent GSAs from gaining power and student support is requiring parental consent for students to either create or participate in the club. This severely hinders many students’ choices for various reasons, including fear of “outing” themselves, fear of homophobic responses from family
members, and other factors related to confidentiality of sexual orientation or gender identity (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz 2010).

GSAs function in different ways. Some students construct them as alternative hang-out spots. These provide a safe place for LGBTQ youth to hang out during off-periods or even after school. Other GSAs function as activist clubs with numerous school and community activities aimed at eliminating homo/bi/transphobia (Russell et al. 2009). In the latter form, the youth stress the importance of using education to fight their opposition. Through this form of activism, they truly begin to develop their sense of agency.

What makes GSAs a unique form of youth development is that they are both initiated and led by the youth themselves (Ibid.). Youth typically have very limited or restricted abilities to genuinely change the institutions that both shape and contextualize their lives. However, GSAs can act as an exception to this typicality (Russell et al. 2009). If a GSA can be described as “life saving” by its creators and participants, there is something truly remarkable occurring (Lee 2002). While some sexual minority students (or heterosexual allies) choose not to affiliate with their GSA clubs for fear of “outing” themselves, their presence within schools is crucial (Walls, et al. 2010).

Understanding the role of GSAs as they relate to bullying is a main goal of this study. I am interested in understanding the link between levels of bullying with the presence of GSAs. Specifically, I am interested in understanding the experiences of bullying for GSA members versus non-GSA members, as well as to understand how different GSAs function in regards to administrative oversight and support levels.
Locating Myself within the Research

The topic of LGBTQ youth bullying is quite personal. My experiences with bullying began as early as second grade. From a very young age, I was ridiculed by other kids for acting too “girly” and feminine. My gender expression was under constant scrutiny. The way the administration at my elementary school decided to handle these situations was to continuously bring my bullies into the office where I was made to confront them. The kids were forced to apologize to me. Unfortunately, this type of action only led to more bullying, since the other kids did not take too well to my telling on them. Most of the ridicule that continued on through elementary school was in regards to my exuded “feminine” qualities. It was not until junior high school where my sexual identity would become the focus of my bullies.

It was in seventh grade when I was first asked the one question that many sexually conflicted youth fear: are you gay? It is one thing to be asked that question as a 25-year old who is “out” with his sexuality, but it is quite another to be asked this question as a developing 13-year old. The question gets shot at you like a bullet, one that keeps coming. For every time I did not answer, more boys would ask. This was not a regular question; it is merely a masked insult. As my “gayness” became quite the hot topic with the other boys in my junior high and high school, groups of boys would corner me in the gym locker room, follow me to my locker, and harass me at the bus stop…trying to “out” me, calling me a “fag”, and telling me I should get a sex change. I dreaded P.E., avoided main places on campus, and hated when it came time to take the bus home. The bullying continued on throughout high school.
However, the bullying changed form in high school. It went from schoolyard-type bullying to more personal attacks. I had rumors spread about me that I had crushes on several other boys and had a fake MySpace account made that depicted me being ejaculated on with the word “fag.” I endured harassing chants from the “cool kids at the back of the bus” on the way home, and I still could not even walk by certain boys without being called some derogatory name. I was not one of those lucky teenagers who attended a school with an active GSA. There was no GSA at all for the first three years of my high school life. It was during my senior year that some semblance of a GSA formed. Only two students joined the first semester, failing to continue the following semester.

In 2011, I had the opportunity to go back to my old high school. I was invited by a former teacher of mine to be a guest speaker for the school’s GSA. Thinking that my experience with any LGBTQ high school organization would be the same as my senior year, I was completely blown away by the membership. Almost fifty students packed the tiny classroom to hear my talk. My old Spanish teacher, now the GSA faculty advisor, informed me that about fifty to sixty students attend the weekly meetings at times.

GSAs are so crucial for the simple fact that they highlight and honor of the voices of LGBTQ students. The existing literature on GSAs makes their importance within schools extremely clear. Unfortunately, I did not experience what membership in a queer-positive school organization was like until I attended California State University Northridge in 2009. My year as the president for the campus’ Gender & Women’s Studies Student Association in 2011 was the sole experience that helped me to solidify my goals to work with queer youth. I engaged in direct work with youth through various
activist projects and outreach events. My experiences really put into perspective the need for positive mentoring and safe spaces for LGBTQ youth.

Experiences with pervasive bullying extend to my close circle of friends and relationships as well. I had several friends of mine throughout high school that had similar instances of being bullied due to their sexual orientation or gender expression. In nearly every case, no action was taken. One of the most severe cases involves my ex-boyfriend, Sam (I have changed his name to protect his identity). After months of constant verbal torments and threats, he decided to call out the teacher’s lack of intervention. After another student got nearly the entire class to chant the word “faggot” with him, Sam stood up and asked his teacher if she could please do something to stop what was happening. Instead of punishing the student who started the chant, or any of the students who joined in, the only thing she did was ask Sam to sit back down and to stop disrupting the class. Sam then left the class, not wanting to stay in this unsafe setting. He got into trouble for leaving class and was sent to the principal’s office. He was punished for disrupting the class and for leaving the room without permission from the teacher. This was the last incident that Sam could deal with. There were several other incidents that led to ineffective changes or even no changes at all. The school administration later suggested he switch to another school, which he did a few days after.

My interest lies not only in exposing how little has changed since my high school years but also in highlighting the experiences and realities of many queer youth almost a decade later. My goal is not to tarnish the name of Santa Clarita by labeling it the hub of queer bullying but rather to help the youth of the city share and validate their experiences of this phenomenon. In implementing this study, I strive to highlight the realities of queer
youth living in this façade of a “100% family-friendly community” by means of participatory research. My deep connection to that city and the queer youth of any past or future generations there is unwavering. I want to see the city I grew up in transform into a more LGBTQ-positive environment. My hopes for this project are to create community-awareness (applicable to any and all communities where this crisis is present) about the injustices that occur and collaboratively create strategies for solutions. While we can certainly empower youth everywhere to share their proposed solutions to the problems they are experiencing, it is our responsibility as adults to listen and to put their suggestions into action.
2. METHODOLOGY

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this research is to understand how youth experience and negotiate instances of bullying related to their sexual identities and gender expression. Using the photovoice methodology, I aim to highlight the visual voices of LGBTQ youths’ experiences of bullying in high school. The photovoice method will allow these youth to share their own experiences of bullying and harassment in schools through visual images. This methodology has never been utilized before with this specific population for these research aims.

This project hopes to contribute to the limited knowledge about youth’s lived experiences of bullying and this innovative method will hopefully contribute to the expansion of sociological research methods by incorporating a visual component to the data collection and presentation of findings. When researchers try to conduct studies on or with LGBTQ youth, they are often hindered by many discriminatory and outdated bureaucratic limitations. In many cases, survey and interview questions are not allowed to directly inquire about sexual orientation (Espelage, Aragon & Birkett 2008). This population is in need of self-representation and empowerment. Using the photovoice method supports LGBTQ youths’ self-representation. The power of representation is placed in their own hands and comes from their own mouths, minds, and hearts. To deny LGBTQ youth this right is only aiding in the process of silencing them.

The purpose of my research is to highlight voices that are grounded in their own legitimate experiences– and to provide the space for youth to come together to share those experiences. I am striving to develop a deeper understanding of what these youth
perceive as the most pressing threats to their personal identities and their physical safety. The photovoice method has the potential for sharing photographs (created by marginalized individuals) with people of power in order to educate and create awareness and community change. The representation of the youth’s voices in this study holds the capacity to allow policymakers and legislators to discuss a reality in which to base proposed laws that do not currently exist and to defend those laws that already do exist. The goal of this project is to visually highlight what actions need to be taken by those in positions of power in order to keep schools safe for LGBTQ youth. Visual images can be a powerful tool for depicting what may be difficult to convey with words. Additionally, images can also be more memorable.

While it is crucial to bring further awareness to the struggles and hardships of LGBTQ teens, it is also important “to incorporate additional perspectives of LGBTQ youth’s lives and to view these youth as resilient and thriving rather than simply ‘at-risk’…[to] propose a paradigm that focuses on understanding the ways in which LGBTQ youth negotiate their development within various social contexts” (Horn, Kosciw & Russell 2009:863). As important as it is to address sexual minority youth safety, “school staff should not [just] focus on the negatives associated with sexual minority students or they might actually promote the self-destructive behaviors that are trying to be stopped” (Bishop & Casida 2011:137). In line with highlighting the strengths of LGBTQ youth, this project also aims to demonstrate the resilience of sexual minority youth by asking them to photograph the ways in which they manage to keep themselves safe in circumstances of bullying.
Theoretical Approaches

Conceptually, this study borrows from multiple theoretical frameworks found in other social justice research projects. The theoretical lenses that inform this research include ecological theories, feminist standpoint theory and Freire’s education for critical consciousness.

Ecological theories

An ecological framework asserts that no single factor can explain or predict why certain phenomenon occur or exist. The combination of individual, relational, communal, and societal factors are all asserted to contribute towards the existence of various situations. Ecological theories are beneficial in highlighting micro, meso, and macro level aspects of people’s lives. An ecological approach to research takes into account people in their environment, their communities and the various systems that inform their life experiences. In this study, youths’ school experiences are influenced and shaped by many social/societal factors, such as the attitudes of the local communities, peers, parents, teachers, the school setting, and the policies and programs that affect their lives.

This framework suggests an interplay of various environmental factors acting on and influencing the individual. An ecological lens allows the researcher to conceptualize the phenomenon of bullying as resulting from personal, structural, and socio-cultural elements. The focus is how these factors continuously affect each other and alter the larger environment in which they are embedded and originate from. Swearer & Espelage (2004) looked at various factors that contribute to general forms of youth bullying, such as family, peers, and communities. Thus, an ecological framework can be used as a way to acknowledge the environmental factors that influence the perpetuation of bullying and
the lack of structural change to address this social problem. An ecological lens also shifts the focus from the individual (in this case: LGBTQ youth), to the environment, thus focusing on the role of social factors (teachers, parents, administrators, communities) and structural issues (school policies and procedures to address bullying).

Feminist Standpoint Theories

This project is also informed by feminist standpoint theory, as developed by Dorothy Smith (1978). Feminist standpoint theories posit that structures of power and routine personal experiences directly affect one another and are connected to larger structural issues. Every individual starts with their own perspective but “looks up and out” to try to analyze the relations that are dictating power downwards and shaping/explaining the oppression they feel and experience. These theories attempt to look at how all social, political, and economic structures have influence on shaping individual experiences, perspectives and identities. Feminist standpoint theories look at how the individual, in turn, continuously reshapes and reformulates those very structures as well. Placing marginalized voices at the center is a principal component of re-shaping and re-formulating oppressive social structures.

While standpoint theory certainly has its roots entrenched in feminist perspectives, this theory encourages any marginalized group to use its epistemology to problematize their socially constructed “lesser” position. Smith (1987) asserts that historically, “the means women have had available to them to think, imagine, and make actionable their experience have been made for us and not by us…our experience has not been represented” (p.19, emphasis added). Women (and many others) needed a legitimate
starting point in which to use and create power/knowledge that they feel is both useful and of value to their own lives. No longer willing to stay silenced, people need modes of knowledge that recognize lived experience as valid truth and speak to them as individuals and collectives. People long for a framework that is based in reality and is substantiated by actual experiences and unique, personal interpretations. The same can be applied to queer youth. Smith (1987) explicitly states how the theory “is open to anyone…[it] creates a point of entry into discovering the social that does not subordinate the knowing subject to objectified forms of knowledge of society” (p.327). Smith is advocating that any person or group marginalized by power/knowledge can apply this theory in their own way to create, interpret, view, and understand power/knowledge as they want to. The agency granted in Smith’s framework not only creates a methodology for reclaiming knowledge, but also for creating it. Standpoint theories pave the way for direct forms of both individual and collective agency by valuing and privileging knowledge created by marginalized individuals themselves. Feminist standpoint theorists provide people with an active method to create language (power/knowledge) in ways that they can use to shape, understand, and interpret their life. If language is unavailable, it can be created. If an experience is not validated, it can be legitimized. If an identity is suppressed, it can be “excavated.” We create what we need to in order to understand, interpret, analyze and share our experiences. We must always have avenues in which to fully express any and all situations. The power of discourse is that it can always be expanded.

Freire’s education for critical consciousness
Applications of critical consciousness, as theorized by Paulo Freire (1974), are also used to frame this study. Freire’s education for critical consciousness approach is utilized by those trying to assert or regain their voices. Language and knowledge are both recognized as social constructions. Those individuals who are marginalized by the greater society, however, are not merely passive receptors of the dominant language and knowledge. They are active agents with the capacity to negate rather than submissively internalize these factors. Critical consciousness is referring to the “breaking of the silence” that gets the process of creation going. It allows for taking action against the former ways of thinking.

This framework proposes the development of themes that are then shared through visual representation that invoke emotional responses from an audience to then push for social change. After common themes are developed, the causes and origins of the problem are sought. The emphasis here is on the dialogue that occurs between the individuals in the group. One of the most powerful and eye-opening steps of this project will be when the youth all come together after taking their photographs and engage in a group discussion. Freire (1970) asserts that bringing people together in a group like this, with a shared vision, enables them to critically analyze their community and the everyday social and political factors that shape and influence their experiences and daily lives. The taken-for-granted forces around us are put center stage in this discussion. From this group dialogue, individual experiences and visual recordings are shared with one another. Ideas and opinions are freely shared as the participants engage with each other regarding an issue that is affecting them all. With the visual images that have been recorded, individuals can begin to trace a problem’s roots, causes, effects, and permeations. The
images act as political statements – recorded experiences that are easily seen and understood.

