

# **The Experiences of Gifted LGBTQ Post-Primary Students in Ireland**

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B.A. M.Phil.

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the  
Requirements for the Award of the Degree of  
Doctor of Education

Dublin City University  
Institute of Education

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Submission Date: 28th November 2022

## Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Education is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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## **Acknowledgements**

This research study could never have happened without the support of so many people.

Thank you to my EdD friends, especially Jennifer Bruton, without whom I never would have gotten through the two years of class (or learned how to use Zotero). Thank you to my CTYI colleagues, who have all been a great support over the last four years. A special thank you to Leeanne, for reminding me what a doctorate is supposed to be about and for all the statistics lessons! Another special thank you to Ruth and Ryan, two former RAs who have been advancing this mission along with me.

Thank you to those who mentored me along the way. Thank you to Prof. Kevin Whelan, who gave me great advice on getting this written. Thank you to Prof. Tracy Cross and Dr. Jennifer R. Cross, for all of the conversations, sage wisdom and kindness you have shown me. Tracy asked me when I would start my doctorate every time he saw me, right up until the day I did.

Thank you to my amazing group of friends. Bébhinn, Éilis, Maeve, Orlagh and Suzanne- truly I could not have done this without all of your support. Thank you for the encouragement from the beginning, for the CWW and for all the Zoom Fridays during lockdown.

Thank you to my supervisor Prof. Joe O'Hara, for your complete support throughout this journey.

I owe a huge thank you to Dr. Colm O'Reilly, my supervisor, mentor and friend. Thank you Colm, for always believing in this work, and in me. I am truly grateful.

Thank you to my family. Thank you Rory, for being the best little brother and always keeping my feet on the ground! Thank you to my parents, Anne and Conor. Mam, thank you for always having the best advice, no matter what the situation is. Thanks for pushing me to take the CTYI exam in 2003 as well, that worked out pretty well in the end. Dad, thank you for your constant support, the cups of coffee and for all the fun. I'd like to think listening to all your stories over the years made me a better writer.

A final thank you to my wonderful partner, Denise. D, truly none of this would exist without you. Some of the best parts of this research came from conversations we had. Thank you for the support, encouragement and love.

This study has been in progress since I worked as a CTYI Residential Assistant. While I did not know the shape it would eventually take, I knew that I wanted to help our LGBTQ student population to feel safe and affirmed on the programme. I wanted them to feel that the staff supported them and that they could be themselves, even if it was only for three weeks each summer. When finally putting all of this together, I thought about several wonderful students I worked with. I thought of the gay boy with the best style on campus, wearing palazzo pants, berets and pearls, but changing into drab, quiet clothes before his parents picked him up. I thought of the transgender girl who came out to me, how her posture instantly changed when she knew it was ok. I thought of the first nonbinary student who came on the programme after a tough year at school and left a brighter, happier child. I thought of all the queer students who came back to work as staff members and helped their students in turn.

Most of all, I thought about the transgender boy forced to be in a girls' RA group in 2014. I was very lucky that it was my group. The conversations we had have informed everything since. Thank you. This is for all of you.

# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures	ix
List of Appendices	ix
Abstract	x
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background	1
1.2.1 Centre for Talented Youth Ireland	2
1.2.2 Rationale for the Study	2
1.2.3 Scope of the Study	3
1.2.4 LGBTQ	4
1.3 Overview of Chapters	4
Chapter 2: Literature Review	4
Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Design	5
Chapter 4: Presentation and Analysis Part 1	6
Chapter 5: Presentation and Analysis Part 2	7
Chapter 6: Discussion	8
Chapter 7: Conclusion	8
1.4 Chapter Conclusion	8
Chapter 2: Literature Review	9
2.1 Introduction to Literature Review	9
2.2 Defining Giftedness	9
2.2.1 Conceptions of Giftedness	10
Francis Galton	10
Charles Spearman	11
Lewis Terman	11
Leta Stetter Hollingworth	11
Howard Gardner	12
2.2.3 Influential Models of Giftedness	13
Francis Gagné and the DMGT	13
Joseph Renzulli and the Three Ring Concept of Giftedness	13
Robert Sternberg and the WICS Model	14
Domain Specific Giftedness	14
Talent Development Model	15
2.2.4 Conclusion	16
2.3 Gifted Education in Practice	16

2.3.1 Identification	16
Stanford-Binet	17
WISC-V	18
Above-Level Testing	18
Criticisms of IQ Tests	19
2.3.2 Interventions	19
Acceleration	19
Enrichment Programmes	20
Centre for Talented Youth, Ireland	22
2.4 Gifted LGBTQ Research	22
2.4.1 Early Research on Gifted LGBTQ Young People	23
2.4.2 Current Research Gifted LGBTQ Research	24
Non-Empirical Studies	24
Empirical Studies	24
2.4.3 Themes in Gifted LGBTQ Research	27
Identity Development	27
Peer Relationships and Social Norms	28
Mental Health	29
Support Structures	29
2.5 LGBTQ Focused Research in Ireland	30
2.5.1 LGBTQ History, Legislation and Policy in Ireland	30
2.5.2 Common Themes in LGBTQ Focused Research in Ireland	31
Anti-LGBTQ Language Use	31
Bullying and Violence	32
Heteronormative School Environment	33
School Leadership, Policy and Lack of Interventions	34
2.6 The Effects of a Negative Climate on LGBTQ Young People	35
2.7 Chapter Conclusion	35
Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Design	37
3.1 Chapter Introduction	37
3.1.1 Research Statement	38
3.2 Philosophical Foundations	38
3.2.1 Queer Theory	39
3.2.2 Transformative Paradigm	40
3.3 Mixed Methods Research	42
3.4 Research Problem and Approach	43
3.5 Research Design	45
3.5.1 Participant Sample	45
3.5.2 Ethical Considerations	46

3.5.3 Insider Researcher Position	47
3.5.4 Pilot Study	48
3.6 Research Methods- Data Collection	48
3.6.1 Questionnaires	48
3.6.2 Interviews	50
3.6.3 Focus Groups	51
3.7 Research Methods- Data Analysis	52
3.7.1 Quantitative Data Analysis (SPSS)	52
3.7.2 Qualitative Data Analysis	53
3.8 Reliability and Validity	55
3.9 Chapter Conclusion	55
Chapter 4: Presentation and Analysis Part 1	57
4.1 Introduction	57
4.1.1 Participant Demographics	58
4.2 Overall Climate at School and CTYI	63
4.3 Factors Contributing to a Negative Climate	66
4.3.1 Negative Remarks and Language	67
Negative Remarks at School	69
Negative Remarks at CTYI	72
Negative Language from Teachers/ Staff Members	74
4.3.2 Harassment and Bullying	76
4.3.3 Lack of Acceptance from Peers	78
4.3.4 Unsupportive Staff	80
4.4 Factors Contributing to a Positive Climate	82
4.4.1 Affirming Extra-Curricular Activities	83
4.4.2 Supportive Leadership	84
4.4.3 Acceptance from Peers	86
4.5 Intervention Findings	86
School	87
CTYI	89
4.5.1 Effect of Climate on Intervention	92
4.5.2 Factors of Intervention	92
4.6 Conclusions	99
Chapter 5: Presentation and Analysis Part 2	101
5.1 Introduction	101
5.2 Overview of Participants' Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation	102
Gender Identity	103
Sexual Orientation	105
5.3 New Contributions to the Field	106

Queer	106
Asexual Spectrum	107
5.4 Gifted Identity Development	109
Social and Emotional Development	110
Twice Exceptional	111
Giftedness and Gender Norms	111
5.5 LGBTQ Identity Development	113
Coming Out	113
Identity Rejection	116
Identity Affirmation	118
5.6 Intersecting Identities	119
5.7 Conclusion	120
Chapter 6: Discussion	122
6.1 Discussion of Chapter 4 Findings	122
6.1.1 The Climate for Gifted LGBTQ Post-Primary School Students in Ireland	122
Factors Contributing to a Negative Climate	122
Factors Contributing to a Positive Climate	123
6.1.2 Interventions Against Anti-LGBTQ Language	124
6.2 Discussion of Chapter 5 Findings	126
6.2.1 Expanding Understandings of LGBTQ	126
6.2.2 Identity Development for Gifted LGBTQ Youth	127
6.3 Further Research	129
Chapter 7 Conclusion	132
7.1 Introduction	132
7.2 Research Questions Answered	132
7.3 New Knowledge	134
7.5 Limitations of the Study	134
7.6 Future Research	135
Catholic Ethos	135
Mental Health	136
7.7 Creating Change	137
Creating Change at School	137
Change at CTYI	139
7.8 Conclusion- Hopes for the Future	140
References	142
Appendices	167
Appendix 1	167
Appendix 2	169



## **List of Tables**

- Table 1- Overview of commonly used identification tools.
- Table 2- Interview participants.
- Table 3- Focus group participants.
- Table 4- Questionnaire participant sexual orientation identifiers.
- Table 5- Questionnaire participant gender identities.
- Table 6- Negative remarks and language at school.
- Table 7- Negative remarks and language at CTYI.
- Table 8- Factors of intervention at school.
- Table 9- Factors of intervention at CTYI.
- Table 10- Questionnaire participants with asexual identities.

## **List of Figures**

- Figure 1- Questionnaire participant LGBTQ pie chart.
- Figure 2- Questionnaire participant gender pie chart.
- Figure 3- Acceptance and support at school.
- Figure 4- Acceptance and support at CTYI.
- Figure 5- Factors contributing to a negative climate chart.
- Figure 6- Negative remarks at school bar chart.
- Figure 7- Negative remarks at CTYI bar chart.
- Figure 8- Factors contributing to a positive climate chart.
- Figure 9- Staff intervention at school bar chart.
- Figure 10- Student intervention at school bar chart
- Figure 11- Respondent intervention at school bar chart.
- Figure 12- Staff intervention at CTYI bar chart.
- Figure 13- Student intervention at CTYI bar chart.
- Figure 14- Respondent intervention at CTYI bar chart.
- Figure 15- Gifted identity development chart.
- Figure 16- LGBTQ identity development chart.

## **List of Appendices**

- Appendix 1: Copy of Survey
- Appendix 2: DCU Research Ethics Committee Approval
- Appendix 3: LGBTQ Terminology

## **Abstract**

This mixed methods study explores the experiences of gifted LGBTQ post-primary students in Ireland. The participant sample in this study is composed of current post-primary students and recent university students, who have been identified as gifted and attended a CTYI summer programme between 2017 and 2019. The quantitative data collection method was an online anonymous questionnaire, while the qualitative data collection methods were interviews and focus groups. Quantitative data is analysed to examine the frequency of negative remarks and language about LGBTQ people, the frequency of intervention by staff, students and the respondents themselves when this language occurs and the correlation between climate and intervention. A thematic analysis of the qualitative data was conducted, which identified common themes within the negative language used. Factors that influenced participants' willingness to intervene in situations of negative language use were also explored. The transformative paradigm guides this study, which places central importance on the lives and experiences of marginalised communities, uses transformative theory to develop the inquiry approach and links results of social inquiry to action.

The study also explores identity development for gifted LGBTQ post-primary students, including the experience of coming out, social and emotional development and peer relations. This study is the first to discuss the experiences of gifted LGBTQ young people in Ireland.

# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This research study seeks to explore the experiences of gifted lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) post-primary students in Ireland, in particular the effects of organisation/ school climate and culture on the experiences of gifted LGBTQ students. This is the first set of data on the experiences of gifted LGBTQ students in Ireland. Findings from this research will hopefully benefit all those working with this student population, as well as contribute to two fields of academic research; gifted education research and research on the experiences of LGBTQ adolescents.

In this chapter, I will introduce the background to my research study and briefly outline what will be covered in each chapter of the thesis.

## **1.2 Background**

Before it became a research study, my work in this area began seven years ago when I developed a policy and staff training for the residential team at Centre for Talented Youth, Ireland (CTYI) in 2015. I wanted to create a clear policy that would deal with anti-LGBTQ harassment and bullying and ensure the rising numbers of LGBTQ students felt safe and affirmed while on the programme. In particular, CTYI had more transgender and gender non-conforming students attending, with no guidelines on how to accommodate name changes, how to relay information on new pronouns to staff, or to assign residential groupings. When I began researching what other centres for gifted programming were doing, I realised there was very little research on gifted LGBTQ young people and none outside of the United States. I contacted ShoutOut, an Irish organisation that runs anti-bullying workshops in schools, and put together a first draft of our policy and guidelines. I adapted this over the years, responding to each new issue that occurred at CTYI, feedback from staff and students and each new piece of gifted LGBTQ research. I began speaking about our policy and practices informally to other gifted education coordinators. I then gave presentations about this work at several gifted education conferences. From my first day on the EdD programme, I knew this is what my research would be. This study is a culmination of the policy work, practice implementation, staff training, student feedback, staff feedback and conversations over the last seven years.

### **1.2.1 Centre for Talented Youth Ireland**

Centre for Talented Youth, Ireland (CTYI) was established in Dublin City University in 1992 to respond to the needs of young people with high academic ability. The Centre aims to provide a highly stimulating academic experience, in an atmosphere that is supportive of both social and emotional needs. For many students attending, CTYI provides the first opportunity to meet others who are like themselves and who share common interests, which is of enormous value on returning to their usual environment (Gilheany, 2005). As well as programmes for gifted students and talent identification, CTYI is engaged in gifted education research. CTYI has produced doctoral theses on gifted disadvantaged students (Carroll, 2020; Breslin, 2016; Healion, 2013), dual enrolment (Ledwith, 2013) and the effects of enrichment programmes for gifted students (O'Reilly, 2010). CTYI has also collaborated on research with parents of gifted students (T. L. Cross et al., 2019), teachers (Cross, Cross & O'Reilly, 2018), social coping and self-concept among gifted students (Cross et al., 2015; J. R. Cross et al., 2019) and gifted adolescents and bullying (Connolly, 2017; Laffan et al., 2022).

### **1.2.2 Rationale for the Study**

When considering the factors which create a positive or negative environment for gifted LGBTQ young people, I identified that a mixed methods research design would allow me to both generalise some findings to the population, as well as develop a detailed view of the phenomenon for the individuals experiencing it.

I decided to use the GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network) Local Climate Survey as the basis for my quantitative data collection. This survey, and the national version of it, are conducted biannually in the United States to collect data on the experiences of LGBTQ young people for over a decade (Kosciw et al., 2021). The survey has also been used in Ireland (BeLonG To Youth Services and Pizmony-Levy, 2019) and in a summer camp setting (Adelman and Woods, 2006). The quantitative data gathered from the questionnaire gives an overall view of students' perceptions of school and CTYI, and the levels of acceptance for LGBTQ people. The closed questions within the questionnaire could identify factors that influenced overall climate and allow me to understand the best predictors of this. The open-ended questions would allow for emerging themes and a more nuanced understanding of the topic. It was also important to me to include open text for identification of gender identity and sexual orientation, so as not to limit any participants' construction of their identity. Before the questionnaire was sent to the sample, I conducted a small pilot study with a group of former students.

For my qualitative data, I conducted a series of interviews and focus groups. I designed an interview schedule with questions that would reflect my research objectives, but also allow for new directions of conversation to arise (which they did). I chose to run focus groups in addition to interviews and the questionnaire, in order for further triangulation of data. There was a great deal of discussion in both groups and I ensured that all participants were called on to give their experiences and opinions. The participants spoke amongst each other, developed ideas together and contrasted their experiences, when different.

I also believe it is a researcher's responsibility to understand the marginalised community they are working with. I have worked directly with gifted LGBTQ youth for the past several years, creating policies and practices that challenged the status quo and positively affected their experience of the CTYI programme.

While data is presented for two sites, school and CTYI, this study is not designed to directly compare them. Each site is rooted in their own complex social and cultural contexts, which would make this an inaccurate and unfair comparison. However, the distinctions made by students for each setting are relevant in terms of determining strategies and practices that can create a more positive climate at any school and gifted education organisation.

### **1.2.3 Scope of the Study**

It is hoped that findings from this research project will contribute further insight to the national body of research on LGBTQ adolescents, which informs related educational policy and practice guidelines for schools. This study will also address a lacuna in the field of gifted education research, by providing an insight into the lives of gifted and LGBTQ young people outside of the current US-centric frame of reference. The study's findings can be utilised to create a model of best practice for working with gifted LGBTQ young people and to engage collaborative research with international gifted education programmes, which would allow similar organisations to better support their LGBTQ student community.

### **1.2.4 Researcher Background**

I have been working with CTYI for seven years as the organisation's Residential Coordinator and Garda Vetting Officer. As Residential Coordinator, I manage the team of Residential Assistants each summer, who are responsible for the pastoral care of approximately 650 students. In this role, I have acted as a support and advocate for LGBTQ students attending the programme, liaised with parents of LGBTQ students and developed training and policy to support this student population. As the organisation's sole Garda Vetting Officer, I am well versed in Child Protection Policy and safeguarding. I have completed the Living, Equality and

Diversity (LEAD) eLearning Programme (Irish Universities Equality Network) and participated in specialised workshops on LGBTQ adolescent mental health (Jigsaw and BeLonG To), LGBTQ bullying in schools (ShoutOut) and training for professionals working with transgender youth (TENI).

I have presented at multiple gifted education conferences in the United States and Europe, most recently at the European Council of High Ability (ECHA) conference in The Hague. I have now published two book chapters related to this topic. One is a guide for counsellors working with gifted transgender and gender non-conforming students in *Handbook for Counselors Serving Students with Gifts and Talents* (2021, 2nd ed.). The other is a collaboration with Dr. Alena Treat, on best practices for supporting gifted LGBTQ students, in *Introduction to Gifted Education* (2022, 2nd. ed).

### **1.2.5 LGBTQ**

There are many variations of the acronym used to describe lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people. Some organisations or researchers choose to include a + symbol to denote other identities not present within just 'LGBTQ'. Some include an A, for asexual, or an I, for Intersex. None of these acronyms is right or wrong. Some participants in this study use different terms, e.g. 'queer' as an all-encompassing term (queer people, queer community etc.). Some research studies use variations of this acronym, in order to best represent their specific participant sample. I have done my best to keep this as clear as possible throughout. For studies who did not have transgender or queer participants, e.g. Peterson & Rishcar (2000), I have simply stated lesbian, gay and bisexual without the acronym, to avoid confusion.

## **1.3 Overview of Chapters**

### *Chapter 2: Literature Review*

The Literature Review is designed to provide the reader with a comprehensive overview of the broad research areas that informed this study. The first section of this chapter will discuss the theories of giftedness, tracing the changes in conceptions of intelligence over the 19th and 20th century. Models of gifted education will then be discussed, including domains specific giftedness, the talent development model and models from influential thinkers in the field; Robert Sternberg, Francoys Gagné and Joseph Renzulli. There is a brief overview of identification methods in gifted education and the two main interventions for gifted students, enrichment and acceleration programmes. These methods are also discussed in the context of CTYI. The second section will discuss the research on young people who are both gifted and LGBTQ. There are limited studies on this topic and virtually none outside of the United

States context. Another issue is the frequent citation of studies with little to no empirical grounding. Thankfully, empirical studies in this area have increased in the last ten years or so, with several important studies published just in the last two years (Lo et al., 2021; Tuite et al. 2021; Wikoff et al., 2021). Themes within these studies will be discussed, in particular facets of identity development, peer relations, support structures and mental health. The final section will introduce research on LGBTQ young people in Ireland. A brief overview of Irish legislation and history of LGBTQ rights is given, in order to provide overall context to the landscape of this research area within the twentieth and twenty-first century. The overall themes identified are anti-LGBTQ language use, bullying, the effects of a heteronormative school environment and the effects of leadership and policy within schools. As the study asks about the climate for students, a brief overview of school climate research is also given.

### *Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Design*

The Methodology and Research Design chapter opens with my overall research statement, which I have summarised below.

This mixed methods study will explore the experiences of gifted LGBTQ students in Ireland and the factors that create a positive, or negative, environment for this population. A convergent mixed methods design will be used. Quantitative data will be analysed to examine the frequency of negative remarks regarding LGBTQ people, the frequency of interventions regarding such remarks and the correlation between external interventions (staff and students) and personal interventions. The qualitative data will explore the content of such negative remarks, factors which affect participants' willingness to intervene in situations of harassment or bullying and their general perception of LGBTQ support in the two environments studied. Findings from this study will be used to advocate for change, on a local level, in my professional capacity at CTYI, and hopefully on a broader scale also.

The philosophical foundations of this study will then be discussed, in particular the transformative paradigm and the work of Donna M. Mertens. I chose to conduct a mixed methods study in order to develop a detailed view of the phenomenon for the individuals experiencing it. An overview is given of my data collection methods, ethical considerations and my own position as an 'insider researcher'. My participant sample for this study consists of current or recent post-primary students, who have been identified as gifted and attended a CTYI summer programme within 2017-2019. Overall I had 155 participants across the anonymous questionnaire (n=142), two focus groups and eight interviews. Of the

questionnaire, two thirds identified as LGBTQ. All of my interviewees identified as LGBTQ, along with half of the focus groups participants.

I used descriptive statistics to analyse the quantitative data gathered from the questionnaire, using SPSS. A correlational analysis using Spearman's rho was also conducted to investigate the correlation of several variables related to frequency of personal intervention. I conducted a thematic analysis on my qualitative data, which came from three sources: responses to the open text boxes in the questionnaire, two focus groups and eight interviews. The transformative paradigm significantly influenced my research design and the data collection methods chosen. It was vital to me that this study would take the utmost care to place the experiences of gifted LGBTQ young people at the forefront of the work, ultimately using the findings to influence social change, at an organisational level and beyond.

#### *Chapter 4: Presentation and Analysis Part 1*

Presentation and Analysis Part 1 focuses on my four key research questions.

RQ1- What is the climate for gifted LGBTQ post primary students in Ireland at school?

RQ2- What is the climate for gifted LGBTQ post primary students in Ireland at a gifted summer enrichment programme (CTYI)?

RQ3- What is the frequency of intervention in situations of negative remarks and language about LGBTQ people and does the climate of a site affect the frequency of intervention?

RQ4- What factors contribute to the frequency of intervention in situations of negative remarks/ language about LGBTQ people?

This chapter presents my findings and analysis on the research questions above, with quantitative findings on participant perceptions of the sites (school and CTYI) and their climate for LGBTQ adolescents. A thematic analysis of the key factors that create a negative or positive climate is presented, drawing from the qualitative data of the study. In terms of creating a negative climate, I identified that language, lack of acceptance from peers and lack of support from staff and leadership were key factors in creating a negative climate. In terms of creating a positive climate, I identified that affirming extra-curricular activities (in particular drama and music), peer acceptance and supportive staff and leadership played an important role. Overall, participants reported that CTYI had a more positive climate than their school. Experiences in school were largely mixed, with half of participants reporting that staff and peers were 'somewhat supportive', however also reporting frequent negative language and a lack of interventions. Almost all participants reported that peers and staff at CTYI were supportive, with far lower rates of negative language. The findings on intervention were



slightly skewed; due to two thirds of participants reporting that they never heard any negative language at CTYI (therefore did not have to seek intervention). I then conducted a thematic analysis on the factors of intervention given by participants. Several themes were identified, including fear, context of remark, overall environment and perception of support..

### *Chapter 5: Presentation and Analysis Part 2*

The content of Chapter 5 arose from an unexpected finding in my qualitative data. While interview and focus group participants were asked the same questions as contained in the questionnaire, many chose to expand greatly on their own identity development as a young LGBTQ person. This led to some very interesting conversations and rich data. As there is such limited research on gifted LGBTQ young people generally and almost none outside of the United States setting, I chose to include this data on the merits of its contribution to a small field and designate it as RQ 5.

RQ5- What are the experiences of identity development for gifted LGBTQ post primary students in Ireland?

This chapter explores gender identity, sexual orientation and how each of these play into the identity development of the gifted participants in the study. Overall, two thirds of participants in the study identified as LGBTQ, with fourteen unique gender identifiers and seventeen unique sexual orientation identifiers. One very new finding to the field is the experiences of participants who are gifted and asexual. Of all LGBTQ identified participants in the questionnaire, 15% identified as being somewhere on the asexual spectrum of identities. Chapter 5 discusses gifted identity development, under the themes of social and emotional development, gender norms and twice exceptionality. Most participants did not discuss their feelings about being gifted generally, choosing to focus on their experiences at CTYI's enrichment programmes instead. While the academic rigour of the courses was important, many discussed the social side as having a significant impact on their overall development. One interviewee identified himself as twice exceptional and discussed how this affects him. LGBTQ identity development is also discussed, under the themes of coming out, identity affirmation and identity rejection. Each interviewee had very different experiences coming out at school and these are described in detail, particularly how this led to either identity rejection or affirmation, both internally and externally. Each of these sections greatly benefit from interview and focus group quotes.

### *Chapter 6: Discussion*

Chapter 6 offers an overall discussion of the findings of Chapters 4 and 5. For Chapter 4, the research questions are examined, along with the results. An overview of the factors that create a negative and positive climate, with corresponding research are also discussed. For Chapter 5, research on LGBTQ identity labels is considered and how an overall expansion of identities corresponds with the findings of this study. Finally, further research is contemplated, particularly in relation to current studies in the field of gifted education generally.

### *Chapter 7: Conclusion*

Chapter 7 is the conclusion of the study. This chapter discusses limitations of the study and the new knowledge gained from it. Two additional themes arose during the study but were unfortunately beyond the scope- mental health and Catholic ethos. Each of these would make for interesting future research. Finally, suggestions for change are offered, for gifted programmes and schools. The chapter closes with quotes from some study participants, who offer their own hopes for change and how they plan to create it in their own lives and beyond.

