

**Uncovering Heteronormativity in Dutch School Culture Through LGBTQ+ Secondary
Students' School Climate Experiences**

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Master thesis

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Abstract

This study aims to give insights into the experiences of LGBTQ+ students regarding school climate of secondary education in the Netherlands and describe what this can teach us about school culture. Despite the focus of previous research on bullying on an individual level, reports on bullying have remained stable or even increased over time. Therefore, more research has started looking at the underlying school culture through researching school climate using a lens of heteronormativity. To collect data, semi-structured interviews with 15 participants were conducted. Deductive coding and a lens of heteronormativity are used for analysis. The findings uncovered four notions of heteronormativity in school culture through experiences of school climate: 'gender policing', 'sexuality policing', 'tokenism' and 'ignorance'. The findings call for practical implications such as providing multiple gender-neutral accommodations as well as implications for future research. In order to create a safer and more inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ students, schools need to stop taking a passive approach and start actively looking for heteronormativity in their own school culture and start resisting against it.

Keywords: Heteronormativity, school climate, school culture, safety, inclusion, LGBTQ+ students, secondary education, Dutch, semi-structured interviews

Uncovering Heteronormativity in Dutch School Culture Through LGBTQ+ Secondary Students' School Climate Experiences

Previous research on the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and questioning (LGBTQ+) students in education has focused mostly on bullying, using a binary construction of bully versus victim, often describing LGBTQ+ students as “victims” or vulnerable “at risk” students that need protection (Payne & Smith, 2013; Szalacha, 2004). This focus is not surprising because in the last few decades, school violence gained increased media and legislative attention and became part of the public consciousness as a problem (Payne & Smith, 2013).

Conversations about creating safe schools for LGBTQ+ students often focused on eliminating individual acts of bullying and harassment targeting LGBTQ+ students (Payne & Smith, 2012). Although previous research led to important findings and interventions, student reports of homophobic bullying and harassment increased (Ferfolja & Ullman, 2020; Ullman, 2014). Mittleman (2023) explained that the previously implemented interventions only tried to change school climate on an individual level and did not address the underlying school culture. An increasing amount of research started using heteronormativity as a lens to gain insight about school culture (Johnson, 2023).

As in other countries, the concerns of LGBTQ+ students have increased attention in the Netherlands (Collier et al., 2015). At present, research on the experiences of LGBTQ+ students in Dutch education has not yet focused on the underlying school culture (Pizmony-Levy, 2018). Therefore, this study aims to give insights into the experiences of LGBTQ+ secondary students regarding school climate and what this can tell us about heteronormativity in Dutch school culture.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Heteronormativity as a Lens

Toomey et al. (2012) defined heteronormativity as a societal hierarchical system that privileges and sanctions individuals based on presumed binaries of gender and sexuality; as a system it defines and enforces beliefs and practices about what is 'normal' in everyday life. Heteronormativity in society is taken for granted and heteronormative standards and discourses that legitimate this are found in most social institutions, including religion, family, education, media, law, and government (Čeplak, 2013; Ferfolja & Ullman, 2020; Robinson, 2016). Using the lens of heteronormativity can offer new insights that go beyond the explanation of individual actors (Payne & Smith, 2013).

School Culture and Heteronormativity

Within education, heteronormative discourses can be found in school culture. School culture represents the systems of knowledge, values, and beliefs that give a school identity and shapes how it functions (Payne & Smith, 2013). Previous research in the US found three notions of heteronormativity within school culture: Gender policing, tokenism, and ignorance.

Gender policing

Gender policing means that LGBTQ+ students who perform visible acts of gender non-conformance are policed by peers through verbal harassment (Mittleman, 2023). Payne and Smith (2012) explain that peers engage in gender policing for two reasons: to pressure gender non-conforming LGBTQ+ students back into conforming to societal gender norms and to assert their own social status by targeting those who deviate from the norm. (Payne & Smith, 2012). Gender policing manifests in everyday life when students who deviate from current gender norms, such as having short hair, wearing baggy or dark-colored clothes, receive negative remarks about their appearance (Mooij, 2016).

Tokenism

According to Atteberry-Ash, Speer et al. (2019), tokenism encompasses two aspects. Firstly, it involves treating one individual from a marginalized group as a representative of the

group to which they belong, resulting in heightened visibility and pressure to avoid mistakes to not poorly represent their group. Secondly, tokenism can also refer to superficial acts of inclusion without challenging or transforming existing structures of privilege and marginalization. Examples of this tokenism in daily life include school only providing LGBTQ+ representation on purple Friday, or providing a gender-neutral accommodation but not maintaining it (Atteberry-Ash, Speer et al., 2019).

Ignorance

The notion of ignorance refers to peers, teachers or schools lacking knowledge and understanding about LGBTQ+ identities and experiences (Giertsen, 2019). Because of this, people are more likely to default to the assumptions and norms of heteronormativity, which can lead to perpetuation of stereotypes, biases, and discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals (Giertsen, 2019). Ignorance manifests in everyday life through making incorrect assumptions about someone's pronouns based on appearance and lacking understanding of the appropriate ways to address LGBTQ+ harassment (Giertsen, 2019).

Navigating a Heteronormative School Culture

According to Collado et al. (2022), LGBTQ+ students can navigate a heteronormative school culture in a variety of six ways. For an overview of the way LGBTQ+ students navigate school culture in the US, see Table 1.

Uncovering Heteronormativity by Looking at School Climate

Even though heteronormativity is found in the school culture, directly researching school culture itself presents challenges (Johnson, 2023). Primarily, when students are asked about school, their responses inevitably reflect their subjective perceptions, making it challenging to establish a comprehensive understanding of the culture that applies to everyone in the school (Payne & Smith, 2013). Furthermore, heteronormativity in school culture often operates on implicit or unconscious levels, which can make it difficult for students to

Table 1

Ways LGBTQ+ Students Navigate School Culture in the US

Way of navigating	Examples	Sources
Self-affirmation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talking to yourself in a positive way 	(Pacely et al., 2021)
Avoidance or ignoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ignoring certain people or places in school in fear of confrontation or to conserve energy 	(Hillier et al., 2020; Perez et al., 2019)
Building a support group within school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having a friend group that consists mostly out of LGBTQ+ people Being part of the Gender- and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) 	(Hillier et al., 2020; Robinson & Schmitz, 2021)
Self-advocacy and standing up for others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Making in-the-moment corrections when dealing with an offensive statement 	(Pacely et al., 2021; Perez et al., 2019)
Educating teachers or students within school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Giving a presentation or lesson or doing an assignment about an LGBTQ+ topic Explaining why a negative remark should not be made 	(Hillier et al., 2020; Perez et al., 2019)
Actively resisting against heteronormativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating LGBTQ+ visibility within school Talking with people about how the school can be more inclusive or safe 	(Robinson & Schmitz, 2021)

recognize and articulate these dynamics during interviews (Payne & Smith, 2013). To address these challenges, researchers have proposed investigating heteronormativity within school culture by examining school climate through a lens of heteronormativity (Johnson, 2023). By gathering and analyzing students' daily experiences and examining the connections between these experiences and notions of heteronormativity, researchers can gain valuable insights regarding the prevalence and impact of heteronormativity within school culture (Mittleman, 2023).