The idea of codifying language and experiences into visual images is seen as a way to “stimulate people ‘submerged’ in the culture of silence to ‘emerge’ as conscious makers of their own culture” (Freire 1970, p.viii). No longer are youth to remain silent or be seen as mere passive recipients of knowledge and uncritical of their experiences and positions. Rather than typical problem-solving strategies as employed by current laws and policymakers, Freire (Ibid.) suggests a much more systemic approach that involves empowering those individuals that were previously silenced or left to the periphery to alter their social relations by means of this critical consciousness.

Synthesizing the theoretical frameworks

All of these theoretical frameworks inform the photovoice methodology. These theories presented each provide a unique lens from which to address the issue of bullying.

An ecological framework focuses on environmental factors associated with bullying. An ecological approach to bullying considers multiple factors in the lives of LGBTQ youth, such as family, peers, school setting, classmates, administrators, and the community. The interplay of social, structural and environmental factors is critical for understanding how to address bullying.

Feminist standpoint theories highlight the importance of voice. Similar to Hergenrather, Rhodes & Bardhoshi’s (2009) photovoice study, photography is described as a special way to provide participants with a voice and language to share their concerns. Feminist standpoint theory will compliment an ecological framework in looking at a
marginalized population’s unique contextualized experiences and the various factors in their life that affect them and influence their experiences. The voices of queer youth are critical for understanding their needs within the context of an ecological lens.

Applying Freire’s critical consciousness approach to this study provides the opportunity for queer youth to come together in the group dialogue session, to share their photographs with one another in a process of consciousness-raising and to collectively find solutions to address bullying. Much like the tenets of feminist standpoint theory, there is an emphasis on including the voices of queer youth within the discussion of this issue that is affecting their lives.

From an ecological framework, those forced to endure injustice frame social problems to be understood at the various micro, meso, and macro factors that continuously affect and re-shape their lives. Feminist standpoint theories grant knowledge creation to those who have been oppressed, thus valuing voice. Freire’s approach provides the opportunity for individual voices to come together to collectively create solutions to issues affecting their lives. Each framework informs the use of the photovoice methodology with queer youth to address bullying.

*Photovoice Methodology*

Photovoice is a visual, participatory methodology that “uses the immediacy of the visual image to furnish evidence and to promote an effective, participatory means of sharing experience and knowledge” (Wang & Burris 1997, p.369). The process of photovoice entails giving cameras to individuals who use photography to identify, represent, and enhance their communities and create social change (Wang & Burris,
Ibid.). The main goals of photovoice are: “(1) to enable people to record and reflect their lived experience; (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through discussions of the photographs; and (3) to reach diverse individuals within the community, including but not limited to policymakers” (Ibid, p.370). Photovoice uses the immediacy of the visual image and accompanying stories to provide voice and promote an effective, participatory means of sharing individuals’ experiences and expertise. It is a way for community members, particularly individuals with a shared social and/or cultural identity, to become the recorders and analysts (Goodhart, Hsu, Baek, Coleman, Maresca & Miller 2006). Participants are encouraged through this methodology to actively participate in creating changes that affect their lives. For the readers (or “audience”), it is “the possibility of perceiving the world from the viewpoint of the people who lead lives that are different from those traditionally in control of the means for imaging the world” (Ruby 1991:53). Beyond simply listening to the voices of the marginalized, photovoice creates a tangible and potentially permanent marker for validating experiences. Rather than simply reading or hearing about issues that individuals want to be addressed, this form of visual sociology allows for us to see the problem – often in a way that is both easier and more meaningful, especially when it may be tedious or difficult to formulate certain issues into words (Nykiforuk, Vallianatos & Nieuwendyk 2011).

The photovoice methodology has never been implemented with LGBTQ youth to explore issues around bullying. This method places the data collection, figuratively and literally, in the hands of the participants, who are the experts in their own lives and whose lives are being affected by social injustice. Using the photovoice method, research is not done on youth but rather with youth. This project aims to allow the youth to speak for
themselves, rather than be spoken for. We can no longer assume what youth want, need, or should do. Youth should be able to make such decisions for themselves and have the opportunity to have a voice in those actions and decisions that directly affect them.

Echoing Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam, & Laub (2009), I believe that there is far too little research or literature available on “youth’s experiences of empowerment in the context of being engaged in and instrumental to social change brought about through social justice organizations and movements” (p.894). The photovoice method affords young adolescents “the opportunity to experience participation and self-determination (voice and choice), to learn new skills, and to take action about things that, from their own perspective, affect their health and safety concerns in the community” (Wilson, Dasho, Martin, Wallerstein, Wang & Minkler 2007:259, emphasis in original).

Implementing the Photovoice Methodology
Identifying the Site

For this project, I focused on LGBTQ junior high and high school youth as well as LGBTQ ally youth who identify as heterosexual from the suburb of Santa Clarita, California. Santa Clarita is a fairly large city, just thirty miles north of Los Angeles. With a population of about 300,000, the city has six different high schools; approximately 3500 students attend each school (City of Santa Clarita 2013).

While I have a personal connection and interest in Santa Clarita because it was my hometown, my purpose of selecting this city as my site is critical for another reason. Suburbs are areas that were created for families as alternatives to large cities. They quite literally came into existence for parents to raise children in a less frantic and chaotic
setting. While Santa Clarita has certainly grown in both size and population since its incorporation in 1987, the suburban city still heavily promotes itself as a family-friendly environment. The city is also a continuous winner of various magazine publication lists such as “Safest Cities in the U.S.”. However, this begs the question: the safest city for whom?

Sampling & Recruitment

I initially aimed to recruit youth between fourteen and eighteen years of age who were currently enrolled in at any of the high schools in the city of Santa Clarita, California. However, the final sample consisted of seven youth between the ages of thirteen and seventeen who are currently enrolled in one of the junior high or high schools within the city. While this specific sample only contains students from three of the city’s schools, stories and examples provided data related to a total of six schools within the city.

The methodology calls for a sample size between 7-15 individuals. This allows for more beneficial reflections, interpretations, and analysis of the relevant themes and issues of the project (Shimshock 2008). Additional benefits include those proposed by Hergenrather et al. (2009):

While small sample sizes [of photovoice studies] may prohibit making generalizations, the insights and information gathered informs researchers about the need for inquiry of the communities addressed…[and] allows entry into some communities that would have otherwise been restricted. The focus lies on the method’s unique ability to provide for equality in sharing ideas, encouraging collaborative learning, enhancing respect for community member knowledge, and facilitating social change. (p.695).
The small sample size here supports the method’s distinct characteristic of giving participants the power of how and when they will participate (Frith & Harcourt 2007).

Participants for this study were recruited through purposeful and snowball sampling. I held an informal informational meeting at one of the city’s largest public parks to provide information to interested youth enrolled in high school. Recruitment for the informational meeting was conducted by word-of-mouth, through the study’s informational flyer (Appendix C) and by Facebook posts (Appendix B).

The informational flyer was placed in relevant public locations such as community centers, youth centers, and popular high school hang-out spots. The city of Santa Clarita also has a city-wide GSA organization (unaffiliated with the school district) that meets monthly. I was invited to speak about the project regarding recruitment at two of their monthly meetings. Additionally, I attended the Santa Clarita PFLAG (Parents & Friends of Lesbians and Gays) monthly meetings for three months to also discuss the project and to recruit participants.

Facebook events (that did not require an RSVP) were created and posted to relevant Facebook pages, such as the high school’s Gay-Straight Alliance pages. Not all of the minors had private Facebook pages and/or their parents required access to their profile so the Facebook event page did not include any language specifically about LGBTQ issues but general language about bullying. The event pages were strictly informational and non-obligatory. The youth were then invited to the informational meeting to learn more about the study. Here, the project was explained in greater detail and all potential participants were informed about the purposes, procedures, and potential outcomes of the study (talking points for this meeting can be found in Appendix A). Due
to low turnout at this meeting (three students), a second meeting was held at a different location one week later.

At the conclusion of these meetings, I distributed a copy of the informational flyer for the study regarding its aims/goals, procedures, and my contact information. All consent forms were also distributed at this meeting (Appendices D-F). The youth then decided if they were interested in participating by contacting me via email or phone to confirm.

Photovoice Training Session

Once consent to participate in the study was obtained by the youth (and their parents, if needed), the youth were invited to attend a Photovoice Training Workshop Session. Here, the youth received an in-depth explanation of the project. The focus of this meeting was about the methodology and what their specific contributions to the project were to be. Cameras and locked camera cards were distributed. Rules and guidelines regarding the photos were also discussed.

Additionally, there was an extensive discussion about the researcher/participant collaborative component, participant-based analysis of the photographs, and a collective orientation toward community action (Appendix G). Group discussion topics revolved around the purposes of the project, its relevance for Santa Clarita, and participant expectations, goals, and aims.

Through dialogue, we chose how we were going to operationally define and conceptualize bullying and harassment (for example, what are they? what are the roles of school, peers, families, community, and the state?). The participants were then invited to
take pictures related to three general themes: (1) experiences of/with bullying, (2) how they deal with and/or negotiate those experiences, and (3) what they feel/think needs to be done in order to address these issues. This session was a chance for the group to brainstorm and share any other themes they felt were important to address prior to the picture-taking (data collection) process. Participants had the option to refine, substitute, eliminate, add, or redevelop any or all of the themes posed. The students responded more to the idea of merely documenting their school experience and organically allowing themes to arise on their own. In the end, this is the approach that was used.

Ethics of camera use were among the issues addressed. These ethical issues included attention to power, authority and responsibility that one has with a camera, importance of respecting the rights and privacy of others and not taking photographs of any sexually-explicit or illegal activity.

The participants used digital cameras that I gave them. The cameras were distributed with a locked camera card. This meant that the data on the card could only be accessed with a password that only I knew. This was done to protect both the identities of the youth as well as the privacy and content of the photos. The students had up to 30 days to take their photographs. Once the youth were done taking their photographs, they contacted me to set up an individual meeting to discuss their photographs in a one-on-one dialogue session. The pictures were uploaded to a password-protected folder on a password-protected computer.

Individual Dialogue/Interview Sessions
After the participants took their photographs, they were asked to participate in an individual dialogue session in which the participant described their photographs and the meanings behind their images. This individual, in-person interview/dialogue session was an opportunity for the youth to verbally share their experiences about bullying and harassment, and the ways in which they believe we need to address the problem. The interviews lasted approximately 20-60 minutes and were audio recorded with the permission of each participant. The recordings were then uploaded to a password-protected computer. Additional questions not directly related to the photographs were asked to gain further insight into this phenomenon. These sessions also served as the main method to obtain further data that the participants were unable to capture within the photographs.

The individual dialogue sessions were structured in the form of qualitative interviews, enhanced by the images taken by the participants. Some of the questions asked during these dialogue sessions were intended to bridge any gaps that I assumed would be difficult to photograph. For this reason, I allowed for the interviews to be a way for the youth to expand upon the issue far beyond merely the photographs themselves. These individual dialogue sessions were semi-structured interviews that were conducted with a loose set of questions (Appendix H). All of these questions were not asked verbatim during each interview. The loose structure of the dialogue sessions allowed for a more conversational approach to discussing the issue of bullying.

Group Dialogue Sessions
After all of the participants met individually with me to discuss their photographs, all participants were then invited to participate in a group dialogue session. The one group dialogue session provided the participants with an opportunity to share their photographs with one another. Their participation in the group dialogue session was completely voluntary (no data was collected) and the youth were encouraged to use selected pseudonyms. The group dialogue session was also held in a public park within the city.

During the group dialogue session, the youth had the opportunity to share some of their photographs with each another and collectively share suggestions about what needs to be done about bullying and harassment in schools based on one’s sexual orientation and gender expression. The group dialogue session lasted approximately two hours. The purpose of the group dialogue session was to provide a space and an opportunity for the youth to come together, if they desired to, in order to share experiences and suggestions for community action. The pictures were then used to identify themes and to begin a discussion towards solutions and problem solving for the future. Five of the seven youth participated in this group dialogue session. All photographs were shared digitally on my laptop.

A Portrait of the Participants

A total of seven youth participated in this project. Six of the students attend two high schools and one participant attends a junior high school. The sample consists of youth from various ethnic backgrounds, genders, and sexual identities. The names of the participants have been changed.
Emelia is a 14-year old straight female. She is a freshman who plays tennis for her school. She is of Italian descent and describes her family as “very traditional”. She is an active member of her school’s GSA and feels very connected to the LGBTQ community.

Margaret is also a 14-year old straight female. As Emelia’s best friend, she also plays freshman tennis for her school and is an active member of her school’s GSA. She is of German descent.

Molly is a 15-year old straight female. She is a member of the Santa Clarita Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program at her school. A moderate member of her GSA (attending a few meetings), her gay friends are what made her want to participate in this study.

Mandy is a 14-year old bisexual female. Also a moderate member of her school’s GSA, Mandy was the student that was most knowledgeable about her campus’ and administrations’ options for dealing with bullying and actions taken.

Adam is 16-year old gay male. He has been the president of his school’s GSA for two years. He is of Armenian and Middle-Eastern descent.

Kimberly is a 17-year old straight female. A member of her school’s GSA, she feels extremely connected to the LGBTQ community. Kimberly has lesbian mothers who both happen to be teachers at the school she attends. She wanted to provide this project with a unique standpoint of not only having parents that are teachers but parents that are gay. She is of Irish descent.

Jimmy is a 13-year old straight male. He was the only participant who was a junior high student. While Jimmy identifies as heterosexual, he chose to participate because of his unique experience of also having gay parents. He is also of Irish descent.
It is interesting to note that while not a mandatory requirement for participation and that recruitment outside of GSA circles was attempted, all of the students (aside from Jimmy) were members of their respective GSAs. This certainly relates to the importance of GSAs which is discussed later. Another interesting finding which is discussed in detail in a later section of this thesis is how the majority of the participants identified as heterosexual and what that might mean in a study that attempts to look specifically at the experience of bullying among LGBTQ students.

Analysis

Each participant took seven to thirty different photographs. The photographs were digitally uploaded to my laptop (in person) in their raw format prior to each respective individual dialogue session. The youth were asked to say anything they desired about any of the photographs with no time limit.