## **1.4 Chapter Conclusion**

One of the most influential figures in early studies of giftedness is Lewis Terman. Terman's work is regarded as controversial now, due to his views on fixed intelligence and class, race and ethnicity. However, his longitudinal study of gifted people remains an important contribution to the field. He is also the first person to write about gifted gay men and lesbians. The presence of gifted LGBTQ participants in his longitudinal study is a reminder that this population is not new. Terman and Oden (1947, p. 121) wrote that their 'present concern is with gifted subjects for whom heterosexual adjustment has been difficult or impossible, or who have developed a pronounced tendency to bisexuality.' This research study is also concerned for gifted participants who are struggling with their identity, in terms of gender and sexual orientation, though for the exact opposite reasons as Terman. This introductory chapter is designed to offer an overview of the research fields of giftedness, LGBTQ and the combination of both. It is hoped that this opening section has helped set the scene for the study and highlight the merits of this piece of research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

## **2.1 Introduction to Literature Review**

This chapter aims to provide the reader with a comprehensive overview of the broad (and continuously evolving) research areas that relate to the subject matter at hand. The first section of this chapter will discuss the myriad theories of gifted education, common practices and provisions for gifted students and gifted education within a national context. The second section will discuss the limited body of research on young people who are both gifted and LGBTQ. The final section will focus on the experiences of LGBTQ young people in Ireland, in particular the effects of bullying/ harassment and school environment on identity development.

## **2.2 Defining Giftedness**

Perhaps the most often cited definition comes from the Marland Report (1972), written for the United States Office of Education, which outlined the unique needs and challenges of gifted students and offered the following,

‘Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons, who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programmes and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school programme in order to realise their contribution to self and society’ (Marland, 1972, p. 10).

The report stated that gifted children could be identified as those who had demonstrated achievement and/ or potential in general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative thinking, leadership ability and visual/ performing arts (Marland, 1972). It also collected survey data, which found a lack of existing services for gifted children, with most extending to a narrow segment of the gifted population, which excluded underserved populations. The definition given is broad and includes both children who have demonstrated high ability and those who have the potential for high ability, in one or multiple areas. This is a uniquely inclusive definition, as many models and theories of giftedness (which both preceded and succeeded the report) differentiate potential (innate natural abilities) from demonstrated ability (achievement).

In terms of recognising the needs of gifted students in Ireland, this was greatly impacted by the Special Education Review Committee, set up by the Irish government in 1993 to seek advice and expertise from those in the special needs areas, and to advocate for best practice (O’Reilly, 2018). The first definition of giftedness, as offered by the report of the Special Education Review Committee (DES, 1993), owes much to Marland’s (1972) definition. It

refers to proficiency in categories of general ability and specific abilities, like creativity, leadership, psychomotor ability and mechanical aptitude.

The next section of this chapter will discuss such theories, from early conceptions within the field to more modern models and research.

### **2.2.1 Conceptions of Giftedness**

All definitions of giftedness are a consequence of several factors, including the motivations of those making the proposal, the social climate of the time and the shifts in our knowledge of human abilities (Coleman and Cross, 2005). The following section will trace the history of the field of gifted education and psychology, presenting the theories, models and work of influential thinkers within the field.

#### *Francis Galton*

Francis Galton's book *Hereditary Genius* (1869) was one of the first to present a theory of genius, which he conceptualised as an exceptionally high ability that was innate. Galton garnered support for his theory by analysing the family lineage of distinguished European men, determining that genius was genetically inherited (Kaufman and Sternberg, 2008). Galton considered the mental qualities that made outstanding achievements possible as a broad, or general ability, which was natural and attributable to genetics (Jensen, 2002). In direct contrast to future models of giftedness that would focus on development, Galton (1896) believed that the key determinant in an individual's place within a distribution of intelligence was where they stood prior to intervention, instruction and/ or practice. In Galton's theory, giftedness would manifest as an outstanding and new contribution to society, which one would assume is more likely to happen in adulthood. Coleman and Cross (2005) view this notion as fatalistic, as it is unlikely that all gifted children will make such contributions and this definition requires a potentially life long wait for giftedness to become apparent. However, these ideas were popular at the time and subsequently led to the popularity of the IQ test as a key identification measure. Some aspects of Galton's work are controversial, in particular his belief in the primacy of heredity affirmed social structures, racial superiority and class dynamics. His focus on physical differences in subjects (e.g. phrenology) and the overall field of eugenics encouraged scientific 'proof' of the prejudices of the time (Silverman, 1989).

#### *Charles Spearman*

A few years after the publication of Galton's work, psychologist Charles Spearman (1904) began to investigate the positive correlations between a variety of cognitive tests. Using his newly developed statistical technique of factor analysis, Spearman identified a factor (latent

trait) which he labelled *g* and defined as the universal notion of intelligence, possessed in varying amounts by all people and responsible for individual differences in test scores and academic performances. This came to be regarded as general intelligence. Spearman also determined some variance specific to each test, which he labelled *s* (specific abilities). Spearman believed that general ability should not be based on the summation or average of a number of tests, but the correlations among many different measures of abilities.

### *Lewis Terman*

Lewis Terman's (1925) compendium of research was one of the most influential longitudinal studies into giftedness; his study included 1528 school children with an IQ of 135 or higher. Terman and his research team focused on questions of intelligence and achievement, namely whether children with high IQ would grow to be eminent adults and what (if any) personal and educational antecedents could nurture their development (Subotnik and Arnold, 1994). One of the most important outcomes of his study was that it normalised certain childhood behaviours, as prior to this a common misconception was that eminent individuals were in some way pathological (Colangelo & Davis, 2003), as giftedness and neurosis was viewed as inevitably linked (Robinson & Clinkenbeard, 2008). While Terman (1954; 1959) later wrote that personality factors and a supportive environment played an important role in the formulation of high ability, and that individual motivational and emotional differences could directly contribute to differential achievements, overall he (like Galton) believed strongly in both innate group differences in intelligence and eugenics.

### *Leta Stetter Hollingworth*

While Galton and Spearman's work considered how giftedness occurred with an individual, Leta Stetter Hollingworth's research was firmly focused on the practical learning environments and supports needed for giftedness to flourish. Hollingworth questioned Galton's work throughout her career, arguing that "eminence and superior mental ability are not identical" (Hollingworth, 1926, p. 14), that the lower numbers of eminent women was a result of sociological limitations, as opposed to biological, and that these factors also affected the achievements of other less advantaged groups in society (Silverman, 1989). There were many similarities between the work of Hollingworth and Terman; both were pioneers in differential psychology, they relied heavily upon objective instruments of measurement and they each executed extensive studies of gifted children. They considered giftedness as the core of high intelligence which set gifted students apart from their same-age peers and believed that this applied to not only general intellectual functioning, but also manifested as different ways of thinking, different social and emotional characteristics, different educational needs and unique developmental trajectories (Dai, 2018). However, one major philosophical

difference was their views on the relationships of education and opportunity to giftedness, in particular regarding inherited ability as the prime determinant of achievement (Silverman, 1989). Hollingworth's work greatly advanced above-age and grade-level testing research (Stanley, 1990), while her insights regarding general and special abilities contributed to numerous modern academic interventions for gifted young people, including gifted curriculum and enrichment programmes (Borland, 1990). From her clinical observations, Hollingworth concluded that that social adjustment among one's peers became more difficult as IQ scores increased (Robinson and Clinkenbeard, 2008), which would influence many future studies on giftedness and peer relations (Gallagher, 1958; Gross, 1989; 2003; Dauber & Benbow, 1990; Swiatek, 1995).

### *Howard Gardner*

Howard Gardner considered that intelligence should not be thought of as singular, but rather that it could occur in several different forms. Gardner's (1983; 1993) theory of multiple intelligences consisted of several distinct categories of human abilities: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalist. Gardner acknowledged that social and cultural influences could have a significant effect in defining giftedness and that external factors (such as a supportive home environment) could directly affect the developmental process. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences contradicted the notion that traditional intelligence measures (e.g. IQ tests) were sufficient to determine giftedness. Gardner has been criticised for the lack of experimental and empirical evidence provided for his theory (Sternberg, 1994). However, Gardner is included here as his efforts are important in light of debunking the early theories of fixed intelligence proposed by Galton and Terman. His effort to break the hegemony of the psychometric interpretation of general intelligence can also be seen as socially motivated, as he desired to achieve a more equitable concept of human potential (Dai, 2020).

Conceptions of giftedness in the early twentieth century, and the prominence of IQ testing as the primary means of identification, were heavily influenced by the rise of behaviourism in the field of psychology and cause-and-effect relationships as the primary source of inquiry in the social sciences (Cross, 1994). Feldman (2003) argued that a determined adherence to traditional notions of giftedness as innate and fixed (e.g. g factor theory), solely identified by most testing measures, would be insufficient to sustain the field of gifted education into the 21st century.

### **2.2.3 Influential Models of Giftedness**

#### *Francoys Gagné and the DMGT*

Francoys Gagné (1985; 1995; 2004) proposed the Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT), which differentiates between giftedness (natural abilities) and talent (systematically developed skills). Gagné (2004, p. 120) states that giftedness is the possession and use of 'untrained and spontaneously expressed natural abilities', in at least one ability domain, whereas talent is the outstanding mastery of systematically developed abilities and knowledge, in at least one field. Gagné believed that both should be defined by the individual placing among the top ten percent of peers in the relevant field. The DMGT also takes into account the developmental relationship between gifts and talents and how certain processes affect the transformation of abilities and aptitudes into evolved skills, including the roles of intrapersonal catalysts (e.g. personality, motivation) and environmental catalysts (e.g. surroundings, significant people).

#### *Joseph Renzulli and the Three Ring Concept of Giftedness*

Joseph Renzulli's (1986) Three Ring Concept of Giftedness proposed that giftedness is the interaction among three clusters: above average abilities (general or specific), task commitment and creativity. Renzulli's model was achievement oriented, whereas theories proposed by Gardner and Sternberg focused on innate ability. Renzulli (2005) proposed that giftedness could be separated into schoolhouse giftedness (e.g. standardised test results) and creative-productive giftedness (e.g. original thinking and problem solving). In Renzulli's conception, giftedness is a behaviour that emerges under the right circumstances, where given the right opportunity and environment the creative student can apply their gifts to create products and/ or solve real-world problems (Callahan & Miller, 2005). Miller (2012) notes that one significant strength of the Three Ring model is the flexibility and potential for generalisation, as it incorporates broad-level explanations of the components of giftedness, without being limited to specific situations, ages, or domains.

The Schoolwide Enrichment Model (Renzulli & Reis, 1985) integrates the Three Ring Concept of Giftedness with two other models: the Revolving Door Identification Model (Renzulli et al., 1981) and the Enrichment Triad Model (Renzulli, 1977). The Schoolwide Enrichment Model focuses on the importance of challenging work for gifted students, additional opportunities for enrichment for all students and a more flexible approach to identification (Reis & Peters, 2021).

### *Robert Sternberg and the WICS Model*

Robert Sternberg has contributed two prominent models to the field: the triarchic model of intelligence (1985) and the WICS model (2003; 2005). The triarchic model of intelligence determined three unique forms of giftedness: analytic (e.g. problem solving), synthetic (e.g. creativity) and practical (the ability to use analytic and synthetic techniques pragmatically) (Sternberg, 1985). His consideration of practical intelligence is interesting, as he stated that a person could be considered 'successfully intelligent' by the virtue of how they adapt and shape environments (Sternberg, 1985). Sternberg expanded upon the role of practical applications of intelligence in his later WICS model (2003; 2005), which conceptualised giftedness as a synthesis of wisdom, intelligence and creativity.

'The basic idea of the WICS model is that, in life, people need creative skills and attitudes to produce new and original ideas; analytical skills and attitudes (academic intelligence) to evaluate the quality of these ideas; practical skills and attitudes (practical intelligence) to execute ideas and to persuade others of their value; and wisdom related skills and attitudes in order to ensure that one's ideas help to foster a common good, rather than only the good of oneself and those closely associated with oneself.' (Kaufman and Sternberg, 2008, p. 77)

The WICS model identifies that giftedness is not defined by strengths in each of these aspects, but rather the ability to capitalise on these strengths and compensate for their weaknesses, in order to adapt and succeed in real world environments (Sternberg, 2005). Some early criticisms of the WICS model were that it did not provide any assessment procedure for identifying or instructing gifted children (Feldhusen, 2003) and that it lacked any supporting empirical evidence (Heller, 2003).

### *Domain Specific Giftedness*

Researchers who hold a domain-specific conception of giftedness focus on specific areas of aptitude and the needs of those who require support (e.g. acceleration or enrichment) in order to progress their skill level (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2008). Domain-specific gifted models are in direct contrast to earlier conceptions of giftedness as generalised, as they proposed that giftedness is bound by the domain-specific areas, such as verbal, mathematical, scientific, artistic and social (Van-Tassel Baska, 2005). In contrast to Renzulli's model, Van-Tassel Baska (2005) considers psychological variables (e.g. motivation, creativity) as an output of giftedness and part of the talent development process, not a unique input of giftedness. Brody and Stanley (2005) state that the measurement of specific aptitude is much more useful educationally than general IQ for identifying precocity, a key



component of their view of giftedness. They define the concept of precocity as the idea that 'gifted students are those who, because they learn at a faster rate and can comprehend more advanced ideas at younger ages, can reason much like older students' (Brody and Stanley, 2005, p. 28). Moon and Roselli (2000) note that those with an egalitarian philosophy tend to be more open to domain specific giftedness models, developed in inclusive settings, as opposed to conceptions of giftedness as innate and fixed. Stanley and Benbow (1996, p. 249) considered critics of gifted education programmes, who claimed that such programmes challenged egalitarian education philosophies, were 'pitting equity against excellence', rather than allowing both to coexist. In particular, the authors condemned resistance to differentiated curriculum, equating all aptitude or achievement testing with elitism and the notion that gifted students were called on to assist classmates with their studies (Stanley and Benbow, 1996).

### *Talent Development Model*

The Talent Development Model focuses on identifying domain-specific abilities in all individuals and developing the talents of those who show exceptional abilities in response to instruction (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2022). Subotnik et al. (2018, p. 231) offer the following conception of giftedness, encompassing five main principles in defence of domain-specific talent development.

1. Ability is a cornerstone of talent development (in particular ability in specific domains).
2. Foundational abilities are malleable and need to be developed. These abilities will also have different trajectories at different ages.
3. Opportunities should be offered to individuals to match their stage of talent development.
4. All individuals can benefit from psychosocial skills, training or coaching to enhance their talent development.
5. The aspired outcome is to prepare talented youth seeking to "change the world" to transform their abilities into creative or path-breaking contributions.

The model considers cognitive and psychosocial factors as crucial to the development of gifted students (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2011), that development may change when interacting with different environments and challenges (Dai, 2017) and that there is direct overlap between this paradigmatic approach and social and emotional skill development (Rinn and Murphy, 2022). (Van-Tassel Baska (2005, p. 358) states that domain-specific conceptions of giftedness 'hold the most promise for promoting talent development in individuals at all stages of development', as they take into account the interrelations between aptitudes and interventions, between predispositions and interests,

and between the life of the mind and practical reality. In this aspect, the Talent Development model differs from those who view giftedness as a static, genetic trait, as it views ability and talent as evolving over time, within the right structures (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2022).

**2.2.4 Conclusion**

In the early and mid-twentieth century, conceptions of giftedness largely focused on giftedness as innate and fixed, identified by standardised IQ testing measures. The late twentieth into the twenty-first century marked a departure from these conceptions, as the belief that intelligence is a fixed ability, predetermined by genetics, is no longer representative of contemporary science (Sternberg, 2017). New theories and models challenged previous hegemonic views of how giftedness should be defined and identified. As noted throughout this chapter, theories and those who propose them are influenced, both directly and indirectly, by the society and culture they are writing in. The shift toward domain-specific giftedness and talent development as dominant modes of thinking, as well as increased interest in alternative forms of gifted identification, is likely connected to greater awareness of equity within the field.

**2.3 Gifted Education in Practice**

The previous section has given an overview of influential models, theories and thinkers in the field of gifted education. This section will discuss how these ideas are transformed into practice, specifically identification of and interventions for gifted students.

**2.3.1 Identification**

The table below offers an overview of the most commonly used identification practices in gifted education.

*Overview of Commonly Used Identification Tools (Van-Tassel Baska, 2005, p. 363)*

<b>Traditional</b>	<b>Nontraditional</b>
Intelligence tests	Nonverbal ability tests
Achievement tests	Creativity tests
Aptitude tests (domain-specific)	Student portfolios and performance by audition
Grades	Performance based assessment

Teacher recommendations	Parent, peer and community recommendations
-------------------------	--

Table 1

The rising popularity of behaviourism in the twentieth century led to the development of educational interventions, such as testing practices, that were seen as scientific, equitable and consistent with growing industry and technology. By the time of Terman’s (1925-1959) seminal studies, the IQ test was the primary tool shaping conceptions of giftedness and the needs of gifted students (Cross, 2003). Most current intelligence tests are still designed to measure intelligence as conceptualised in the Catell-Horn-Carroll (CHC) theory, which describes intelligence as a hierarchy, where general intelligence (g) or cognitive ability is at the top, while broader abilities (e.g. fluid reasoning, visual processing, deductive reasoning) sit below this (Gentry et al., 2021). Feldhusen (1984) et al., state that a sound identification process should include five major steps: defining program goals and types of gifted youth to be served; nomination procedures; assessment procedures; individual differentiation, and; validation of the identification process. This section will briefly discuss the two most widely used IQ testing instruments in the field of gifted identification, the Stanford-Binet and the Wechsler scales, as well as above-level testing.

*Stanford-Binet*

Binet and Simon’s (1916) development of a mental scale to identify students who needed alternative types of education was one of the first to include an assessment of higher-level cognitive skills. Subsequent iterations of this scale and correlating tests would have a huge influence on the field of gifted education. Lewis Terman, in collaboration with Maud Merrill, (1916; 1960) adapted Binet’s scale and created the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale, which he used as the primary assessment measure for the children in his study. Terman’s use of the Stanford-Binet undoubtedly popularised it within the field, although the modern version has not too much in common with the version Terman used (Perleth et al., 2000). The Stanford-Binet V consists of ten subtests that measure: fluid reasoning, knowledge, quantitative reasoning, visual spatial processing and working memory (Cao et al., 2017). One critique of the Stanford-Binet is that, at higher ends of the scale, differences tend to be greater than at the mean, while social changes sometimes produce age variations in test-taking skills and underlying cognitive skills (Robinson, 1992).

## *WISC-V*

The Wechsler scales gained popularity in the 1960s American testing market (Lubin, Wallis, & Paine, 1971), as Verbal, Performance and Full Scale IQ scores were introduced and became a popular way for school psychologists to identify students for gifted programming (Silverman & Gilman, 2020). There are several different Wechsler scales, however the most commonly used for gifted identification is the revised Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-V). The WISC-V measures verbal comprehension, perceptual reasoning, working memory, and processing speed. The Wechsler family of instruments have been translated into multiple languages and their validity has been established in multiple countries (Cao et al., 2017). However, like the Stanford-Binet, some criticisms have been levelled at the use of and results produced by the WISC-V. Kaufman et al. (2015) suggest that hypotheses generated from WISC-V profiles should be supported with data from multiple sources (e.g. if a child is taking the test in a language different from their native one). Silverman and Gilman (2020) state that the WISC-V demonstrates wide discrepancies in the scoring patterns of gifted children, as gifted children tend to earn high mean scores in tasks most focused on abstract reasoning ability (verbal, visual spatial, and fluid reasoning), but lower scores in working memory and processing speed. In 2018, NAGC published a position paper, outlining similar concerns regarding score discrepancies when using the WISC-V. NAGC endorsed the use of expanded index scores that could optimise measures of reasoning and minimise processing skills (NAGC, 2018), which could be used to explore a variety of strengths, which would be sufficient to identify cognitive giftedness in diverse, asynchronous children (Silverman & Gilman, 2020).

## *Above-Level Testing*

Both Terman (1926) and Hollingworth (1926) administered above-level testing to some children in their respective gifted study cohorts, although their reasoning for this was not made clear (Warne, 2012). As noted earlier in this chapter, Hollingworth's (1926, 1942) work would have a significant impact on the field, as it greatly influenced the research of Julian Stanley and his work on above level testing (1974; 1990). Above-level testing is the process of identifying children with high ability, by administering a test to a child who is younger (or in a lower school class/ grade) than the group for which the test was originally designed (Stanley & Benbow, 1981-1982). After an initial success with a mathematically bright child, Stanley (1976) administered the College Board's Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) to two hundred middle-school students in Maryland who scored above the mean of high-school seniors on the test. This process, based on above level testing, is now called Talent Search and operates as a key identification process for many gifted programmes around the world (see Lee et al., 2008; Barnett & Gilheany, 1996).

### *Criticisms of IQ Tests*

Stanley (1974) found that high IQ scores were frequently inadequate as a predictor of performance in specific academic areas. Achievement definitions for gifted identification could be more readily applied to schooling, in terms of general academic achievement (Gallagher & Gallagher, 1994) and/ or subject specific achievement (Stanley and Stanley, 1986). While IQ measures, like the Stanford-Binet and Wechsler scales, were originally thought to be fairer than previous measures of intelligence and relatively independent of socio-economic and political considerations, this was unfortunately not always the case (Coleman and Cross, 2005). IQ tests illustrate the individual's academic knowledge gained prior to taking the test; therefore, children who have been socialised in families who promote academic skills have a substantial advantage (Sternberg, 2017). Ford (1998) and Ford et al. (2018) suggest that an over reliance on traditional IQ scores are also a primary barrier to the recruitment and retention of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education programmes.

### **2.3.2 Interventions**

The two main types of intervention for gifted students are acceleration and enrichment programmes. The rationales for acceleration and enrichment programmes are based on different assumptions about four basic concepts: the nature of intellectual giftedness, characteristics of giftedness, the goals of education, and the adequacy of education curricula (Southern et al., 1993). This section will discuss acceleration and enrichment programmes for gifted students, offering an overview of each strategy, its benefits and some challenges.

#### *Acceleration*

As an academic intervention for gifted students, acceleration has garnered a great deal of empirical support (Colelangelo et al. 2004; Assouline et al., 2010; Gross, 2006; Lee 2010). Acceleration is typically defined as progress through an educational programme or setting at a faster rate, or younger age, than conventional (Pressey, 1949). When Terman (1925) looked for bright students to take part in his study, he found that they were frequently the youngest in a class due to accelerated grade placement (Brody, 2004). Colangelo et al.'s (2004) seminal study on acceleration, *A Nation Deceived*, proposed twelve reasons why acceleration was not widely accepted in American schools. The reasons reflected greater concern about grade-based types of acceleration (moving students through school grades at a faster rate), than about subject-based forms of acceleration (allowing earlier access to content). While acceleration is often thought of exclusively as grade skipping, there are a wide variety of programme options that fit the criteria given by Pressey (Southern et al.,

1993), including advanced placement, curriculum compacting, mentorships, extracurricular programs and concurrent enrolment (Colangelo, 2004).

The Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth (SMPY), established by Julian Stanley, aimed to help young people access educational resources in order to fulfil their potential in maths (Stanley, 1974; Benbow, Lubinski and Suchey, 1996). SMPY and Stanley's related research greatly contributed to the development of intervention strategies (including acceleration and enrichment) and programmes for gifted students, while the longitudinal studies of SMPY participants conducted by Lubinski and Benbow (2021; 2006; 2001; 1995) provided empirical evidence of the model's success (Brody & Stanley, 2005). Brody (2004) states that while a variety of accelerative strategies were utilised within SMPY (including subject acceleration and academic summer programmes), it was Stanley's work with students who entered university several years early that gained the most attention.

In their study on teacher attitudes toward acceleration in the Netherlands, Hoogeveen et al., (2005) found that teachers were most concerned about potential isolation, social competence and the development of emotional issues for accelerated students. This pattern is consistent with studies in the United States (Southern & Jones, 2004; Rambo & McCoach, 2012; Siegle et al., 2013), who found that fears of potential social and emotional adjustment issues were the most significant factors in determining negative attitudes toward acceleration. However, studies have shown that students who skipped grades, or took early entrance to school/college, generally did not result in social and emotional difficulties (Rogers, 2002; Colangelo et al., 2004; Benbow et al., 1996). Van-Tassel Baska (1986) states that acceleration can improve the motivation, confidence, and scholarship of gifted students and allow for earlier completion of professional training. In her longitudinal study of exceptionally gifted students in Australia, Gross (2006) found that the social self-esteem for those substantially accelerated was at least one standard deviation above the mean. Several studies have shown that accelerated students, from elementary and secondary levels, also performed as well as older non-accelerated students or outperformed same age, non-accelerated peers on standardised achievement tests (Kulik & Kulik, 1992; Rogers, 1991; 2002). VanTassel-Baska (2021) states that high ability students can only be served well in schools when educators set aside harmful myths about acceleration practices and employ research based accelerative practices.

### *Enrichment Programmes*

While acceleration is an intervention based on the alternation of higher-grade knowledge than typical, or of speeding up the pace of material presented, enrichment supplies richer

and more varied content (Schiever & Maker, 2002). Enrichment programmes can focus on concept rather than skill learning, use interdisciplinary curriculum and theme based studies, cross age grouping and the opportunity for students to engage in hands-on learning and the application of knowledge to solve complex problems (Renzulli & Reis, 2000).

Olszewski-Kubilius (1989, p. 423) outlined the following benefits of enrichment programmes:

1. 'Perceptions of increased social support for learning and achievement due to the homogeneous grouping with other gifted students;
2. Positive feelings resulting from a learning situation that presents a more appropriate match between the students' intellectual abilities and the challenge of a course;
3. Development of study skills as a result of immersion in an intellectually challenging course;
4. Development of independence and enhancement of general living skills;
5. Increased knowledge about university programs and college life;
6. Raising expectations and aspirations for educational achievement due to success in a challenging learning environment;
7. Self-testing of abilities due to placement in an intellectually challenging situation and subsequent re-evaluations and new goal setting that can further a student's progress in attaining excellence.'

In a meta-analysis of the effects of enrichment programmes on gifted students, Kim (2016) found that grade level and programme period were statistically significant moderators of effect sizes for both academic achievement and socioemotional outcomes on enrichment programmes. Furthermore, summer residential programmes had the most significant impact on gifted students' academic achievement, as well as their socioemotional development (Kim, 2016). In their five year study, Barnett & Durden (1993), found that students who participated in CTY summer courses were more likely to take additional college courses while still at school and attend more competitive colleges, compared to their gifted peers who had not attended programmes. Similarly, Olszewski-Kubilius & Grant (1996) found that students who participated in gifted summer programmes continued a pattern of high achievement into higher education studies. From a socioemotional development perspective, Rinn (2006) found that summer enrichment programmes nurtured self-concept and better peer relations for the students who attended, while Enersen (1993) found that making friends and gaining confidence was as integral to gifted students' development as challenging course work. One participant in Hutcheson and Tieso's (2014) study connected his experience at a gifted summer programme with a newfound awareness that the world was

larger and more accepting than he realised, which encouraged him to persevere through the harassment and bullying at school.