School Climate

Harris et al. (2021) defined school climate as a manifestation of school culture, where the collective perceptions of behavior and the individual interactions between members of an

organization determine the experiences, feelings, and attitudes of those within it. How an individual experiences school climate differs and is colored by one's social location, cultural experiences, and school context (Kutsyuruba et al., 2015). According to Payne and Smith (2013), when researching school climate for LGBTQ+ students, school climate specifically relates to safety and inclusion.

LGBTQ+ Students and Safety

The fact that LGBTQ+ students experience less safety at school compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers has been widely reported in research (Goodenow et al., 2016; Kroneman et al., 2018). In 2014 a national US survey found that 59.6% of LGBTQ+ students experienced verbal harassment compared to 29.2% of heterosexual peers (Kosciw et al., 2015). Students need to feel safe at school to learn, socialize with peers, and have healthy development (Atteberry-Ash, Kattari et al., 2019; Vafai, 2016). Not having a safe environment can have severe consequences, such as dropping out of school, lower grades and drug and alcohol abuse (Snapp et al., 2016; Toomey et al., 2012). Williams and Chapman (2011) described how it also leads to increased mental health issues, showing that 26.3% of LGBTQ+ students reported having depression, compared with 11.9% of heterosexual peers. How safe a school environment is for LGBTQ+ students, is determined by the LGBTQ+ students' experience of verbal and physical harassment perpetrated by peers and/or teachers, and how teachers respond to harassment (Ellis, 2009; Kosciw et al., 2020; Steck & Perry, 2018). For the operationalization of safety, see Table 2.

LGBTQ+ Students and Inclusion

Students may experience a school as safe, while at the same time not feel like they are included. Safety can be a prerequisite for inclusion. Inclusive education is not possible if students do not experience school safety (Stuft & Graff, 2011). Safety can also be an outcome of inclusion, since more inclusive education leads to a safer environment (Gato et al., 2020). Kokozos and Gonzalez (2020) defined inclusive education as ensuring that all

Table 2

Operationalization of Safety Based on Policy Research Done in the US

Determining Factors Related To (Lack of) Safety	General definition	Occurs through	% LGBTQ+ students who experienced it based on		Sources
			Sexuality	Gender	
Verbal Harassment	A wider range of peer-to-peer behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homophobic remarks • Negative remarks about someone’s gender • Threats 	68.7%	56.9%	(Burk et al., 2018; Ellis, 2009; Graham & Juvonen, 2002)
Physical Harassment	A range of physical actions that someone intentionally uses to can hurt another person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shoving • Pushing • Punching • Kicking • Injuring with a weapon 	25.7%	21.8%	(Christensen et al. 2021; Kosciw et al., 2020; Rigby, 2007)
Teacher response to harassment	The way the teacher responds in a situation of harassment or when harassment is reported	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignoring the situation • Telling students to stop the harassment • Explaining to students why they should not harass • Handing out consequences to perpetrators 			(Kosciw et al., 2020).

minorities are represented within educators’ teaching. Inclusion can be viewed at three levels: inclusion in what is being taught, inclusion by teachers, and inclusion by school (Burk et al., 2018; Ellis, 2009). For the operationalization of inclusion, see Table 3.

LGBTQ+ Students in Secondary Education

LGBTQ+ individuals recognize, label, and come out as LGBTQ+ at younger ages and in greater numbers than before, often around the age of 14 (Seelman et al., 2015; Russell et al., 2021). This might be due to more visible LGBTQ+ role models, more access to information and support online and/or evolving societal attitudes towards

Table 3

Operationalization of Inclusion Based on Policy Research Done in the US

Inclusion	General definition	Done through	Sources
...			
In what is being taught	What the teaching materials describe about LGBTQ+ to help create a more diverse curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGBTQ+ as a topic within teaching materials in lessons 	(Burk et al., 2018; Ellis, 2009; Snapp et al., 2016)
By teachers	What a teacher does inside of their classroom to ensure that LGBTQ+ students are represented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher allowing students to choose an LGBTQ+ topic for an assignment • The teacher providing assignments that must be specifically done about an LGBTQ+ topic • The teacher allowing students to bring up an LGBTQ+ topic in class and letting it become a discussion • The teacher bringing up an LGBTQ+ topic themselves and starting a discussion in class 	(Day et al., 2020; Ellis, 2009).
By school	What a school does outside of class to ensure that LGBTQ+ students are represented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school provides visible LGBTQ+ resources (e.g., books or posters) • The school provides LGBTQ+ accommodations (e.g., Gender and Sexuality Alliance, gender neutral toilet and/or changing room) • The school leaders respond to and handle GSA proposals in a positive way • The school proactively comes up with ideas to create more resources or accommodations and presents them to the GSA 	(Gato et al., 2020; Snapp et al., 2016)

LGBTQ+ (Russell et al., 2021). As a result, an increasing number of LGBTQ+ individuals disclose their identities during secondary education. Given that secondary education coincides with the onset of adolescence, a period characterized by significant physical, cognitive, and

social changes affecting identity development, the level of safety and inclusion experienced by LGBTQ+ students in this educational context holds substantial influence (Heinze & Horn, 2009; Mutya et al., 2021). Considering that research consistently shows that attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals are least favorable among adolescents, there is a need for research to investigate LGBTQ+ students' experiences of school climate using a lens of heteronormativity, particularly in the secondary education setting (Payne & Smith, 2012; Russell et al., 2021).

Research Question

This study aims to answer the following research question: How do students who identify themselves as LGBTQ+ experience school climate within Dutch secondary education and what can this teach us about school culture? Additionally, this study aims to answer the sub-question: How do Dutch secondary education students who identify themselves as LGBTQ+ navigate school culture?

Methodology

This interview study is based on a constructionist epistemology and interpretive research paradigm, which means that the researcher and participants will collaboratively create knowledge through their interaction during the interviews (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Collaborating in the research process helps to establish rapport and trust between researcher and participant, which is especially necessary when dealing with a historically underrepresented group such as LGBTQ+ individuals. Based on the researcher's own expertise and experiences, they will then interpret the findings within the framework of existing research.

Positionality and Trustworthiness

The researcher in this study acknowledges their own position and its influence on the study's design and interpretation of the findings. Being LGBTQ+ themselves, identifying as

non-binary and queer, the researcher brings firsthand experiences and understanding of LGBTQ+ complexities. The researcher's LGBTQ+ identity enhances effective communication with participants, using terminology familiar to LGBTQ+ individuals that may not be known or understood by non-LGBTQ+ individuals. This effective communication contributes to a more rigorous interpretation of participants' perspectives. However, the researcher's LGBTQ+ identity may also influence the selection and presentation of findings. To ensure the alignment between the data and participants' stories, the researcher engaged in peer debriefing, consulting with a peer to assess the congruency between the transcripts, methodology, and findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Other steps taken to ensure trustworthiness were member checking (asking participants to read, review and, if necessary, add to or modify the transcription) and describing the data and choices made in detail (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Data Collection