Rather than have the students pick between their submissions regarding which were their favorites, were the most impactful, or which they felt were the most worthy of being discussed, together we digitally scrolled through every single image and paused whenever the students felt the desire to speak. I felt this was the best way to get as much information about as many photographs as possible.

I allowed for the themes to arise organically during the dialogue sessions. First, I utilized a content analysis approach. A content analysis involves studying recorded human communications and/or experiences (Babbie 2010). The photographic content was analyzed particularly using a summative approach. Summative content analyzes involve “consensus-building” strategies of the subjects directly involved in a specific event or
phenomenon (Rapport 2010). This type of analysis allows for groups of people to come together to reveal and then share issues that are inherent in data that has either previously been ignored or understated. Since I value the collaborative nature of the photovoice method, I found that the summative content analysis’ ability to create that partnership to be quite beneficial. Using this approach, participants “can join in with the researcher in the analysis process and can help in the consideration of data representation” (Ibid., p.272). The photographs were coded based solely on the participant’s intended meanings and personal attached experiences. Because the students knew exactly what they were intending the data to look like, the analysis arises from the students sharing their interpretations of these texts/images (Hsieh & Shannon 2005).

I also took note of similarities between photographs/explanations and situations/experiences that I felt were striking examples and displays of the phenomenon in question. The themes that came up multiple times and those that the participants explicitly stated were the most important to them were among those highlighted. The following themes were devised as a combination of the photographs and their accompanying descriptions and meanings as relayed during the individual dialogue sessions.

These themes include: (1) what the contemporary form of bullying consists of; (2) the lack of understanding on various levels - including the disconnect between youth from other youth, youth from their parents, youth from the school faculty and administration, and youth from their community/city; (3) the notion of spaces - including those that youth find negative and those that youth feel safe in; (4) the role of Gay-
Straight Alliances; (5) the common lack of motivations to seek help from bullying and harassment; and (6) proposed solutions to address the problem.
3. FINDINGS

Contemporary Form of Bullying

All participants shared how the traditional form of bullying is rarely the issue. The view that words are often more damaging than physical harm was quite consistent. Margaret stated, “[With] physical harm, your wounds will heal…but inside, you could be [living] 30 years from now [and] people can still hate themselves from what they were called in high school.” Another participant shared how the verbal insults she has endured have affected her negatively to such an extent that she gets very uncomfortable when she is ever complimented. The more frequent barrage of insults has made her uneasy at accepting words that are actually kind. Margaret shared how Figure 1 represents the overwhelming anxiety that she feels daily from the threat of verbal teasing, especially when she is around people that she is unfamiliar with.

Figure 1: Anxiety
This focus on verbal bullying relates to the idea of internalized oppression. Kimberly shared experiences of how the bullied can sometimes become bullies themselves. “Bullying affects people in different ways and they all take it out differently.” She shared that while some people who are bullied might do harmful things to themselves, a friend of hers decides to take it out on others. The friend claims it is all for fun, but the bullying Kimberly experiences from this friend is anything but fun. Figure 2 is an image of Kimberly’s lesbian friend. She will tease Kimberly for things such as the way she dresses, her glasses, the way she talks, etc.

Figure 2: Bully < > Bully

Bullying was said to occur at all ages, it changes different forms as the youth grow older. Age is a very significant factor when analyzing bullying, especially with the forms in which it emerges. Emelia provided an example of how “in elementary school people, would come up to you and blatantly say things such as ‘hi, you’re fat’ to your face, but high school is where a large portion of the bullying is done behind people’s
backs.” This form functions to the benefit of the bullies since blame is nearly impossible to pinpoint and easy to deny involvement with.

This covert form of bullying can be doubly harmful. Margaret shared that “sometimes, people don’t even know they could be being called those things or whatever they’re being called.”. This sly form of bullying often results in certain youth randomly finding out they are being targeting either by other peers or even by their teachers. Figure 3 is an image of one student who had hateful things written about them in a textbook because he was both larger (weight) and was merely perceived to be gay by many students. Kimberly submitted this photo and claimed that she was unaware if the student referred to in the book was even knowledgeable of these insults. She did not know the student but went on to say that insults such as these in school textbooks were quite common.

Figure 3: Textbook Insults
Hurtful slurs that circulate the campus or school property vandalized with broad insults are examples of how bullying can occur without knowing exactly who is doing the bullying and who is being affected. This example is clearly displayed by the photograph below (Figure 4) taken from a textbook that leads to a school-wide environment that fosters impersonal, or generalized, bullying. Emelia elaborated, “It may not be directly to them…but they will know, sooner or later, that they are being called these names.” While the insult is not aimed at any specific individual, that is not its intention. It is there to remind LGBTQ students that there is at least one person on the campus that does not like them. It feeds into creating an environment framed as opposed to LGBTQ people. Figure 4 represents an example of this non-specific bullying.

![Figure 4: Non-Specific Teasing](image)

Oftentimes, textbook insults can be much more crude. Kimberly discusses an image she found (Figure 5) in one of her mother’s textbooks. While not gay herself, Kimberly has lesbian mothers, both of whom teach at her high school. Kimberly is
another example of how LGBTQ bullying extends to straight people who merely have LGBTQ people in their lives. While she personally gets bullied for having two moms, she also has to endure hearing and seeing harassment at her mothers’ expense.

Figure 5: Gay Teacher Insults

Kimberly states,

This is the one that gets me the most. Some kid decided that it would be hilarious to write that about my mom. I find no humor in it whatsoever. I about cried in my mom’s room because...why do you have to look at it that way? I mean, she’s just a human being. She’s trying to teach you and they just take advantage of that fact.

While crying during this portion of the interview, she went to share how there were even worse images in the textbooks but she forced herself to stop looking at them all. The web of those affected by bullying is far beyond those directly involved. It was interesting to see the students display the bullying of gay teachers since I had initially thought about at the start this study.

It should be noted that while the participants certainly stressed that verbal bullying is much more common than physical, the latter is still very much present. Adam shared while verbal bullying is occurring at much higher numbers, severe physical
bullying still occurs at his school several times a year. He shared a story with me in the beginning of his interview:

Last year, a girl transferred over from Haddonfield High School and she came over to our school because she was bullied. I mean, she already had a mental disability...minor, but you know...she was already considered a target. So the fact that she came out as a lesbian didn’t help. Well, boys from Haddonfield came over when she was done with fifth period. She waiting outside for, I think, a parent and they pinned her up against a brick ball. No one could see. And they hit her head against it, and she actually passed out. And apparently they said to her before they did it, “you can’t run away.” She went into homeschooling from there.

Again, he informed me that incidents of this nature occurred at least two or three times a year. This story was the only one involving severe physical bullying that was shared with me during the course of project.

_Lack of Understanding_

Youth from Youth

Not all youth find popular slang to be acceptable. What is considered an offensive or hurtful word / phrase to some may sometimes be considered a joke and harmless by others. Participants were adamant about the positive effects that came from standing up and calling people out when words being used could possibly be taken as an insult. It was interesting to see how terms such as “fag” or “dyke” were not taken the same way by all the participants. Adam explained how being called a “fag” and hearing “that’s so gay” didn’t feel like bullying to him, but to others it did.

A key finding regarding the misunderstandings between youth is that there is a definite gender gap regarding support for LGBTQ peers. Emelia shared how a male friend of hers had come out to his other male friends. Afterwards, he was completely shunned by them. Additionally, Mandy shared how a male friend of hers was harassed so
severely for being gay by his male friends that he actually left the school. She stated, “Everyone suggested that he went because he was just having the worst experience here.”

These stories are just two examples that the participants shared with me regarding LGBTQ acceptance by boys in comparison to girls. While the students never explicitly compared the treatment of LGBTQ boys versus girls, many of the stories shared during this project were quite clear that coming out to boys resulted in many more negative outcomes than coming out to girls, for both LGBTQ boys and girls. Kimberly shared a story regarding a young gay male freshman involved with a controversial incident that occurred on her campus last semester:

One of the boys on the football team came out. And he dropped out of sports cause he got bullied that much. His locker got peed in. I’m not joking…All of his stuff was peed on. I mean seriously, you just defiled all of his homework and all of his personal equipment just because he came out? So he quit sports shortly after that. The football coaches use derogatory language to him all the time…[they] weren’t very supportive at all.

An example such as this is a much more common occurrence in boys’ high school sports programs than in girls’. It is much more accepted for girls to transgress femininity by participating in sports than it is for gay boys to “infiltrate” the realm of masculinity by participating in sports. This is related to the notion of hegemonic masculinity framing the entire institution of sports. Girls wanting to “act masculine” or join typically masculine institutions is viewed as more acceptable than a boy who is “demoting” himself to a being gay, regardless of his sports affiliation. Again, boys’ gender policing is much more strict.

Mandy echoes this stating that girls on her campus typically react very nonchalantly when she discloses her bisexuality. Meanwhile, it is the boys who often question her and tell her that she is either a lesbian or “indecisive.” Regarding lesbian
students, many of the participants felt that much of the LGBTQ bullying occurring is
gereed much more towards gay men. “I feel like [lesbians] have a much easier time than
they think they have”, said Mandy. While it is not to say that LGBTQ girls are not bullied
(as is clear from the previous example of the girl getting attacked on the brick wall), the
stories involving the boys were merely more numerous.

Analyzing bullying on a general level, the participants seemed to feel that girls are
judged more harshly in all ways except for lesbianism. “Being gay is not as equal as
being lesbian”, admitted Margaret. Even this young 14-year old freshman was able to
weed out the double standard that two women together is often considered “hot,” even by
male peers in her age group, yet two men is not. This may relate to male gender roles –
specifically, the role of heterosexuality as the main component of hegemonic masculinity.
Again, a boy transgressing hegemonic masculine characteristics is considered more
deviant than a girl transgressing idealized feminine characteristics.

Relatedly, the participants spoke a lot about the role of student groups and
organizations. Molly elaborated on her involvement with Reserve Officer Training Corps
(ROTC). She included a photograph (Figure 6) of her pit bull to symbolize a common
assumption: “Pit bulls have a bad rep’ because they look mean - but they’re not.” She
related this to how people assume she is quite strong emotionally due to her involvement
in ROTC, however she added, “just because ROTC is military-based, it’s not protected
from bullying.” Because of the military component, people often assume that Molly, as
well as some of the other girls in ROTC, were lesbians. Molly endures teasing and
harassment because she participates in a program typically believed suited for boys. It is
interesting to hear the participants of this project be so quick to see lesbian bullying as
less frequent, however bullying straight-identifying girls for being gay based on their choice to participate in certain school programs should not be ignored.

Figure 6: Deception

Overall, there is a clear disconnect between students on a very broad level. Margaret admitted “even those perfect people who are like, perfect…they’re not perfect…they have family problems, they have self-issue problems.” This came as a surprise considering she had previously echoed her friend Emelia when she stated that “non-populars do hate cheerleaders cause they think they’re so much better than us”. Even those few participants who would initially say that they did not feel their school was divided by popular kids and non-popular kids, the term “populars” was used very frequently. There is a clear division between the students at a very broad level that seems to make those on the “lesser” end unhappy with the situation. However, I believe that the students possibly feel that this specific phenomenon is far too pervasive and far too embedded in high school culture to even begin to address. The issue of “the populars”
bullying the “non-populars” was consistent. Even when the students remained unaware of the origins of specific reasons as to why the bullying was occurring, they seemingly lack any desire to connect with or understand each other. Cliques seemed rather static and students rarely hang out with or talk to students outside of their immediate social circles.

Lastly, this broad-level conceptualization of bullying indicates that students do not really look at LGBTQ bullying as separate from general bullying. It is hard to decipher whether students feel that looking specifically at LGBTQ bullying is hindering the ability for bullying as a whole to be addressed more cohesively, systematically, or effectively, or whether they do not genuinely think about LGBTQ bullying as a separate phenomenon from bullying as a broad issue. Regardless, most of the participants were bullied for other aspects aside from their sexual identity including their height and weight. Figure 7 represents Emelia and Margaret’s fears of being teased about their weights, which they tell me happens quite often.
While LGBTQ bullying affects them and their friends, they (as well as all of the other participants) feel that all types of bullying should be addressed simultaneously.

Parents from the Youth

Genuine disconnect between parents and their kids is not completely unanimous, but certainly prevalent. Emelia explained how her mother believes that she is not mature enough to make “proper” decisions. Furthermore, her mother neglects to understand Emelia’s genuine experience and motivations for her behavior:

“She doesn’t try talking to me. One time, she was talking to me about my bangs because they cover my eyes sometimes. And she was like, ‘why don’t you cut your bangs off?’ And I finally stood up to her, cause I don’t like talking back to my mom...And I’m like ‘cause they make me feel protected and I feel safer and more closed in’. Cause I need that kind of shell around myself so I don’t have to be completely exposed. And she’s like ‘That’s complete bullshit! You don’t need that kind of thing! I don’t want you saying these things just ‘cause you like looking that way’. She doesn’t understand that I actually feel insecure.”

Much of this apprehension for parents failing to understand their children is related to the denial of their child growing up. Many of the participants admitted that they feel their parents are stuck thinking that they are still very young children. Parental denial is one of the biggest reasons why many LGBTQ kids and teens often tell their parents last in regards to “coming out,” let alone informing them if they are also bullied. Their friends often spend much more time with them so the trust level is much stronger. “Everyone seems to come out to their friends a lot earlier than their parents”, admits Adam.

Parents often suffer from a genuine lack of knowledge for how to deal with situations that are often unexpected. When Mandy came out to her parents and eventually told them she was being harassed at school, her mom admitted, “I just don’t know what to do”. She went on to say that because her parents never had a personal experience
dealing with this particular phenomenon, she did not necessarily expect her parents to be knowledgeable on how to handle the situation. So oftentimes, the youth do not blame their parents but choose not to tell them so as to “spare” them the stress of having to figure out what to do.