### *Gifted Education in Ireland*

As previously noted, interest in gifted education in the United States greatly increased directly following the release of the Marland Report, however this did not last. The waning attention paid to the topic imitated the level of appeal that gifted education had historically held, with both educational decision makers and the general public (Jolly & Robins, 2016). This lack of appeal is one that is often mirrored in Ireland's relationship with gifted education. Ireland has a predominantly egalitarian philosophy, which impacts gifted and talented programming (O'Reilly, 2018). Marland's definition states that gifted children require differentiated curriculum, however this conflicts with more traditional Irish thinking that gifted children are sufficiently challenged through regular classroom activities (O'Reilly, 2010). In the Education Act (1998), the educational needs of 'exceptionally able students' were included within the specified special educational needs, for which interventions should be made as part of general school based education. The Education for Persons With Special Educational Needs Act (the EPSEN Act) was published in 2004, however this act made no reference to giftedness as a recognisable additional educational need, therefore no resource hours could be reserved for gifted students. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) published a set of draft guidelines in 2007, for teachers working with gifted students. A subsequent review of these guidelines (NCCA, 2008) showed that they succeeded in supporting school management and teachers in regards to school policy for gifted children, although did not give enough support on differentiating curriculum (O'Reilly, 2018).

In 2014, CTYI launched the first report of Irish teachers' attitudes toward gifted education (Cross et al., 2014). A questionnaire was administered to schools around Ireland and more than 800 teachers, principals, and resource teachers completed a survey which contained items relating to the participants themselves, schools, current practices and opinions about gifted students. Cross et al. (2014) determined that most Irish teachers are generally supportive of gifted children, however are concerned about a lack of access to specialised knowledge in the area. Almost all respondents were opposed to any form of grade acceleration and some respondents felt that curriculum differentiation was not needed, feeling that gifted students do not need this within the classroom. While most teachers can identify gifted students who are high achieving, there is a struggle in identifying gifted students who are under-performing.



Outside of school based interventions, the only formal gifted programme in Ireland is CTYI.

## **2.4 Gifted LGBTQ Research**

The field of gifted LGBTQ research is still relatively young, compared to other subfields within gifted education, and consists largely of position papers from gifted education advocacy groups and organisations (NAGC, SENG), opinion pieces (Tolan, 1997; Friedrichs, 1997; Eriksson and Stewart, 2005), broad literature reviews (Cohn, 2002; Stewart, 2006; Friedrichs, 2012; Sedillo, 2015; Treat & Whittenburg, 2006) and practical advice for educators (Treat & Seney, 2021; Treat, 2017; Sedillo, 2018 Pride Flag; Friedrichs, 2014). Though limited, there is some empirical research on the topic (Peterson & Rischar, 2000; Treat, 2008; Sedillo, 2013; Hutcheson and Tieso, 2014; Wikoff et al., 2021; Tuite, 2021; Lo et al., 2021) and a small number of case studies (Treat, 2010; Sedillo, 2018 T is Missing; Sewell, 2019). Thus far, gifted LGBTQ research has almost entirely consisted entirely of US centric studies.

This section does not propose that being LGBTQ and being gifted are problems of equal measure (or problems at all), however it is important to consider how being LGBTQ can affect the social and emotional development of gifted students, amid the general demands of adolescent development (Peterson & Rischar, 2000).

### **2.4.1 Early Research on Gifted LGBTQ Young People**

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Terman's longitudinal study of gifted children and development of psychometric testing had a major impact on the field of gifted education. Terman's work focused on many aspects of the lives of gifted people he studied, including gender and sexuality. This short section will discuss Terman's writing on giftedness, gender and sexuality. While his work was clearly informed by the culture of 1930s-40s America, it is still an interesting contribution to the field, as it represents the first writings on gifted gay and lesbian people.

In the third volume of his study series, Terman's interest in masculine and feminine traits appears, as he explored these traits in the study's gifted subjects (1930). Finding that 'sex differences' were less extreme in the experimental group than the larger population, Terman interpreted this to mean that gifted girls had more masculine traits than their non-gifted female peers. However, Terman (1936) was quick to assert that male gifted students did not possess or display an increase in feminine traits, as this would have potentially implied homosexuality (Vialle, 1994). In order to further his theories, Terman developed the Masculinity-Femininity (MF) test, which would enable a quantitative analysis of a subject's

deviation from 'the mean of his or her sex in interests, attitudes, and thought trends' (1936, p. 3). Specifically, questions were devised to ascertain the levels of the following traits,

'The lists agree in denoting as masculine traits (a) much interest in science, mechanics, sports, and travel; and correlatively (b) little or no interest in religion, domestic arts, art, music, and literature. Relatively feminine traits are similarly found to be (a) much interest in art, domestic arts, religion, music, and literature, and (b) little or no interest in travel, sports, and mechanics.' (Terman and Miles, 1936)

By quantifying traits as distinctly and uniquely masculine and feminine, Terman could standardise male and female behaviour, while providing an important mechanism to weed out sexual 'deviants' (Kline, 2001). Terman and Miles' (1936) Masculinity–Femininity (MF) test subsequently contributed to the standardisation of measures of gender for other psychometric tests (Hegarty, 2007), placing masculinity and femininity firmly as logical opposites of each other. A later chapter of the study focused on the gifted participants and mental health, in particular the collected data on any experiences of insanity, nervous disorders, alcoholism, delinquency, and homosexuality (Terman and Oden, 1947). Terman (1947, p. 120) described the cases of seventeen study participants (eleven men and six women), who were 'known, or believed on good evidence, to have a history of homosexuality'. For three of the women, information was provided by a secondary source, whereas all others provided the details themselves. Interestingly, the authors emphasise their belief that they have identified all of the 'cases of marked homosexuality' amongst male participants, ensuring these are recognised as 'few', whereas 'among the women the number of unknown cases may be greater' (Terman & Oden, 1947).

#### **2.4.2 Current Research Gifted LGBTQ Research**

##### *Non-Empirical Studies*

As noted in the opening of this section, there is a limited amount of empirical studies within the field of gifted LGBTQ research. In 1995, Friedrichs and Etheridge conducted an informal survey on gifted issues within a non-heterosexual population and published their findings in the *Council for Exceptional Children/The Association for Gifted Newsletter*. Several of the gay, lesbian and bisexual youth who responded to the survey stated that educators should become more aware of the risk factors that these youth faced, including suicidal ideation (Friedrichs & Etheridge, 1995). Friedrichs (1997) then extended this survey and reported that gifted gay students had social and emotional problems, which related to their combination of giftedness and sexual orientation and might increase the risk of suicide. Sedillo (2015)

criticises the frequent citation of Friedrichs (1997) as an authoritative study on gay gifted youth, as it lacks empirical grounding.

Tolan's (1997) opinion piece on sex and gifted adolescents describes psychological challenges that gay gifted adolescents might face, giving hypothetical examples of situations. While Tolan (1997) does caution that the topic requires research in order to speak on the topic with certainty, along with Friedrichs (1997), this remains one of the most highly cited articles on the experiences of gifted gay adolescents, despite its lack of grounding.

### *Empirical Studies*

An early and influential contribution to the field of gifted LGBTQ research was Peterson and Rishcar's (2000) retrospective study of the adolescent experience of lesbian, gay and bisexual young adults with high ability (there were no transgender or queer youth in this study). Using a post-positivist mode of inquiry, the authors found significant themes of isolation, depression and suicidal ideation, together with high achievement and over-involvement in extra-curricular activities. Naturally, the time of writing will have greatly influenced the study, as the LGBTQ community in the US have experienced significant shifts in media portrayals, culture and equality legislation. Peterson and Rishcar (2000) write,

'In general, these participants survived alone, with no role models, no gay peers, and no one or very few with whom they could share their feelings and thoughts, especially during the years of "wondering," but also after being convinced of sexual orientation.'

Recently, Wikoff et al. (2021) replicated Peterson and Rishcar's (2000) qualitative study with college age students. The authors identified three overall themes within their study; identity development (assigned identity, the discovery process, and intersectional identity), social dynamics (peers, educational stakeholders, and community), and mental health (coping skills) (Wikoff et al., 2021).

Sedillo (2013) presented qualitative research findings and a grounded theory analysis on the topic of gay gifted suicide and suicidal ideation. He found that resiliency was a significant factor in how participants coped with suicidal ideation; gifted adolescents in the study coped with suicidal ideation abstractly, while nongifted adolescents did so concretely (Sedillo, 2013). Sedillo's (2018) case study participant stated that his giftedness and thirst for knowledge helped him locate information about being transgender and his attendance of gifted programmes was a positive factor in developing resilience.

Hutcheson and Tieso's (2014) qualitative study used critical ethnography as a theoretical framework, in order to investigate the social coping strategies of gifted LGBTQ students in middle and high school. Participants from a selective Southeastern university were interviewed and asked to retrospectively describe their experiences of being gifted and LGBTQ while in middle and high school. Hutcheson and Tieso also explored the personal and social intersections of gifted and LGBTQ identities, finding that 85% of the gifted LGBTQ participants reported feeling different for being LGBTQ, 75% reported feeling different for being gifted, and 50% also expressed feeling scared or anxious about the social repercussions of their identities (Hutcheson & Tieso, 2014). Overall, the authors found that participants' engagement in academic and extracurricular activities was a support to their identity development, however certain social coping strategies, in particular hiding/ denying aspects of their identities, was emotionally painful and a stressor for participants (Hutcheson & Tieso, 2014).

Tuite's (2021) exploratory study examined the coming out experiences of gifted LGBTQ alumni from a United States residential gifted high school. Participants in this study all attended in-state home schools for their freshman and sophomore high school years, then transferred to the GT School for their junior and/or senior years. Students are admitted to the school based upon past academic performance, PSAT and/or SAT scores and noncognitive indicators such as drive, persistence, and motivation (Tuite, 2021). Within the study sample, gifted LGBTQ students reported realising their sexual orientation/ gender identity during late adolescence (the mean age was 16.55 years). Overwhelmingly, the participants were more likely to share their LGBTQ status at the GT School (47.5%) in comparison with their home school (13.5%). Tuite et al. (2021) posit that this may be due the different developmental stage participants were at in their home school compared to the GT School. However, participants also discussed social fears as reasons they did not share at their home school and that they felt safer to share their sexual orientation and/or gender identity within the GT School environment. Many also expressed extreme concerns that their families would not accept them if they knew.

One interesting addition to the field is Lo et al.'s (2021) retrospective study, where researchers interviewed nine LGBTQ postsecondary students in North America who are graduates of an academically focused high school in Turkey. The participants in the study were part of a peer-support network formed by the LGBTQ alumni of a highly selective Turkish secondary program with an extensive screening process, including a cognitive aptitude test, the WISC-V and observations from a week-long summer camp (Lo et al., 2021). Overall, participants utilised their personal strengths (i.e. advanced reasoning,

resourcefulness) to mediate some their identity struggles, found support in the liberal atmosphere of their high school and emphasised their appreciation of the opportunity to study abroad and reflect on their gender and sexual identities in a new cultural lens (Lo et al., 2021). While Lo et al. (2021) state that the relatively positive experiences presented by the group are not representative of the experiences generally reflected by LGBTQ individuals in Turkey (one of the participants characterised this as 'constant life threats'), this remains a welcome and unique contribution to the field.

While not specifically focused on gifted LGBTQ young people, Laffan et al.'s (2022) study on the experiences of gifted students and bullying in Ireland did have a significant number of respondents who identified as LGBTQ (43.1%). Laffan et al. (2022) found that a substantial amount of problem mental health related outcome variances could be explained by the dual statuses of some gifted adolescents in the sample (including LGBTQ identity and being twice exceptional) gender, however not to the same extent as some of the more wider social and developmental contexts. Victimization frequencies did not appear to differentiate for LGBTQ young people among the sample, however the researchers caution that further specific research is needed to study the intersection of giftedness with other identity aspects in order to draw more meaningful conclusions regarding the systemic extent of victimisation and bullying (Laffan et al., 2022).

### **2.4.3 Themes in Gifted LGBTQ Research**

This section will discuss several key themes which recur in gifted LGBTQ research; identity development, peer relationships and social norms, mental health and lack of support.

#### *Identity Development*

All gifted students face issues surrounding identity formation and healthy psychosocial development (Cross & Cross, 2017) and may engage in social coping strategies designed to avoid being stigmatised in social or academic situations (Cross et al., 1993). Gifted LGBTQ students may face identity struggles at a younger age than their peers due to accelerated cognitive development and the desire to pursue information about sexual orientation and gender identity (Peterson & Rischar, 2000; Stewart, 2006). The gifted LGB students in Peterson and Rischar's (2000) retrospective study struggled with the burden of being twice different, which was linked to anxiety, depression, and feelings of isolation. Participants in Wikoff et al's (2021) study considered their identity development in three ways; that gifted identity was more of an assigned identity, sexual/ gender identity was more of a discovery process, and the intersection of the two was complicated for some but helped others. Hutcheson and Tieso (2014) found that the extent to which participants in their study hid their

sexual orientation and gender identity was a conscious choice—an intellectual problem to be solved by using data to decide when and how to be open about it. The continuum of visibility (Cross, 1997; Cross et al., 1991) is a framework that is particularly relevant for gifted LGBTQ students, who must choose whether to hide and deny, or express and embrace, their sexual orientation and/ or gender identity (Hutcheson & Tieso, 2014). Students who are particularly sensitive will be acutely aware of the risk of harassment and discrimination and may engage in strategies of self-preservation by concealing their identity (Treat, 2010), developing disparate personal and private personas (Stewart, 2006), suppressing behaviours that are averse to stereotypical gender roles (Kerr & Cohn, 2001) or overcompensating for non stereotypical gender behaviours with exaggerated mannerisms (Hutcheson & Tieso, 2014). The high level of energy required to maintain a mask of gender conforming behaviour is therefore energy not spent on the tasks of positive cognitive and social development (Stewart, 2006). Peterson and Rischar (2000) found that for the gifted lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents in their study, meeting developmental challenges was both lonely and daunting, as struggles with identity development affected participants' sense of self and were associated with depression, which subsequently affected social relationships. A number of respondents in Wikoff et al.'s (2021) study stated that exposure to LGBTQ individuals and community, combined with affirmation and guidance from teachers, had a major impact on their identity development as gifted and LGBTQ.

#### *Peer Relationships and Social Norms*

Cross (2011) states that gifted individuals live in a world of mixed messages, encouraged to highly achieve yet also sometimes ostracised for standing out. This lack of clear social norms can lead to uncertainty and anxiety, particularly when a gifted student is also LGBTQ (Cross & Reidl Cross, 2015). Without a supportive environment, which acknowledges and supports their talents and skills, gifted students generally can engage in inappropriate coping strategies, such as denying their talents, underachieving, or masking their giftedness from classmates to gain peer acceptance (Cross & Swiatek, 2009). This is relevant for gifted LGBTQ students, as it is another identity to decide to deny, downplay or mask entirely. In Wikoff et al.'s (2021) study, participants stated that peer relationships were generally more difficult in terms of their gifted identity, compared to their sexual/ gender identity.

Although gifted students can generally face difficulties with stigmas and stereotypes, it is important to recognise that these are mixed and less overwhelmingly hostile than those encountered by LGBTQ students (Hutcheson & Tieso, 2014). A participant in Hutcheson and Tieso's (2014, p. 363) study explained how he felt hearing statements like 'that's so gay', or

homophobic slurs, in school; 'those things were very disturbing and distressing... especially in the moment when you're pursuing your sexuality or trying to figure out who you are.'

The participants in Peterson and Rischar's (2000) study expressed that social discomfort was associated with isolation and questions about their identity (as early as elementary school) precipitated their social unease. Experiences of peer support were generally mixed for Peterson and Rischar's (2000, p. 239) participants, as 61% found support from high school peers, but others expressed fear ('I had to move away from everyone I knew to begin coming out') and the desire to wait until university to meet like-minded friends. In Sedillo's (2018) study, the gifted transgender participant reported having few, if any, supportive peers.

Students who are gifted, LGBTQ and part of another marginalised group may feel torn between balancing various aspects of their identity, or feel the need to internalise one identity in order to externalise the other (Sewell, 2020). Sewell (2019, p. 47) describes his internal conflict as a gifted, Black and gay youth, 'Suppressing different points of my identities became critical to my success in school, perhaps especially by influencing my interactions with peers.' A Black student in Hutcheson and Tieso's (2014) study expressed feeling isolated, as outside of her school GSA, there was a strong stigma against homosexuality at her predominantly Black high school.

From a positive standpoint, a participant in Peterson and Rischar's (2000, p. 239) expressed that his intelligence had allowed him to 'to spar, debate, and argue with the most adroit gay basher'. A clever strategy for peer relations employed by participants Lo et al. (2021, p. 8) was 'faking it until making it' and discussing LGBTQ issues in front of friends without making a fuss, behaving as if it were already normalised. This strategy has the potential to facilitate self-acceptance by signalling to their peers that being LGBTQ is normal, thus encouraging inclusion, and by reinforcing an internal self-belief of normality (Lo et al., 2021). Participants in Wikoff et al's (2021) study spoke of the value of connecting with peers who shared either gifted and/ or LGBTQ identities, through gifted programming, advanced classes and extracurricular activities.

### *Mental Health*

Sedillo (2018) cites Terman (1916) and Hollingworth (1942), who suggested that gifted adolescents who are isolated may be at a greater risk of severe mental health issues, which is supported by his findings. The majority (83%) of Peterson & Rischar's (2000) study participants reported bouts of depression during junior and senior high school, and 72% reported being suicidal at some point during that time. Two participants in Hutcheson and

Tieso (2014) reported experiencing depression during high school, and others expressed feelings of unhappiness because of their social situations. The transgender adult interviewee in Sedillo's (2018) case study, stated that he thought of committing suicide ten times during his lifetime, the first time being when he was 12 years old, giving the following reason: 'Being transgender and not understanding it or knowing there were options or treatments... There was no one like me' (p. 44). In Cross et al. (2002, p. 248), 'sexual identity issues, such as homosexuality,' is listed as one of the significant risk factors of suicide among adolescents.

Both Hutcheson and Tieso (2014) and Peterson and Rischar (2000) found that while some gifted LGBTQ students in their studies used academic and athletic overachievement or overinvolvement in extracurricular activities as coping strategies, others engaged in self-destructive and risky behaviours in order to fit in (Hutcheson & Tieso, 2014; Peterson & Rischar, 2000). Some gifted LGB students in Peterson & Rischar's (2000) study became overly involved in school in order to create structure and balance, and to distract themselves from fears regarding coming out.

### *Support Structures*

Although addressing broad societal challenges for young gifted LGBTQ students is beyond the remit of most school counsellors, an awareness of issues and challenges can have a significant impact on a counsellor's understanding of their student (Friedrichs, 2012). In response to a question about what educators should understand about the school experiences of gifted LGB adolescents, Peterson and Rischar (2000) found three overarching themes: students are overwhelmed with internal and external identity struggles, lack of role models and lack of support for coming out. Having adequate role models is important for gifted LGBTQ adolescents (Treat, 2017), as without this students may form their conception of LGBTQ people from the media, which can portray them in a negative or salacious fashion (Friedrichs et al., 2017; Stewart, 2006).

As discussed earlier, gifted LGBTQ students may experience a lack of support from peers, however this is undoubtedly influenced by the school environment they are in. Several participants in Hutcheson and Tieso (2000, p. 363) described their classes and extracurricular activities as 'uncomfortably heteronormative', as they (consciously and unconsciously) reinforced heterosexuality as the norm and erased the existence of identities outside of this. One gifted LGBTQ participant in Wikoff et al.'s (2021, p. 280) study shared that on reporting bullying and harassment to their school, 'Teachers and school administrators didn't believe my reports, since "with bullied students we generally see a drop in their GPA".' Hutcheson and Tieso (2014) write that in order for educators to be proactive in



guiding their gifted LGBTQ students, they must firstly engage in their own research, to determine the most effective pedagogies to reduce stereotypes and prejudice against LGBTQ people.

## **2.5 LGBTQ Focused Research in Ireland**

This section of the chapter will offer a broad overview of LGBTQ adolescent focused research in Ireland. The section will begin by contextualising the field within Irish history, legislation and policy. Common themes within the literature (many of which echo the themes in the previous section) will then be discussed.

### **2.5.1 LGBTQ History, Legislation and Policy in Ireland**

The first major shift in Irish legislation in favour of LGBTQ people was the amendment to the Victorian era Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act (1993), which decriminalised male homosexuality in Ireland. Following this, the government signed into law the Unfair Dismissals (Amendment) Act (1993), the Employment Equality Acts (1998– 2011) and the Equal Status Acts (2000–2011), all of which made discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation illegal. The introduction of the Education (Welfare) Act (2000) required schools to develop codes of behaviour that would meet the anti-discrimination obligations of the Employment Acts. In 1999, the newly established Equality Authority, initiated an advisory committee on issues affecting lesbian, gay and bisexual people. The publication of the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) report had a major impact as it emphasised education as a key issue, noting ‘students harassed or bullied due to their sexual orientation are at particular risk of early school leaving’ (NESF, 2003, p. 30). The report also recommended that the Department of Education and Science (DES) should consider the ‘inclusion and integration of young LGB people’ in school planning, as well as a factor in whole school evaluations and departmental inspections (NESF, 2003, p. 66). In 2006, a government funded ‘Stop Homophobic Bullying in Schools’ campaign was launched, which provided resources to schools on how to support LGBT students and emphasised the importance of the grounds of discrimination outlined in the Equal Status Acts. Along with vital legislative changes, a body of research began to emerge on the topic of homophobic bullying in Irish schools (Norman, 2004; O’Higgins Norman and Galvin, 2006; O’Higgins Norman, Galvin and McNamara, 2006; Minton et al., 2008; O’Higgins-Norman, 2008; Mayock et al., 2009). Following an anti-bullying forum in 2012, the DES established a working group to address bullying in Irish schools. The group was specifically tasked to ‘identify priority actions that can encourage schools to develop anti-bullying policies and in particular strategies to combat homophobic bullying to support students’ (‘Action Plan on Bullying’, 2013, p. 8). The working group also included representatives from BeLonGTo Youth Services and Gay and

Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN), which, naturally, would have a significant influence on the content and language of the policy being created. The Action Plan on Bullying Report (2013, p. 5), a report from the working group to the Minister for Education and Skills, opens with a commitment to encourage schools to develop anti-bullying policies and in particular, 'strategies to combat homophobic bullying'. In 2013, updated anti-bullying guidelines were issued by the DES to all schools in Ireland. These guidelines included explicit recommendations for the implementation of education and prevention strategies regarding homophobic bullying and language. The 2018 LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy, published by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, gives the provision of 'specific prevention initiatives for LGBTI+ identity-based bullying in schools' as an action to be undertaken by the DES over the next two years (2018, p. 24).

### **2.5.2 Common Themes in LGBTQ Focused Research in Ireland**

This section will discuss common themes that arise in research focused on LGBTQ adolescents in Ireland, in particular how each aspect contributes to the overall climate for LGBTQ young people in school environments.

#### *Anti-LGBTQ Language Use*

Language as oppression is one of the key themes identified in the work of various researchers on the topic of homophobic bullying, as derogatory language and homophobic slurs can be used as a way to affirm in-group and out-group identity, where heterosexuality is the norm and homosexuality (real or perceived) is a deviation (Epstein and Johnson, 1998; O'Higgins Norman and Galvin, 2005, 2006; Minton et al., 2008; Farrelly, O'Higgins Norman and O'Leary, 2017). Data from O'Higgins Norman and Galvin's (2006) study suggested that many teachers and parents accepted homophobic language (such as using 'gay' as a pejorative) as normal behaviour among adolescents and not deserving of reproach. One teacher in the study stated 'If we hear terms used we would ask them to stop slagging, but it (gay etc) is so much part of the vernacular now; sometimes you have to turn a deaf ear' (O'Higgins Norman and Galvin, 2006, p. 17). The researchers concluded that it was difficult to assess whether homophobic bullying and name-calling was pervasive in schools due to a lack of engagement from teachers when the behaviour occurs, or whether the teachers were choosing to ignore it due to its pervasiveness (O'Higgins Norman and Galvin, 2006). Acceptance and resignation of the word 'gay' being used to refer to something negatively cultivates an insidious culture within a school, which without direct intervention is likely to lead to more serious incidents of homophobic bullying.

One of the 'practical tips for building a positive school culture and climate' offered by the 2013 Procedures is that staff members should 'consistently tackle the use of discriminatory and derogatory language in the school – this includes homophobic language' (DES, 2013, p. 42). The inclusion of the term 'homophobic language' is important, as it legitimises it as an issue within schools and directs school leaders to consider it as related to homophobic bullying. This is in line with research on the topic, as several studies have identified homophobic language as a key element of homophobic bullying (Thurlow, 2001; Guasp, 2014; Poteat, Slaatten and Breivik, 2019). In their report on the experiences of LGBTQ young people in post-primary schools in Ireland, BeLonG To and Pizmony Levy (2019) found that 68% of students reported hearing other students make derogatory remarks about being gay frequently or often, 47% reported hearing negative remarks specifically about transgender people frequently or often and 48% of students reported they heard homophobic remarks from teachers or staff, all of which students reported contributing to a hostile learning environment.

### *Bullying and Violence*

Bullying and harassment in a public setting, with an audience of peers, allows the perpetrator to assert themselves as the dominant norm and the victim as 'other'. A subsequent lack of teacher intervention may then consolidate the heteronormative ethos of the school environment (O'Higgins Norman, 2008). Minton et al.'s (2008) exploratory study of a self-selecting sample of school-aged LGBT students in Ireland found that 34.3% of respondents frequently experienced verbal abuse around their sexual orientation. Minton's (2014) study investigated incidence rates of homophobic bullying behaviour amongst secondary school students in Ireland and found that while age was not a significant factor, gender was. The male participants in the study were statistically significantly more likely to report having been homophobically bullied through name-calling than were the female participants, as well as being significantly more likely to report having homophobically bullied others through name-calling (Minton, 2014).