Participants

Fifteen participants were interviewed. To be included, participants had to be between 12 and 19 years old, identify as LGBTQ+ and attend a secondary school in the Netherlands. To recruit participants, convenience sampling was first employed, using the researcher's contacts and the GSA network in the Netherlands to locate schools and students who wanted to participate in the study. In line with the research question at the time of recruitment which included comparing across the tracks of secondary education, purposeful sampling was employed to find participants with a specific intersection of sexuality orientation and gender expression to ensure an equal distribution across tracks. To maintain participant anonymity, pseudonyms were used for their names and school names. For an overview of the participants, see Table 4. Informed consent letters, including parental consent for participants aged 12 to 16, were obtained. The interview questions addressed sensitive topics regarding identity

Table 4

Participant Information

Name	School	Age	Track	Year	Ethnicity	Sexual orientation	Gender expression	Pronouns
Benjamin Cornelissen	RGS Waterloop	17	HAVO	4	Dutch	Male	Bisexual	He/him
Biru Peters	Het Bussums Lyceum	16	VWO	6	Dutch	Non-binary	Unlabeled	They/them
Dana Nieuwenhuizen	Het Brummens	16	VWO	5	Dutch	Female	Lesbian	She/her
Emma van der Berg	Bach Lyceum	18	HAVO	5	Dutch	Female	Lesbian	She/her
Liz Zomer	Landelijk Montessori College	16	VMBO	4	Dutch	Female, Genderfluid	Queer	She/her+ They/them
Manoah van Mulder	Het Bussums Lyceum	17	VWO	6	Dutch	Female, Genderfluid	Queer	All
Merel de Vries	KMS Tromp	16	VMBO	3	Dutch	Female	Lesbian	She/her
Noah Teunissen	RGS Waterloop	14	HAVO	3	Dutch	Genderfluid	Unlabeled	All
Pieter den Dijk	Theo van Doesburg College	16	VWO	4	Dutch	Male	Bisexual	He/him
Raina Boom	Mariahoeve college	14	VMBO	3	Dutch	Genderfluid	Bisexual	All
Safiya Bosman	Pionum	15	VMBO	3	Dutch	Female	Bisexual	She/her
Sam van den Heuvel	Fransiscus van der Schooten college	16	HAVO	4	Dutch	Non-binary	Queer	They/them
Tess Willems	Bach Lyceum	16	HAVO	5	Dutch	Female	Bisexual	She/her
Teun van der Akker	Brink Lyceum	16	VMBO	4	Dutch	Trans male	Unlabeled	He/him+ They/them
Vera Brill	Het Brummens	17	VWO	5	Dutch	Female	Bisexual	She/her

and possible challenging experiences. To ensure comfort, participants were given the option to have a guardian present or access the questions beforehand. None of the participants chose to do so. During the interview, participants were informed they could pause or end the interview at any time without an explanation, but none of them exercised this option.

Data Sources

Because no questionnaires or interview guidelines exist for safety and inclusion of LGBTQ+ secondary students, an interview guideline was constructed based on the theoretical framework. For an overview of how the interview questions were created based on the theoretical framework, see Appendix A. The interviews were semi-structured, questions were prepared beforehand, but there was also room for further questions or topics. The full interview guideline can be found in Appendix B. The interviews took place from February through May 2023 and lasted 40 to 90 minutes, using MS Teams. All gathered data was stored in a data package on YODA, where it will be stored for at least 10 years in accordance with The Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity [external link](#) (Algra et al., 2018).

Data Analysis

To analyze how LGBTQ+ students experience school climate, the data from the interviews was analyzed through deductive analysis using four steps (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). The first step was to create and define initial coding categories, based on key research concepts (see Appendix C for the initial codebook). The second step was to code the data using the predetermined codes. The third step was to note data that could not be coded and to decide if the data represented a new category, or a subcategory of an existing code. A matrix for both safety and inclusion was constructed to organize the data, with columns representing codes and rows representing participants. This was then synthesized. The last step was to report the findings of the deductive analysis, which offered supporting and non-supporting

evidence for existing research (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The transcripts of the interviews were coded in NVivo.

To analyze what the experiences of LGBTQ+ students could teach us about school culture, heteronormativity was used as a lens during data analysis, considering whether and how a piece of data might be reflective of heteronormativity within the school culture.

Limitations

This study had limitations in terms of intersectionality and selection bias. By not incorporating intersectionality, this study may have overlooked the unique experiences of individuals belonging to multiple marginalized groups. This might have led to an incomplete understanding of the complexities of LGBTQ+ experiences, as it fails to account for the ways in which different forms of oppression and privilege intersect and interact. The data could be skewed towards more openly LGBTQ+ participants, as almost all the participants were involved with a GSA, potentially neglecting the perspectives of LGBTQ+ individuals who are less open. Additionally, participants under 16 were required to provide parental consent to participate, meaning that younger people who were not out to their parents may have chosen not to participate. Successfully recruited participants were also those who had access to computers, headphones, tablets, or mobile phones, potentially excluding people with reduced financial means.

Results

Safety: Experiences of Verbal Harassment

Participants shared a similar narrative. 'Gay' and 'faggot' are the most common swearwords in school, most often used daily. Thirteen participants opened up about their encounters with negative remarks, providing numerous examples of how they experienced this situation. Remarks often happened in one of two situations: when participants differed from the gender norm or when participants were more openly LGBTQ+. Participants also

talked about the role of teacher in experiences of unsafety, both when harassment happens in class and when harassment is reported to teachers afterwards.

Sam and Noah Fall Outside of the 'Stereotypical' Image

Participants explained how the way someone looks influences the amount of verbal harassment they receive. For example, Sam explained how since cutting their hair and wearing darker and more baggy clothes, they also started receiving more negative remarks from peers. They stated: "I feel like [the number of remarks] has to do with the way I dress. I have short hair and I always dress a little baggy. So there's a bit of a fuss about that." Noah had a similar experience after cutting his hair and tried to explain why they think this happens, stating:

People still have a very stereotypical image in their mind that girls have long hair, boys have short hair. Girls wear pink and skirts, boys don't. Girls wear makeup, boys don't. And that's it. If you go out of that image at all, then you no longer belong. Then you are ignored or comments are made and I think that has a lot to do with each other.

Sam and Noah encountered 'gender policing' (Mittleman, 2023). Cutting their hair short deviates from the gender norms in the eyes of their peers, who tried to police them back to the gender norms by making a negative remark about the way they looked.

Participants described navigating 'gender policing' in two ways. Some participants described ignoring or avoiding certain people or situations. For example, Raina described that they would not say anything about a negative remark out of fear of repercussions. Participants also described navigating 'gender policing' through self-advocacy. For example, Biru shared their experience of physical empowerment, stating: "I don't feel unsafe that much, because I'm in Thai boxing and I know that if they try and say something, then I can resist somewhat and that does give me a lot of self-confidence." This example shows how next to ignoring or

avoidance, some participants also navigated 'gender policing' by either verbally or physically standing up for themselves.

Liz is Pushed Back Again

Participants also explained that the amount of verbal harassment depends on how open somebody is about being LGBTQ+. Liz described how after joining the GSA and giving presentations about LGBTQ+ in their own class, they started receiving more negative remarks. They stated:

From that point on it's really clear that you're queer and then of course you are an extra quick target of comments. We had German, for example, and then you just heard jokes about my sexuality all the time. And when I walked away because the lesson was over, then I was just really called after in the hall and people followed me and I found that really scary... It felt like people are trying to push you back again actually, to not talking about it.