Furthermore, the teens felt that parents are generally not aware of how verbal bullying has become more frequent than physical bullying. Without the physical signs that come with the latter form of bullying, the parents are unaware of when and how to approach their kids regarding this issue. This too could be related to why the youth do not consistently blame their parents for not asking. However, this is two-fold; since the youth do not feel the parents understand them on a general level, they feel as if they cannot genuinely speak with their parents about issues such as sexuality or bullying relating to their sexuality. A combination of discomfort and disregard relate to inaction for both the youth and the parents.

When the issue is not of parental denial of the child growing older, the problem seems to become about parents’ actual lack of approaching or handling the issue of their children being bullied. This relates to parents not taking the responsibility of protecting their child as well as laziness on their behalf. Margaret explained how when she spoke to her dad about being bullied, his response was always “call the principal, he’ll fix it”. But she went on to say how she eventually asked her father, “do you know how many calls [the principal] hasn’t called you back on now?” She concluded by saying, “parents should help, but they won’t always help”. Mandy echoes this stating, “[parents] are equipped enough to think they know what they should do, but they really don’t”. Often too, parents believe that methods and pep-talks that worked for them as children will also fare well
with their own children. Adam was displeased with this logic exclaiming, “They’re like ‘well, back in my day…’ but I’m like ‘well, it’s not back in your day…this is 2013 and it’s not that way anymore’”. This very basic disconnect from each other’s experiences is not merely just the result of an age gap, but also one that displays poor communication from both parties.

The few participants that discussed their parents’ pro-active approaches to supporting them during hard times relates to those parents’ specific experiences. Molly expressed how her mother “ending up going in [to the office] and losing her mind” after she was informed about the bullying. She then stated that her mother’s quick and motivated actions were due to the fact that she too was bullied in her younger years. Their shared connection through similar experiences helped their relationship grow. The fact that only two participants shared examples of their parents effectively handling the bullying makes it seem as if only those parents were also bullied in their youth were not only aware of the signs to look out for but also more willing to be proactive in how they decided to handle the situation.

However, some examples display how these disconnects can often lead to the parents becoming the active bullies. One participant shared that she is often bullied by her mother: “she doesn’t like the person that I am”. Her mother teases her, and went on to state, “she doesn’t realize that it does bother me a lot”. One participant shared some information regarding her lesbian friend Ally. She was described as a suicidal girl whose family constantly puts her down for “shaming” them with her sexual identity. “When she’s already down, they don’t realize what they’re doing”. Ally has attempted suicide numerous times and still is very depressed. Rather than making an attempt to understand
their child, they choose to become further disconnected by distancing themselves from the issue. This led to lesser possibilities of acceptance or opportunities for stronger connections.

Faculty and Administration from the Youth

The participants discussed a general disconnect between the faculty and the general student population. Talking about hesitations students have about seeking help from counselors, Emelia shared, “they won’t really understand completely ‘cause we’re younger than them and we have a completely different life”. As with the lack of understanding between youth and their parents, the age gap is described as the problem. Despite all the training that counselors go through prior to attaining their positions, the students seem to be quite critical of merely opening up and trusting a stranger with a very personal story, even if they are counselors whom they are told are there to help them. While some of the participants shared that they would prefer to talk to a counselor about bullying rather than their parents, campus counselors do not seem to be pro-active enough about getting students into their offices.

Molly was the only participant who shared experience of direct harassment from the teachers themselves. She discussed how she has had teachers who teased her for the way she looks. Her weight, hair, and attire were among her characteristics that were targeted. The teacher’s consistent harassment towards Molly was indeed an ongoing pattern of behavior that involved an unequal display of power, especially considering that Molly had asked her teacher to quit teasing her multiple times. Molly stated that she genuinely felt that the teacher did not like her, leading her to feel it was a form of mental
or psychological abuse. While not directly related to sexual or gender identity, this was another example of how the students shared experiences of experiences of bullying in general, as they seem to advocate looking at bullying as one large phenomenon.

Teachers as bullies is one issue that is rarely ever discussed. Teachers are meant to guide youth and to provide support to their students. The idea that there are teachers who actively participate in bullying kids is yet another phenomenon beyond the scope of this project. However, it should be noted that this is a separate phenomenon from unsupportive faculty. But might participating in teasing students be different than merely not providing vocal support? Being silent can often have the same effect as perpetuating the problem. Not doing anything is sometimes just as bad.

The City From Its Youth

The youth in Santa Clarita schools are very disconnected from their community. Emelia blatantly admitted, “We’re not a big part of our own community; we’re not old enough…we only have our high school and our home and that’s pretty much all we know”. It is very clear that the individuals with political power in the city of Santa Clarita are very disconnected from the youth living in the community. When they do acknowledge or claim to understand the youth, there is a seeming denial of diversity. The people of the town often disregard that LGBTQ people live in the city, let alone kids and teens. Several of the participants exclaimed questions such as “Why do they keep pretending we [LGBTQ teens] don’t exist?” Furthermore, the city officials often leave campus issues up to the schools themselves. They exude a mentality that it is not their
responsibility to alleviate problems that are more directly in line with school administrators.

Even though some may argue that the city is pro-active at trying to reach the youth, the participants often felt that the city’s general mentality and ideology was confining. Kimberly explains how she refers to the city as a “bubble community”:

“[People in the city] tend to judge you if you aren’t that picturesque family”. It is a common view to believe that each generation is often more open-minded and accepting of differences than the generation before them. The youth in Santa Clarita fall in line with this in believing that because the city is composed mostly of parents, they feel that most of the people who live in the city are often close-minded. The city government is composed of many anti-LGBTQ people and so the assertion that LGBTQ people are not generally accepted in the community is not unexpected.

Furthermore, the city’s seeming conservative leanings makes it hard for LGBTQ or pro-LGBTQ youth to reach out for support or resources. “If you know the right people you can be very supported, but if you don’t know the right people you can feel very outcast…it’s hard to find those people who can support”, stated Kimberly. There are very few resources available within the city itself, and all those that are within the city limits are not actually city-sponsored. Even participants like Adam who are heavily involved with their school, do not feel truly connected to their communities or the city itself.

“We’re a city of older people”, says Adam.

In some ways, the youth not only seemed disconnected from their immediate city but also from the country as a whole. Regarding their knowledge of country affairs, many of the students were unaware of what laws did and did not exist that related to LGBTQ
people. I was troubled when Adam discussed his views on gaining national rights:

“Equality to me is country-wide civil unions like in Texas.” Texas happens to be one of the dozens of states where *any* form of same-sex union is legally barred from any sort of statewide recognition. This misinformation of LGBTQ politics not only relates to school curricula issues within the city, but macro-level disconnects extend to prominent happenings across the country.

*Spaces*

Negative Spaces

The idea of negative spaces manifested in two forms. One related to locations on campus where one-time or sporadic bullying has occurred and reminded the participants of negative experiences. A second related to where more widespread and continuous bullying occurs. Jimmy included a photo (Figure 8) of a spot where he was interviewed by student reporters for his school’s morning announcements. “They were interviewing people about what they were going to do for their moms on Mother’s Day…and as soon as I said I had two moms, they gave me weird looks and just walked away,” shared Jimmy.

*Figure 8: Cut-Short*
His interview was completely cut short at the mere mention of his gay parents. This is perhaps one of the more subtle or indirect examples of a bullying experience that was provided. A complete disregard accompanied with a disgusted “roll of the eyes” served to express a tacit disgust for Jimmy and his family. These forms of insults are less commonly thought of as acts of bullying, but are often very pervasive.

There was more discussion regarding spaces where more frequent and systematic bullying happens. Some students explicitly expressed that knowledge of these unsafe spots of campus is a necessary “survival technique”. All of the students were very aware of what places on campus they found to be “hotspots” for bullying but also shared how campus supervision levels were not increased in these areas. Additionally, while it is often easy to merely avoid these places, most of these “hotspots” are places on campus where all students must enter/cross at some point everyday.

P.E. locker rooms were among the general locations on campus where harassment was the heaviest. Figure 9 was shared by Emelia. Her male friend snapped the photo below for her in the boy’s locker room:

![Figure 9: Boys’ Locker Room](image-url)
She stated how the locker belonged to an “out” gay boy who has a reputation for being “slutty” and also gets picked on for being heavier. Again, no blame could be pinpointed to those responsible and the young man is left wondering who dislikes him enough to vandalize school property to share their hatred. Unfortunately, this is far from the only example of P.E. locker rooms being described as unsafe spaces. Kimberly also shared the story mentioned earlier about the “out” freshman football player incident in the boy’s locker room.

The outdoor stages and central quads were described as other prominent places to avoid on each campus. Kimberly took a photograph (Figure 10) of her quad because that is the location that she “avoids like the plague” because of the bullying she endures there. Sharing a story of what occurs there, Kimberly stated how kids who hang out there “like to joke around that [she] was bought and that [she] has a price tag on [her] head or that [she’s] a test tube baby or a catalog baby” because she has two mothers.
Again, while it is easy to merely avoid areas on campus so as not to be harassed, the quad on Kimberly’s campus is in front and center of her school. Every student must walk through it in order to get on or off campus and to get to any classes on the upper part of the campus. It would be impossible to stay completely clear of this area.

While some spaces are merely those that LGBTQ or LGBTQ ally students avoid, there are also those that they are actually barred from. Kimberly included a photograph (Figure 11) of a verse from a church song. She noted how she felt the song was discriminatory in its message and what it represented to her:

[The song] talks about families being together forever…about how to get into the [Mormon] temple and to be a family together. But my family is unable to go to the temple due to the fact that I have two moms. So I would always hate singing this song as a little kid. Anything that goes against the main core beliefs of what family is isn’t allowed in the temple. And so this song represents a bunch of the things I will no longer be able to do.

![Figure 11: Song Verse](image-url)
Some spaces are those that bullied youth want to be able to enjoy, but are denied access for various reasons. Her church is meant to be a community space yet a certain sector of the population who desires to share it does not feel safe. While many may not see this as bullying, they are at the very least sanctioned judgments that function to create both a sense of a shame and a tacit understanding of what is “allowed” or what are “acceptable” ways of being defined by others. These judgments result in the same harmful effects on the youth as other forms of direct harassment. As a result of these types of discriminatory and hateful actions, the shame experienced by the youth can be self-internalized.

Safe Spaces

Some spots on campus represent positive experiences. Certain classrooms were among the most discussed. One of the students took a photograph of the equality sign that acts as the logo of the Human Rights Campaign – the largest national LGBTQ-advocacy non-profit organization. While her photograph depicted the sticker on her binder, she informed me of how that well-known logo sticker was used by some faculty members to inform students that they were supportive of LGBTQ students. Emelia shared, “You can find that in any classroom of a teacher that you can talk to about anything, really, not just sexuality, and it’s pretty much representative of a place where you can be safe”. Adam shared how his school also participates in this unofficial program where teachers can self-identity with an equality sticker on their classroom doors or windows as allies in Figure 12 below. Over 30 teachers have participated at Adam’s school at the time of this project. This is a symbolic gesture that teachers can take part in. It also functions as a
conversation starter as students who are unaware of the sticker’s purpose can ask their teacher and learn more about it.

Figure 12: Visible Teacher Support

One school has a unique location called the Student Responsibility Center (Figure 13) where a specialized counselor can help students out in a unique environment. Mandy was one of the participants claiming that “a lot of people trust her…she brings [the problem] out in a different way”.

Figure 13: Unique Space
Her unconventional approach of helping students seems to be well received. The counselor there has helped many LGBTQ students before. Mandy went on say, “I know that friends of mine go to her instead of their mom and dad…to figure out what they should say to everyone [about their sexuality]”. This space was well-received by the students.

There was a very particular and consistent appreciation of the Internet. Margaret shared, “people say the Internet is a place to be bullied but there’s also people that understand you on the Internet…it’s like an open community”. Relatedly, Emelia stated how the internet made her feel: “I feel like I belong anywhere I am online cause there is always someone you can relate to…someone that can comfort you…and it’s really nice”. While the Internet is not considered a “space” in the conventional sense, it certainly is one in the symbolic sense. Youth often look forward to “going” because of the personal connections they have on it. Emelia’s photographic inclusion of her personal computer (Figure 14) represented a space where she claims she feels more safe and connected than her own school. The Internet is also a way to create and sustain anonymous relationships with people all across the world. The participants were adamant that they can find anyone for support no matter what the issue. Networking and building relationships with individuals and groups outside our immediate communities can provide support and understanding.
Most of the participants referred to a desire for a space not just where they felt safe or was described as positive, but one they could call their own. Some of these personal spaces on campus were often isolated locations. Emelia shared, “I had like, two friends and we would eat in the library is this closet every lunch”. Some of the places on campus that students referred to as special held a truly personal attachment. Mandy’s picture (Figure 15) of the spot where she and her friends hang out captures the spot where all of them first met at the beginning of the year. It is place where she goes when she is upset because she feels comfortable.
All of the students submitted photographs of their unique and specific hang-out spots. There is an undeniable attachment to these spots because it is the only area on campus they go to on breaks and where all of the students in that particular group feel the most comfortable. A commonality among these places was their secluded locations from the rest of the campus. They were often on the backsides of buildings or in the corners of campus. This could serve to function as a way the students physically and symbolically distanced themselves from potential problems.

Gay-Straight Alliances

Importance

While Gay-Straight Alliances could have been grouped with the “spaces” theme, I felt that the participants spoke distinctly enough about them that GSAs warranted a separate discussion. While the meetings do take place in “safe spaces”, GSAs function to provide a unique sense of group solidarity. Emelia shares how “everyone’s really friendly
and nobody judges you at all”. It is not just about the physical classroom where the GSA meetings take place, but all the symbolic and personal effects the clubs have their members.

Adam elaborated the most on the role of GSAs, particularly because he is the GSA President at his campus. His GSA is working on initiatives that aim to not only make their campus a safe zone, but claimed that his group was “gonna try and make the entire district a safe zone”. While some GSAs merely act as a way for LGBTQ students to mingle, his leadership skills have helped make the GSA at his campus to be activist-oriented, one with far-reaching goals and lots of activities. The proactive executive board of his GSA (Figure 16) is composed of two other individuals that he claims help him in more ways that he can explain.