### *Heteronormative School Environment*

McBride and Schubotz (2017) define heteronormativity as the dominant model of social organisation, rooted in a foundational divide of male from female and the institutionalisation of heterosexuality as the only natural and normal state of being. O'Higgins Norman et al. (2006) identified a significant heteronormative value system in the boys' single-sex school, which is in keeping with earlier studies that also linked homophobic behaviour to narrow constructions of masculinity among adolescent boys (Mac an Ghail, 1994). One sixteen year old male student stated

‘Gay students would probably get a hard time around here. A few people would have problems with it, because it is different, not normal. People are slagged if they’re not into football or PE, and because of the music they like. Calling someone a faggot is if they are not like a guy’ (O’Higgins Norman & Galvin, 2006, p. 10).

It is easy to assume that a quote like this, from fifteen years ago, is outdated and unlikely to occur now, due to a perceived increase of knowledge and acceptance of LGBTQ people and issues. As will be discussed in the Presentation and Analysis chapter, unfortunately this sentiment is still all too real for young people in Ireland.

All of the interviewees in McBride and Schubotz’s (2017) study described negative schooling experiences due to heteronormative practices, with uniform policies acting as a major site of internal and external negotiation. One trans male student gave the following description, ‘I was pushing the uniform rules and cutting my hair shorter and shorter. Wearing a girl’s uniform was like going to school in drag every day in the worst possible way. I just constantly felt this wasn’t the right thing for me. I just never felt comfortable in it at all. It didn’t even look right on me. Outside school I had a masculine presentation. People thought I was a trans woman [male-to-female] who didn’t pass in the school uniform. I was going into the girls’ toilets, in a girl’s uniform, and getting asked if I was in the right bathroom’ (McBride and Schubotz, 2017, p. 299).

#### *School Leadership, Policy and Lack of Interventions*

School principals and other school leaders play a vital role in the creation of a positive (or negative) school climate for LGBTQ young people (Farrelly, O’Higgins Norman and O’Leary, 2017; Foody, Murphy, et al., 2018). O’Higgins Norman et al. (2006; 2008) found that a lack of response from those in leadership positions and school authorities (i.e principals and boards of management) had a significant influence on how teachers, and students, responded to incidents of homophobic bullying in Irish post-primary schools. Research shows that teacher efforts to intervene in bullying may be affected by their perception of the school climate (Yoon, Sulkowski and Bauman, 2016) and that uses of homophobic language is more likely to be tolerated if it is considered normative of the school environment (Hektner and Swenson, 2012; Troop-Gordon and Ladd, 2015; Poteat et al., 2019). Farrelly et al.’s (2017, p. 158) survey of Irish primary school principals found that instances of homophobic language use (including the use of words like ‘gay, poof, faggot or lesbian’) were reported as being significantly more frequent than incidents of homophobic bullying. The authors note that this may be indicative of a lack of awareness about homophobic language and its impact on

students in primary schools (Farrelly et al., 2017, p. 160). Perceived lack of support from school principals in addressing homophobic language or homophobic bullying may influence the likelihood of whether a teacher will intervene when it occurs (O'Higgins Norman, 2004; McGuckin and Lewis, 2008; Meyer, 2008). For the post primary teachers in O'Donoghue and Guerin's (2017) study one of the main supports in addressing homophobic bullying was school leadership. The study also found that the main barriers to addressing homophobic and transphobic bullying were: students' discomfort in discussing their sexual orientation with teachers, teachers' discomfort in discussing LGBTQ issues, lack of training in the area, a lack of priority given to homophobic and transphobic bullying, and parental views (O'Donoghue and Guerin, 2017).

O'Higgins Norman and Galvin (2004, p. 10) found that regarding teacher attitudes toward homophobic bullying in Irish post-primary schools, 89% of teachers surveyed specifically stated a lack of formal policy or guidelines was hindering any improvements in dealing with such issues. In 2013, the DES published *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (DES, 2013), which gave specific attention to homophobic bullying, including recommendations that schools implement education and prevention strategies that tackle homophobic bullying and that teachers consistently confront the use of discriminatory and derogatory language within the school. However, the presence of a policy is all but moot without associated practices.

## **2.6 The Effects of a Negative Climate on LGBTQ Young People**

As noted in the previous sections, negative language, bullying and harassment, heteronormative systems and school leadership all contribute to the overall climate within a school, or organisation, for LGBTQ young people. The climate of a school or organisation plays a significant role for LGBTQ adolescents in terms of bullying and harassment (Birkett, Espelage and Koenig, 2009; Wernick, Kulick and Inglehart, 2013; Kosciw *et al.*, 2018; ), social and emotional growth (McGuire *et al.*, 2010), mental health (Peter, Taylor and Campbell, 2016) and overall feelings of safety (Toomey, McGuire and Russell, 2012; Day *et al.*, 2020). Negative language directly contributes to school climate for LGBTQ adolescents (Thurlow, 2001; Guasp, 2014; Poteat, Slaatten and Breivik, 2019). Indirect negative language can also be used as a way to affirm in-group or out-group identity, enforcing a dominant ideology of heteronormativity within a school and leaving LGBTQ young people feeling othered (Minton et al., 2008; O'Higgins Norman, 2009; Minton, 2014). In terms of interventions on hearing negative language, Wernick et al. (2014) found that students' willingness to intervene was shaped by the prevalence of hostile climate, social context and modelling of intervention behaviours by peers.

The promotion of a positive school climate has been linked to reductions in anti-LGBTQ victimisation, as well as reducing negative impacts of this kind of victimisation (Birkett, Espelage and Koenig, 2009; Ancheta, Bruzzese and Hughes, 2021). Overall, LGBTQ youth fare better in schools who actively address their needs and concerns, in terms of safety (McGuire *et al.*, 2010; Day *et al.*, 2020), hearing less negative remarks (Toomey, McGuire and Russell, 2012; Poteat, Scheer and Mereish, 2014), having more academic success (Kosciw *et al.*, 2013) and general psychological well-being (Gillig & Bighash, 2021). One of the strongest predictors of a less hostile school climate is the presence of supportive educators within a school (Kosciw, 2013).

## **2.7 Chapter Conclusion**

The Literature Review chapter offers an overview of the research areas that relate to the subject matter at hand; giftedness, gifted LGBTQ research and LGBTQ focused research in Ireland. The theories and models of giftedness are continuously evolving, as are our understandings of best practices for supporting gifted students. While giftedness is not explored as deeply as LGBTQ identity in this study, the study sample consists entirely of gifted young people, who have been identified through the CTYI Talent Search or via an educational psychologist report (typically including WISC-V testing). This study has been greatly influenced by the existing literature on gifted LGBTQ young people, particularly in terms of identity development. Peer relationships, social pressures, mental health and positive leadership each play a key role in the affirmation and support of gifted LGBTQ young people. Previous research studies in Ireland, and internationally, have shown how the climate of a school or organisation for LGBTQ young people can directly affect their wellbeing. This study has also been greatly influenced by the lacuna within the existing research- the experiences of gifted LGBTQ young people outside the United States. The next chapter will discuss methodology, including the research statement, research methods, data collection and overall analysis.

## Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Design

### 3.1 Chapter Introduction

'As I wander through the territory of research and evaluation, I worry that what we do may not make any difference. As I look out in the world, I know that there is such a need to address issues of social inequity, and I believe that research and evaluation do have a place in making visible these inequities and supporting social change to further justice.' (Mertens, 2009, p. 5)

This chapter will outline the research approach, methodology and data collection strategies I undertook for this project. I open the chapter with this quote from Donna M. Merten's seminal work on the transformative paradigm, as her work had a significant guiding influence on this study. Working with young gifted LGBTQ people, it was vital to me that this study would take the utmost care to place the experiences of these participants at the forefront and ultimately use the findings to influence social change, at an organisational level and beyond.

The broad research approach is the plan or proposal to conduct research, and involves the intersection of philosophy, research designs and specific methods. In order to adequately plan and prepare for this research study, I began with Creswell & Creswell's (2018) framework; firstly, considering the philosophical worldview assumptions I bring to the project, secondly, using this to choose a related research design and finally, assessing which specific research methods and procedures would translate my approach into practice. In terms of philosophical worldview, I was steered throughout by the transformative paradigm. This significantly influenced my research design and the data collection methods chosen.

This chapter will first provide my overall research statement. Following this, the philosophical foundations of this study will be discussed, in particular queer theory. An overview of the transformative paradigm and the work of Mertens will then be considered and its implications for research and evaluation with marginalised groups. The third section of this chapter will focus on methodology, specifically mixed methods research. The fourth and fifth section will discuss my research problem, approach and design. Finally, data collection and analysis will be examined.

### **3.1.1 Research Statement**

This mixed methods study will explore the experiences of gifted LGBTQ students in Ireland and the factors which create a positive, or negative, environment for this population. A convergent mixed methods design will be used, with quantitative and qualitative data being collected in parallel, analysed separately and then merged. Quantitative data will be analysed to examine the frequency of negative remarks about and toward LGBTQ people, the frequency of interventions if these remarks are heard and the correlation between external interventions (staff and students) and personal interventions. The qualitative data will explore the content of such negative remarks, factors which affect participants' willingness to intervene in situations of harassment or bullying and their general perception of LGBTQ support in the two environments studied. The reason for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data is to compare and integrate overall findings of the topic with the voices of participants, the majority of which are LGBTQ. The transformative paradigm will guide this study throughout each phase. This paradigm is defined by the following characteristics: it places central importance on the lives and experiences of marginalised communities, it uses transformative theory to develop the inquiry approach and most importantly, it links results of social inquiry to action (Mertens, 2009). Findings from this study will be used to advocate for change, on a local level, in my professional capacity at CTYI, and hopefully on a broader scale also.

### **3.2 Philosophical Foundations**

Creswell and Creswell (2018) define 'worldview' as a basic set of beliefs which guide action, or a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study. The authors note that their concept of worldview is described by others as 'paradigms' (Lincoln, Guba and Lynham, 2011). Researchers develop worldviews from a myriad of sources, including discipline specific orientations, research communities, mentors and past research experiences- all of which combined will directly influence their choice of research approach. Creswell & Creswell (2018, p. 62) note that researchers are increasingly using a 'theoretical lens' in qualitative research regarding the experiences of marginalised groups, which becomes a transformative perspective shaping the type of questions asked, how data is collected and analysed and provides a call for action. Lincoln & Guba (2013) includes queer theory as existing under the umbrella of new lenses through which to filter research findings. Furthermore, she criticises the use of the term 'identity politics', sometimes used to disparage new theoretical approaches designed to understand the nuances of cultural, social, political, gender and racial difference (Lincoln and Guba, 2013, p. 9).



In terms of gifted education research, many studies have been criticised for producing fragmented results (Cohen, 1996; Renzulli, 2012), which do not invest enough in theoretical aspects like historical perspectives and philosophical foundations (Cohen, 1996, 2005). Ambrose et al. (2010) assessed that the field does not have a coherent conceptual structure in theory and research and that there is a disconnect between research and practice. Similarly, Ziegler and Raul (2000) found a distinct disagreement on the conceptual and operational definition of giftedness. Developing a solid conceptual base and theoretical awareness in studies of gifted education allows researchers to avoid conceptual blind spots, which ignore important aspects of giftedness and talent (Cohen, Ambrose and Powell, 2000). Dai and Chen (2013) analysed three major paradigmatic differences of gifted education approaches (gifted child approach, talent development approach, and differentiation approach), with the goal of encouraging researchers and practitioners to be more explicit about their assumptions, goals, and educational strategies, in both research and practice. Lo and Porath's (2017) comprehensive review of conceptual changes and paradigm shifts in gifted education notes the shift from 'exclusivity to diversity', which aligns with critical theory perspectives in the social sciences, and envisions new possibilities through empowering gifted individuals who are oppressed in our current society (Cohen, Ambrose and Powell, 2000; Lo, 2014). In light of this conceptual wave, Lo and Porath (2017) note that many field scholars began to engage in research and provoking conversations on issues related to diversity and social justice in education, including gender and sexual orientations (e.g. Hutcheson & Tieso, 2014; Sedillo, 2013). Kerr and Huffman (2018) identify the relevance of the talent development model of giftedness for gifted LGBTQ young people. Dai (2017) states that a focus on talent development (rather than giftedness) should be developmental, treating the developing person as an open, dynamic, and adaptive system, changing while interacting with their environment and challenges. Talent development is applicable across diverse domains, including academics and the creative arts, and focuses on the importance of adapting social and mental skills in order to allow individuals to progress to higher stages of performance productivity (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius and Worrell, 2021).

### **3.2.1 Queer Theory**

Queer theory is a collective of intellectual challenges to the social and political constructions of gender identity and sexual orientation (Alexander, 2018), which emerged as a way to challenge 'imprecise measures of meaning and identity' (Mertens (2009, p. 23). Many queer theorists argue that concepts of sexual orientation and gender are portrayed as central, organising principles of society, social relations and institutions, designed to preserve a hegemonic (and heteronormative) ordering (Sedgwick, 1990, cited in Browne & Nash, 2010). Much queer scholarship has been greatly influenced by the seminal work, and subsequent

interdisciplinary debates, of Michael Foucault (1978). His statement on sexuality as a historically specific concept which structures society and social relations caused a shift in research, from a consideration of subjects and subjectivities to a focus on discourse, in particular how institutions and practices reinforce certain understandings about gender and sexual orientation (Browne and Nash, 2010). Queer theory has roots in several schools of critical thought, including feminist theory, poststructuralism and constructivism (Alexander, 2018). Lincoln, Guba and Lynham (2018) note that constructivists tend toward the anti-foundational, a term used to denote a refusal to adopt any permanent or static set of standards by which the truth can be universally known. The truth and any agreement regarding what is valid knowledge, arises from the members of a stakeholding community (Lincoln, 1995). Similarly, queer theory is considered anti-foundationalist, as it opposes the notion of fixed identities. Alexander (2018, p. 496) states that this resistance to orthodoxy manifests in 'expounding, elaborating, and promoting alternative ways of being, knowing, and narrating experience—through scholarship, through embodied being, through social and political interventions'. Browne and Nash (2010, p. 4) state that queer research can take the form of any research positioned within conceptual frameworks that 'highlight the instability of taken-for-granted meanings and resulting power relations'. By establishing a transformative approach and reaching out to concealed communities, like the LGBTQ population, researchers can engage voices that have been traditionally unrecognised or excluded.

### **3.2.2 Transformative Paradigm**

As a philosophical position, the concept of a transformative worldview arose during the 1980s and 90s, from individuals who proposed that post-positivist assumptions belied the experiences of marginalised individuals in society, by imposing structures and theories that did not adequately address issues of oppression, discrimination and social justice (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The ontological assumption of the transformative paradigm holds that our knowledge, or the reality we accept as true, is socially constructed and exists within the complex dynamics of power and privilege (Mertens, 2009). In terms of gifted education, the transformative mode of inquiry views knowledge as embedded in a cultural matrix of values and power relationships grounded in struggles around gender, race, social class, and other culturally and economically determined variables (Cross, 2003). The transformative paradigm places central importance on the experiences of diverse groups that have been traditionally marginalised for qualities like gender and sexual orientation (Mertens, 2010) while advancing an agenda for change that will improve the lives of those oppressed and alienated (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Mertens (2009) states that four basic belief systems are relevant to defining a paradigm in a research or evaluation context: ethics (axiology), reality (ontology), the nature of knowledge (epistemology) and approach to systematic inquiry (methodology). In terms of axiology, ethical choices must engage in the concept of discrimination and oppression as pervasive, and that researchers have a responsibility to understand the marginalised community they are working with in order to challenge the status quo of societal processes. The transformative ontological assumption embraces the idea that multiple definitions of reality are possible, investigates the power issues that lead to different definitions, acknowledges the socially constructed nature of these definitions and explicitly identifies the values that underlie these definitions of reality. In terms of epistemology, the researcher acknowledges the social and historical construction of knowledge in a complex cultural context, which is not absolute and singular, but rather constructed within the dynamics of power and privilege in that particular setting. Mertens (2009) further states that a researcher working within this paradigm should have a deep understanding of the specific cultural issues being studied in order to make a decision on appropriate data collection methods, remain open to adaptations from the study population and most importantly, link the data collected to social action. With a rigorous structure, research under the transformative paradigm that is oriented toward social justice can ensure the investigation is trustworthy and that inferences are supported, yielding new insight into complex situations, while simultaneously advocating for communities that have been marginalised (Hurtado, 2015). The transformative paradigm guides the determination of a study's focus, the development of questions and methodological aspects of inquiry.

In specifying the criteria for a transformative study, Mertens (2009) considers the following as important factors: the use of a research problem connected to a marginalised community, a theoretical lens (such as queer or feminist theory) that might guide the research, research questions relevant to the issues of the group being studied, and a literature review that includes key issues of this community, such as diversity and oppression. Critical theory perspectives on power, oppression and marginalisation are vital to advocacy focused studies and Mertens (2003; 2009) cites several groups which have extended the thinking about value placement in research, including feminists, members of diverse ethnic/ racial groups and the LGBTQ community. Transformative researchers can derive empathic understandings of participants' ways of knowing in order to best convey their views, voices and aspirations (Hurtado, 2015).

The writings of Mertens (2003, 2009) have articulated a clear connection between the transformative framework and mixed methods, as she cites several mixed methods studies

which incorporate this framework and bridges the philosophy of inquiry with the practice of research (Sweetman, Badiee and Creswell, 2010). Mertens (2003, 2009) provides a framework for mixed methods studies which allows an assessment of the inclusion of an advocacy perspective: the transformative framework. This will be discussed in the next section.

### **3.3 Mixed Methods Research**

Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that qualitative and quantitative approaches should not be viewed as perpetually fixed and distinct categories, rather they represent different ends of a continuum. Mixed methods research is therefore, in the middle of this continuum.

While quantitative approaches dominated the social sciences research field from the late nineteenth century to the mid twentieth, the latter half of the twentieth century was marked by increased interest in qualitative research, as well as mixed methods approaches.

Quantitative research is an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables, typically reported on instruments which allow numbered data to be analysed using statistical procedures, whereas qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding meanings that individuals or groups ascribe to a problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research methods also allow for the development of a deep understanding of a phenomenon as it is experienced in a particular setting and is suitable for studies designed to expand our knowledge of the substrata of complex phenomena, e.g. students' experiences of an educational environment (Neumann, 2014).

Mixed methods research is an approach to inquiry involving the collection and integration of both qualitative and quantitative data, in order to yield additional insight beyond the information that could be provided by each approach singularly (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The core characteristics of mixed methods research includes the collection of both qualitative (open-ended) and quantitative (closed) data, the rigorous methods associated with quantitative and qualitative data individually and the integration of the two data sets, through merging them or connecting them sequentially (Sweetman et al., 2010). Mixed methods research designs tend to employ the use of both open- and closed-ended questions, as well as emerging and predetermined approaches in order to integrate the quantitative and qualitative data obtained (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

As a qualitative form of inquiry supports a focus on individual meaning and the complexity of a given situation or social issue (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018), I identified it would be necessary for this study. Qualitative methods can sensitively engage with social research on

marginalised communities, as such methods focus on the politics of inquiry, emphasise values and place the goal of social justice centre stage (Sweetman, Badiie and Creswell, 2010; Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Mertens (2009) writes that the inclusion of qualitative dimension in methodological assumptions is critical in transformative research and evaluation, as it establishes a dialogue between the researchers/ evaluators and the community members. Leech et al. (2011) and Coleman et al. (2007) conducted meta-analysis and found that overall, mixed methods studies were less common than single methods studies in gifted education journals. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2010) outlined that compared to single method research approaches, mixed methods research approaches can better address the challenges of contemporary gifted education research.

Methodology is interwoven with and emerges from the nature of specific disciplines (such as sociology and psychology) and perspectives (such as Marxism, feminist theory, and queer theory) (Lincoln, Guba & Lynham, 2018). Mertens (2009) urges researchers to choose appropriate methods of systematic inquiry, which include some form of interactive link between researchers and participants, with due consideration to any adaptations needed to accommodate cultural complexity and acknowledge the power systems in place. Jackson et al. (2018) noted that using the transformative paradigm and mixed methods research together influenced the creation of a more culturally relevant survey instrument for their study. I took this into consideration when adapting some of my questionnaire items, in order to be as inclusive as possible.

### **3.4 Research Problem and Approach**

The type of research or evaluation needed can be identified through an interactive relationship with community members and researchers (Mertens, 2009). The root of this research study began several years ago, when I developed interventions to support gifted LGBTQ students attending the CTYI summer programme. It was through conversations with this student population that our current policy and practices were cultivated. An additional element is that many of our former students choose to return to work as staff members on the programme. This allows even greater dialogue on the topic, as these staff members have direct experience of the practices utilised. The transformative paradigm is not limited to a singular view of research and/ or evaluation, rather it provides opportunities for the emergence of many different models of research and evaluation (Mertens, 2009).

When considering the myriad of factors which may influence the cultivation of a positive or negative environment for gifted LGBTQ young people, I identified that a mixed methods research design would allow me to both generalise some findings to the population, as well

as develop a detailed view of the phenomenon for the individuals experiencing it. I further determined that a convergent mixed methods design merges qualitative and quantitative data in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem. Typically in this type of design, a researcher collects both forms of data at roughly the same time, integrates the data at different stages of inquiry, and probes any contradictions or incongruent results that arise (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The close-ended questions within the questionnaire could identify factors that influenced the outcome and allow me to understand the best predictors of outcomes, while open-ended questions would allow for emerging themes and a more nuanced understanding of the topic. Four research questions were decided:

RQ1- What is the climate for gifted LGBTQ post primary students in Ireland at school?

RQ2- What is the climate for gifted LGBTQ post primary students in Ireland at a gifted summer enrichment programme (CTYI)?

RQ3- What is the frequency of intervention in situations of negative remarks and language about LGBTQ people and does the climate of a site affect the frequency of intervention?

RQ4- What factors contribute to the frequency of intervention in situations of negative remarks/ language about LGBTQ people?

However, during the data collection process, an unexpected additional theme began to emerge regarding identity development. During the data analysis phase, I determined that the extent to which participants had spoken about their identity development, in terms of being LGBTQ and gifted, was relevant to the overall study. I believe this data speaks to the depth and nuance of knowledge I wished to gain when using qualitative methods, therefore it was incorporated into the overall study. I named this RQ5- What are the experiences of identity development for gifted LGBTQ post primary students in Ireland?

I consider this research study as fitting within the transformative paradigm in the following ways. By the very nature of the topic, this study is focused on interrogating the experiences of gifted LGBTQ students and ultimately affecting change. Mertens (2009) states emphasises the researcher's responsibility to understand the marginalised community they are working with, which I believe I am in a unique position to do. From a professional perspective, I have worked directly with gifted LGBTQ youth for the past several years, creating policies and practices which challenged the status quo and positively impacted their experience of the CTYI programme. From a personal perspective, I am also a former student of the programme and I identify as queer. I subscribe to the idea of multiple, socially constructed definitions of reality and therefore included all students (not only those that are LGBTQ) in this study, as I wanted to explore how identity might play a role in the observation and experience of

negative remarks regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. I also chose to include open text for identification of gender identity and sexual orientation, so as not to limit any participants' construction of their identity. I questioned how issues of power and privilege would manifest in interventions in situations of harassment, e.g. would a student who is LGBTQ be less likely to intervene due to potential negative exposure of their own identity? I acknowledge that the two sites of the study (CTYI and school) are rooted in their own complex social and cultural contexts, therefore the data collected cannot be considered to be the singular experience of each and directly compared. Students spend three weeks at CTYI at any given time, far less than their time at school. However, as described later in the Presentation and Analysis chapter, several students offered direct examples of affirmation (including visible LGBTQ leaders, LGBTQ focused activities and interactions) which can be replicated in any setting in order to cultivate a positive climate for LGBTQ young people. I chose a mixed methods approach, in order to reap the benefits of both quantitative and qualitative modes of inquiry. Mertens' (2009) work on the transformative paradigm was also relevant to this study in terms of my work as a practitioner in the field, as she emphasises the intersection between applied social research and programme evaluation, with research providing information about the need for, improvement of, or effects of programmes and policies.

### **3.5 Research Design**

#### **3.5.1 Participant Sample**

Purposeful or theoretical sampling strategies are based on the researcher's conscious decision to obtain data from individuals, based on the rationale that they embody certain relevant characteristics to the study, and/ or because their life experiences are reflective of the phenomena being investigated (Mertens, 2009). The participant profile for this study was a post-primary student or older, gifted and had attended a CTYI summer programme within 2017-2019. The participant profile for this study was post-primary students aged 13-17, who currently attend CTYI's summer programmes, and former CTYI students aged 18 years and older, who attended CTYI programmes from 2017-2019. Former students were invited in order to increase the potential sample size and as their experiences on the programme and in post-primary school are still relatively recent. Some snowball sampling also occurred, as participants spoke to friends about the project. In total 142 participants took part in the online questionnaire, which represented a 16% response rate. While this response rate could be considered relatively low, this study had a higher number of participants than the empirical gifted LGBTQ studies cited in the previous chapter (Hutcheson & Tieso, 2014; Lo et al, 2021; Peterson & Rischar, 2000; Wikoff et al., 2021; Tuite et al., 2021). It also had a broader range of identities under the LGBTQ acronym. As this is the first study conducted on gifted LGBTQ

young people in Ireland, it is hoped that subsequent studies would yield a higher response rate. As discussed in the following section, my response rate was directly affected by the lack of face to face CTYI programmes for 2020 and 2021. I held two focus groups, one with three participants and one with two. One group comprised three former students who have also worked with the programme, which offered a particularly unique insight. Finally, I conducted eight interviews, some in person and some over Zoom.

Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, CTYI was unable to hold an in person summer programme in 2020 or 2021, which limited access to participants and forced a change to aspects of participant recruitment and involvement. Typically, students take part in related research while on campus, during a designated study period. This also allows for a higher level of participation and subsequent sample size. In order to recruit participants for the first part of the study I posted envelopes containing a letter about the project, the Plain Language Statement and details of how to access the online questionnaire. There were two versions of the online questionnaire, one which required parental consent (for participants under the age of 18) and one which did not (for participants over the age of 18). Responses were originally a little slow to come in over about a month long period. By chance, I met a former student (who is transgender), who told me that as his parents disapproved of his gender identity they would have immediately discarded the envelope due to its content. I decided to directly email any former students over the age of 18, which almost doubled the responses overnight. For the second part of the study (focus groups and interviews), I sent another email to former students to recruit participants.