This example illustrates how the more a student openly identifies as non-heteronormative or the further someone moves away from the heterosexual norm towards the 'stereotypical openly LGBTQ+ person', the more likely they are to face derogatory comments from peers. What Liz encountered is very similar to 'gender policing', but it did not have to do with gender but with sexuality. Therefore, Liz encountered what is from here on out called 'sexuality policing'.

Participants described navigating 'sexuality policing' in three ways. Some participants described ignoring or avoiding certain people. For example, Liz navigated the negative remarks by ignoring the person making the comments. They stated: "I just know that if I respond to that, they actually like it, so if I don't do anything with it, then I don't worry about it as much. And then he also has less desire to say anything." Participants also described navigating through self-affirmation, with for example Merel stating: "Yeah, I am who I am,

and you just have to accept it, and if you don't, okay, but that's not my problem.” Lastly, participants described navigating ‘sexuality policing’ by building a support group who could help them deal with such negative situations, such as an LGBTQ+ friend group or the GSA.

Liz, Manoah and Noah Talk About Teachers and Harassment

Participants explained how teachers play an important part when it comes to safety in school. Five participants described that a teacher acted as an active perpetrator of harassment. For example, Liz described a situation in which she left class to go to the gender-neutral toilet and got a negative remark from the teacher when she came back. “The girls' toilet is there, isn't it? and then everyone laughed. Then I just felt very unsafe.” Participants also described how teachers did not always deal with harassment from peers in the right way. For example, Manoah described how teachers in general do not do enough when they see harassment, but also do not know how to do better. They stated: “The teachers also indicated to the GSA: ‘I don't know what to do.’ So it's partly ignorance.” Furthermore, participants highlighted teachers’ inadequate handling of harassment reports. Fear of consequences and the risk of being outed to parents by school prevented many from reporting incidents. However, even when reports were made, teachers often mishandled the situation, as exemplified by Noah’s experience:

Two days before even talking to me, my mentor had a conversation with those guys [the perpetrators]. And my mentor said I apparently mentioned that I found it annoying that they swear with homo... So then things were said to those boys by my mentor, which I had not said myself, in a conversation I did not even want to happen. I didn't want it to be made into a big thing. I mean, I've gotten comments quite a lot before, I would rather let it go.

All three examples highlight instances where teachers failed to appropriately address harassment. The examples show that teachers are not always aware of the impact of their

responses on LGBTQ+ students. When teachers are aware, they often do not know how to act in a better way. Thus, as Manoah already mentioned in her description, Manoah, Liz, and Noah experienced 'ignorance' (Giertsen, 2019). Because the teachers lack knowledge and understanding about LGBTQ+ identities and experiences, they are more likely to default to the assumptions and norms of heteronormativity, leading to harassment or inappropriate handling of incidents.

Participants described navigating 'ignorance' in two ways. Firstly, some participants chose to ignore or avoid the ignorance by either avoiding specific teachers or classes, or refraining from reporting harassment to teachers. Secondly, other participants took it upon themselves to educate the teachers in order to reduce the ignorance. For example Teun, gave a presentation on being transgender, addressing topics such as transgender hate and how to approach it in an appropriate manner.

According to participants, teachers can reduce their ignorance by engaging in self-education about LGBTQ+ topics, actively seeking out the experiences of LGBTQ+ students in school, and reflecting on their own teaching practices concerning LGBTQ+ issues in the classroom. Additionally, participants emphasized that teachers can enhance their response to reports of harassment by prioritizing the comfort of the students, offering guidance on appropriate steps to take, inquiring about the desired outcome, and most importantly, attentively listening to the wishes of the students.

Inclusion: Shallow and a Passive Approach from Schools and Teachers

In line with safety, participants shared quite a similar narrative when it came to inclusion. When looking at all three levels (Inclusion in what is being taught, inclusion by teachers, inclusion at school) LGBTQ+ was often not included at all. When it was included, it was almost always included in a shallow way. In the rare cases that students noted LGBTQ+ inclusion explained in the right way, it was often initiated and/or organized by the GSA. In

line with the operationalization of inclusion, the findings for inclusion are organized as: inclusion in what is being taught, inclusion by teachers and inclusion by school.

Inclusion in What is Being Taught: Shallow, Not There and Not Explained Right

Participants explained that LGBTQ+ topics were either not included in what was being taught in lessons at all, were only included in one or two lessons without really paying attention to it or were included in more than two lessons purely because of the GSA.

Merel has Seen Zero Representation

Two participants explained how within their school they had seen no LGBTQ+ inclusion at all. Merel noted only seeing cisgender and straight being represented in school but described understanding why. She stated:

I get that it's difficult when the teaching material is already there, like teachers have to follow the lessons in the book because the tests have already been made. I just think that it's unfortunate that in those tests and because of that in the lessons there is no inclusion of LGBTQ+.

This example shows that the current teaching materials are not always perceived as inclusive towards LGBTQ+ individuals. This observation indicates that the curriculum underpinning these teaching materials is likely to be grounded in a heteronormative perspective.

Sam and Pieter Note the Shallow Representation of LGBTQ+

Eleven participants explained how they had only received one or two lessons where LGBTQ+ topics were included, with most of them mentioning biology. Participants found these lessons to provide a poor explanation and to be very shallow. For example, Sam noted how the book and the teacher talked in a very heteronormative way when they had only one paragraph about LGBTQ+ in sex education. Pieter noted that not all sexualities and gender identities are equally talked about in school, stating:

I do think there is representation for homosexuals, but I feel that for other sexualities it's still very much not there... If you have a different sexuality than gay, I would still find it unfortunate, because then you see that a certain sexuality is emphasized, but yours is not.

At present, there exists an uneven representation of LGBTQ+ sexualities and gender identities in school, seeing only representation for 'the most known sexualities' such as gay, lesbian, and bisexual. Thus, Sam and Pieter experienced 'ignorance' (Giertsen, 2019). Having limited knowledge on LGBTQ+ identities leads to teachers not being aware that LGBTQ+ is more than just gay, lesbian, and bisexual and by default only teaching about the 'most known sexualities'.

Liz Takes Matters into Their Own Hands with the GSA

Participants explained how they navigated the fact that there was very little and very shallow representation in class by taking matters into their own hands and educating others with the GSA. For example, Liz stated:

I actually had given a lesson myself, but otherwise not from teachers... with the GSA, every year we went by the first and second years and then we just gave a presentation with the entire LGBTQ+ alphabet in it. But it's purely because the students actually organize it, that it gets done.

Students and teachers from the GSA are thus described as currently being the only people in school who try and make sure that LGBTQ+ topics are included in the right way in lessons.

Teachers: Not Always the Right Approach to Inclusion

Participants explained that in general teachers did not provide LGBTQ+ inclusion. When they did, participants often described how the teacher did not use what the participant saw as the right approach. Specifically, participants mentioned teachers' failure in employing the appropriate approach to assignments and discussions.

Manoah about Assignments in Class

Participants explained how at present, teachers do not provide specific assignments in which the whole class has to do the same task that relates to LGBTQ+. The only opportunities participants had to include LGBTQ+ in assignments was when teachers provided an option within an assignment in which the participants themselves proactively had to look for a topic related to LGBTQ+ and then had to ask the teacher for permission. Views on the right approach to LGBTQ+ inclusion in assignments varied among participants. Some participants were content with open assignments, as it allowed freedom of choice without imposing on others. Participants like Manoah believed that mandatory assignments should be provided more. She stated:

Then you're forced to delve into somebody else's view, somebody else's experience, and that often generates empathy. I think when you immerse yourself in someone else, then you can understand it better and then you can more easily form your own opinion.