![Figure 16: GSA Board](image)

A significant role of GSAs include their peer-level connection to the other students, particularly one that is different from that of a traditional counselor. Speaking of his own GSA, Adam shared how students “usually come and talk to the GSA officers
cause we’re like a little counseling ourselves”. The GSAs that some of the participants belonged to were far from simply being weekly get-togethers. They are actually outreach organizations with a focus on helping LGBTQ and pro-LGBTQ students in any way that they could.

Only one high school in the city, Silver Springs High School, did not have a GSA. I found this odd as several of the participants noted how many students referred to it as “the gayest school”. This unofficial title arose because the school apparently has the highest number of “out” kids, however the school was also referred to as one of the least safest schools in the district. Adam explained that the high occurrences of anti-gay bullying at Silver Springs could be related to the high number of LGBTQ students. Adam states, “it could be because they have the biggest [LGBTQ population] and they want to get rid of them”. This climate of anti-LGBTQ attitudes on campus may certainly be one of the reasons for its missing GSA, however only assumptions can be made considering none of the participants for this project actually attended Silver Springs.

Misinterpretations

Margaret shared how she frequently has to defend the right for heterosexual students to be involved with her GSA, including her own. She stated, “People heard the word ‘gay’ in it and they think – ‘gay’…You don’t have to be gay to be in it – Gay Straight Alliance….you can be straight too”. Emelia added to this as she shared what happened with a boy she is dating: “This person I’m kind of in a relationship with, I told him I was going to a GSA meeting and he was like ‘are you bisexual?’…I’m like ‘no, it says straight in the name.’”. These statements echo the assumption that GSAs are only for
LGBTQ people. On the contrary, most GSAs have quite a large membership of straight students. A good strong network of allies (both students and faculty) is often crucial, especially for those GSAs that are still fairly new.

What makes this so unique is that a large majority of the GSAs throughout the city have at least fifty percent straight-ally memberships. At Adam’s campus, straight allies make up 80% of the total members. I found this to be a key finding considering the majority of the sample for this project also consists of individuals who identity as heterosexual. While larger straight memberships may change the dynamics of GSAs, Kimberly eloquently defended, “I think having a big strong base of straight people might be more comforting in knowing that not everybody is anti-LGBT[Q]…so other people feel like coming out”. It was interesting to see straight members feeling the need to defend their intent or purpose for being part of a GSA. However, those straight students heavily involved in the GSAs were certainly aware of their own unique impact.

The participants elaborated on the idea of “membership secrecy”. The students recognized that being “outed” as LGBTQ by participating in a GSA is a legitimate concern. However, many of the participants were quick to state how the vast majority of students do not pay attention to specific memberships of student organizations. Margaret shared: “You would think people would be like ‘oh, you’re in GSA?’…but no one knows…so if that’s what you’re scared of, you should still go”. Joining the club, or even attending a meeting, is perhaps more secretive than one would think. Club memberships are not common knowledge and inclusion in all public club events (such as yearbook pictures) are often not mandatory. The participants seemed to desire calming the fears of those students apprehensive about joining the club.
However, the participants were not without examples of how they sometimes get teased for being a GSA member or for having LGBTQ friends. Molly admitted that people often assume she is a lesbian because many of her friends are gay. Additionally, this sentiment was echoed by Jimmy because of his involvement with anti-bullying programs on campus as well as for having gay parents. “Oh yeah, that happens all the time”, he claimed. Jimmy went on to share that he feels people accuse others of being gay because it is still widely considered an insult. Furthermore, it is only an insult because it is a denigrated identity. Fortunately, this specifically motivated type of bullying seems infrequent enough to not outweigh the pros of GSAs.

*Lack of Motives to Seek Help*

It quickly became apparent that there is a severe lack of student motivation to seek help from bullying. When asked about how students deal with being bullied at their schools, all of the participants gave answers such as “we don’t really deal with it” or “people just accept it”. Bullying has merely become part of the high school experience for many youth and students seem to find that either ignoring or accepting it is the most simplistic route to go. It has become a routinized behavior or perhaps even a strategy.

The rise of verbal harassment over physical bullying gives rise to the main reason as to why students often choose not to report these incidents: lack of evidence. Margaret explained, “There’s not much you can do…You can’t be like ‘this person called me this’…there’s no evidence, you don’t have a bruise on your face or you don’t have any physical marks”. The youth have lost faith in any punishment given to their bully/bullies.
because unless someone will be there backing them up, it is their word against the bully’s.

The participants shared that they felt the issue sometimes was not regarding a lack of administrative or faculty support, but rather a prominent lack of student motivation to seek help. “I think the counselors are very nice…they’re always trying to help” Emelia shared. But the general level of fear that comes from opening up and speaking about experiences with bullying makes these youth exposed and vulnerable.

The common view that reporting the bullying would not result in genuine changes is related to the participants’ experiences that the bullying sometimes increases once reported. “Most of the time, the kids that are teasing or bullying them figure it out and if they figure it out, they will in fact hurt them physically”, Molly admits. So not only does the bullying often continue, but it also escalates and at times even changes to a more dangerous form. The fear of increased harassment, whether it ends up occurring or not, seems to be unanimous. Molly continued to say that the reason most students will not report bullying to anybody is because “they are afraid of what’s going to happen…they don’t feel safe from other students”. The low amount of reported bullying relates to the idea that bullied youth fearful of the consequences that result from telling. Deciding not to report bullying involves a rationalization strategy of weights the pros and cons.

There were several participants who shared just how ineffective some of the school interventions can be. Adam explains, “If the bullying persists for a while, [administrators] have a little contract – which I think is ridiculous – saying ‘you’re not going to bully them anymore – sign here’…but then of course it happens again”. Examples such as this provide insight into why youth often choose not to report bullying.
If school administrators consider forms like these to be legitimate ways of handling situations that involve the safety of their students, this can be problematic. For example, it places students in a difficult situation where the bullied youth are brought face-to-face with their tormentors in attempt to resolve the issue.

Ineffective action (or better said: non-action) also takes place by staff outside of the front offices. Kimberly provided a recent example of campus supervisors bearing witness to acts of bullying and harassment and failing to intervene. “A campus supervisor walked by and didn’t do anything one time last month when all these people came up and started teasing me that I didn’t have a dad”. The campus supervisor stared in the direction, shook her head, and then kept walking onward. These staff members are hired to survey the campus and make sure students are safe. It is not merely that these individuals are not doing their job, but that they are also lying about it when confronted. Kimberly claimed that when she later asked the campus supervisor why she did not stop the other kids from teasing her, the woman replied, “I don’t know what you’re talking about”.

It is important to note that many students felt comfortable merely hanging out with their friends when they needed to be cheered up from insults or harassment. Mandy shared that “what you really need when you’re in a bad situation is friends to come together and help you out” (Figure 17). Many participants discussed the importance of a group of friends for students who are bullied as well as the fact that students often use their friends as the common way to negotiate their experiences with bullying.
The Youths’ Proposed Solutions

More Teens Experiences

The participants were adamant that further research in this area or any attempts made by school districts to address the issue of bullying should continue to capture the experiences and voices of the youth themselves. They felt that it is key to gain further insight into youth’s unique perspectives. Nearly every participant valued the project’s goal of letting their own voices be heard. Fourteen-year old Margaret stated how much she disliked when parents and school administrators assume what teenagers experience and how they handle those experiences: “No, you don’t know!” she protested. The participants stood firm on letting those who are affected by a specific phenomenon to be those at the “table of discussion”.

Some participants expressed the significance of this photovoice project in their life. Mandy declared, “I decided to use the project as the main push to just tell my
parents”. She was not “out” during the recruitment process but was by the time of her interview. I take great pride in helping to positively influence these youths’ lives.

The participants feel that it is crucial to include straight allies as part of research on and for LGBTQ youth. Straight people “who have friends that are LGBTQ…they know the struggles”, claimed Mandy. It seems fairly common for LGBTQ people to have heterosexual friends and family who are believed to be truly connected to the LGBTQ community. Additionally, excluding straight allies also functions as a form of ostracizing a supportive segment of people. This goes against nearly everything the LGBTQ community stands for.

Harsher Punishments

Molly, the participant with the most stories of direct personal experiences of bullying protested, “I think [bullies] should get suspended and if they don’t listen to [the office] the first time, then they’re expelled”. Her numerous experiences with bullying resulted in bullies getting off with either a slap on the wrist or no punishment at all.
Effective measures resulting in decreased bullying are rarely taken. The students seemed to feel that suspensions would be an effective method to decrease the levels of bullying.

Programs for Younger Kids & Parents

The desire for anti-bullying programs at younger ages than those currently offered was highly encouraged. Bullying “is still happening when you’re in first grade…and that’s sometimes where it starts”, stated Emelia. All but one participant shared how they had been bullied starting in their elementary school years. Molly was among those who explained, “I’ve basically been teased all life”. While administrators are quick to dismiss the idea stating that younger kids would not understand a discussion of this nature, they are simultaneously perpetuating the problem. Oftentimes adults justify the problem by claiming that bullying is just a part of child’s play and a natural aspect of growing up. However, there are ways for kids to horse around, joke, and have conflicts without having to hurt, insult, or even dehumanize others.

Adam suggested something along the lines of parental courses. These could be either private courses or ones provided by the schools themselves. Rather than leaving parents to their own devices when dealing with their kids being bullied or being bullies, many participants suggested we include them in the discussion about bullying and the importance of making better efforts to speak to their children.

Visible Faculty

Some of the participants included photographs of supportive teachers. These faculty members are able to connect with students in effective ways. Their frequent time
together makes their visibility and presence just as important as those of counselors or even parents. It could be considered more important than parents considering their interactions with the students are more direct and consistent. One of the shots (Figure 20) taken by Mandy was of her Biology teacher:

I first came out to him…he really helped me come out. He’s one of the biggest teachers you can go to here to be really supportive because he gives you real answers instead of those cheap ones like ‘yeah, it’ll be okay’. He tells you what you can do in the situation and he’ll talk to you for real.

Adam was so proud to share a photograph of his principal (Figure 21). He explained how many students were hesitant to meet him because word spread that he was a conservative Mormon.

Wanting to clear up the rumors and find out his stance on LGBTQ students, Adam arranged a meeting with the principal and learned that he actually was huge supporter and ally. “He met all the GSA officer’s parents and welcomed them to our school and said a lot of good things about us”, Adam stated. His support is described as exceptional as Adam went on to say how the principal “always gets involved with the
GSA and participates in all [their] fundraisers”. While it is great that the students eventually found out that the principal was a supporter and ally, it was still up to them to make the initiative to build that relationship with him.

Adam also shared a photograph (Figure 22) of one his counselors who made herself extremely visible. Having a lesbian daughter herself, she worked to make herself as accessible as possible to LGBTQ students.
Similarly, Kimberly included a photograph (Figure 23) of a teacher of hers because of his vocal support for LGBTQ students. “He’s the baseball coach and he in fact had an out player on the team one year and he was very supportive of him” shared Kimberly.
She felt that his outward support was truly touching considering he was a sports coach on campus and her previous example involving the football coaches makes her wary of those in sports.

Coming Out in Higher Numbers

Mandy stressed this point very passionately. When discussing how the general attitude of the city might play into an environment that fosters bullying, Mandy poignantly stated, “People don’t come to see lesbians or homosexuals [in Santa Clarita] so when they see them, they usually judge them…but when they go to West Hollywood, they know what to expect”. People are not “out” in Santa Clarita compared to cities such as West Hollywood. Thus, interactions with LGBTQ people are less common and are theorized to be a leading reason for discrimination and judgment. Mandy suggested that if more people would come out “as who they really are”, then people’s exposure to LGBTQ people would change their views and make LGBTQ people less afraid to express their true identities. Mandy took a photograph of West Hollywood (Figure 24). I felt this was interesting to note considering that it was the only image taken outside of the city of Santa Clarita. She felt that the safest place for her was actually outside the city limits.
Regarding West Hollywood, Mandy elaborated, “I feel it’s just a community that comes together…even though everyone’s different, they can make something beautiful and everyone’s more expressive over there no matter what they are”. People who hold strong anti-LGBTQ views are often those who have little to no communication or relationships with LGBTQ people.

No Need for Separation

Through the participants voices, many highlighted that while LGBTQ bullying is certainly a phenomenon all its own, analyzing it separately is perhaps detrimental to eradicating all types of bullying and bullying as a phenomenon. Adam stated, “don’t get me wrong LGBTQ bullying is an issue, but bullying is all a huge issue that we’re all trying to stop”. Every single participant felt that addressing all types of bullying was more beneficial than focusing on a certain type of bullying, such as LGBTQ bullying. Looking at the larger picture can support the movement towards social change.
For instance, one participant included a photo of a statement that was written on the board of classroom when they walked in (Figure 25).