I hypothesised that students who identified as LGBTQ would be more likely to take part in the study, due to personal investment some other references here. Overall, two thirds of the questionnaire participants identified as LGBTQ (64.3%). A large discrepancy also arose in the age of participants. Participants who were over eighteen and received the information directly were far more likely to complete the questionnaire, whereas participants under the age of eighteen who received a recruitment pack requiring parental consent were less likely to complete the questionnaire. The mean age for questionnaire participants was 18.4. This is a younger mean age than the majority of gifted LGBTQ studies.

### **3.5.2 Ethical Considerations**

There were two major ethical considerations regarding this study: age and the potentially sensitive content. In the initial recruitment stage, all participants received a Plain Language Statement, contact details for any questions they might have and a list of LGBTQ related support organisations. Participants under the age of 18 were required to submit an Informed



Consent Form, completed by parents/ guardians before taking part. It is difficult to pinpoint whether this may have affected participants' choice to be involved in the study, however the overwhelming majority of participants for the questionnaire were 18 or older. For the focus groups and interviews, all participants were over the age of 18. All measures were approved by the DCU Research Ethics committee in advance of the data collection phase.

Naturally, the questions asked and the content of this study may be difficult for some LGBTQ participants, particularly if they have had negative experiences. For the questionnaire, as it was anonymous, I could not reach out to any participants who spoke about difficult experiences of harassment and bullying. A list of LGBTQ support organisations was included at the beginning and the end of the questionnaire. For the participants that took part in focus groups and interviews, I sent a subsequent email each time with the same list of organisations and encouraged them to follow up with me, if they so wished.

### **3.5.3 Insider Researcher Position**

Biographical experiences that arise from individual and social characteristics can have significant influence on the research interests people have, the methodologies they choose to adopt, how they interpret and analyse data, and the ways in which findings are represented (Sikes and Potts, 2008). Terry et al. (2017) note that the researcher is never a 'blank slate', and inevitably will bring their own social position and theoretical lens to the analysis. However, Smyth and Holian (2008) note that research from within offers an opportunity to ground the work in everyday issues as those involved experience them, confronting assumptions, perceptions and consequences, enabling the researcher to learn, reflect and act on the study's findings. Lincoln (1995) states that as research takes place within, and directly affects, a community, the researcher should know this community well enough to connect the research results to positive action. In the transformative paradigm, the researcher begins with the acknowledgement that there is a power differential present between themselves and study participants and furthermore, that sustained involvement with the community should be engaged in order to gain trust (Mertens, 2009). This aspect of the transformative paradigm was a perfect fit for the study, as I have worked directly with the students who participated in the study for several years. I designed and implemented the organisation's first policy related to gender identity, therefore it is likely many of the study's transgender, non-binary and gender nonconforming participants have spoken to me personally. I would hope that their participation reflects the trust Mertens writes about. The positive comments regarding the CTYI team members and leadership from several participants is also reflective of this. My insider research position was also detailed in the overall ethics approval process, with no issues found. However, the value of considering (and

reconsidering) one's own positionality is immense, therefore I include the below reflexivity statement.

#### **3.5.4 Reflexivity Statement**

I am part of the community of participants within this study in several ways. Firstly, I identify as queer. Secondly, I was identified as gifted (via a Talent Search assessment) when I was a teenager and attended the CTYI summer programmes multiple times. Thirdly, I have worked at CTYI for nine years, and therefore have a professional interest in this work. It was important for this study to attempt to mitigate any biases my personal experience and background might bring to this study. I kept a research diary throughout this process and used this to continuously self-examine, considering content, phrasing and whether I was allowing any predispositions to influence my choices. In terms of my identity as a former student and a member of the LGBTQ community, it was not difficult for me to separate my own personal experiences from those of my participants. Given the many years between my own time in school and at CTYI, my experiences were quite different to those of my participants. From a cultural perspective, Ireland (and the world) have quite different levels of representation for LGBTQ people now, than they did when I was the same age as the study participants. It was my role as a professional within the organisation that I felt required the most self-reflection. While the majority of participants across all three data sites had positive experiences at CTYI, several wrote/ spoke about negative experiences and criticised certain situations that occurred on the programme. It was crucially important to me that I disregard any feelings of defensiveness, or desire to show the organisation in a perfect light. Therefore, I ensured any negativity about CTYI and the relevant experiences were included in the data presented. I felt this was important to remain accountable and also to ensure that the actionable steps that occur as a result of this study will be put into place within CTYI immediately.

#### **3.5.5 Pilot Study**

Mertens (2009) writes that transformative epistemology is characterised by a close collaboration between researchers and participants of the study, a style of communication which uses participants' language of choice and appropriate cultural sensitivity and awareness, from development to implementation and utilisation. Prior to beginning data collection for this research project, I conducted a pilot study with twenty-four participants, all of whom were former students of the programme. Of this group, nineteen participants identified as LGBTQ, four identified as straight and one wrote that they were questioning their identity. Each participant completed the questionnaire and was then asked for feedback. Based on this, I adapted the final version of the questionnaire. I also deviated from the

original version of the questionnaire by including open boxes for the types of negative remarks heard and experienced. This was to allow for participants' 'language of choice' as I felt predestined answers would not truly elucidate the nuanced experiences of those answering.

### **3.6 Research Methods- Data Collection**

#### **3.6.1 Questionnaires**

The GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network) Local Climate Survey's (LCS) questions formed the basis for this study's questionnaire, however I chose to adapt and include several new questions in order to align with a mixed methods form of inquiry. The GLSEN survey has been used and adapted by other researchers and advocacy groups (Adelman and Woods, 2006; Kosciw and Pizmony-Levy, 2016; Gato *et al.*, 2020), including by BeLonG To, the largest youth LGBTQ advocacy group in Ireland (BeLonG To Youth Services and Pizmony-Levy, 2019). GLSEN's LCS is an abridged version of the organisation's National School Climate Survey, which aims to map the climate or environment of school for LGBTQ students. The questionnaire poses a parallel series of closed-ended questions about negative remarks students have heard in school about sexual orientation and gender identity. Students are also asked closed-ended questions about how safe they feel in school. Adelman and Woods (2006) utilised the GLSEN LCS in a summer camp based setting, where data was collected from LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ students, who attended a range of schools in their district. While the authors supplemented their study with questions to elicit demographic data, this study did not in order to maintain participant anonymity.

In terms of my own adaptations, the first one I considered was the cultural context of certain questions in the questionnaire, e.g. the phrase 'locker room' which would not likely resonate with students in Ireland. I questioned the value of including a list of slurs as examples of negative remarks (as the GLSEN survey does) from two angles; firstly, whether the confronting nature of such slurs would be triggering to LGBTQ participants in the survey and secondly, whether any list of slurs could truly encompass the breadth of negative remarks that could be experienced. I ultimately opted to remove slurs and instead included an open text box for participants to write about homophobic and transphobic rhetoric and experiences. In their study of the experiences of homophobic bullying among LGBT young people in Ireland, Minton *et al.* (2008) used an optional open box for respondents to elaborate on name-calling around their sexual orientation, which offered a nuanced insight into participant experiences.

Another significant adaptation was the use of gender identity and sexual orientation options. Mertens (2009) emphasises that within the transformative paradigm, care must be taken to understand dimensions of diversity in the research context, to recognise the strategies needed to remove barriers to participation and to reject the homogeneity of generic labels for a complex group. In early drafts of this study's questionnaire, I considered which and how many gender labels to include for participants. The below from my research record reflects my original thoughts on the topic,

'Participants will be given a broad list of options for gender identity and will be asked 'Does your gender match the one you were assigned at birth?', this is to identify any participants who are transgender. Including 'transgender' or a variant as a gender identity (such as 'trans female or trans male') undermines trans participants, who will simply be able to choose male, female or another gender identity.'

However I continued to return to Merten's (2009) notion of 'barriers to participation'. I questioned whether a participant would choose not to complete the questionnaire due to their gender label not being present. I also wished to avoid any use of the word 'other', as it is paramount that language used in a study like this is inclusive and validates participants' affirmed identities. In order to embrace the dimensions of diversity and reject the homogeneity Mertens (2009) warns against, ultimately it was decided to include an open text box for participants to self declare their gender. dickey<sup>1</sup> and Green (2007) state that participants should be given every opportunity to self-identify themselves, and have those identifications included and respected regardless of complexity. Sevelius et al. (2017) also emphasise the importance of allowing transgender and gender non-confirming participants to identify their sexual orientation in relation to their gender identity, which is an important factor of inclusion when engaging in affirmative research with this population. By embracing the expansion of identity labels among young people, researchers can work toward social justice, positive development and honour adolescents' engagement with and challenge of existing taxonomies of self-understanding (Russell, 2016; Hammack *et al.*, 2021). As discussed later in the Presentation and Analysis chapters, some participants chose to include rich descriptions of how they identified their gender identity and sexual orientation, something which would have been lost with any generic labelled options. At the end of each section, participants were also given space to add their thoughts on any question within the section. Some used this to offer advice to their imagined reader, or to reflect on relevant experiences that were not directly related to the questions asked.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. lore m. dickey does not use capital letters for his name.

**3.6.2 Interviews**

Kvale (2007, p. 14) defines an interview as an ‘inter view’, an interchange of views between two people, which utilises the centrality of human experience for knowledge production and emphasises the social situatedness of research data. Qualitative methods, such as interviews, can yield rich information about the potential complexities, fluidity, and diversity of sexual identities (Savin-Williams, 2005). Grove et al. (2005, p. 7) state that transformative results can be most directly captured through personal reflections evocative of those with first hand knowledge. In keeping with the transformative paradigm, I strived to maintain patience, sensitivity, and honesty in my interviewing (Mertens, 2009).

The pre interview phase includes the following steps: contacting potential interviewees to determine interest, explaining the purpose and process in order to ensure the participant fully understands what will happen, answering any questions the interviewee might have (e.g. regarding confidentiality or anonymity), gaining informed consent and getting permission to record the interview (where appropriate). In order to recruit participants for interviews, I emailed former students (from the same list as the questionnaire). Some snowball sampling also occurred, as those who took part were asked to speak to their friends. All participants were required to complete an informed consent form prior to their interview. I conducted eight interviews, between April 2nd and April 6th 2022. Four interviews took place in person, in DCU, and four took place over Zoom. The demographic breakdown is as follows: two gay trans men, one lesbian trans woman, two nonbinary people, two cisgender queer women and one asexual man. A full table of interviewees (with pseudonyms) appears below.

**Interview Participants**

Participant ID Code	Name	Age	Gender	Sexual Orientation
INT1	Benedict	23	Transgender Male	Bisexual
INT2	Joan	21	Cisgender Female	Bisexual
INT3	Olivia	20	Transgender Female	Lesbian
INT4	Dillon	19	Non binary	Queer
INT5	Carlos	20	Cisgender Male	Asexual
INT6	Steven	23	Transgender Male	Gay

INT7	Joe	22	Non binary	Gay
INT8	Suzie	19	Cisgender Female	Queer

Table 2

The next interview phase is the 'tentative phase', which is the beginning portion of the interview, as interviewer and interviewee develop a rhythm and rapport. I designed an interview schedule with questions which would adequately reflect the research objectives (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007), including a series of open-ended questions which provided an overall structure, while allowing for new directions of conversation to arise (Kvale, 2007). Each interview opened with a question on the participants' last attendance at a CTYI programme. Due to my professional capacity within the programme, I had met each interviewee as a student, which allowed for rapport to occur naturally. I had also been directly involved with assisting some of the interviewees during their time on campus, in terms of coming out or issues experienced that related to their identity. During the immersion phase, Mertens (2009) emphasises the importance of not imposing controls on the interviewee, by interjecting additional comments or questions in order to avoid pauses or silences. Interviewers should communicate their acceptance of the participant's style of conveying their thoughts, feelings and experiences, allowing for trains of thought, making notes for any topic they might return to for clarification, but not interrupting the participant as they speak. I believe I achieved this, as many interviews included new and unexpected directions for conversation.

The emergence phase is the closing point of the interview, where interviewers summarise and clarify issues that emerged during the interview. Mertens (2009, p. 246) notes that at this point participants may ask questions of the interviewers about their own experiences, or add relevant insights to the topic, particularly as the 'pressure' of the interview seems to be over. During one interview I had stopped the recording device, when the interviewee began to speak more about the topics discussed, forcing some rapid note taking and a lesson learned for the next interview! All interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed.

After each interview, I sent a follow up email expressing gratitude and offering a list of supports, should any interviewee require them. I also welcomed any further contact from them. While some participants did discuss difficult experiences, there were no immediate issues of concern that arose. Most participants expressed their enjoyment of the session and offered further conversation, if needed. Corbin and Morse (2003) note that participants can gain a number of benefits from being interviewed, including validation of their experiences,

making sense out of certain situations by talking them through and hope that their participation and story might help others.

### **3.6.3 Focus Groups**

Focus groups are a form of group interview, where the reliance is on the interaction within the group who discuss a topic supplied by the researcher, yielding a collective rather than an individual view (Morgan, 1996). Focus groups allow participants to drive the discussion, directing the conversation and engaging in topics that interest them, as opposed to having the researcher's agenda at the forefront (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). Heck (2006) notes that a focus group setting can be useful as it allows participants to think about issues in ways that they might not if they were interviewed alone, however participants may also choose to reserve certain views due to the public setting. I chose to run focus groups in addition to interviews and the questionnaire, in order for further triangulation of data. Morgan (1996) notes the following as important issues to be addressed in focus groups: deciding the number of focus groups to be run, deciding the size of the group (with regard to intra-group dynamics), allowing for absenteeism, ensuring the sample have homogeneity in respect to the topic, ensuring a comfortable environment is created for participants to speak freely and chairing the meeting in a balanced way. I found all of these to be relevant in my own experience with the focus groups. I ran two focus groups on April 12th, 2022, one in person with three participants and one over Zoom with two participants. In terms of sampling homogeneity, this was not an issue as all participants were former students of the programme (therefore identified as gifted). There was a great deal of discussion in both groups and I ensured that all participants were called on to give their experiences and opinions. The main issue I encountered was recruitment, as unfortunately the focus group recruitment call had the lowest response rate (compared to the questionnaire and interviews). The Zoom focus group had four participants originally, however one switched to an interview due to other commitments and one did not show up on the day. However, Kvale (1996) notes that the number of subjects necessary depends on a study's purpose and argues that a small number of subjects should not be disregarded due to a perceived lack of generalisable knowledge. While the number of participants was small, the contributions of the focus groups were overall a good addition to the study. The participants were able to speak amongst each other and develop their ideas together, or contrast their experiences which were different.

Below is a table of the focus group participants.

#### **Focus Group Participants**

Participant ID Code	Name	Age	Pronouns	Sexual Orientation
FG1	Ken	18	He/ him	Asexual
FG2	Emma	18	She/ her	Straight
FG3	Dennis	19	He/ him	Undisclosed
FG4	Enda	19	He/ she/ they	Queer
FG5	Jackie	19	Any	Gay

Table 3

### 3.7 Research Methods- Data Analysis

In terms of data analysis, mixed methods research designs allow cross-interpretation of both the quantitative and qualitative data, therefore accessing multiple possibilities, by using both statistical and text analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

#### 3.7.1 Quantitative Data Analysis (SPSS)

In total there were 142 responses to the questionnaire. I first conducted a preliminary analysis to check for any outliers. It was determined that one participant had submitted two responses. The two responses had the same demographic information for age, school type, school location and last year attending CTYI, as well as an identical list of unique labels for gender identity and sexual orientation ('queer, pansexual, nonbinary, neutrois, aromantic, quoiromantic, idemromantic'). The responses, both quantitative and qualitative, were close to identical. Therefore, one response was deleted. However, I did combine the qualitative responses before deleting (most were extremely short) as I deemed it relevant to the overall study.

The quantitative data was then imported into SPSS, a statistical data-analysis software package. A descriptive statistical summary of the data was conducted first. Descriptive statistics describe and present data, e.g. in terms of summary frequencies, and are primarily used for the organisation and enumeration of the data at hand (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2013). For this study, descriptive statistics were used in order to present the mean (the average score) and the standard deviation (a measure of the range of scores) of certain data. Descriptive statistics were useful for presenting the data for RQ1 (the climate for gifted LGBTQ post primary students in Ireland at school?) and RQ2 (the climate for gifted LGBTQ post primary students in Ireland at a gifted summer enrichment programme).

For RQ 3 (whether the climate of a site affects the frequency of interventions) I determined a correlational analysis was needed. Correlational analysis provides an estimate of the



magnitude of a relationship between two or more variables (Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004). I was interested to find out whether there would be a significant relationship between the frequency of personal intervention; teacher/ staff intervention, the perception of general student acceptance and the perception of overall teacher/ staff support. The two most commonly used correlations are the Spearman rank order correlation and the Pearson correlation (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2013). Pearson's correlation can only be used for interval and ratio data, therefore it was not useful for this study. I chose the Spearman's rho rank order correlation as my data was largely ordinal, given that it came from Likert style questions. Spearman's rho calculates a correlation coefficient on rankings rather than the difference between the individual cases and the mean for the variable as a whole (Muijs, 2011).

### **3.7.2 Qualitative Data Analysis**

As I wished to allow the data to lead the analysis, an inductive approach was deemed the most suitable. Inductive coding and theme development involves working 'bottom up' from the data, developing codes and themes using what the data as the starting point; the data provide the bedrock for identifying meaning and interpreting data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I chose to follow Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2013) conception of thematic analysis; that coding and theme development are subjective and interpretative processes, where analysis is created by the researcher, at the intersection of the data, their theoretical and conceptual frameworks, disciplinary knowledge, and research skills and experience (Terry et al., 2017). Thematic analysis can be used to analyse data from each of the data collection sites in this study: interviews, focus groups and textual data from qualitative surveys (Braun, 2013; Terry et al., 2017). Terry et al. (2017) state that within this type of thematic analysis, the assumption is that coding will develop depth and move beyond the obvious surface level through continued immersion in, or repeated engagement with, the data.

I firstly transcribed all of the interview and focus group recordings. While Zoom does have a transcription feature, I found this still required a great deal of editing. Each recording was transcribed directly into Microsoft Word. For the questionnaire qualitative data, I separated the open text responses on Microsoft Excel and moved them into a Word format for analysis. I then read over the transcripts multiple times in order to identify initial themes amongst the data. After familiarising myself with the qualitative data overall, I imported it into Taguette, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). García-Horta and Guerra-Ramos (2009) note that certain factors can make interview analysis quite demanding, including interviewees moving between points rapidly, offering fragmented ideas and using words and meanings in interchangeable ways. This was particularly true when speaking

about LGBTQ identities, as interviewees often used different definitions and constructions of these terms. The interviews also produced an overwhelming amount of information, therefore an efficient data management technique was needed. Taguette's platform provides a mechanism to manage qualitative data and to develop code schemes, apply codes to the interview transcriptions, and organise themes. I identified and labelled all segments of interest and relevance within the datasets, being mindful that this should be a process both of data reduction and synthesis, and a way of starting to organise the data and my observations into patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2013). While a CAQDAS was needed for efficient management of qualitative data, particularly given the multiple sources and sheer amount, I found listening to the interview and focus group recordings repeatedly to be the most helpful in terms of forming the themes around identity development, which became Chapter 5.

For RQ4 (the factors that contribute to the frequency of intervention), I used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. I first separated the data from the relevant questions, organised it and deleted any repeat answers or non-answers (e.g. N/A or 'same as before'). I conducted a thematic analysis on these answers, identifying codes and assigning them to each answer. I then gave each code a number (there were eight codes in total) and found the percentage for each, using excel.

The use of an inductive approach to my thematic analysis allowed for unexpected themes that arose. I did not anticipate how much the qualitative participants would speak about aspects of identity development, or the long discussions we would have about defining gender and sexuality. Therefore, I chose to split my Presentation and Analysis chapters. The data which arose on identity development is brand new to the field and adds nuance and depth to the overall study. An inductive approach allowed me to be more fluid with my analysis and include this important data in the overall findings.

### **3.8 Reliability and Validity**

Lincoln, Guba and Lynham (2018) state that reflexivity demands that researchers interrogate themselves regarding the ways in which research efforts are shaped and staged around the binaries, contradictions, and paradoxes that form our individual lives. Furthermore, they implore researchers to self examine and question how such binaries and paradoxes shape interactions with participants (Lincoln, Guba & Lynham, 2018), in who we become to them in the process of becoming to ourselves (Mayan, 2016). Mertens (2009) considers validity in the transformative paradigm as building on Guba and Lincoln's (1989, cited in Mertens, 2009) concept of credibility in qualitative research, which essentially focuses on the demonstrable

correspondence between the ways that community members perceive constructs and the way the researcher portrays their viewpoints.

In this study I have used triangulation, clarifying research bias and thick description as validity checks (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Greene (2007) states that triangulating data allows for multiple perspectives and multiple meanings being taken into consideration in order to create a collective generation of greater understanding of the phenomena at hand. Thick description establishes credibility through the lens of readers who read a narrative account and are transported into a setting or situation (Creswell and Miller, 2000). Thick description creates 'verisimilitude' and a space for the reader to imagine their way into the life experiences of another, through the captured voices of lived experience (Denzin, 2001, p. 140).

### **3.9 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter offers a statement on the worldview, principles and experience that has guided my methodology throughout this study. Using a mixed methods approach, I was able to integrate quantitative and qualitative data to examine my research questions regarding climate. The collected quantitative data also allowed me to examine diverse sexual orientation and gender identities amongst my population, while the qualitative data allowed me to interrogate the meaning of these identities and the experiences of gifted LGBTQ young people.

As findings are unique to the individual or community experiencing them, those most profoundly affected are best positioned to reflect on and share the implications of the phenomena being studied (Grove, Kibel and Haas, 2005). I believe that the data collection methods utilised, in particular the qualitative data, offers a unique and powerful reflection of the experiences of gifted LGBTQ young people in Ireland. A key standard for rigour in research is that the researchers should know the community of focus 'well enough' that they can link research results to positive action within that community (Lincoln, 1995). Social action as a result of findings is also a key aspect of the transformative research model. Mertens (2009) depicts this as a cyclical approach, whereby the researcher has an ongoing relationship with community members, allowing the results of one cycle of inquiry to feed into decision making, interventions and the next cycle of inquiry. The results of this research study will directly affect the students who participated within it, as they will be used to adapt and improve our current practices within the programme.

## Chapter 4: Presentation and Analysis Part 1

### 4.1 Introduction

This study aims to explore the following key research questions:

RQ1- What is the climate for gifted LGBTQ post primary students in Ireland at school?

RQ2- What is the climate for gifted LGBTQ post primary students in Ireland at a gifted summer enrichment programme (CTYI)?

RQ3- What is the frequency of intervention in situations of negative remarks and language about LGBTQ people and does the climate of a site affect the frequency of intervention?

RQ4- What factors contribute to the frequency of intervention in situations of negative remarks/ language about LGBTQ people?

I chose to conduct a mixed methods study in order to develop a detailed view of the phenomenon for the individuals experiencing it. The close-ended questions in the questionnaire provided quantitative data on the frequency of negative remarks about and/ or toward LGBTQ people, the frequency of interventions from staff, peers and the participants themselves on hearing this language and how this interacted with their perception of the climate of each site. Through SPSS, I used descriptive statistics to analyse the quantitative data gathered, including the frequency of hearing anti-LGBTQ language, the frequency of intervention from the individual, peers and staff members and the general perception of student acceptance and staff support. I was interested to find out the correlation between personal intervention and teacher/ staff intervention and the general perception of acceptance and support at each site.

The data was imported into SPSS and a descriptive statistical summary of the data was conducted, before I began testing the correlations and causal relationships of the data. Descriptive statistics describe and present data, e.g. in terms of summary frequencies, and are primarily used for the organisation and enumeration of the data at hand (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2013). For the quantitative data gathered, descriptive statistics was deemed the most useful to give an overall presentation of the data, including the mean (the average score), the standard deviation (a measure of the range of scores) and the overall demographic data. A correlational analysis using Spearman's rho was then conducted in order to examine the correlation of several variables related to frequency of personal intervention; teacher/ staff intervention, the perception of general student acceptance and the perception of overall teacher/ staff support. The rich qualitative data gathered illustrates the

effects of negative language, the factors which affect willingness to intervene in situations of witnessing this language and the general perception of support in the two environments studied. My qualitative data comes from three sources: responses to the open text boxes in the questionnaire, two focus groups and eight interviews. I firstly transcribed all of the interview and focus group recordings. I then separated the open text responses on Microsoft Excel and moved them into a Word format for analysis. I familiarised myself with the qualitative data overall and then imported it into Taguette, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software package. Taguette's platform provides a mechanism to manage qualitative data and to develop code schemes, apply codes to the interview transcriptions, and organise themes. I identified and labelled all segments of interest and relevance within the datasets, being mindful that this should be a process of both data reduction and synthesis, and a way of starting to organise the data and my observations into patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2013). I am guided by the transformative paradigm throughout the study, which places central importance on the lives and experiences of marginalised communities and links results of social inquiry to action (Mertens, 2009).

In this chapter, I will present my findings and analysis on the research questions above, with quantitative findings on participant perceptions of the sites (school and CTYI) and their climate for LGBTQ adolescents. A thematic analysis of the key factors that create a negative or positive climate will be presented, drawing from the qualitative data of the study. My findings on the relationship between climate and interventions into incidents of anti-LGBTQ remarks/ language will then be explored. In terms of personal interventions, the factors affecting intervention will be analysed. All findings will be supported by an abundance of quotes from the participants who were involved in the study, in particular from the interviews and focus groups.

#### **4.1.1 Participant Demographics**

Overall, the total number of participants across the questionnaire, interviews and focus groups was 155. There were 142 questionnaire participants, 8 interviews and 5 focus group participants. For Chapter 4, all statistical data is drawn from the questionnaire. There are some quotes included from focus group and interview participants, as they relate directly to the quantitative data gathered.