Most participants desired a combination of mandatory and optional assignments. Participants suggested giving a few specific assignments throughout the year that focus explicitly on LGBTQ+, involving the entire class. Additionally, for open assignments, participants recommended actively suggesting LGBTQ+ as an option for students to consider, alongside other choices.

Biru Talks About their Experience with Discussions in Class

Participants noted how discussions on LGBTQ+ topics were rare, happening only a few times during participants' schooling. The level of comfort for participants and how they navigated a discussion was dependent on both the class's response and how teachers navigated the discussion. Two participants shared positive experiences where discussions were handled calmly, with the teacher asking general questions and creating a safe space for participants to share their stories. In these cases, participants could navigate the discussion by

educating others about their experience as an LGBTQ+ person, resulting in more empathy and inclusion.

However, most participants described instances where teachers mishandled LGBTQ+ discussions. For example, Biru talked about how the teacher very specifically asked them to make a contribution in an LGBTQ+ discussion. They stated: "I found that a bit scary, because I'm just seen as the token non-binary person. I really did not like that, being picked out because of who I am." This example highlights the potential for discussions to lead to 'tokenism', where individuals are reduced to their LGBTQ+ identity and asked to speak for all people who identify as LGBTQ+ (Atteberry-Ash, Speer et al., 2019). In cases where discussions were experienced as potentially leading to tokenism, participants navigated the situation through avoidance, choosing to either refrain from sharing about their own LGBTQ+ experiences or to not participate in the discussion at all.

Participants thus described that discussions can either enhance inclusion or lead to tokenism. It is therefore important that teachers navigate LGBTQ+ discussions in the right way. Participants suggested that teachers should consult participants beforehand to gauge their willingness to participate. Additionally, teachers should observe the class' reactions during the discussions and adjust their approach accordingly.

Counterexamples: Teachers Take Action

Even though generally participants described their teachers as not providing LGBTQ+ inclusion or not providing it in the appropriate way, participants also gave descriptions of individual teachers who did take action in some form and provided inclusion. For example, Teun explains how conversations with their history teachers changed their school life for the better. He stated:

My history teacher is very accepting of me. Sometimes when I'm too early, she'll sit with me and ask how my transition is going and then I will explain everything and

how far I am now. I can't really talk about it often at school and then to have someone who's supportive of all my choices and listens to me, that's just really nice. Usually I go to school pretty unhappy but when I have lessons from that teacher, it just makes me happy because I know this teacher understands and supports me.

This example shows how if a teacher initiates short one-on-one conversations with an LGBTQ+ student and shows genuine interest, it can have a big impact on how included they feel at school. Manoah also had a teacher that made them feel included, stating: "Beginning of this school year, the English teacher had given a piece of paper with what is your name, pronouns, and what pronouns do you want me to use in class? That made me pretty happy." This example shows how something as small as a piece of paper with three questions on it can show LGBTQ+ students that they are safe in a teachers' classroom.

Schools: Passive Approach

Similar to the experiences of inclusion by teachers in class, participants explained how outside of class, schools take a very passive approach towards providing LGBTQ+ inclusion. Specifically, participants talked about the passive approach towards accommodations, resources, and GSA proposals.

Noah and Pieter Experience Poor Execution of LGBTQ+ Accommodations

Seven participants noted having access to a gender-neutral toilet at school. However, almost all of them described how the gender-neutral toilet was not really approached appropriately by school. For example, Noah talks about the inconvenient location of the gender-neutral toilet:

The gender-neutral toilet is one toilet, even just one toilet cubicle, which used to be a toilet for the disabled. And they've now changed that to a gender-neutral toilet. And it's located in the teachers' rooms. So if you have class all the way up, you have to go all the way down to the very corner of the school to go to the toilet.

Four participants also noted vandalization of the gender-neutral toilet and the bullying that it sometimes leads to. For example, Pieter stated:

The toilets are vandalized. At an open day when they [the school] said like we have these toilets, all the decorations were destroyed by students. So it's not really that you think I can safely go to the toilet here, because they're just not well maintained... if you use that toilet as a boy, it's basically like: You use the gender-neutral toilet, you're gay. So they [the boys] all don't use it.

Both examples show how school tried to include LGBTQ+ students by creating an accommodation, yet only did so in a symbolic way and not in a way that altered any underlying structures. Thus, Noah and Pieter experienced 'tokenism' (Atteberry-Ash, Speer et al., 2019).

Participants described navigating the tokenism through avoidance or ignoring. Some participants, as for example Pieter noted, actively avoided going to the gender-neutral toilet despite feeling like that is where they belong, out of fear of repercussions. Gender non-conforming participants described actively avoiding Physical education (PE), due to the fact that the 'gender-neutral changing rooms', were often not really changing rooms but a toilet or the room where the PE equipment is kept, which did not make them feel safe or comfortable.

According to participants, schools could deal with the tokenism by creating appropriately sized gender-neutral facilities distributed across multiple locations within the school. This would normalize gender-neutral facilities since it is no longer just at one place. Furthermore, having multiple gender-neutral facilities offers additional options for students seeking safer restroom environments. By spreading the gender-neutral facilities throughout the school, the risk of vandalism may be dispersed across multiple locations, resulting in reduced incidents of vandalism per individual toilet. Schools should also actively engage with LGBTQ+ students, seeking their feedback on the usability and effectiveness of the

accommodations, while also inquiring about measures the school can undertake to ensure appropriate utilization of these facilities.

Emma and Noah See School Initiatives that do not Work Out

All fifteen participants unanimously expressed a lack of available LGBTQ+ resources in school. When school did provide resources, it was often not done in the right way. Emma described how some of the books that her school put on the Dutch reading list under the heading LGBT were actually bad representation. She stated:

I read one that was really bad representation. Because it was pedophilia and an old man falling for a little boy, so that didn't make me very happy. It was a good book, but it wasn't good representation.

Noah described how his school tried to include LGBTQ+ students by putting up posters but ended up contributing to less safety. They stated:

They [the school] hung posters with “We don't swear with” and then put all swear words for LGBTQ+ people on it. They meant well, but in the end I think a lot of words came up in students minds because of that. I mean, now it's usually just swearing with gay but if you put transvestite or faggot on posters and hang it all around the school and make those words bigger than We don't swear with in all colorful fonts then that might come across wrong.

Both examples show that school tried to provide resources and create inclusion, but that they did not understand how to approach this in an inclusive way. Thus, Emma and Noah experienced ‘ignorance’ (Giertsen, 2019). Because the school lacks knowledge and understanding about LGBTQ+, they automatically assume the posters and books are inclusive purely because they are about LGBTQ+.

Participants described navigating the ignorance in resources by actively resisting against heteronormativity through creating visibility. Biru explained how when the library in

their school tried to promote a book about two women that was written by a cisgender man, they explained to the library why this was not good representation and presented them with alternatives. According to participants, schools can make themselves less ignorant by reading more about LGBTQ+, by letting the GSA check the resources they plan on providing and by asking LGBTQ+ students how they feel about the current resources and how school could do better.