![Image of a whiteboard with text written on it]

*Figure 25: Similarities*

The youth in this study made links between racism and heterosexism. The youth framed both forms of inequality as linked and that fighting against only one form of injustice perhaps limits the possibility of achieving justice on a more broad scale. They seemed to acknowledge the need to learn from history regarding social movements pushing for equality. We can certainly learn a lot by looking at previous sociopolitical struggles and how they were overcome. The photo also seems to imply that time progression will lead to inevitable gains and changes in perception (here: regarding LGBTQ individuals). Through identifying these intersections, a larger systemic goal can be formed.
4. DISCUSSION

Re-conceptualizing Bullying

There has been a significant shift from physical to verbal bullying. Bullying now has become much more subtle than is has been historically understood (Bishop & Casida 2011). It is rare for students in our current era to make a point to physically go up to other students and say hurtful words in a confident manner. Bullying usually occurs quickly in passing or where the bullied student(s) is/are outnumbered. This makes it much harder to specifically identify bullies or to directly intervene in a situation. The “escape” is simple and the blame is easily dismissible. We can clearly see the relevance of work by researchers such as Walton (2005) and Short (2010) who decry the traditional framing of bullying that became outdated decades ago. The stereotypical image of five guys on a bike teasing a kid on his way home from school is far from a realistic, contemporary example of bullying - especially for LGBTQ kids. The uniqueness of this quick (almost instantaneous) verbal bullying relates to the lack of physical evidence or proof. Findings from this study also indicate subversive and covert forms of bullying that are prevalent and serve to relay an anonymous message that is clearly homophobic and hateful. Most of the examples that the youth provided of what typically occurs did not allow for a genuine reaction from others - let alone intervention. These kids were often affected by a lack of witnesses because of the nature of the incidents. If no one actually sees or hears these occurrences, admits to seeing or hearing them, or steps forward to say that they saw or heard them, then it is merely the word of the bullied youth against another (or others). Additional problems arise if the bullies outnumber the bullied youth. We must work to
educate youth and faculty on how to decipher this form of bullying, as well as create effective (and safe) methods of intervention.

**Role of Intersectionality**

This research project has illuminated the need for expanding the focus of LGBTQ bullying to include the intersections of other forms of oppressions. I now feel that the narrow focus of a specific type of bullying might be suitable for mere research purposes but not necessarily to beneficial to address the issue in a practical sense. By the end of data collection, I felt as if I was doing these kids a disservice but limiting my “desired data” to that of LGBTQ relevance. However, I could not be happier that the youth took the project and made it their own by including images and stories that related to other forms of bullying as well. Moving forward, bullying should analyzed as an intersectional phenomenon that crosses lines of many identity characteristics. The students often shared experiences that involved overlapping characteristics. The locker room photo (Figure 9) depicted intersections of sexual identity and values/morals pertaining to sexual activity in general. The photo of the textbook insult (Figure 3) depicted intersections of student’s sexual identity and weight. The photo of teen girls’ monitoring of their weight (Figure 7) depicts intersections of gender identity with weight. Bullying oftentimes relates to more than one aspect of a youth’s identity. Indeed, it is layered.

The students shared experiences of bullying related to their weight, age, general appearance, who their friends were, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Due to the numerous identity characteristics that youth are bullied for, one would think that this phenomenon would at least be more discussed considering the sheer potential number of
students affected. These are not separate, unique forms of bullying. These are intersecting components of our identity that cannot be ignored or disconnected. Bullying is about dominance, and nothing more.

*Implementing a Multi-level Approach*

While LGBTQ-bullying is certainly an issue worthy of being addressed, I now feel the need to echo the students in their desire for bullying to be addressed on multiple levels. Micro level attempts should focus on highlighting more teen voices. At this level, bullying is not an abstract concept, but a lived experience that directly affects the lives of many youth. Here, we are able to get the truly personal information regarding the causes and effects of the phenomenon. At the mezzo/meso level, one can work to facilitate peer-to-peer relations, faculty-to-student relations, and parent-to-youth relations and explore ways to create discussions of understanding and communication. We can learn to build connections between the youth and the highly influential people in their lives. This level allows us to take the knowledge and experiences shared from individuals and use it to inform and potentially strengthen social circles, families, and campuses. Macro level attempts should focus on community and citywide efforts to address harassment so as to increase levels of solidarity, belonging, and safety on broad scale. Macro level attempts should also not just focus on alarming statistics of student bullying but also on those “less frequent” but more telling examples of bullying that sometimes result in student transfers, acts of violence, or even suicides.

All attempts at ending bullying should be generalized and far-reaching. Singling out specific types of students or narrowing a focus to a certain form of bullying
inadvertently creates a hierarchy. However unintentional it may be, failing to acknowledge that all forms of bullying are equally harmful prevents more systemic social change and warrants one form of bullying as more damaging than others. These research findings support a more ecological approach to addressing bullying. We can see why the youth are encouraging us to combat this issue at different levels, tackling the problem not simply among the individuals involved but the environment in which they exist. Bullying cannot simply be addressed by speaking to those involved. We must look at how the experiences of the bullied youth are interpreted by the people who are connected to their lives, how conceptions and performances of gender roles perpetuated at a broad level affect kids and teens, and how and why society as a whole seems to be tackling this issue at a glacial pace.

Teens

Getting more youths’ perspectives is without a doubt one of the best approaches to begin tackling this issue (Mishna, Newman, Daley & Solomon 2008 and Muñoz-Plaza, Quinn & Rounds 2002). What makes these experiences so pressing is that they are current. It grounds the data in a more contemporary manner than other studies that ask adults to think back and discuss their past (Murdock & Bolch 2005). This was another benefit of working with youth currently in high school as opposed to individuals asked to discuss their past. The participants were much less likely to exaggerate or distort their experiences (even if unintentional) due to time lapse. We must take steps like this continually to keep information up-to-date and also to measure the effectiveness of any
changes in experiences at the individual level with similar studies using a higher number of participants.

The Parents

Parents without past experiences with bullying need to make more of an effort to discuss the issue with their children. This topic can understandably be a difficult issue to talk about with their kids, however parents must have more compassion regarding unfamiliar issues. Additionally, the youth should also inform their parents about the reality of high school life. The youth cannot leave actions up to their parents. Knowledge and understanding is a two-way street. Youth and their parents must work together. Effective parental intervention could go a long way and if enough parents spoke to the school administration about the ineffective policies in place perhaps more beneficial reforms could be created. Support groups for parents, made up of other parents, can also be formed as a way to create awareness and mobilize parents to take collective action against the bullying of their children.

The issue of parents bullying their children is crucial and needs to be addressed as well. While different from student bullying, this type of harassment from close family members also leads to creating an environment that can be psychologically damaging to the individual being targeted. In this case, the parents are more than likely hoping for their child to change (or hide) their sexual identity by means of negative reinforcement. While this type of bullying differs from the definition of bullying used in this project as informed by Whitted & Dupper (2005), parental bullying of youth may stem from both fear and anger that result from failing to understand their child’s life. Whether that be
sexuality or any other identity component, there are many reasons that parents fail or choose to not understand their child’s experiences including their religion, morals/values, political orientation, social networks, and so on.

The Faculty & Administration

The faculty and administrations on junior high and high school campuses should be held to higher levels of responsibility. While steps toward campus safety should not solely rest of their shoulders, counselors should be making sure that students are familiar with who they are and what they are there for. They should understand the kids’ fears and apprehensions. Adolescent development should be incorporated into their training. Making themselves available is not enough. There should be more effort on the faculty’s side at reaching out to the students.

Regarding typical punishments, the counselors merely bringing in those students who bully and telling them “don’t do it again” is not enough. While I agree with Gerald Walton (2005) in warning that this approach can often be considered merely “pulling noxious weeds from an otherwise aesthetically-pleasing garden”, I also sympathize with the youth who wish to attend school without the presence of these harassing individuals (p. 91). More realistic considerations need to be taken regarding the bullied youth.

Supportive faculty members should make themselves more visible and outward with their support. Having resources available is pointless if the students are unaware of what, who, and where they are available. Teachers have a responsibility to their students. They are not merely there to share and test information to the youth but also to guide them and act as role models. Teachers have responsibilities towards fostering a more
compassionate environment free of physical and verbal harassment and violence (Kosciw, Greytak & Diaz 2009). I applaud the teachers photographed here for being beacons of hope for the students of this project. It is highly beneficial to have such supportive individuals working with kids in this specific environment.

Additionally, many of the student programs that are geared towards anti-bullying prevention are ineffective for various reasons. For one, many of the students are unaware of these programs. If the students are unaware of what their schools are actively trying to do to help, how are they supposed to be reached? Even those students who are aware of these various programs and events describe them as effective “only to an extent, but not entirely school-wide”, but perhaps merely with those students who were immediate and active participants. The faculty and administration’s limited efforts are going unnoticed and are minimally effective at best. In addition to improved programs, the curriculum could be greatly improved. The findings from this study also echoed the literature indicating students’ lack of knowledge regarding LGBTQ issues. A school curriculum that was LGBTQ-inclusive would benefit both LGBTQ students as well as their straight peers. LGBTQ-inclusive curricula help foster a more accepting school environment (GLSEN 2011a).

The faculty and administration certainly needs to be doing more regarding the safety of the students. While general safety should be addressed more effectively, the locations on campus where bullying knowingly occurs more frequently should not be ignored. The findings of this study align with research conducted by Whitted & Dupper (2005) and Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz & Bartkiewicz (2010). It has become quite common to uncover that LGBTQ youth will avoid certain places on campus. The participants from
these previous studies also labeled P.E. locker rooms and quads as “hotspots” for bullying. Since the youth shared how increased campus surveillance (supervisors and “yard duty’s”) was not increased in these areas, the schools should be taking note. If students unanimously find certain spots on campus to be sites of heavy bullying, administrators need to address this issue. Attention must be paid to maintaining the safety of the students in these areas where bullying is highest, especially when it comes to locations on campus that all students must occupy at some point during their school day. Avoidance is not only an ineffective solution, but an unrealistic one as well.

Relatedly, more schools should look into spaces such as the Student Responsibility Center found on one high school campus. A higher number of safe spaces could only be beneficial. Participants in this study seemed to respond well to adults that did not feel like a therapist or a psychiatrist. The main reason why I never spoke to a counselor when I was in high school was because I did not want to feel as if I was being “treated” or being psychoanalyzed, so I understand where the students are coming from.

The City

The city could expand its efforts to create spaces that are all-inclusive. Public and “family-friendly” spaces should not be framed with narrow definitions of what a family is. West Hollywood should not have to be the closest safe space for LGBTQ youth who live in Santa Clarita. West Hollywood is over 20 miles away. Citywide efforts to help these youth attain spaces where there can go and feel safe within the city-limits should be a priority.
While it is great that there are at least a few select private and non-profit LGBTQ organizations and groups with a presence in the city, the city itself should be doing more to connect with its youth, especially those at risk for bullying. Kids and teens are rarely considered important in city affairs, simply because they do not often make significant financial decisions that affect the city. But a city is not merely a business, it is a social community. If Santa Clarita is going to pride itself on being one of the most family-friendly cities in the country, it needs to make sure that the kids and teens who are in those families are able to go to school without being bullied. This is related to the identity characteristic of age. This is certainly a gap that needs to be bridged and can begin simply with dialogue. The adults of the city are simply waiting for the youth to reach an age of “relevance” to the city. This inevitably leads to the youth becoming marginalized based on their age. In this instance, age and sexual identity are intersecting in experiences of subordination by these youth.
5. CONCLUSION

Challenges

The majority of the challenges that I experienced in implementing this study were in regards to the young ages of the participants. Since some of the participants were as young as 13, extra accommodations had to be taken in order to maintain their safety, confidentiality, and comfort. Only two of the participants were old enough to drive, and of those two, only one had their own car. Most of the participants had to be driven to our various meetings and gatherings. Thus, I was often at the mercy of the parents’ schedules when it came to planning meeting and interview times. On a few occasions, the parents would be waiting nearby. While I understand the apparent necessity, this often made both the participants and myself feel a bit rushed.

This project was also conducted near the end of the school semester. The student’s own school schedules often made it difficult to plan meetings. Frequently, interviews had to be re-scheduled three or four times due to various scheduling conflicts. Even when the youth found time to meet with me, there were a few cases where the window of time was very brief. For example, my interview with Molly was barely twenty minutes long because she had after-school commitments during the weekdays and was out of town at another parent’s home on the weekends. In sum, minors are a quite difficult population to work with in terms of commitments and obligations that are often beyond their control.

Their real names were never written, recorded, or revealed before, during, or after the study. Pseudonyms were selected prior to the individual dialogue sessions and we then used them within each interview. It became difficult to keep reminding the
participant’s during the dialogue sessions to also refer to the names of their friends, family members, peers, and schools under pseudonyms as well. Any slips-ups on either end were omitted from the transcriptions.

Special considerations regarding the content of the photographs were of great concern. Appropriateness of what to photograph was discussed at the Photovoice Training Session. All of the participants were minors, so I had to stress that no sexually-explicit, illicit, or illegal activities could have been photographed so as to minimize risk for both the participants and the researchers.

To address the potential risk of revealing the participants’ sexual orientations to their parents, a slightly altered parental consent form was created so as not to disclose the project’s focus on sexual identities. Because some of the youth were not openly LGBTQ to their parents or guardians during the recruitment process, the parental consent form did not specifically state that the study was about the connection between bullying and an LGBTQ identity. Rather, the parental consent form described the study about bullying in general and bullying in relation to adolescent identity formation. My goal for this project was not to force the participants to “come out” to their parents, nor for the parents to question or uncover the sexual orientations of their children. The alternatively worded parental consent form was merely to protect the safety and identities of the youth and to help alleviate obstacles for those who want to participate but may not be able to do so with parental consent. During the group gathering, none of the participants used their real names so as to maintain anonymity. The youth were instructed to use their pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.
There were notable challenges that arose from discussing personal experiences. Some of the participants felt very defensive during their interviews. Most notably, Adam was often very quick to deem his school the safest in the district. However his campus was the only one where participants shared an example of severe physical violence against LGBTQ students. While his campus was one of two in which participated in the equality sticker program where teachers could place the HRC logo outside their classrooms to signify their ally status, it was only his campus where many of the stickers were ripped off by other students. Throughout our interview, I felt that his strong involvement with campus affairs and his role as a student organization president led him to portray the school as more accepting than it really is. He followed up one of his stories of bullying about the girl knocked out against the wall as “one of the maybe two or so incidents like that that happen a year”. While not stating it, I felt as if the lower incidences of bullying reported were made to make the phenomenon seem less severe.

With regards to the photovoice methodology, I found that the use of photographs in lieu of other forms of data presented a unique hardship. Many of the photos were completely unusable. Whether they were blurry, too dark, or failed to come out at all, some of the participants were disappointed that their pictures did not come out as planned. One participant lost their first set of photos after accidentally deleting them. Because of the unique nature of this form of data, once deleted it could not be recovered. One camera was also damaged during the data collection.