##### *Questionnaire Demographics- Sexual Orientation*

Two thirds of questionnaire participants identified as LGBTQ (n=104). Of the 7.1% (n=12) that identified as 'Not sure', five included a response to 'If you marked yes to the last question, please use this box to describe how you identify.'

1. 'I've always thought I was straight but recently I've felt slightly differently and I am currently figuring out whether it is curiosity or a sexual realisation'
2. 'Think I'm pansexual'
3. 'Asexual'
4. 'Bisexual, but often use queer as an umbrella term'
5. 'Bisexual'

Considering four participants in the 'Not sure' category gave an identifier within the LGBTQ spectrum, they were included in LGBTQ identified participants. Therefore, the final number of LGBTQ identified questionnaire participants was 108, meaning two-thirds (64.3%) of questionnaire participants identified as LGBTQ.

### Do you identify as LGBTQ?

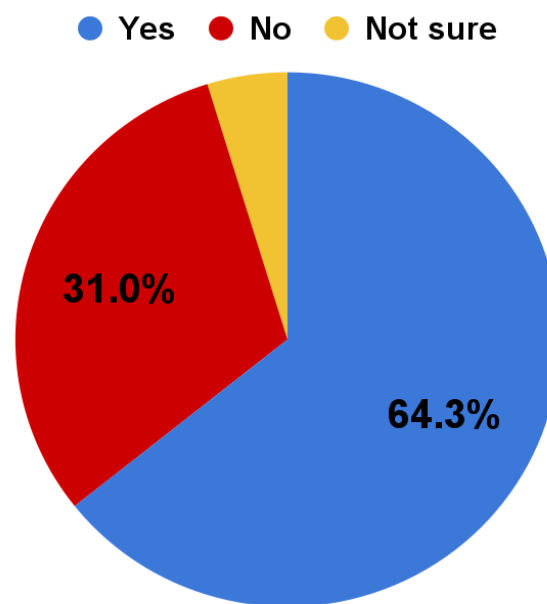


Figure 1

As previously discussed, I exercised considerable thought on how to ask questionnaire participants about their identity within the LGBTQ spectrum. Merten's (2009) concept of 'barriers to participation' influenced my final decision to eschew defined options, in favour of open text boxes. I was also conscious of providing for participants who may identify their sexual orientation as outside the conceptualisation of scales commonly used (Galupo *et al.*, 2014), or for those who have multiple identity labels (Higa *et al.*, 2014). I coded seventeen

sexual orientation labels. Below is a table of all sexual orientation identifiers reported by questionnaire participants.

*Questionnaire Participant Sexual Orientation Identifiers*

<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Bisexual	51
Queer	17
Lesbian	11
Gay	10
Pansexual	10
Asexual	9
Demisexual	5
Aromantic	4
Panromantic	3
Quoiromantic	2
Aspec	2
Biromantic	2
Homosexual	2
Polyamorous	1
Idemromantic	1
Unlabelled	1
Demiromantic	1

Table 4

Out of the total LGBTQ participants, 22.2% also used multiple labels to describe their sexual orientation. Due to the presence of multiple labels for some participants, the total exceeds 108. Bisexual was by far the most common identifier given, with 47.2% of LGBTQ study participants including it as an identifier. BeLonG To’s (2019) school climate survey for LGBTQ young people in Ireland had similar findings, as 45.2% of their sample identified as bisexual.

*Questionnaire Demographics- Gender Identity*

I coded fourteen gender identities amongst the total 142 questionnaire participants. A table of questionnaire participant gender identities can be found below. The majority of respondents identified as either cisgender male or female, with just under a third (26.1%) identifying their gender as something other than cisgender.

**Breakdown of Cisgender and Non Cisgender Participants**

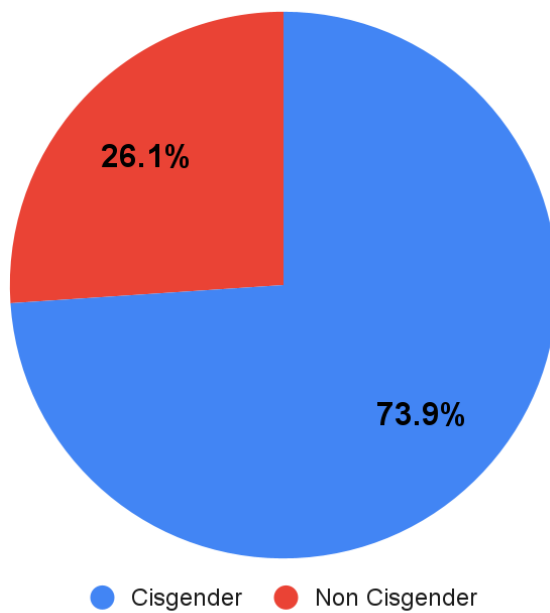


Figure 2



Questionnaire Participant Gender Identities

	15 (n=5)	16 (n=5)	17 (n=10)	18 (n=64)	19 (n=37)	20 (n=15)	21 (n=5)	22 (n=1)	Total
Cisgender Female	1		3	40	16	4	1		65
Cisgender Male	1		3	14	13	6	3		40
Transgender Female				1	1	1			3
Transgender Male		1		1		2			4
Nonbinary	3	2	3	4	2	2		1	17
Female/ Questioning				2	1				3
Male/ Questioning							1		1
Questioning				1					1
Queer					1				1
Genderfluid		1			1				2
Nonbinary/ Genderfluid		1							1
Neutrois					1				1
Agender			1	1					2
Transfeminine, Agender and Female					1				1

Table 5

In Chapter 5, gender identity and sexual orientation are discussed in greater detail, with particular reference to specific identities and overall identity development. However, for the data in this chapter I feel it is relevant to have an overall idea of the demographics of the population sample.

#### **4.2 Overall Climate at School and CTYI**

This section will explore Research Questions 1 and 2.

RQ1- What is the climate for gifted LGBTQ post primary students in Ireland at school?

RQ2- What is the climate for gifted LGBTQ post primary students in Ireland at a gifted summer enrichment programme (CTYI)?

The questionnaire utilised for this study is modelled on the GLSEN Local Climate Survey. GLSEN has been conducting their national version of the survey in the United States biennially since 1999. Versions of their survey have been used internationally (Taylor and Peter, 2011; Pizmony-Levy and Kosciw, 2016; Gato *et al.*, 2020), in Ireland (BeLonG To & Pizmony-Levy, 2019) and in summer camp settings (Adelman & Woods, 2006). The first set of variables assess exposure to anti-LGBTQ remarks at the two primary sites, school and CTYI. Negative remarks and language are a significant factor in school climate for LGBTQ adolescents (Thurlow, 2001; Guasp, 2014; Poteat, Slaatten and Breivik, 2019). The items were divided into sections on hearing negative remarks about sexual orientation (LGBQ) and negative remarks about transgender and gender non-conforming identities. In the LGBQ section, the first question was identical to the original GLSEN survey; respondents were asked to indicate the frequency of hearing the word gay used in a negative way (such as “That’s so gay” or “You’re so gay”). The second question was adapted from the original survey, rather than offer a list of slurs, the question simply asked about the frequency of hearing negative remarks about being gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer. In the next section, participants were asked about the frequency of hearing negative remarks about transgender or gender nonconforming people. These variables were measured with 5-point Likert-type scales ranging from Never (1) to Frequently (5). Results indicate that the students often hear negative remarks and language regarding sexual orientation (M=3.58, SD=1) and gender identity (M=3.17, SD=1.16) at school.

### School

Sexual Orientation	Gender Identity			
	M	SD	M	SD
Freq of hearing gay used in negative way	3.75	1.00	N/A	N/A
Freq of hearing negative remarks	3.58	1.16	3.17	1.16

For CTYI, the results were quite different. Results indicated that the participants are significantly less likely to hear negative remarks regarding sexual orientation (M=1.40, SD=0.62) and gender identity (M=1.5, SD=0.67).

### CTYI

Sexual Orientation	Gender Identity			
	M	SD	M	SD
Freq of hearing gay used in negative way	1.68	0.98	N/A	N/A
Freq of hearing negative remarks	1.40	0.62	1.5	0.671

The second set of variables assessed participant perception of acceptance from peers and support of staff. Participants were asked the following questions for each site.

1. How accepting do you think students were of LGBTQ people?
2. How supportive do you think staff were of LGBTQ people?

Again, answers were then measured with a 6 point Likert-type scale ranging from Not at all accepting (1) to Very accepting (6). For the question on staff, the word 'accepting' was replaced with 'supportive'.

### Acceptance and Support at School

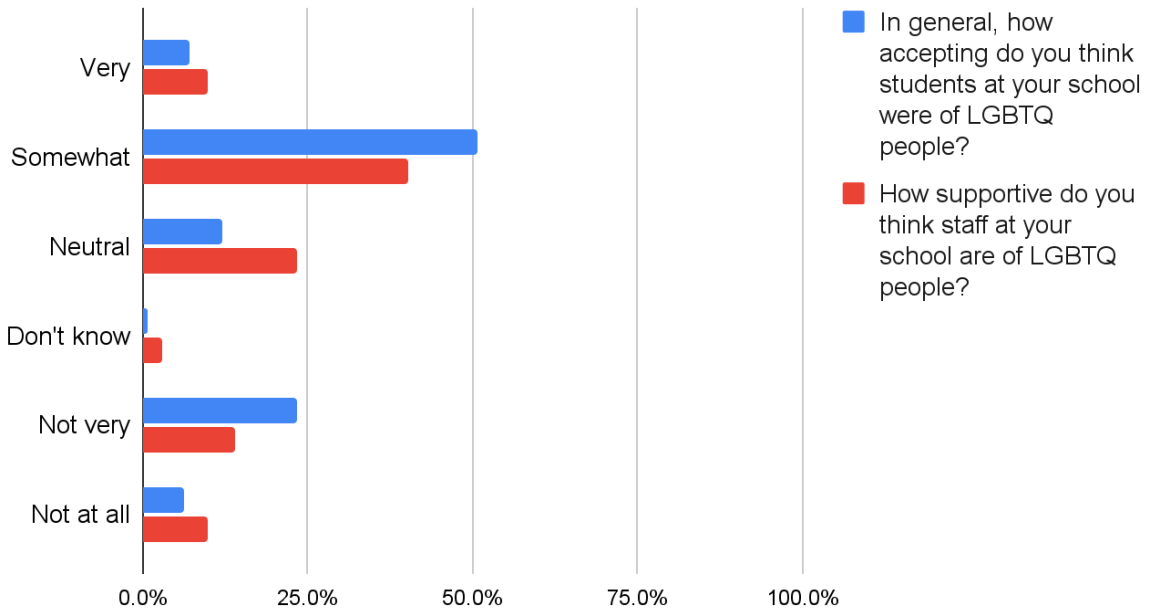


Figure 3

### Acceptance and Support at CTYI

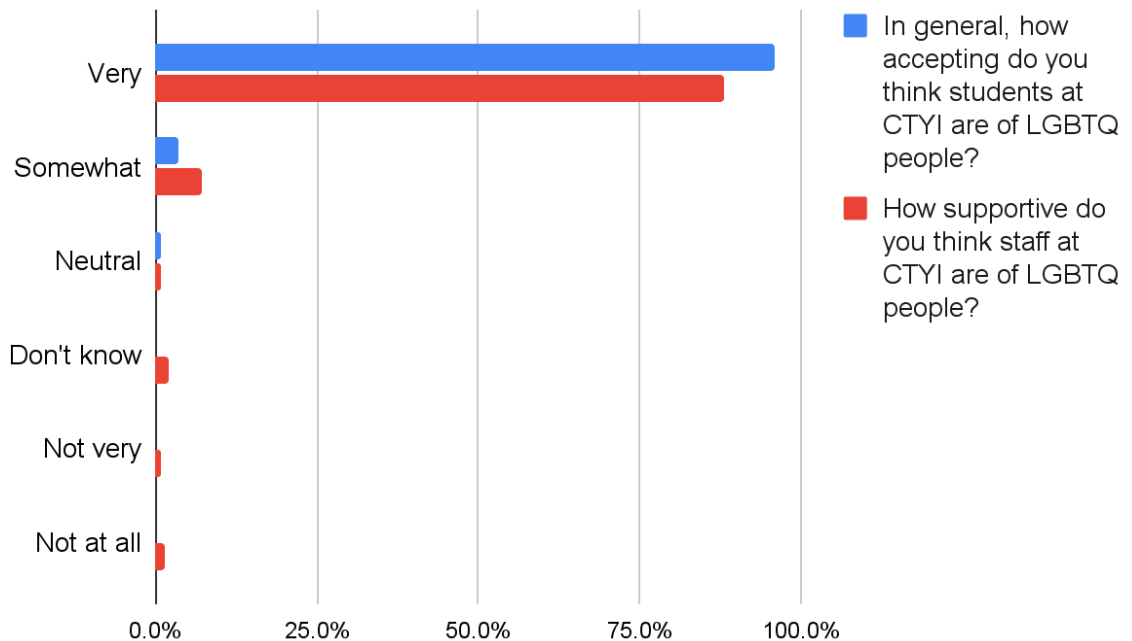


Figure 4

Overall, questionnaire participants rated CTYI as having higher student acceptance and higher levels of staff support.

Spearman’s rho was run to determine whether there was a correlation between frequency of negative remarks and participant’s perception of overall student acceptance. My hypothesis was that there would be a negative correlation, meaning more frequent negative remarks would correlate with a lower perception of student acceptance and a lower perception of staff support. There was a negative correlation between the frequency of anti-LGBTQ language and overall perception of student acceptance. There was also a negative correlation between frequency of anti-LGBTQ language and overall staff support in school, however these were not as strongly correlated.

**Correlation Between Negative Language and School Climate**

	Student Acceptance		Staff Support	
Negative Remarks 1 (gay as pejorative)	rs=-0.41	p=<0.001	rs=-0.23	p=0.006
Negative Remarks 2 (sexual orientation)	rs=-0.51	p=<0.001	rs=-0.31	p=<0.001
Negative Remarks 3 (gender identity)	rs=-0.28	p=<0.001	rs=-0.19	p=0.23

The next section will discuss the factors that contribute to an overall positive or negative climate.

**4.3 Factors Contributing to a Negative Climate**

In this section, I will discuss findings which can be classed as negative, or contributing to a negative climate. All participants were asked about negative remarks and language at both school and CTYI. Qualitative data from the questionnaire, focus groups and interviews was analysed and several themes identified; harassment and bullying, gender norms and a heteronormative environment, lack of staff support and lack of peer acceptance. Cronbach’s alpha was used to measure the internal consistency of the questions regarding negative remarks, as this is a useful option with attitude instruments similar to the Likert scale (Siegle, 2015). The negative remarks consisted of six items and the value for Cronbach’s Alpha for the survey was  $\alpha = .72$ . Below is a chart identifying the overall themes.

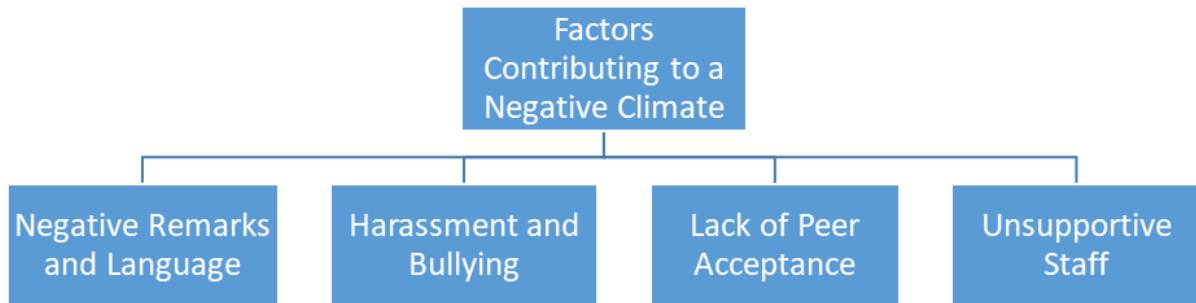


Figure 5

#### 4.3.1 Negative Remarks and Language

The following charts display the results of the three items designed to assess exposure to anti-LGBTQ remarks and language.

In terms of negative remarks at school, two thirds (62%) of questionnaire participants reported hearing the word gay used in a negative way frequently or often, half (52.8%) reported hearing negative remarks about sexual orientation frequently or often and just over a third (38%) reported hearing negative remarks about gender identity frequently or often.

### Negative Remarks in School

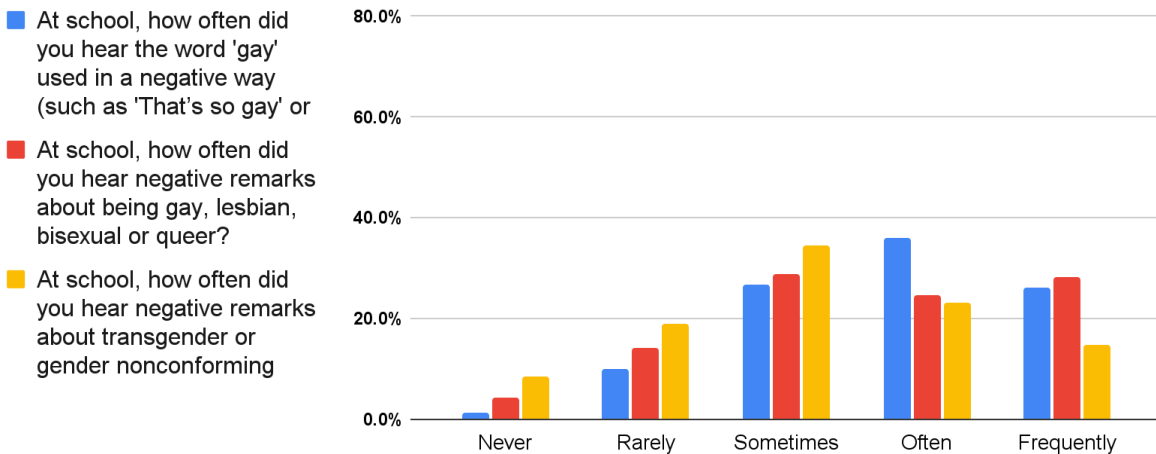


Figure 6

For CTYI, participants reported an opposite result. Two thirds of questionnaire participants reported that they never heard the word gay used in a negative way (57%), heard negative remarks about sexual orientation (65.5%) or heard negative remarks about gender identity (59.9%).

### Negative Remarks at CTYI

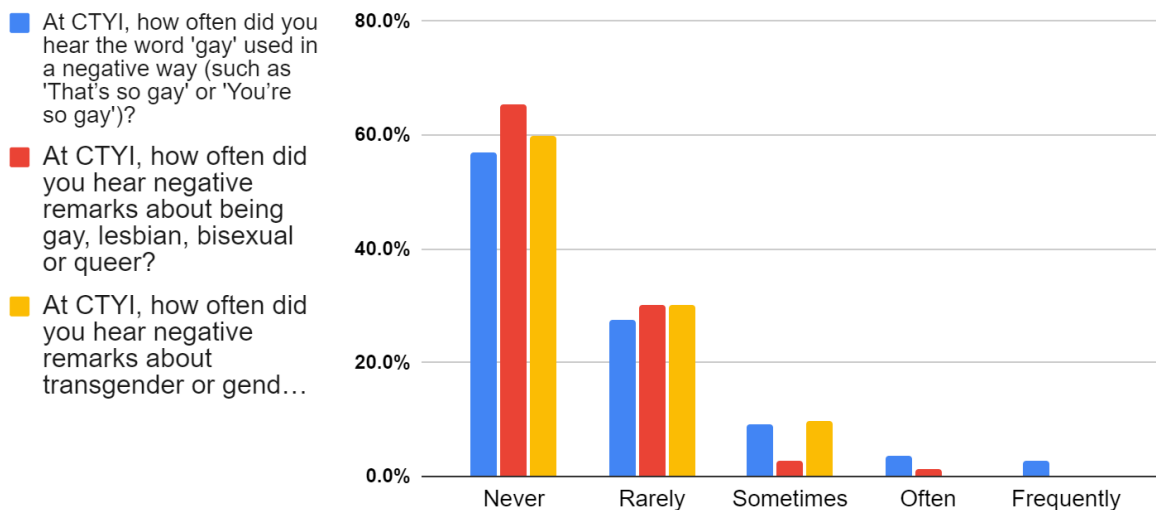


Figure 7

For both sections, participants were given an open text box to give examples of the remarks heard. I combined the answers for each section on negative remarks at school and coded each one using Taguette. For the sections regarding negative remarks at school, 71.1% of

participants gave examples for the sexual orientation section and 57% of participants gave examples for the gender section. In total, 182 responses were recorded for examples of negative remarks at school. For the CTYI sections, 17.6% and 20.4% of participants gave examples of negative remarks for the sexual orientation and gender identity sections, respectively. In total, 54 responses were recorded for examples of negative remarks. After eliminating some codes and merging others, I identified six overall codes: slurs, using an LGBTQ term as pejorative, general discrimination, disgust, misgendering/ deadnaming and other. The code 'Other' was required for ten responses which did not fit any general theme. The results for each site had two key differences; participants reported a much higher percentage of slurs at school than CTYI and a higher percentage of statements were coded as 'other' for CTYI than school.

### *Negative Remarks at School*

Given the higher frequency of negative remarks at school, it is unsurprising that there were many more examples given in the open text box. The table below includes the percentage of type of negative remark and examples given.



### Negative Remarks and Language at School

Negative Remark Type	Percentage	Examples of Remarks
<b>Slurs</b>	43.4%	-'faggot, gay, dyke, lesbian, freak, tranny' -Mainly slurs, calling people homophobic slurs because being LGBT+ was seen by many as a bad thing.' -The terms "f*ggot," "f*g," "queer," and "tr*nny" were often used in derogatory ways towards any queer presenting people, usually followed by pointing and laughing.'
<b>Pejorative use of LGBTQ term</b>	23.6%	-'That's so gay' -Lesbian being used as a negative descriptor' -In general the word transgender being used as an insult.'
<b>General Discrimination</b>	23.6%	-Girls spreading rumours about other girls being gay as a way to disenfranchise them.' -A friend justified the exclusion of an individual from our friendship group by revealing to me that he had come out as gay.' -Trans/ gender non-conforming people don't exist, they just want attention.'
<b>Disgust</b>	8.8%	-Saying it's gross or weird.' -Calling them perverts/paedophiles.' -I don't know how lesbians could live with themselves, that's disgusting.'
<b>Misgendering/ Deadnaming</b>	9.9%	-Deliberate misgendering and deadnaming of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals.' -Deliberately/maliciously deadnaming a transgender student'. -Saying nonbinary people are delusional'
<b>Other</b>	5.5%	-Insensitive and offensive questions regarding slightly lesser-known identities'. -Mockingly saying they identify as an attack helicopter.'

Table 6

Focus group and interview participants also spoke about negative language at school.

'The F slur was thrown around every day. Not at me, but everyday thrown around. Everyone just called each other it and it was kind of awful.' Olivia

The below quotes from Carlos and Suzie illustrate that casual homophobic language is often overlooked and that this infiltrates the environment of a school.

'To the best of my memory, I never heard any explicitly homophobic remarks, like 'I hate gay people and think they should all die' but there's a lot of you know, 'get away from me, are you gay' or something. Things like the use of gay as a slur, especially in primary school. It was viewed as a word for something that annoyed you...Like you could call someone an idiot, or call them gay, and it all meant the same thing to us. Then in secondary school it was more implicit homophobia, jokes like 'what are you, gay?' Carlos

'I didn't hear it every day. But it wouldn't be a case that if I heard the f slur in the hallway I would think I'm so shocked that let me go tell the teacher... It was completely normalised. Such that I would say if someone had been called out for using the f slur they would have been confused as to why they were being called out for it. Same with the saying "That's so gay". Generally an atmosphere where it was completely unacceptable that someone could actually be gay or trans or anything.'

Suzie

Derogatory language and slurs can also be used as a way to affirm in-group or out-group identity and enforce a dominant ideology of heteronormativity within a school (Minton *et al.*, 2008; O'Higgins Norman, 2009; Minton, 2014). This is clear in Joe's perception of how his straight peers interacted with him.

'I heard negative language pretty frequently. It kind of died off a little bit towards the end of my run of secondary school but there were also specific ones... I remember in the first half of secondary school there would be some older kids that would make sort of snide comments, like I basically got catcalled, when I was walking through the school. Like yelling things at me that I don't think they would have if I was straight and masculine.' Joe

Joe later described one specific incident of an extremely upsetting negative remark made by someone he then considered a friend. This took place not long after the Pulse Nightclub shooting in Florida, the deadliest incident in the history of violence against LGBT people in the United States.

'Shortly after Pulse happened, I was just talking to this guy about it and why gay bars are a thing and why gay people need our own spaces. He was genuinely asking and he turns to my friend Zack and said 'Zack, would you go into a gay bar?' Zack being edgy and thinking he's funny said, "I would go in with an uzi and shoot all those f\*ggots down". He was doing it to cause a stir. I basically fell apart with that whole friend group over that.' Joe

#### *Negative Remarks at CTYI*

The table below provides the breakdown of types of negative remarks heard at CTYI. In total, 54 responses were recorded for examples of negative remarks.

*Negative Remarks and Language at CTYI*

Negative Remark Type	Percentage	Examples of Remarks
<b>Slurs</b>	11.1%	-'In my first course in 2016 I heard peers use terms such as "fag" and "dyke" in a derogatory manner, generally by the younger students.' -'Using the 'f slur' towards someone gay'
<b>Pejorative use of LGBTQ term</b>	18.5%	-'Saying "that's so gay" to refer to a behaviour that was considered uncool.' -'Derogatory terms used to describe different sexualities being used as jokes.'
<b>General Discrimination</b>	29.6%	-'General discontent with the amount of LGBT+ people present, nothing very specific.' -'Most students were really good honestly, but I had friends who had their TAs misgender them and talk down to them about being trans.' -'The negative remarks I heard were mostly about trans women from cis straight males, calling trans women "pretenders" so they could use the women's restrooms and sexually abuse other women.'
<b>Disgust</b>	3.7%	-'That being gay is disgusting.' -'Weird'
<b>Misgendering/ Deadnaming</b>	7.4%	-'People using wrong pronouns in reference to people.' -'There was one incident where someone asked a mean question about another student's deadname.'
<b>Other</b>	29.6%	-'I never did hear but I think there was like one confirmed homophobe one time but besides that nothing.' -'Mostly people not being used to being around openly queer people getting defensive.' -'Usually in a joking way between gay people so it doesn't really count.' -'Some people would say that they didn't get it, and would sometimes not want to understand it since they weren't familiar with it before CTYI.'