Vera has to be 'The One to Initiate it'

Participants described how another way they navigated school taking a passive approach regarding accommodations and resource was to actively resist against heteronormativity through addressing problems with higher authorities with their GSA. However, participants also noted that when they tried to address these problems, schools again took a passive approach and often left everything that had to do with inclusion with the GSA. For example, Vera stated:

I think our school is not necessarily really thinking about those things [gender-neutral accommodations]. It's not that it's not accepted, but it's more that we [the GSA] didn't suggest it, so I don't think they're thinking about it.

This examples illustrate how schools initially foster inclusion by establishing a GSA. However, the school swiftly shift the responsibility of creating inclusion onto the GSA, adopting a passive stance without actively contributing to the process. Thus, Vera experienced 'tokenism' (Atteberry-Ash, Speer et al., 2019). Improving this situation requires schools to proactively generate ideas and present them to the GSA, thereby taking an active role in promoting inclusion.

Counterexamples: School Takes Action

Participants also gave descriptions of times when school approached an action in the right way, leading to inclusion of LGBTQ+ students. Tess described how her school handed

out pronoun stickers. She stated: "I know that school handed out stickers with pronouns that you could stick on something. So a number of teachers also have she/her on their laptop."

Merel also described how school on their own initiative put trash cans in the men's toilet, stating:

We have trash cans for the boys who menstruate in the men toilets. I heard about those trash cans from a trans friend of mine and he came running all happy like: Merel, there now are trash cans in the men's toilet!

Both these examples show that small things that school can quite easily do, like pronoun stickers or trash cans, can make LGBTQ+ students feel really included.

Discussion

The present study used semi-structured interviews with Dutch LGBTQ+ secondary students to look at experiences of school climate and what this could tell us about school culture. In terms of safety, participants commonly reported verbal harassment and dissatisfaction with how teachers handled such incidents. Participants' experiences of safety revealed three notions of heteronormativity: 'Gender policing', 'sexuality policing' and 'ignorance'. Regarding inclusion, participants generally shared that there was little inclusion at school, and if present, it was very shallow or poorly explained. Participants' experiences of inclusion revealed two notions of heteronormativity: 'Ignorance' and 'tokenism'.

Gender and Sexuality Policing

The finding that participants experienced negative remarks based on their appearance aligns with previous research conducted in the US, which has highlighted the presence of 'gender policing' in the school climate (Mooij, 2016). The occurrence of 'gender policing' underscores the role of societal norms and stereotypes in shaping perceptions of gender and sexuality (Mittleman, 2023). Deviating from these prescribed norms exposes individuals to increased scrutiny, criticism, and harassment (Payne & Smith, 2012).

Interestingly, the finding that participants experienced 'sexuality policing' based on their openness about being LGBTQ+ differed from previous US research (Mooij, 2016). This disparity may be attributed to the Netherlands' long standing reputation for its progressive stance on LGBTQ+ rights compared to the US, where increasing legal restrictions and less accepting attitudes prevail (Bos et al., 2008).

To gain a comprehensive understanding of these heteronormative notions across different cultural contexts, future research should conduct a comparative cross-cultural study in countries or regions with varying levels of LGBTQ+ acceptance and rights.

Ignorance

The present study shed light on three different aspects of the notion of 'ignorance', the failure of teachers to appropriately address harassment, the lack of understanding in creating inclusive resources and the limited representation of LGBTQ+ sexualities and gender identities in schools. The first two aspects align with the definition and manifestation of 'ignorance' as described in previous US research, highlighting the role of knowledge and understanding in promoting inclusivity and challenging heteronormative assumptions (Giertsen, 2019).

However, the third aspect of 'ignorance' identified in this study, related to the 'the most known sexualities', was not part of the definition provided in previous US research (Giertsen, 2019). This suggests that teachers and schools may not only default to heteronormativity but also to homonormativity, further reinforcing limited perspectives on sexual orientations and gender identities (Seidman & Alexander, 2020). Future research should consider expanding the definition of 'ignorance' to encompass both heteronormativity and homonormativity.

Tokenism

'Tokenism', as identified in earlier US research, encompasses two distinct aspects: the treatment of one individual from a marginalized group as a representative of the entire group to which they belong, and the provision of symbolic inclusion without challenging existing structures of privilege and marginalization (Atteberry-Ash, Speer et al., 2019). Consistent with this definition, the present study revealed the presence of both aspects of tokenism within different levels of LGBTQ+ inclusion, aligning with prior research (Atteberry-Ash, Speer et al., 2019). Participants described how schools attempted to include LGBTQ+ students by creating specific accommodations and establishing GSA's. However, these efforts often remained symbolic and failed to bring about meaningful changes in the underlying structures of the school environment. Future research should explore the long-term impact of both aspects of tokenism on the experiences and well-being of LGBTQ+ students.

Implications for Educators

It is important to note that each student is different and has their own subjective experience. Therefore, it is good to keep in mind that there is not one single solution with which a teacher or school can ensure that all LGBTQ+ students feel safe and included.

Teachers

Based on this study, there are three implications for teachers. Firstly, teachers should enhance their knowledge and understanding to prevent 'ignorance'. They should actively seek to learn more about LGBTQ+ issues by engaging in research, conversations with LGBTQ+ students, and self-reflection on their teaching practices (Gato et al., 2020). Secondly, teachers should immediately address instances of harassment, providing protection and support for LGBTQ+ students. Thirdly, when having a discussion about LGBTQ+ in class, teachers should consult participants before discussions to gauge their willingness to participate, and observing class reactions to adjust their approach accordingly.

School leaders

There are three implications for school leaders. Firstly, to prevent 'tokenism' with only having symbolic inclusion, schools should provide appropriately sized gender-neutral facilities distributed across multiple locations within the school environment as well as actively engaging with LGBTQ+ students, seeking their feedback on the usability and effectiveness of the accommodations. Secondly, to prevent 'ignorance' schools should have a better understanding about LGBTQ+, let the GSA validate the resources they plan to provide and ask LGBTQ+ students how they feel about the current resources and how school could do better. Thirdly, schools should proactively generate ideas and present them to the GSA, thereby taking a more active role in promoting inclusion that challenges the underlying structures and marginalization.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance to look beyond the individual LGBTQ+ student, to be aware of heteronormativity in the school culture and what this means for the experiences of school climate. Currently, the school climate is not seen as inclusive or safe by LGBTQ+ students and there are multiple notions of heteronormativity in the school culture underpinning this. And despite LGBTQ+ students navigating the culture in the best ways they can, the only way this will truly change, is if schools stop their passive approach and actively remove the heteronormativity barriers in their own school culture

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Appendix A

Table 5

From Theoretical Framework to Interview Questions

Operationalization	Question
Inclusion	
<i>Inclusion in class</i>	
LGBTQ+ topics in assignment and projects	14. Give an example of when you were allowed or encouraged to focus assignments on LGBTQ+-related topics.
LGBTQ+ topics in discussions	12. Describe a moment where you felt really comfortable or uncomfortable to share your perspective in class. 13. What do you think of openly discussing LGBTQ+ topics with the whole class?
LGBTQ+ topics in lessons	8. Walk me through a time when you have been taught about LGBTQ+ topics, such as history or events. 9. How do you feel about the way teachers provide LGBTQ+ topics in textbooks and other assigned readings in class? 11. Describe how your perspective as an LGBTQ+ student influences the way you are able to participate in and contribute to the lessons?
<i>Inclusion in school</i>	
Anti-bullying or harassment policies	6. Do you know if there is a protocol and/or an anti-bullying or harassment policy in school?
Resources	3. Walk me through a time when you recognized yourself in visual materials in school such as pictures, posters, videos etc. 4. Walk me through a time when you maybe saw other LGBTQ+ identities in

visual materials such as pictures, posters, videos.