While two of the participants were children of gay parents and three of the participants had strong connections to LGBTQ people, only two of the participants actually identified as LGBTQ. We must acknowledge the significance behind the
majority of the participants identifying as heterosexual. There are many reasons why more straight youth participated over LGBTQ youth. For starters, straight youth have “less to lose” since their respective gender or sexual communities is not being critiqued in the manner as it would be with LGBTQ youth. Aside from obvious issues of “outing” themselves either falsely or prematurely, perhaps the process of representing LGBTQ students of a city was too much pressure. However I believe that low levels of LGBTQ youth involvement could be related to the idea of how I separated the LGBTQ bullying phenomenon from bullying in general. Perhaps many LGBTQ do not have experiences of bullying or harassment that only pertained to their sexual identity and therefore felt as if they did not have anything to contribute. However, it can also be suggested that LGBTQ youth, considering the conservative sociopolitical climate of the city mentioned earlier, were perhaps apprehensive to participate merely because of fear or anxiety. The idea of using visual images certainly could have deterred people for reasons of privacy.

The small sample size of this study does not allow for its findings to be generalized to a larger population, either of LGBTQ students or students in general. Only seven students from three schools participated in this study. The findings only represent the experiences of youth in one suburban city. Santa Clarita is a moderately populated city (over 250,000) about thirty miles north of Los Angeles, California. Additionally, only four of the ten junior high and high schools were directly represented in this project.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

If this research were to be expanded, similar studies should include a higher number of participants. A larger number of students could provide much more data and
could even lead to a more telling cross-campus analysis. Varying environmental factors
could also be better addressed if students from different cities (even across different
states) were part of the same research sample.

I would definitely suggest including the participation of the parents of LGBTQ youth. Qualitative research capturing the perspectives and voices of parents could broaden our knowledge about the hardships that parents face raising LGBTQ children. The “coming out” process and negative/positive attitudes towards their children’s sexual orientation or gender identities certainly affects the parents as well. It would be beneficial to provide spaces for parents to speak on this issue. This project’s main aim was to allow youth to speak for themselves and to validate their lived experiences as legitimate. Questions that involved parents were not answered parents themselves, but by their kids.

Relatedly, the two participants with gay parents provided data that suggests further inquiry in this area. While research should necessarily focus on the bullying that results from having gay parents, more qualitative research should include the experiences of youth with LGBTQ parents to expand our knowledge about that unique population. Much like how heterosexual parents are affected by their LGBTQ children, heterosexual kids are affected by their LGBTQ parents. Both cases represent unique hardships that indirectly involve a certain population that is often out of their control.

I would also suggest further research is needed on the phenomenon of teachers bullying students. While only minimal examples were mentioned by the participants of this study, perhaps more data can be found in other schools and in other cities. This is an issue that needs more exploring. Typically overlooked when analyzing bullying, more information should be gathered about the possible severity of this issue.
While some of the participants did not identify as white, the majority of them could pass as white, based on the color of their skin. Further research should incorporate additional voices of students of color. The intersection of gender and sexual identity with race was not addressed within the photographs or interviews. Furthermore, the city of Santa Clarita is not as racially diverse as some other cities or even suburbs. A more racially diverse group of students could provide additional findings.

**Last Remarks**

Participants had the opportunity to share their photographs and to voice their experiences of identifying as an LGBTQ student or LGBTQ-ally student enrolled in junior high or high school, particularly one in Southern California where the sociopolitical climate is supposed to be one of the most progressive in the nation. Participants also had the chance to share their experiences of bullying and harassment related to their sexual orientation and/or gender expression. The students in this study were given the opportunity to voice their strategies for staying safe and provide recommendations to faculty, parents and other adults on how to keep high schools safe for LGBTQ youth and for how to address bullying. I am hoping for this project to contribute to a deeper understanding of experiences of LGBTQ youth living and attending high school in Santa Clarita, CA, a southern California suburb that prides itself on its record on safety and being a family-friendly community.

The information that these youth shared for the purpose of this project allowed them to add their voice to the movement towards eliminating bullying across the nation. This project strived to do more than merely bring awareness to this issue. There is a
potential now for this project to provide a platform for the youth themselves to continue telling their stories, sharing their needs, and providing ideas for action and social change through photography. It provided youth with the tools to learn from one another’s experiences and to potentially use photovoice to their own accord beyond the confines of this project.

The purpose of photovoice is to share the findings in the form of photographs and participant voices in a community in the form of an art exhibition. As a public, community-based event, this allows for anybody (including policymakers) to come and “experience” the data. The point of these exhibits is not merely to share the images with the public but to initiate discussions and plans for action. The students in this research project are very interested in collaborating on a photograph exhibit of their work in order to share their feelings and proposed solutions to address the phenomenon of bullying. It is community work such as a photo exhibit that really brings to life the power, effectiveness, and usefulness of this methodology. I look forward to working on this with them in the near future.
References


Kilman, Carrie. 2007. “This is Why We Need a GSA”. *Teaching Tolerance* 1(31): 30-36.


Ryan, Caitlyn and Ian Rivers. 2003. “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth:


Appendix A: Informational Meeting Talking Points

- Introduction of the Researcher(s)
- General information regarding voluntary nature of the project
- Brief discussion about the topic’s history and relevance (current literature and relation to the city of Santa Clarita)
- Discussion regarding the project’s purposes and aims
- Brief introduction to the photovoice methodology (what it is and why it is being used here)
- Go over the procedures of the project (basic steps involved and what participants can expect)
- Answer any questions
- Closing remarks distribution of consent forms and contact flyers (information regarding what the youth should do next if they decide to participate in the project)
Appendix B: Facebook Event Page Text

What is this event?
This is an Informational Meeting for the project “Using Photovoice to Understand Youths’ Experiences with Bullying”.

When will the Informational Meeting be held?
This meeting will be held on ________ at __:___ located at __________. (TBD)

Attending this meeting is merely for informational purposes where we will discuss the purposes, aims, and procedures of this photovoice project. Attendance will not obligate later participation in the project. Participation in both the meeting and project are no cost to you.

What is the project?
This is a photovoice project that aims to restore the voices of queer youth in the discussion of bullying in high schools. Using the art of photography, interested participants will visually represent experiences, interpretations, and proposed solutions to bullying. We can no longer silence those who are being directly affected by this pressing issue. Startling statistics and shocking stories warrant the need for the inclusion of bullied youth as both resources and individuals with solutions.

The city of Santa Clarita, despite its ability to laud itself as “family-friendly”, is no different with regards to rates of bullying for diverse youth. I want to give Santa Clarita youth the chance to express themselves, to validate their experiences, and to provide suggestions for how address the pressing issue of bullying in high schools.

Who am I?
I am a Saugus Alumni who wishes to seek social justice and see change in his hometown. I have a very deep passion for activism and highlighting the voices of marginalized groups.

I hope you will help me with this photovoice project…because this is not just about me. This project is about US!

How to contact me:
If you have further questions about this project, contact me, John Anderson, at 661-645-1885 or e-mail me at: john.anderson.728@my.csun.edu

I look forward to seeing you at the Informational Meeting!
Using Photography to Understand Bullying

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth still represent a disproportionate percentage of those youth bullied in schools. Startling statistics and shocking stories warrant the need for the inclusion of bullied LGBTQ youth as both resources and individuals with solutions.

This is a project that aims to restore the voices of queer youth to the discussion of bullying. Using the art of photography, youth who are interested in participating in this photovoice study will visually represent experiences, interpretations, and proposed solutions to bullying. We can no longer silence those are being directly affected by this pressing issue.

The city of Santa Clarita, despite its ability to laud itself as “family-friendly”, is no different in regards to rates of bullying for LGBTQ youth. I want to give the queer youth of Santa Clarita the opportunity to express themselves, to validate their experiences and to provide suggestions for how relevant and pressing this issue is.

I am a gay, Saugus Alumni who wishes to seek social justice and see change in his hometown. I have a very deep passion for activism and highlighting the voices of marginalized groups.

I have a very deep passion for this type of activism. I hope you will help me with this project…because this is not just about me. This project is about all of us.

If you are interested in participating or if you have further questions, contact me, John Anderson, at 661-645-1885 or via email at john.anderson.728@my.csun.edu regarding the no-obligation informational meeting.
Appendix D: Adult Consent Form

California State University, Northridge
CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Using Photovoice to Understand LGBTQ Youths’ Experiences with Bullying

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

RESEARCH TEAM
Researcher:
John Anderson
Sociology Department
(661) 645-1885
john.anderson.728@my.csun.edu

Faculty Advisor:
Moshoula Capous-Desyllas, Ph.D.
Sociology Department
18111 Nordhoff St.
Northridge, CA 91330-8318
(818) 677-3594
moshoula@csun.edu

PURPOSE OF STUDY
The purpose of this research study is to use photovoice to allow lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth to visually represent their experiences with the issue of bullying in schools.

WHAT IS PHOTOVOICE?
The process of photovoice entails giving cameras to individuals who use photography to identify, represent, and enhance their communities and create social change (Wang & Burris, 1997). The main goals of photovoice are: “(1) to enable people to record and reflect their lived experience; (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through discussions of the photographs; and (3) to reach diverse individuals within the community, including but not limited to policymakers” (Ibid, p.370). Photovoice uses visual images and accompanying stories to provide voice and promote an effective, participatory means of sharing individuals’ experiences and expertise.

Participants are given the opportunity to go out into their respective communities and take pictures that will act as documentation of their experiences. The participants later come together to discuss the pictures in regards to content, meaning, interpretation,
and form. During these small group discussions, “the participants select the photographs that most accurately represent the community’s needs and asset(s) – they contextualize (explain the meaning behind the photographs); and codify (identify those issues, themes or theories that emerge from the process)” (Wang, Burris 1997, quoted in Shimshock 2008:5). The pictures are then used to analyze themes that act as jumping off points to begin a discussion towards solutions and problem solving for needs assessment.

SUBJECTS

Inclusion Requirements
You are eligible to participate in this study if you are currently enrolled in a high school in the city of Santa Clarita and are at least 18 years of age.

Time Commitment

This study will involve approximately 1-½ hour to attend a photovoice training session and 1-2 hours of your time to complete an individual dialogue session, in addition to the time it will take you to take approximately 15-20 photographs. This study is anticipated to last over a period of 2 months.

PROCEDURES

The following procedures will occur:

1. You will attend a one-time photovoice “training session”. This will last approximately 60-90 minutes. We will be going over the themes of the project and standards and ethics regarding photography within the scope of this project. This session will not be recorded.

2. You will be given three themes from which to based your photographs:
   a. your experiences of/with bullying
   b. how you deal with and/or negotiate those experiences
   c. what you feel/think needs to be done in order to address these issues
You will be asked to take between 5-10 photographs depicting each theme presented.

3. You will have a window of 14-21 days to take all of your pictures.

4. You will attend an individual, in-person dialogue session with the Principal Investigator to share your photographs and the meanings behind your images. This will last around 60-90 minutes. This session will be audio recorded. To give permission to be recorded, please initial here: ________.

5. You will also be invited to attend a group dialogue session. This will last approximately 2-3 hours. While this is not part of the study (data will not be collected), here, you will have the opportunity to share your experiences regarding the photography process if you wish to do so, and we will all discuss every participant’s favorite photographs as relevant to the project. This session will not be recorded.
APPROPRIATENESS
No photographs may contain any sexually explicit, illegal, or harmful activity. This is to protect the safety of all participants and the researchers.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with the procedures described in this study include psychological discomfort from the discussion and visual representations of personal experiences of bullying and discussion of sexual orientation and/or gender identity. You may also experience boredom at the length of the project and/or fatigue from the photography process. However, your participation in the project is completely voluntary and you may choose to end your participation in the study at any time you wish without any repercussions. In the event of emotional distress, referrals can be made to counseling services within the community.

BENEFITS
Potential benefits of participation in this study include the following:
(1) You will have the opportunity to share your photographs and to voice your experiences of identifying as LGBTQ student enrolled in high school
(2) You will have the chance to share your experiences of bullying and harassment related to your sexual orientation, sexual identity and/or gender expression
(3) You will be given the opportunity to voice your strategies for staying safe and provide recommendations to faculty, parents and other adults on how to keep high schools safe for LGBTQ youth and how to address bullying
(4) Your participation will contribute to a deeper understanding of experiences of LGBTQ youth living and attending high school in Santa Clarita, CA.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION
The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT
Compensation for Participation
You will not be paid for your participation in this research study

Costs
There is no cost to you for participation in this study.

WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM THE STUDY AND CONSEQUENCES
You are free to withdraw from this study at any time. If you decide to withdraw from this study you should notify the research team immediately. The research team may also end your participation in this study if you do not follow instructions, miss scheduled visits, or if your safety and welfare are at risk.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Subject Identifiable Data The only document containing any identifiable information will be the consent form. Nowhere else will any other identifiable information be
collected. Pseudonyms will be used in any individual or group discussions/interviews and these code-names will be associated with the data collected. The researchers will be the only individuals with access to these code names.

**Respect for Confidentiality**
All participants are required to respect each other’s confidentiality within the study and to abide by the Confidentiality Agreement.

**Data Storage**
All research data will be stored on a laptop computer that is password protected. The audio recordings and photographs will also be stored in locked cabinet. All audio tapes will be erased at the conclusion of the project.

**Data Access**
The researcher(s) and faculty advisor named on the first page of this form will have access to your study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.

**Data Retention**
The researchers John Anderson and Moshoula Capous-Desyllas, named on the first page of this form, will have access to your study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.

**IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS**
If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone 818-677-2901.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT**
You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your relationship with California State University, Northridge. Your signature below indicates that you have
read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.