Table 7

I found the quote 'mostly people not being used to being around openly queer people getting defensive', interesting as it implies a shift in social dynamics and power. Both Steven and Suzie touched on this in their interviews.

'I feel like there is something to having these, the sort of pecking order at CTYI being significantly different. Like the social hierarchy when you're talking about who's a cool person, in that adolescent way at CTYI versus in the outside world and suddenly people have a lot of social capital because the rules are changed in CTYI in a way that is probably overwhelming. Because you're suddenly the popular one for all the reasons why you would've been unpopular at school.' Steven

'At CTYI it was cool to be gay. At school it was so heteronormative that I wanted to be straight but it was the complete opposite at CTYI. It wasn't the same that if you were straight you got harrassed like if you were gay in school obviously! It's that you were just accepted and celebrated'. Suzie

Joe identified that while he did not hear negative comments at CTYI, he did experience them in (non official) social media groups for CTYI students.

'I very rarely heard any queerphobic comments. I can't remember anything specifically... Any queerphobic comments I actually heard were from CTYI International Facebook groups. Probably because people felt safer saying things on the internet! There was a CTYI politics group, in retrospect a horrible idea, but again it was weird because even at the time it was very clear they wanted to be "edgy funny" or whatever. Some people made posts that were inherently trying to piss people off. But I felt like all these people are nice to me in person so I feel like that wouldn't happen if they were homophobic? It was very confusing. But none of them were in my friend group at CTYI so it didn't affect how safe I felt there.'

Finally, as discussed in my methodology, one of the key aspects of the transformative paradigm is linking results of inquiry to action (Mertens, 2009). This is also a benefit of my 'insider researcher' status, as the findings of this study will directly impact CTYI policy and practices. The questionnaire participant quote regarding a Teaching Assistant misgendering a student and speaking 'down to them about being trans', is information we did not have before. This can lead to changes in staff training, to ensure the academic team receive the same type of training as the pastoral care team do.

### *Negative Language from Teachers/ Staff Members*

Unfortunately, some of the negative language reported by participants came from teachers/ school staff members and CTYI staff members. For CTYI, the example was given in the previous section of a TA speaking negatively to a student. One participant also wrote that he felt a lack of inclusive language was an issue.

‘Going to the disco with a member of the opposite sex was encouraged in my RA meeting, leaving me feeling excluded. As in many aspects of society, the assumption was that we were all ‘straight’, with my RA asking me if I had a girlfriend.’

Several questionnaire participants cited their school teachers’ attitudes and remarks as having a significant impact on their experience in school.

‘A teacher said it was unfair for gays to have children because they would be bullied by other children.’

‘On multiple occasions I heard/ witnessed homophobic comments and behaviour from teachers at the school.’

‘Once my religion teacher went on a rant about how God didn't accept transgender people, my whole class was shocked and wrote a letter to the vice-principal about it. Although we reported her, she did not receive any punishment/consequences.’

While it’s very possible that the teacher did receive ‘punishment/ consequences’ which were not discussed with the student body, the perception of this being acceptable is quite troubling. However, it is positive that the student references the ‘whole class’ being shocked, which indicates a sense of peer support. One questionnaire participant, who identified as trans and agender, reported the following as the negative remarks they heard about trans and gender nonconforming people,

‘Misgendering trans students, saying nonbinary people are delusional, calling being trans "believing you're something that you're not", saying pronouns other than he/she/they are stupid, saying that trans issues aren't that important.’

In a subsequent answer this participant then clarified that some of these remarks had come from a teacher (“the one about trans people believing they're something that they're not and

directly comparing trans people to psychiatric patients was a teacher'). Finally, one questionnaire participant wrote the following jarring anecdote.

'My principal told a person in my year group that he would bring a pile of bricks onto their head because they had a pride flag tied onto their bag, though he said that was because it wasn't part of the uniform.'

#### **4.3.2 Harassment and Bullying**

In a study conducted by Laffan et al. (2022), gifted adolescents in Ireland were asked about the perceived reasons for why they felt they were victimised (by either traditional bullying or cyberbullying). Overall, 30% stated this was due to their giftedness and 13% stated this was due to their sexual orientation. Siegle (2017) notes that cyberbullying can come in a variety of forms, including posting hurtful messages on social media, impersonating someone else online in order to cause humiliation and sending cruel messages directly to the victim. Two particular incidents of bullying stood out in this study, with interview participants Olivia and Katharine. Their bullies used the same method of cyber bullying, yet both girls said they had never heard of anyone else experiencing this. Each was added to a Facebook messenger group which contained cruel and abusive messages toward them, then swiftly removed. The result of this is that they would receive notifications of the messages, but could not access the group to respond.

'For a while I was added into this group chat and then removed right away... So I was able to read all the messages that had come before but I wasn't able to respond to any of them and they'd basically been saying a bunch of like transphobic things about me and it was the first time I'd properly faced that. Like obviously I was upset by it, obviously I was hurt by it but on the other hand it didn't bother me hugely because they were like a group of guys that I didn't really like much anyway, they were kind of known to be the guys who would be mean.'

Despite stating she was not hugely bothered, Katharine did state she was subsequently unhappy with how the incident was handled by the school.

'Ever since first year they'd always said 'if you're being bullied, if you're being cyber bullied, you report and we'll deal with it.' But then when I told them they said they couldn't do anything because it didn't happen on school grounds. It was only when one of the boys used the trans slur to me in person that they did something. I think

they just kind of gave out to him but as far I know, there wasn't any proper punishment, he didn't get detention or anything. I felt so pissed off.'

Olivia's bullies used the same method.

'I started to get added to group chats with some guys in the year above me. They started to dehumanise me, call me very dehumanising things. They would deadname me and before I could even say anything would remove me from the group chat. This kept happening. Then they made a Facebook page, which was meant to be me. The profile picture was a crude amalgamation drawing of me and then they'd share photos from my private social media and say really awful things. Being a 15 year old girl, who was very socially isolated at school... That was quite awful.'

This took place during the same year described in the 'Coming Out' section, where Olivia was outed as transgender by the same bullies. Transgender adolescents are twice as likely to experience school absenteeism due to the consequences of victimisation (Day *et al.*, 2020), however Olivia was quick to clarify she missed no school through this due to her focus on Junior Cert exams.

The participants in Peterson and Rischar's (2000) study expressed that social discomfort surrounding questions about their identity (as early as elementary school) led to social unease and feelings of isolation. One participant related the following,

'I specifically remember many occasions where the "popular" students would actively interrogate and harass the "out" kids with invasive questions about their personal lives, not to be curious, but to make fun of their answers. This was never stopped by teachers.'

Focus group participant Dennis described the exclusion of gay boys at his school and stated that he would not have chosen to come out due to watching his others' experiences with harassment.

'Lots of negative remarks, physical abuse, even simple things like in science class and we were using the wash bottle and they were squirting people they knew were gay. They were targeted for any sort of abuse like that. The administration was pretty poor at handling it, when it came up they didn't really do anything about it and there was never an inquiry. It was quite obvious that it was because they were LGBT, but there was never any inquiry into why that was happening.'



One questionnaire participant described an incident of direct homophobic abuse, which was downplayed by her school.

'I did report a group of people from my school and a nearby boys' school because they would shout things at me and my friends when we walked by them at lunchtime (outside the school), one of them called me a dyke. The teacher I talked to was very supportive, the boys were talked to in their school but unfortunately the girls in my school were not. The school said they weren't going to get involved as they considered it a "friendship issue" and not bullying.'

#### **4.3.3 Lack of Acceptance from Peers**

For the negative responses, 23.2% stated that peers at school were 'not very accepting' and 6.3% stated that they were 'not at all accepting'.

Suzie described her upset at a situation where she felt pitted against the rest of her class for standing up for her beliefs.

'There was also a discussion about sexism and stuff and when I called that out people started arguing with me. None of their points were valid but they were supported by the whole class so I was kind of ridiculed into not talking anymore.'

Pearson et al. (2007) found that the same-sex attracted youth in their study reported feeling less socially integrated in their schools than peers who experienced only heterosexual attractions. Jackie referenced the impact of social capital and the 'popular' students in their school.

'All the LGBT people weren't allowed in the main friendship groups, they were completely isolated socially.' Jackie

One participant stated the value in those with more social capital using this in a positive way,

'There were definitely a few times when other students with more "social credit" I guess than me would intervene and it would stop.'

The theme of LGBTQ people being predatory was also recorded by multiple participants, as part of the types of negative language heard. This type of rhetoric is consistent with other

studies on the topic (Herek, 2007; Avalos, Kibler and Monk-Turner, 2022). The reiteration of this type of stigmatising narrative serves to isolate LGBTQ adolescents further from their peer group. The following are all quotes from questionnaire participants.

'People would never sit beside me in the cafeteria and make remarks implying lesbians are predatory'

'People made remarks about how pretty girls would 'attract that type of attention' when talking about queer women, this was said in a negative way as if it was predatory behaviour on the queer women's part.'

'Calling transgender people perverts and paedophiles.'

'Calling queer people perverted, saying they'd be willing to physically harm queer people.'

One of the most shocking quotes from the entire study was from a male questionnaire participant who identified as bisexual and attended an all boys school.

'I was told that some students wouldnt go to the bathroom when I was there because they thought I would rape them purely because of my sexuality.'

In terms of peer acceptance at CTYI, 95.8% of questionnaire participants stated they felt their peers were very accepting. Any negative incidents spoken about tended to be on an individual level, as opposed to from the general peer group. However, negative incidents at CTYI were sometimes viewed as more upsetting than school, due to the perception of CTYI as a safe space. For Olivia, a particular incident in her final year was extremely distressing.

'The first day of class, I said something and this guy Jordan in the front said 'yeah, just like he was saying' in reference to me. And I said, 'I'm not a he?' And he said 'oh sorry, I only heard your voice'. So that was great (sarcastic). Then in the study period we did an icebreaker with our name, pronouns and something interesting. When it got to Jordan he made a transphobic joke and that made me and the other trans people extremely uncomfortable. It took me aback because I had never experienced anything like that at CTYI before. You know, a place that was home for two weeks of the year, for five years it was home. It was one of the only times I ever felt really uncomfortable.'

Unfortunately for Olivia, and her classmates, this continued over the programme.

‘Over the next few days, he just kept making weird little remarks that made people feel uncomfortable and he was doing other things that made people feel uncomfortable as well. Then we had some walking debates in a study period and one of them was on freedom of speech... He was going on a rant, saying he should be able to say whatever he wants, say any jokes he wants. Then he looked directly at me and said ‘and I don’t think people should get offended by jokes or statements I make’. Not going to lie, I was ready to punch him. So I just left the room. I just couldn’t, I was too angry at this point. That evening I sat on the steps of the accommodation and cried. I was with my friend and we were just crying, we both wanted to go home. A place I usually never wanted to leave... I had never been made to feel like that before.’

Olivia’s distress at this is understandable generally, but particularly considering how CTYI had previously differed from her difficult experiences at school. When asked how she felt the situation was handled, she stated that while she appreciated the staff speaking to Jordan and that he then left her alone. However, she was ultimately disappointed that he was not removed from class entirely. Benedict also spoke about how the perception of CTYI as a safe space may lead to a greater feeling of upset when something goes wrong.

‘You almost feel blindsided by it because everyone is so friendly, even from the staff, but you still have all these other big serious emotions underneath that. You build it up so much, because for a few weeks, this is the only space where I get to have everything be perfect, so then when anything negative happens it feels twenty times worse. I remember one of my friends got the confidence to come out as trans at CTYI. But then when he went back to school on the bus, people threw their food at him on the bus and he was beaten up quite severely. So then when anything happened at CTYI, it brought back all this legitimate trauma from outside of it.’

#### **4.3.4 Unsupportive Staff**

Half of questionnaire participants reported that teachers and staff at their school were somewhat (40.1%) or very (9.9%) supportive. However, many participants expressed their frustration at a lack of adequate response from teachers and school leadership in incidents of both anti-LGBTQ language and anti-LGBTQ bullying. The overall frequency of intervention from staff and teachers at school was quite low, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

The incident described earlier in this chapter, where Olivia was reprimanded for swearing while in a room with her bully, was not resolved to her satisfaction.

'Even though he was just about to graduate and they said there was nothing they could do, there was. They could have not allowed him to go to his graduation ceremony, because if anyone did any pranks they weren't allowed to go to their graduation ceremony. But he was allowed to say these things and do these things to me and he got away with it.'

Another questionnaire participant described their frustration with wanting to address casual homophobic language,

'I have tried mentioning to guidance counsellors before about the use of slurs and negative "that's so gay" in my school but they told me that they "never hear that" and they "can't do anything about it". The only time they actively did something was when I got incredibly upset hearing someone beside me making negative remarks, but all they did was move me so I wasn't sitting beside them anymore.'

In terms of overall school leadership, two participants identified that their efforts to create an LGBTQ club, or what is commonly called a GSA (Gender Sexuality Alliance) in the United States were met with extreme resistance.

'The administration of my school obstructed the formation and continuation of an LGBTQA club and attempted to require parent/guardian permission for students under sixteen to join - requiring young, vulnerable students to out themselves in order to find a supportive environment' Questionnaire Participant

'The principal told me the school wasn't qualified enough to do something like that. When I think of what homophobia felt like in that school, a lot of it was that being queer was seen as a struggle. That you needed to support students with it, rather than seeing being queer as an extension of some of your students, something that you should be engaging with. Everything that was related to queerness in any way was something that either students needed to be taken care of, or it was something to be suppressed because it was inappropriate.' Dillon

A lack of support from teachers is clearly a significant factor in how LGBTQ students perceive their school climate. One of the most distressing quotes came from a questionnaire participant, who described how teachers' negative views about LGBTQ people were subtly communicated, leading her to not report any harassment due to fears of being 'outed'. In particular, she worried that this would affect how teachers treated her and her overall grades.

'LGBTQ+ people were never really mentioned in class but there were teachers who were outspoken in their opinions surrounding these topics... They wouldn't say anything aggressively homophobic or transphobic, but they would definitely slide their opinion into conversations and direct discussion towards their way of thinking. It was enough to make me scared to report any nasty behaviour as I wasn't entirely convinced that the matter would be handled appropriately. I also thought there was a possibility that reporting bullying or nastiness could 'out' me to the staff and make the whole situation worse... I think I was probably right to have these fears because the way things fell, those teachers had a say in things like fourth year placements and even predicted grades in my final year.'

This participant was 19 at the time of completing the questionnaire (January 2022), meaning she completed her Leaving Cert during Covid-19, when the Leaving Certificate exams were replaced by predicted grades. She wrote that she 'thankfully' moved schools before her final year, directly influenced by the lack of teacher support.

#### **4.4 Factors Contributing to a Positive Climate**

In this section I will discuss findings which can be classed as positive, or contributing to a positive climate for LGBTQ young people. Overall, a significantly higher number of participants identified CTYI as having higher levels of student acceptance and staff support than their school. This can also be linked to the effects of summer enrichment programmes for gifted youth generally, which have been found to nurture self-concept and peer relations (Rinn, 2006; Kim, 2016), including for gifted LGBTQ adolescents (Hutcheson & Tieso, 2014). Many participants also identified positive experiences during their time at school. One unique theme which emerged regarding positive experiences was the benefit of extracurricular activities. Participants also cited supportive leadership and peers as contributing to a positive environment. Below is a chart identifying the overall themes.

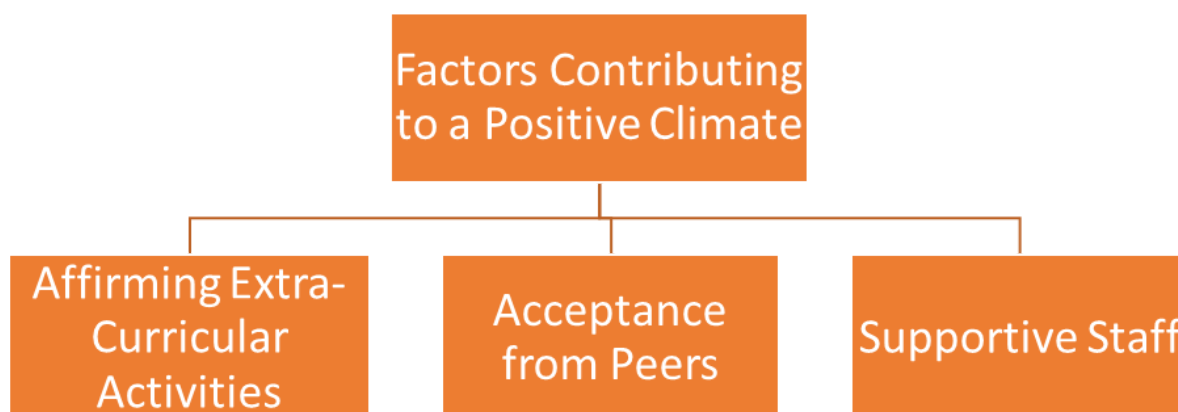


Figure 8

#### 4.4.1 Affirming Extra-Curricular Activities

Music, drama and performance were cited by participants as being significant in their identity development and as overall positive experiences. Olivia recalled being cast in the school musical as one of the most affirming moments of her life.

‘I didn’t think I would get cast as a girl and then I did! Getting to do something a year prior that I never would have thought I would get to do, getting a lead role in that musical... It was just something else. I got to just be myself, that’s what I like about acting, even though I’m being another person I’m still getting to explore different aspects of my personality to create characters. I really like that. And just being on a stage, it felt right, it felt like this is what I want to do for the rest of my life.’

This experience led to Olivia’s course choice for university, she is currently studying drama.

Several questionnaire participants cited the activities at CTYI as being a positive experience. Joe described their enjoyment of activities at CTYI, which made them feel included in a way they were not in school.

‘A lot of the activities I felt were very queer-focused in a way that was never talked about in school. They had things like Drag Race Appreciation, Fashion Appreciation

and Diva Appreciation, which was lit! It was also the fact that there were two or three RAs/ staff in each event and it was established very quickly that this was a safe space.'

It is worth noting that each of the activities Joe mentions directly relate to their feeling of having to 'tone it down' in school. They specifically note that their only chance to 'perform' was during debating and they were not allowed to be part of a fashion show competition ('the teacher said what are people going to think and no one will vote for a man in a dress.')

Doing drag and performing was also a positive experience for Enda at school.

'I put on a drag show in my school in sixth year, I performed and we had a famous Irish drag queen come to speak. She was wonderful and my year responded really well. I was freaking out afterward in class but the response was great. For the next month people, especially lads, would say I can't believe you did that and it took great courage and whatever. It was an overwhelmingly positive experience.'

Some of the youth in Higa et al.'s (2014) channelled their experiences of harassment for being LGBTQ into advocacy and activism, such as engaging in external projects, organising LGBTQ positive media campaigns at school, or talking with school officials about anti-LGBTQ attitudes and behaviours in the school. Olivia recalled the positive experience of a school project she did under her own initiative, which subsequently won a prize in an external competition. However, both Olivia and Benedict mentioned the mental toll of activism after a time.

'I'm still always going to stand up for trans rights, I'm still always going to stand up for queer rights. Because it's something that still needs to be fought for. I think I just had to fight for so long in school, it did take a lot out of me. So I've been taking a very long extended period from activism. And that's fine, I shouldn't have to be a soldier all my life.' Olivia

'The people who I know who are still working in trans activism, I really don't know how they do it because I wouldn't be able to do it for that long. At this point I'm like I'm good, I'm going to tap out. I used to think it was my duty to talk to people and now I'm like 'I'm just a dude (laughing).' Benedict

#### 4.4.2 Supportive Leadership

Overall, 88.8% of questionnaire participants described staff at CTYI as 'very supportive'. The visibility of LGBTQ adults had a positive effect for several participants.

'I felt a lot more represented by the people around me and represented by the staff. I thought wow I actually can be gay, happy, and have a job that is nice, you know. I felt seen and I felt respected in a way I hadn't in school.' Joe

'There was a relationship of trust with CTYI faculty [for my friends and I]... That was a very nice experience.' Dillon

'When I came out as nonbinary to my RA, in my first year in the CTYI post-primary summer programme, she went above and beyond to make sure I was not misgendered or deadnamed within the programme, but also to ensure I would not be outed to my then-unsupportive family.' Questionnaire Participant

Steven also felt the visibility of some gay teachers at his school had a positive impact on the environment, even if some of the casual language use remained the same.

'Well obviously I heard a lot of 'that's so gay' because I went to school in the early 2010s! But I didn't hear much other directly homophobic language, which I feel like speaks to the value of having LGBTQ teachers.' Steven

Several other participants recalled the positive impacts of teachers and staff members at their school on the overall environment, particularly through the use of inclusive language and topics.

'There are teachers who are definitely supportive. My Irish teacher openly referred to her friend who is nonbinary because it was relevant and it was nothing, as it should be. That was good' Ken

'I had one English teacher in my final year of secondary school who always discussed queer content in course material openly and with the attention it deserved. Nothing was rooted in queerness, but it was mentioned where appropriate and he didn't shy away from talking about the lives of queer writers or queer context if it was part of a story.' Questionnaire Participant



'My school principal in particular is very supportive in regards to LGBT issues so the rest of the staff follow in suit' Questionnaire Participant

Of all the interviewees, Benedict had the most positive experience with his school. His teachers and peers were not only supportive when he came out, the school also made any accommodations necessary for him to feel comfortable.

'The school said I could wear the boys uniform, the blazer or the jumper, whatever made me comfortable. I could use the teachers bathroom instead of gendered ones as well.'

#### **4.4.3 Acceptance from Peers**

As discussed earlier in this chapter, 95.8% of questionnaire participants stated that students at CTYI are very accepting of LGBTQ people. Peers at CTYI had a positive impact on the experiences of the following questionnaire participants.

'CTYI course was my first interaction with children my own age that identified as LGBT+ which in turn taught me more about the LGBT+ experience that I think I could have learned in a classroom'

'Students had overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards LGBTQ+ issues [at CTYI], it was a safe space where anyone could be themselves, regardless of what that entailed, which extended to orientation.'

'I really appreciated how accepting everyone was at CTYI because it really helped me personally figure out myself so much quicker, but I just wish schools were similar in that sense.'

In terms of peer acceptance at school, half of the questionnaire participants (50.7%) stated their peers were 'somewhat' supportive. For interviewees experiences were mixed, with some describing experiences of harassment (Joe, Katharine, Olivia), others receiving strong support from peers in school (Benedict) and others later at university (Suzie). Benedict had a particularly positive experience with his peers.

'My class didn't care and said if I wanted to get changed in the guys' changing room it was no problem.' Benedict

## 4.5 Intervention Findings

This section will explore Research Question 3.

RQ3- What is the frequency of intervention in situations of negative remarks and language about LGBTQ people and does the climate of a site affect the frequency of intervention?

To assess personal, peer and staff interventions when such language harassment occurred, the questionnaire asked for the frequency of each intervention, for negative remarks regarding sexual orientation, and for negative remarks regarding gender identity. Participants were asked these questions for each site. I also conducted Cronbach's Alpha for this question group. For frequency of intervention, this consisted of twelve items across school and CTYI and the value was  $\alpha = .72$  showing good reliability. I utilised descriptive statistics to analyse the closed-ended series of questions on frequency of intervention from the individual, peers and staff members, before assessing correlations with Spearman's rho.

### *School*

Frequency of intervention was measured for staff and student intervention on a 5 point Likert type scale (1- Never, 2- Some of the time, 3- Most of the time, 4- Always, 5- N/A I never heard these remarks). A score of 5 (I never heard these remarks) is indicative of a more positive climate in that site, as the remarks are not being made in the first place.

### **Frequency of Intervention**

	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Staff Intervention- Sexual Orientation	1.5	0.753
Student Intervention- Sexual Orientation	1.58	0.698
Personal Intervention- Sexual Orientation	1.86	0.935
Staff Intervention- Gender Identity	1.69	1.233
Student Intervention- Gender Identity	1.8	1.131
Personal Intervention- Gender Identity	2.03	1.237

Overall, the frequency of intervention was quite low across the board. The majority of respondents indicated that teachers/ school staff members very rarely intervene, in instances of negative language regarding sexual orientation or gender identity.

## Staff Intervention

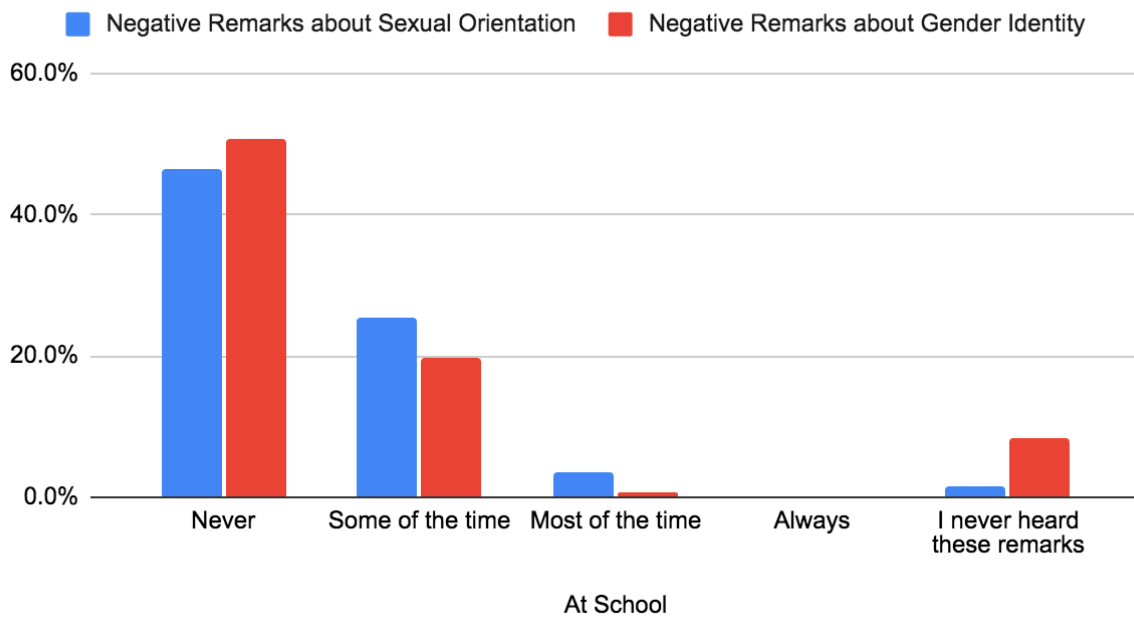


Figure 9

Other students were slightly more likely to intervene, but this was still infrequent for sexual orientation ( $M=1.58$ ) or gender identity ( $M=1.8$ ).