7. Explain to me if and how you have the ability to access LGBTQ+ information in school that is not taught in class for example in books, computers, folders etc.

10. Can you find books in school with LGBTQ+ subjects or authors?

Accommodations

5. Describe which accommodations are available for LGTBQ+ students at your school? Think of gender-neutral toilets, GSA's, safe places, etc.

Inclusion by people at school

Inclusion by teachers

15. Describe somebody off the staff in this school who you look up to.

16. Are there members of the school staff who are out or open at school about their LGBTQ+ identities?

17. To what extent do you experience the teachers you have now as supportive of LGBTQ+ students?

18. Describe how comfortable you would feel talking one-on-one with a teacher about LGBTQ+ related topics.

Inclusion by friends

19. If you look at your core group of friends, can you describe the support you experience from them?

Inclusion by peers

20. If you look at your peers, so the people your age, your year, to what extent do you experience support from them?

Safety

Verbal harassment

22. Can you tell me about a moment, if this happened, when something happened at school that created a feeling of discomfort or unsafety, which had to do with your LGBTQ+ identity?

	23. To what extent are negative remarks being made at school about someone's sexuality or gender identity? For example swearing with "gay" or "faggot"?
Physical harassment	24. To what extent has somebody at your school ever been physically threatened because of their LGBTQ+ identity?
Teacher response to harassment	23. b. How do teachers deal with this? What do you think of the way they deal with this? Should they deal with this in a different way?

Navigating school culture

Ways of navigation	20. c. Identify and describe a moment where you did not feel supported? How did you navigate this? What kind of impact did this have on you?
	22. b. How did you navigate this?

Appendix B

Interview guideline

RQ Gemma: How do students who identify themselves as LGBTQ+, experience school climate within the different tracks of Dutch secondary education and what can this teach us about school culture?

Introduction

1. Can you introduce yourself: Who you are, how old you are, where you go to school?
 - a. Can you tell me more about why you identify with this acronym of LGBTQIA+?
2. What challenges have you faced in school related to the way you identify?

Representation in school

3. Walk me through a time when you recognized yourself in visual materials in school such as pictures, posters, videos etc.
 - a. Where did you come across this material?
 - b. What about this made you recognize yourself?
 - c. Give examples of what kind of visual representation you miss.
 - d. Where and how would you like to see this representation?
4. Walk me through a time when you maybe saw other LGBTQ+ identities in visual materials such as pictures, posters, videos.
 - a. Where did you come across this material?
 - b. Give examples of what kind of visual representation you miss.
 - c. Where and how would you like to see this representation?
5. Describe which accommodations are available for LGTBQ+ students at your school? Think of gender-neutral toilets, GSA's, safe places, etc.
 - a. How do these accommodations impact your daily life in school and how you feel at school?

- b. Give examples of what kind of accommodations you miss? Where and how would you like to see these? What kind of impact would this have on your day-to-day life?
6. Do you know if there is a protocol and/or an anti-bullying or harassment policy in school?
 - a. Explain to me how you see this in day-to-day life in school.
 - b. In which kind of situations do you think the protocol should be different/better?
7. Explain to me if and how you have the ability to access LGBTQ+ information in school that is not taught in class for example in books, computers, folders etc.
 - a. How do you feel about this?

Representation in lessons

8. Walk me through a time when you have been taught about LGBTQ+ topics, such as history or events.
 - a. In what classes have you been taught these things?
 - b. In what ways were these topics taught? How did it make you feel?
 - c. How do you think this should be different/better?
9. How do you feel about the way teachers provide LGBTQ+ topics in textbooks and other assigned readings in class?
 - a. Are there reading materials used in class from LGBTQ+ writers that you know of? Can you give an example?
 - b. How do you feel about this in-/exclusion?
 - c. What kind of inclusion of LGBTQ+ topics and/or authors would like to see within school?
10. Can you find books in school with LGBTQ+ subjects or authors?

- a. What do you think about this? Are those books that you read?
11. Describe how your perspective as an LGBTQ+ student influences the way you are able to participate in and contribute to the lessons?
 12. Describe a moment where you felt really comfortable or uncomfortable to share your perspective in class.
 - a. How do you feel about this?
 - b. Describe how you are either encouraged or discouraged by your teachers and or peers to share your perspective. How does it make you feel?
 - c. What can school change or do to ensure LGBTQ+ topics are openly discussed in class.
 13. What do you think of openly discussing LGBTQ+ topics with the whole class?
 - a. How many times does this happen?
 - b. Who initiates these conversations?
 14. Give an example of when you were allowed or encouraged to focus assignments on LGBTQ+-related topics.
 - a. Was this a closed assignment from the teacher or an open assignment where you could choose to work on it?
 - b. Have you ever focused an assignment on LGBTQ+ topics?
 - c. How did it make you feel?

Inclusion by people at school

15. Describe somebody off the staff in this school who you look up to.
 - a. What makes that you look you up to them? How do they make you feel?
16. Are there members of the school staff who are out or open at school about their LGBTQ+ identities?
 - a. How do these people make you feel?

- b. How does their openness influence the way you feel at school?
 - c. Describe what it would mean to you if more school staff was LGBTQ+. What would change?
17. To what extent do you experience the teachers you have now as supportive of LGBTQ+ students?
 - a. Give an example of how and when they were supportive. How did that make you feel?
 - b. How can your teachers provide better support for you?
18. Describe how comfortable you would feel talking one-on-one with a teacher about LGBTQ+ related topics.
 - a. Explain why you either feel comfortable or uncomfortable speaking with this teacher?
 - b. Describe a situation which was positive and one that was not as positive and explain why.
19. If you look at your core group of friends, can you describe the support you experience from them?
 - a. In what way does their support show? How does that make you feel?
 - b. Can you identify and describe a moment where you did not feel supported? How did that make you feel?
20. If you look at your peers, so the people your age, your year, to what extent do you experience support from them?
 - a. In what way does their support show? How does that make you feel?
 - b. How does it differ from the support you feel from your friends?
 - c. Identify and describe a moment where you did not feel supported? How did you navigate this? What kind of impact did this have on you?

21. If you look at your school, do you think that not only your sexuality, but all LGBTQ+ sexualities and gender identities are recognized within school?