*I agree to participate in the study.*

Participant Signature ____________________________ Date ____________________________

Printed Name of Participant ____________________________

Researcher Signature ____________________________ Date ____________________________

Printed Name of Researcher ____________________________
Appendix E: Parental Consent Form

California State University, Northridge

PARENTAL CONSENT FOR CHILD PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Title: Using Photovoice to Understand Youth Perception of Bullying

You are being asked to consent for your child to participate in a research study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to allow your child to participate. A researchers listed below will be available to answer your questions.

RESEARCH TEAM

Researcher:
John Anderson
Sociology Department
(661) 645-1885
john.anderson.728@my.csun.edu

Faculty Advisor:
Moshoula Capous-Desyllas
Sociology Department
18111 Nordhoff St.
Northridge, CA 91330-8318
(818) 677-3594
moshoula@csun.edu

PURPOSE OF STUDY
This project studies student perceptions and interpretations of bullying in high schools using photographs.

WHAT IS PHOTOVOICE?
The process of photovoice entails giving cameras to individuals who use photography to identify, represent, and enhance their communities and create social change (Wang & Burris, 1997). The main goals of photovoice are: “(1) to enable people to record and reflect their lived experience; (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through discussions of the photographs; and (3) to reach diverse individuals within the community, including but not limited to policymakers” (Ibid, p.370). Photovoice uses visual images and accompanying stories to provide voice and promote an effective, participatory means of sharing individuals’ experiences and expertise.

Participants are given the opportunity to go out into their respective communities and take pictures that will act as documentation of their experiences. The participants later come together to discuss the pictures in regards to content, meaning, interpretation,
and form. During these small group discussions, “the participants select the photographs that most accurately represent the community’s needs and asset(s) – they contextualize (explain the meaning behind the photographs); and codify (identify those issues, themes or theories that emerge from the process)” (Wang, Burris 1997, quoted in Shimshock 2008:5). The pictures are then used to analyze themes that act as jumping off points to begin a discussion towards solutions and problem solving for needs assessment.

SUBJECTS

Inclusion Requirements

Your child is eligible to participate in this study if he/she is currently enrolled in a high school in the city of Santa Clarita and is at least 14 years of age.

Time Commitment

This study will involve approximately 1-½ hour to attend a photovoice training session and 1-2 hours of your child’s time to complete an individual dialogue session, in addition to the time it will take your child to take approximately 15-20 photographs. This study is anticipated to last over a period of 2 months.

PROCEDURES

The following procedures will occur:

1. Your child will attend a one-time “photovoice training session”. This will last approximately 60-90 minutes. We will be going over the themes of the project, as well as standards and ethics regarding photography within the scope of this project. This session will not be recorded.

2. Your child will be given three themes from which to based his/her photographs:
   a. their experiences of/with bullying
   b. how they deal with and/or negotiate those experiences
   c. what they feel/think needs to be done in order to address these issues

3. Your child will be asked to take between 5-10 photographs depicting each theme presented.

4. Your child will have a window of 14-21 days to take all of their pictures.

5. Your child will attend an individual, in-person dialogue session with the Principal Investigator to share his/her photographs and the meanings behind his/her images. This will last around 60-90 minutes. This session will be audio recorded. To give permission to be recorded, please initial here: ________.

6. Your child will be invited to attend a group photovoice session that is not party of the study (data will not be collected). Here, your child will have the opportunity to share their experiences regarding the photography process if they wish to do so, and we will all discuss every participant’s favorite photographs as relevant to the project. This will last approximately 2-3 hours. This session will not be recorded.

APPROPRIATENESS

No photographs may contain any sexually explicit, illegal, or harmful activity. This is to protect the safety of all participants and the researchers.
RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with the procedures described in this study include psychological discomfort from the discussion and visual representations of personal experiences of bullying. Your child may also experience boredom at the length of the project and/or fatigue from the photography process. However, your child’s participation in the project is completely voluntary and he/she may choose to end their participation in the study at any time they wish without any repercussions. In the event of emotional distress, referrals can be made to counseling services within the community.

BENEFITS
Potential benefits of participation in this study include the following:
(1) Your child will have the opportunity to share their photographs and to voice their experiences and interpretations of bullying in high school.
(2) Your child will be given the opportunity to voice his/her strategies for staying safe and provide recommendations to faculty, parents and other adults on how to keep high schools safe for youth and how to address bullying.
(3) Your child’s participation will contribute to a deeper understanding of experiences of bullied youth living and attending high school in Santa Clarita, CA.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION
The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT
Compensation for Participation
Your child will not be paid for his/her participation in this research study.

Costs
There is no cost to you for your child’s participation in this study.

WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM THE STUDY AND CONSEQUENCES
You are free to withdraw your child from this study at any time and your child is also free to stop participation in this study at any time without any consequences. If you decide to withdraw your child from this study you should notify the research team immediately. The research team may also end your child’s participation in this study if he/she does not follow instructions, misses scheduled visits, or if his/her safety and welfare are at risk.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Subject Identifiable Data
The only documents containing any identifiable information of your child will be the adolescent and parental consent forms. Nowhere else will any other identifiable information be collected. Pseudonyms will be used in any individual or group discussions/interviews and these code-names will be associated with the data collected. The researchers will be the only individuals with access to these code names.

**Respect for Confidentiality**
All participants are required to respect each other’s confidentiality within the study and to abide by the Confidentiality Agreement.

**Data Storage**
All research data will be stored on a laptop computer that is password protected. The audio recordings and photographs will also be stored in locked cabinet. Once the interviews are transcribed, the audio tapes will be erased at the conclusion of the study.

**Data Access**
The researcher and faculty advisor named on the first page of this form will have access to your child’s study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies your child will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about your child.

**Data Retention**
The researchers John Anderson and Moshoula Capous-Desyllas, named on the first page of this form, will have access to your child’s study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies your child will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about your child.

**IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS**
If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your child’s rights as a research participant, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone 818-677-2901.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT**
You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep. Participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may refuse to answer any question or discontinue his/her involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you and your child might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your relationship with California State University, Northridge. Your signature below indicates
that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.

Your child will be provided with an assent form that explains the study in language understandable to a child. A member of the research team will also read the form to your child and answer any questions your child may have. Your child will be asked to sign the form only if he/she agrees to be in the study. If your child does not wish to be in the study he/she will not be asked to sign the form. In addition, if after signing the assent form your child changes his/her mind your child is free to discontinue his/her participation at any time.

*I agree to allow my child to participate in the study.*

---

**Parent Signature**  
**Date**

---

**Printed Name of Parent**

---

**Researcher Signature**  
**Date**

---

**Printed Name of Researcher**
Appendix F: Adolescent Consent Form

California State University, Northridge

ADOLESCENT ASSENT TO BE IN A HUMAN RESEARCH PROJECT

We would like to invite you to participate in a research project. Participating in this project is your choice. Please read about the project below. Feel free to ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A person connected to the research will be around to answer your questions.

Title of the study:
Using Photovoice to Understand Youth Perception of Bullying

RESEARCH TEAM
Principal Researcher: John Anderson, Graduate Student
Department: Sociology
Telephone Number: 661-645-885
Email Address: john.anderson.728@my.csun.edu

Name and Title of Faculty Advisor: Moshoula Capous-Desyllas, Ph.D
Department: Sociology
Telephone Number: 818-677-3594
Email Address: moshoula@csun.edu

WHAT IS THIS PROJECT ABOUT?
The goal of this project is to use photovoice to understand youth’s perceptions and interpretations of bullying.

WHAT IS PHOTOVOICE?
The process of photovoice entails giving cameras to individuals who use photography to identify, represent, and enhance their communities and create social change (Wang & Burris, 1997). The main goals of photovoice are: “(1) to enable people to record and reflect their lived experience; (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through discussions of the photographs; and (3) to reach diverse individuals within the community, including but not limited to policymakers” (Ibid, p.370). Photovoice uses visual images and accompanying stories to provide voice and promote an effective, participatory means of sharing individuals’ experiences and expertise.

Participants are given the opportunity to go out into their respective communities and take pictures that will act as documentation of their experiences. The participants later come together to discuss the pictures in regards to content, meaning, interpretation, and form. During these small group discussions, “the participants select the photographs that most accurately represent the community’s needs and asset(s) — they contextualize (explain the meaning behind the photographs); and codify (identify those issues, themes or theories that emerge from the process)” (Wang, Burris 1997, quoted in Shimshock
The pictures are then used to analyze themes that act as jumping off points to begin a discussion towards solutions and problem solving for needs assessment.

**WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN THE PROJECT?**

If you decide to participate in this study, the following will take place:

1. You will attend a one-time project “photovoice training session”. This will last approximately 60-90 minutes. We will be going over the themes of the project and issues about photography, specifically around the topic of this project. This session will not be recorded.

2. There will be three categories on which to base your photographs:
   a. your experiences of/with bullying
   b. how you deal with or handle those experiences
   c. what you feel/think needs to be done in order to deal with or solve these issues

3. You will be asked to take between 5-10 photographs of each above themes

4. You will have a general timeline of 14-21 days to take all of your pictures.

5. You will attend an individual, in-person dialogue session with the Principal Investigator to share your photographs and the meanings behind your images. This will last around 60-90 minutes. This session will be audio recorded. To give permission to be recorded, please initial here: ________.

6. You will also invited to attend a group dialogue session. This will last approximately 2-3 hours. While this is not part of the study (data will not be collected), here you will have the have the opportunity to to share your experiences about the photography process if you wish to do so, and we will all discuss every participant’s favorite photographs. This session will not be recorded.

**APPROPRIATENESS**

No photographs may contain any sexually explicit, illegal, or harmful activity. This is to protect the safety of all participants and the researchers.

**RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

The possible risks from participating in this project include psychological discomfort from the discussion and visual representations of personal experiences of bullying. You may also experience boredom at the length of the project and/or boredom from the photography process. However, your participation in the project is completely your choice. Thus, you may choose to end your participation in the study at any time you wish without any consequences. In the event of emotional distress, referrals can be made to counseling services within the community.

*Respect for Confidentiality*

All participants are required to respect each other’s confidentiality within the study and to abide by the Confidentiality Agreement.
BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT TO YOU AND OTHERS
Potential benefits of participation in this study include the following:

(1) You will have the opportunity to share your photographs and to voice your experiences and interpretations of bullying in high school.
(2) You will be given the opportunity to voice your strategies for staying safe and provide recommendations to faculty, parents and other adults on how to keep high schools safe for youth and how to address bullying.
(3) Your participation will contribute to a deeper understanding of experiences of bullied youth living and attending high school in Santa Clarita, CA.

COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION
You will not be paid for your participation in this research study.

COSTS
There is no cost to you for participation in this study.

DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PROJECT?
You can ask questions any time. You can talk to the researchers, your family or someone else in charge, before you decide if you want to participate. If you do agree to participate, you can change your mind and withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. If you have questions about the study please contact a member of the research team listed on the first page of this form.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone 818-677-2901.

If you want to participate in the study, please sign your name below.

_________________________ ___________________________ ______________
Signature of Adolescent Age Date

__________________________ ____________________________
Signature of Researcher Date

___________________________ ____________________________
Signature of Individual Obtaining Assent Date
If different from researcher
Appendix G: Training Workshop Session Curriculum

(Duration: 1-1 ½ hours; Location: Convenient community location chosen by participants)

The individual dialogue session will include an overview of the goals and purpose of photovoice and the procedures of the project; underlying issues about the use of cameras, power, and ethics within the parameters of the project; potential risks to participants; and how to minimize these risks. There will be discussion about themes to focus the photographs on. The training workshop will last approximately 1-1½ hours.

Prior to Beginning:
- Consent forms will be reviewed with participants prior to the beginning of the photovoice training workshop.
- Voluntary nature of participation in the study will be emphasized
- Any and all individual questions and concerns will be answered and addressed

Introduction & Purpose of the Project:
- Introduction of Principal Investigator
- Key elements will be highlighted with participants (i.e. project aims, procedures of the project, timeline)
- Discussion about the researcher/participant collaborative component, participant-based analysis of the photographs, and a collective orientation toward community action.
- Group discussion about the purposes of the project, relevance of the project for Santa Clarita, and additionally participant expectations, goals, and aims

Dialogue and Discussion:
- Establish guidelines for discussion
- Discussion about bullying and harassment (what are they?, what are the roles of school, peers, families, community, and the state?, etc.)
- Detailed discussion about the data collection procedures and processes
- Ask group what is photography, what does it mean to them- conveys information, captures point in time, etc. and discussion photography as a mechanism for social change
- Power, authority and responsibility that one has with a camera
- Importance of respecting the rights and privacy of others
- Not taking photographs of faces or any other identifiable information. Not taking photographs of any sexually-explicit or illegal activity.

Discuss and Review:
- Photographic tips to successfully take pictures
- Discussion on close-ups and angles and how symbols of the community or culture might be photographed
• Appropriateness of the three themes – (Participants will have the option to refine, substitute, eliminate, add, or redevelop any or all of the themes posed)
• Reasonable timeline for taking their photographs
• Any final questions?
Appendix H: Individual Dialogue Session Interview Guide

• Describe any personal experiences you have had with bullying or harassment.

• How do you feel your sexual orientation or gender identity is relevant to your experiences with bullying or harassment?

• Describe any other experiences or instances of bullying with any of your friends or peers at your school.

• What is the typical form of action that bullied youth at your school result to in order to deal with bullying or harassment?

• What have your parents or guardians done about these issues?

• What has your school done regarding these issues?

• How do you feel the “attitude” of Santa Clarita either relates to or negates these experiences?

• What do you think should be done at both the school and city level to address LGBTQ youth bullying?
Appendix I: Confidentiality Form

Confidentiality Form

I agree to ensure the confidentiality of all participants by:

- Not discussing any portion of the project to any individuals outside of those participating
- Not discussing or sharing any content (interviews or photographs) to any individuals outside of those participating
- Not sharing any identifiable information about any participants or myself with any individuals, both those participating and those that are not

Printed Name: ________________________________

Signature: ________________________________

Date: ______________