Safety

22. Can you tell me about a moment, if this happened, when something happened at school that created a feeling of discomfort or unsafety, which had to do with your LGBTQ+ identity?
- a. How did you experience this/ feel about this?
 - b. How did you navigate this?
23. To what extent are negative remarks being made at school about someone's sexuality or gender identity? For example swearing with "gay" or "faggot"?
- a. What kind impact does this have?
 - b. How do teachers deal with this? What do you think of the way they deal with this? Should they deal with this in a different way?
24. To what extent has somebody at your school ever been physically threatened because of their LGBTQ+ identity?
- a. How did you experience this/ feel about this?
 - b. What kind of impact did this have on you?
25. To what extent are students and teachers at school aware of each other's identities, names and pronouns?
- a. How did that make you feel?
26. Describe a time when you avoided a place, class, event, or club at school because you felt unsafe due to being LGBTQ+.
- a. How do you feel about this?
 - b. What could school have done to make you feel safer?

Concluding remarks

27. We have come to the end of the interview. I have asked you for your experiences as an LGBTQ+ student with representation, safety, and inclusion at school. Before I stop recording, I wanted to give you a chance to add something to your answers you have given so far or to bring in a new topic. So if we look at representation, inclusion and safety, are there things you say we have not discussed this yet, but this is important to me in those three subjects?

Appendix C

Table 6

Initial Coding Categories.

Code	Short code	Definition	Source
School climate			
<i>Safety</i>			
Safety_Student experiences of harassment	SA_SEH	All the moments a participant talks about an experience of harassment because of an LGBTQ+ identity, whether this happened to them or someone else.	(Ellis, 2009)
1.Verbal harassment	SA_SEH_VH	All the moments a participant describes an experience with verbal harassment. For example: a homophobic remark, a negative remark about someone's gender, a verbal threat or not using someone's chosen name and pronouns.	(Burk et al., 2018; Ellis, 2009; Graham & Juvonen, 2002; Kosciw et al., 2020)
2.Physical harassment	SA_SEH_PH	All the moments a participant describes an experience with physical harassment. For example: shoving, pushing, punching, kicking, or injuring with a weapon.	(Christensen et al. 2021; Kosciw et al., 2020; Rigby, 2007)
Safety_Teacher response	SA_TR	All the moments a participant describes how teachers responded to harassment or a situation that felt unsafe for the participant. This includes both positively and negatively experienced responses.	(Burk et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2020).
<i>Inclusion</i>			
Inclusion_Student experiences of inclusion in class	INC_SEIC	All the moments a participant talks about what is (not) done to create inclusion in class.	(Ellis, 2009; Snapp et al., 2015)
1. Including LGBTQ+ topics in assignments and projects	INC_SEIC_AP	All the moments a participant describes their experiences of (not) being able to do an	(Burk et al., 2018; Ellis, 2009)

		assignment or project about LGBTQ+ topics.	
2. Including LGBTQ+ topics during discussion	INC_SEIC_DI	All the moments a participant describes their experiences with having a class discussion about LGBTQ+ topics and describes why they chose to (not) actively participate within this discussion.	(Burk et al., 2018; Ellis, 2009)
3. Including LGBTQ+ topics in lessons	INC_SEIC_LE	All the moments a participant describes their experiences with (not) being taught about LGBTQ+ topics in lessons.	(Burk et al., 2018)
Inclusion_Student experiences of inclusion in school	INC_SEIS	All the moments a participant talks about what is (not) done in school outside of class to include all students.	(Burk et al., 2018; Day et al., 2020; Kosciw et al., 2012; Toomey et al., 2012; Snapp et al., 2015).
1. Anti-bullying or harassment policies	INC_SEIS_PO	All the moments a participant describes the (non-) existing anti-bullying/harassment policies in school and their, or other LGBTQ+ students', experiences with these policies.	(Toomey et al., 2012; Snapp et al., 2015).
2. resources on LGBTQ+ issues/concerns	INC_SEIS_RE	All the moments a participant describes their experiences with (not) having visible information that relates specifically to LGBTQ+, such as books in the library or posters in school.	(Burk et al., 2018; Ellis, 2009).
3. LGBTQ+ Accommodations	INC_SEIS_AC	All the moments a participant describes their experiences with (not) having accommodations in school specifically for LGBTQ+ students, such as a GSA or gender-neutral toilet.	(Burk et al., 2018; Toomey et al., 2012; Snapp et al., 2015)
Inclusion_Student experiences of inclusion by people at school	INC_SEIP	All the moments a participant describes their experiences with support from people at school. This includes both positive and negative experiences.	(Toomey et al., 2012).
1. Inclusion by teachers	INC_SEIP_TE	All the moments a participant describes their experiences with	(Kosciw et al., 2012).

		support from teachers. This includes both positive and negative experiences.	
2. Inclusion by friends	INC_SEIP_FR	All the moments a participant describes their experiences with support from friends. This includes both positive and negative experiences.	(Gato et al., 2020; Snapp et al., 2015).
3. Inclusion by peers	INC_SEIP_PE	All the moments a participant describes their experiences with support from peers. This includes both positive and negative experiences.	(Snapp et al., 2015).

School culture

School culture_ Notions of heteronormativity in school culture	SC_HET	All the moments participants mention how heteronormativity is represented within their school culture. This includes both moments that participants very specifically mention the word heteronormativity, as well as moments that participants unconsciously describe heteronormativity.	(Palkki & Caldwell, 2018; Payne & Smith, 2013)
1. Gender Policing	SC_HET_GE	All the moments participants describe the fact that homophobic bullying is based on visible acts of gender non-conformance.	(Mittleman, 2023)
2. Panoptic of heteronormativity	SC_HET_PH	All the moments participants describe the fact that what teachers do is influenced by the anticipation of a reaction of for instance parents, coworkers and/or management.	(Ferfolja & Ullman, 2020)
School culture_ Ways LGBTQ+ students navigate school culture	SC_NAV	All the moments participants describe a way in which they navigate their school culture.	(Collado et al., 2022)
1. Self-affirmation	SC_NAV_SA	All the moments participants describe affirming themselves. For example, through talking	(Pacely et al., 2021)

		about their own sexual- or gender identity in a positive way or telling themselves they are valid.	
2. Avoidance or ignoring	SC_NAV_AI	All the moments participants describe avoiding or ignoring people or places in school. This might include talking about fear of confrontation, conserving energy, feeling unsafe or feeling uncomfortable with certain people or places.	(Hillier et al., 2020; Perez et al., 2019)
3. Building a support group within school	SC_NAV_CO	All the moments participants describe building a support group within school. For example, through either having a friend group that consists mostly out of LGBTQ+ people or becoming a part of the GSA.	(Hillier et al., 2020; Robinson & Schmitz, 2021)
4. Self-advocacy and standing up for others	SC_NAV_SO	All the moments participants describe standing up for themselves or others who are LGBTQ+. For example, through making corrections when dealing with an offensive statements and/or redirecting this remark towards something positive.	(Pacely et al., 2021; Perez et al., 2019)
5. Educating teachers or students within school	SC_NAV_ED	All the moments participants describe educating people within school about LGBTQ+. For example, through explaining why a negative remark is offensive or giving a presentation or lessen or doing an assignment about an LGBTQ+ topic.	(Hillier et al., 2020; Pacely et al., 2021; Perez et al., 2019)
6. Actively resisting against heteronormativity and trying to make a change	SC_NAV_HET	All the moments participants describe actively trying to make a change and resisting against heteronormativity. For example, through creating more LGBTQ+ visibility within the school or talking with people at school about how there could be more	(Robinson & Schmitz, 2021)

inclusivity and safety in school
for LGBTQ+ students.