## Student Intervention

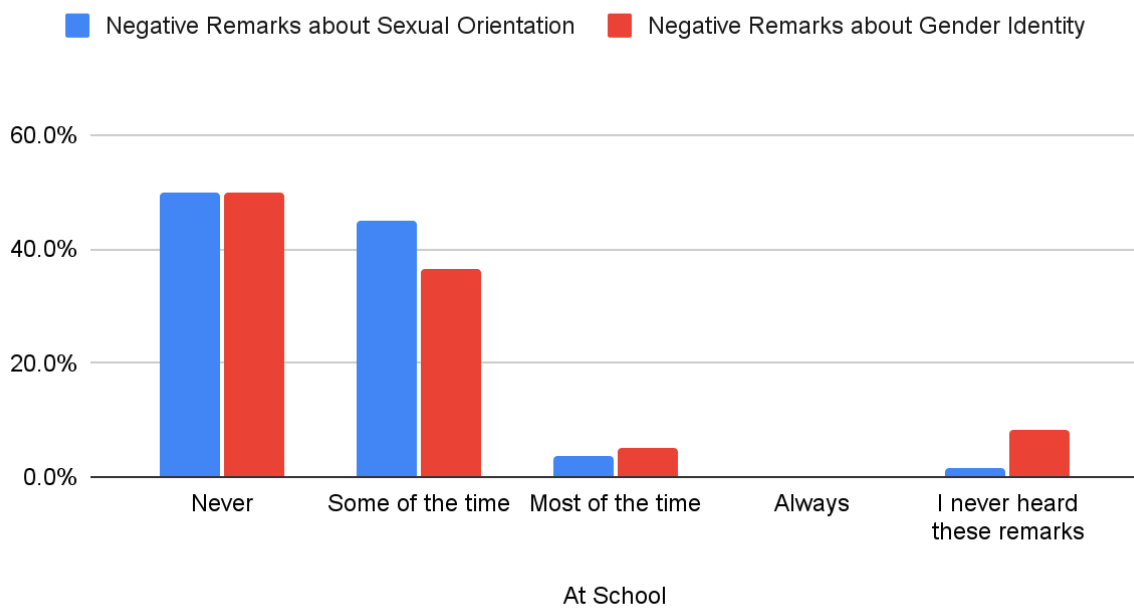


Figure 10

The statistic I was most interested in was personal intervention. Questionnaire respondents identified that they were more likely than either staff or students in their school to intervene, for both sexual orientation (M=1.86) and gender identity (M=2.03).

### Respondant Intervention

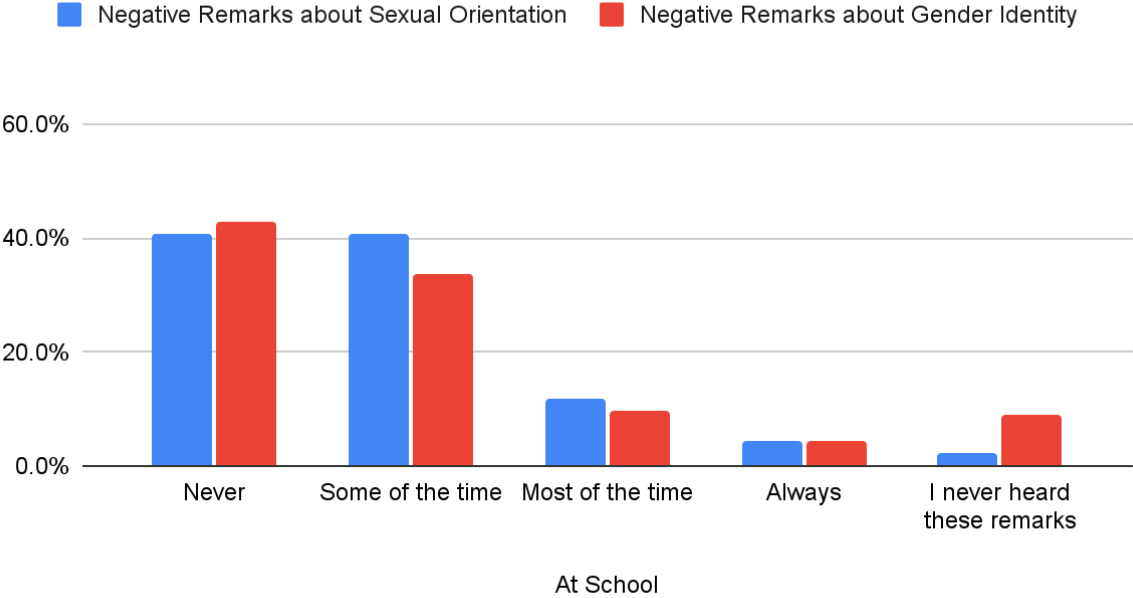


Figure 11

Just under 10% of questionnaire participants stated that they never heard negative remarks about gender identity. Only 2% stated they never heard negative remarks about sexual orientation, including use of the word ‘gay’ as pejorative.

Spearman’s rank-order correlations were run to examine the relationships between personal intervention, student intervention and staff intervention at school. For negative remarks regarding gender identity, there were positive and significant correlations between personal intervention and witnessing other students intervene ( $r_s = 0.55, p < 0.001$ ) and staff interventions ( $r_s = 0.39, p < 0.001$ ). There was also a significant correlation between personal intervention and other student intervention for negative remarks about sexual orientation ( $r_s = 0.45, p < 0.001$ ). One unexpected result was the lack of significant correlation between personal intervention and staff intervention for negative remarks about sexual orientation ( $r_s = 0.04, p < 0.645$ ).

### CTYI

Overall, the frequency of intervention was higher for staff, student and respondent interventions at CTYI.

#### Frequency of Intervention

	M	SD
Staff Intervention- Sexual Orientation	4.56	1.01
Student Intervention- Sexual Orientation	4.06	1.38
Personal Intervention- Sexual Orientation	3.83	1.59
Staff Intervention- Gender Identity	4.4	1.22
Student Intervention- Gender Identity	3.99	1.42
Personal Intervention- Gender Identity	3.87	1.56

The most frequent response for interventions at CTYI was 'I never heard these remarks', with 60% of participants stating this for each type of intervention, personal, student and staff.

### CTYI Staff Intervention

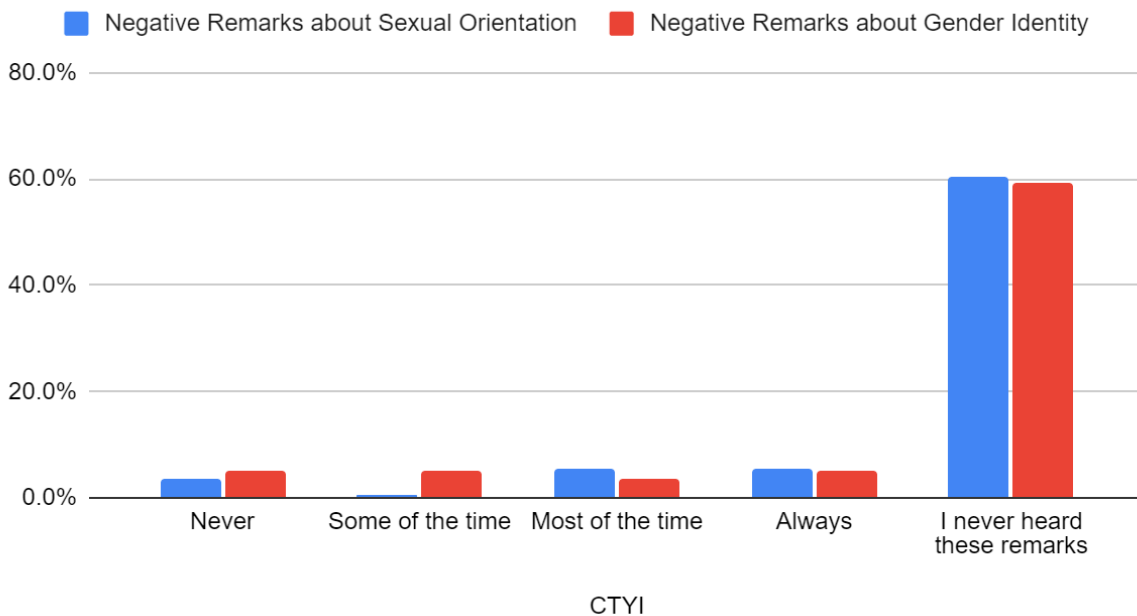


Figure 12

## CTYI Student Intervention

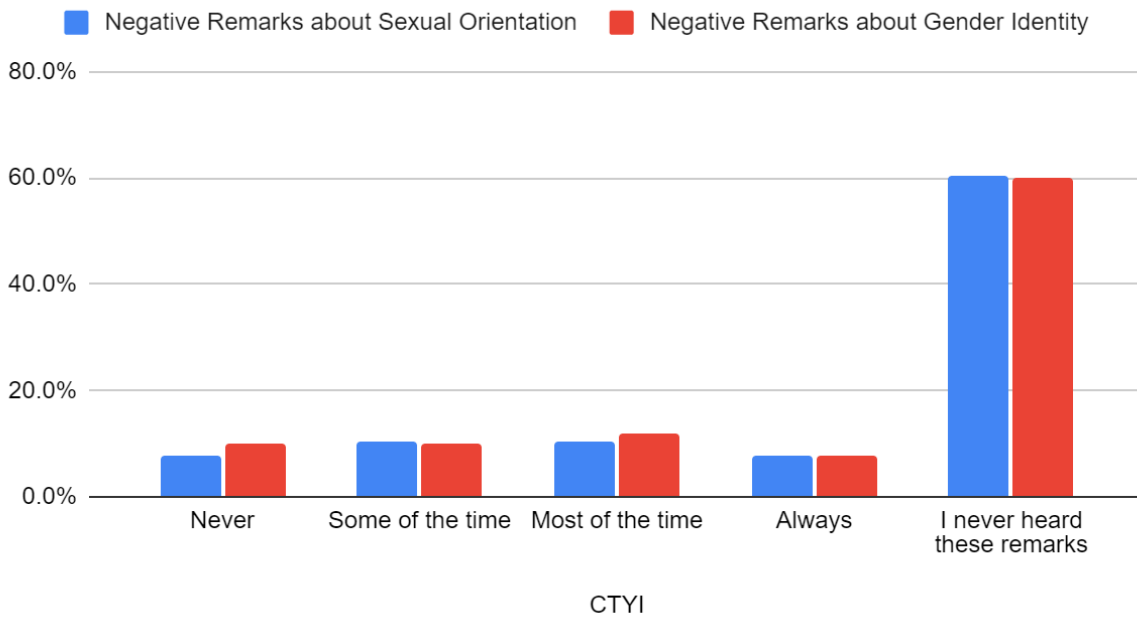


Figure 13

## CTYI Respondent Intervention

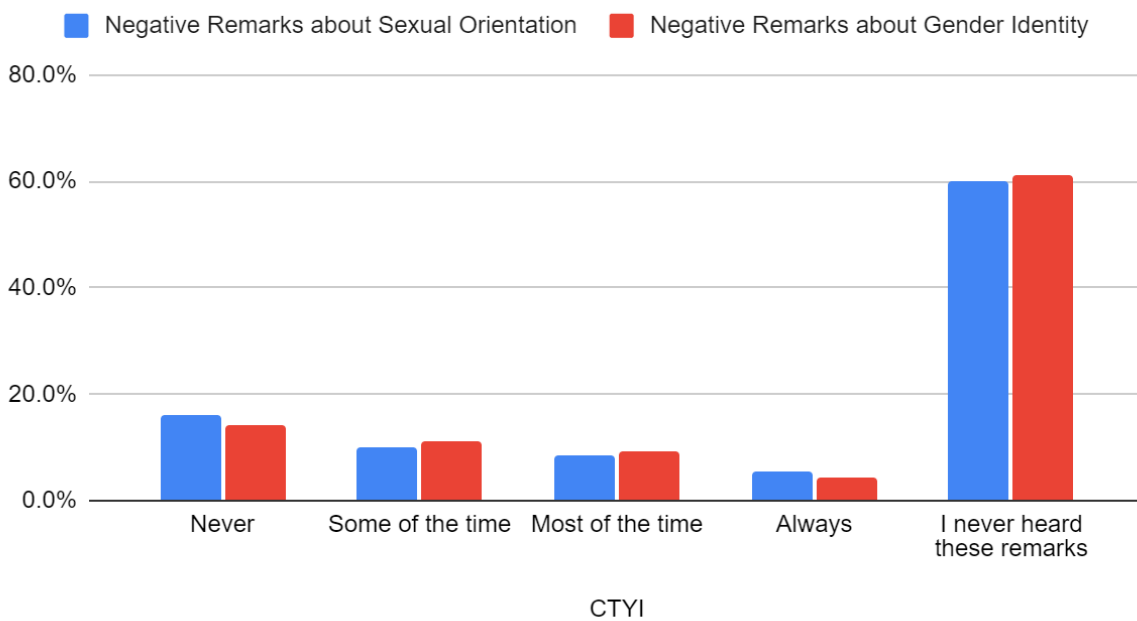


Figure 14

As the most frequent answer for CTYI was having never heard these remarks, which does not really provide relevant information in terms of the factors of intervention, I isolated this option in SPSS and ran Spearman's rank-order correlations again to gauge whether there

was a correlation between personal intervention generally. For negative remarks regarding gender identity, there were positive and significant correlations between personal intervention and witnessing other students intervene ( $r_s = 0.96$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and staff interventions ( $r_s = 0.88$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). There was also a significant correlation between personal intervention and other student intervention for negative remarks about sexual orientation ( $r_s = 0.95$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), as well as staff intervention ( $r_s = 0.88$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

#### **4.5.1 Effect of Climate on Intervention**

To find out whether the climate of a site affects the frequency of interventions in situations of negative remarks and language about LGBTQ people, I examined the responses to the questions regarding overall student acceptance and staff supportiveness to see whether the responses would have a significant correlation for personal, student and staff intervention. I ran a correlational analysis using Spearman's rho, which had mixed results. For staff intervention at school, overall staff supportiveness had a significant correlation for intervention toward negative remarks about gender identity ( $r_s = 0.29$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ) and sexual orientation ( $r_s = 0.41$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). For student intervention, overall student acceptance had a less significant correlation for intervention toward negative remarks about gender identity ( $r_s = 0.19$ ,  $p = 0.025$ ) and no significant correlation for intervention regarding sexual orientation negative remarks ( $r_s = 0.05$ ,  $p = 0.523$ ). I found no significant correlation between personal intervention and overall school student acceptance and staff support. I found no significant correlations for any of the CTYI data. This leads me to several conclusions. Firstly, the measure of the climate of a site is more complex than could be gathered with this data. Secondly, although there is some correlation between witnessing others intervene and personal intervention, reasons for personal intervention perhaps have a greater connection to internal factors, than external. With this in mind, the next section will explore the factors given by questionnaire participants that would lead them to intervene, or not intervene.

#### **4.5.2 Factors of Intervention**

This section will explore Research Question 4.

RQ4- What factors contribute to the frequency of intervention in situations of negative remarks/ language about LGBTQ people?

Participants were asked 'What factors would have led you to intervene, or not intervene?' for each site, in relation to both negative language about sexual orientation and regarding gender identity. I conducted a thematic analysis on the open-ended responses to the question regarding factors of intervention. I deleted any repeat answers, or non answers (e.g.

'N/A' or 'same as before'). In total, 243 responses were recorded for factors of intervention at school. After eliminating some codes and merging others, I identified eight overall themes: fear, context of remark, perception of staff support, perception of peer support, overall culture of environment, age, positive intervention and other. The code 'other' was required for twelve responses which did not fit any other themes. Within some themes there were also sub-themes which emerged, for example the theme 'Fear' encompasses fear of drawing attention to oneself, fear of being targeted next and fear of being outed. For 'Context of Remark', this included participants differentiating between targeted harassment and casual language use, their relationship with the remark maker and their relationship with the victim. For 'Overall Culture of Environment', this included participants expressing that it was hopeless and/ or pointless to intervene due to not being able to make any kind of significant difference.

The two most frequent factors of intervention at school were the context of the remark (51.4%) and fear (26.3%). In terms of context, many participants differentiated between casual language use and targeted harassment, with some also stating their intervention would depend on the remark maker, the surrounding group and the social dynamics involved. For CTYI, I repeated the process and 245 responses were recorded for factors of intervention. The results were largely similar with half the group (57.6%) stating the context of the remark was the most important factor to them. However, one statistical difference arose, in that 22.4% of participants stated that they would intervene if they heard these remarks, compared to only 7.4% of responses for school interventions. Some of the reasons given are listed in the table on the next page.



Factors of Intervention- School

Factor of Intervention	Percentage	Examples of Factors
<b>Fear</b>	26.3%	-'Being LGBTQ+ and being scared I'd have homophobic remarks thrown at me' -'Fear of judgement, isolation' -'Fear of raising suspicions about myself'
<b>Context of remark</b>	51.4%	-'Going beyond general homophobia to direct confrontation/bullying' -'How confident I felt at the time, the person who I was standing up to' -'How pointed/directed the remarks were at friends, who else was present and heard the remarks' -'The reaction of the group, the popularity of the people saying it.'
<b>Perception of Teacher Support</b>	6.6%	-'Assumptions that my school lacks the knowledge to deal with it.' -'I knew that staff would not be supportive of me, they would probably dismiss the issue and do nothing about it.' -'Staff never cared or did anything about it so there was no point in saying anything.'
<b>Perception of Peer Support</b>	9.9%	-'I didn't want to ostracise myself from other students by reporting them. The remarks were fairly common.' -'I think it would be difficult to remove from an environment composed entirely of boys trying to be men. So I wouldn't have intervened in those situations. They underpin most interactions you have in that space.' -'I intervened when someone was being harassed but it's not worth getting targeted because people say slurs or casual homophobia, because it happens every day.'
<b>Culture of Environment</b>	14.8%	-'I felt that it was pointless as I wasn't going to be able to change the culture of the school.' -'I would have been forced to accept the remarks and move on, such was the atmosphere cultivated in my school.' -'Unless the incident would put others in harm's way not much would be done, we would just tell other lgbtq+ students to avoid specific people.'
<b>Age</b>	2.9%	-'Age. In my earlier years I was more focused on protecting myself in an environment that I found very uncomfortable.' -'I was one of the only queer people in my year and wanted to defend myself (when I was older). In earlier years I just wanted to lay low.'

<b>Positive Intervention</b>	7.4%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-'I always intervened in school.'</li> <li>-'I always tried to intervene when I could.'</li> <li>-'Empathy for others. It's happened to me so I know how it feels and wouldn't wish that on anyone.'</li> <li>-'I intervened because I was LGBTQ. Unless I felt physically threatened I would always intervene.'</li> </ul>
<b>Other</b>	4.9%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-'Being too shy.'</li> <li>-'Laziness.'</li> <li>-'Im a) not a snitch and b) the remarks were never harmful.'</li> </ul>

Table 8

Factors of Intervention- CTYI

Factor of Intervention	Percentage	Examples of Factors
<b>Fear</b>	8.6%	-'At the time I was a very conflicted young queer person trying to both find and protect myself in the only place I felt safe to be out. I was not out as trans while I was at ctyi (and still am not in most parts of my life).' - 'I am queer and I do not want to have the remarks directed at me so that would make me less likely to intervene.' - 'I was never out at CTYI and I don't think I would've felt it was my place to intervene. Being trans can already feel like you've got a target on your back. I never would have intervened in the moment.'
<b>Context of Remark</b>	57.6%	- 'Bullying and/or visible malicious intent, would lead me to intervene.' - 'If the remarks had caused a student to become visibly upset and/or angry.' - 'Active bullying and harassment, as opposed to general snarkiness.' - 'If I deemed the person to be intellectually superior to me I would worry about starting a debate about gender by intervening.'
<b>Perception of Staff Support</b>	5.3%	- 'The staff at CTYI always made it very clear that they were supportive of LGBTQ students' - 'Knowledge that the student making the remarks would be appropriately reprimanded.' - 'I would have felt very confident going to a member of staff about it, because CTYI was such a friendly place for lgbt kids like myself, no one would have supported anyone saying hateful stuff.'
<b>Perception of Peer Support</b>	6.9%	- 'Confidence that other students at CTYI would support me if I was to intervene.' - 'Causing potential conflict with another student would lead me to not intervene.' - 'Whether or not I thought it would affect my friends' opinions of me.' - 'Not wanting to be excluded from friend groups with such opinions.'
<b>Culture of Environment</b>	1.6%	- 'I feel that CTYI is very LGBT friendly, so I wouldn't think those remarks would be tolerated.' - 'Wouldn't have made a difference.'
<b>Age</b>	3.7%	- 'Age was a big thing for me, as I got older I became much quicker to call out ignorant comments.' - 'My age at the time in comparison to other students and my understanding of lgbtq in general.'

<b>Positive Intervention</b>	22.4%	<p>-I like to think I would intervene, I wouldn't intervene if I felt that my own safety was threatened but that was never a problem at ctyi.'</p> <p>-If they are being homophobic then it needs to be called out.'</p> <p>-I intervened because it's the 21st century and gender constructs are ridiculous.'</p> <p>-The people around me were always majority supportive so the one or two people being hateful never had any shortage of us challenging them.'</p>
<b>Other</b>	8.6%	<p>-I wouldn't intervene if they were queer themselves and were using them humorously.'</p> <p>-They were often slips of the tongue from boys who were used to that type of language in school.'</p>

Table 9

The factors reported in the questionnaire were mirrored in the interview and focus group data. Katharine spoke about how the context of the remark was a factor, specifically that casual language use would be dismissed.

'Unless it seemed to be said in an actual derogatory way to a gay person, it was only then that people might have gotten involved because it was more personalised. But people kind of saying it randomly, I don't think anyone ever said anything' Katharine

Dennis and Enda (who were in the same focus group) described the influence of having supportive peers. For Enda, this meant he was more likely to intervene at CTYI. Dennis spoke about intervening at school and feeling let down by his peers for not supporting him.

'I think I would have been more likely to intervene at CTYI. At CTYI I think it's way easier to say we could word that differently or to call someone out on saying something wasn't ok. You have the backing of a lot of the other students and when you're in a space where there's a lot more queer people in a room, you aren't the only one speaking out. Whereas I think I did once call someone on something in secondary school but I was the only person talking.' Enda

'I intervened two or three times in school and it was a terrifying experience, you never know how it could escalate. I was sitting in a classroom with my friend who would have been out as gay for two years at this point, and one guy was always using slurs and abuse. He just didn't know what he was talking about, he was an idiot. And one day I had enough and I had a go at him... But everyone else who was also our friend had been hearing the same stuff, and when I brought it up no one stuck up for him with me.' Dennis

Suzie also had a negative experience with her peers when she attempted to stick up for LGBTQ rights generally.

'I argued a lot with a lot of people and called out stuff that was happening and no other student supported me in that. When somebody was being transphobic I called them out on it... People kind of started arguing with me. None of their points were valid but they were supported by the whole class so I was kind of ridiculed into not talking anymore... I went to my year head and I was crying in her office, I was so upset.'

Emma stated that the culture of her school would make her less likely to intervene, as it feels like nothing will change.

'I don't mind standing up for people, but most of the time they are not going to actually listen anyway. I think sometimes it...like when I've stood up for things in the past nothing ever changes anyway.' Emma

Finally, age was a factor for a small number of questionnaire respondents. However, getting older and moving toward the end of school had a major effect on Joe and their peer interactions. After a falling out with a friend group, Joe was empowered to constantly intervene.

'I had a big falling out with my friend group in fifth year, because they were being homophobic to me and I wasn't taking it. They would make side homophobic comments as so-called jokes and I would say "tell me why that's funny, seriously". So when I went into sixth year I was not afraid to call people out. I felt like I will not see you in a year, I have nothing to lose, I will call you out when I can.'

#### **4.6 Conclusions**

Overall, the climate is mixed in Ireland for gifted LGBTQ students. Questionnaire participants reported high levels of anti-LGBTQ language at school and low levels of teacher intervention. However, half of participants did also state that students in their school were somewhat accepting (50.7%) and staff were somewhat supportive (40.1%). The qualitative findings from the questionnaire data, in terms of types of language used and factors of intervention, was complemented by the qualitative findings from the interviews and focus groups. Several LGBTQ participants spoke, or wrote, about incidents of targeted harassment and bullying. Social capital at school arose as an interesting theme, as participants spoke about losing social capital for being LGBTQ, others using their social capital to positively influence the crowd and how the social norms of their school (often rooted in gender and heteronormativity) influence the overall atmosphere.

The climate for gifted LGBTQ students at CTYI was largely reported to be positive. This is in keeping with other studies on the benefits of enrichment programmes for gifted students generally and the limited studies on gifted LGBTQ students. Participants reported low levels of anti-LGBTQ language, as well as high levels of support from staff (88.0%) and acceptance from students (95.8%). From the qualitative data, participants reported positive experiences

with peers, making friends, feeling safe to be LGBTQ and the benefits of openly queer leaders.

For both sites, it was clear that the climate was influenced by the presence of negative language, incidents of harassment, overall attitudes of staff, overall attitudes of peers and leadership. Leadership also arose within overall systems and policies, e.g. not being to start an LGBTQ club. Affirming extra-curricular activities, in particular music and drama, were a positive outlet for gifted LGBTQ young people, with several interviewees now pursuing the creative arts at university and as a hobby. One participant now regularly performs and competes in drag shows in Ireland!

I wanted to find out whether the climate of a site affects the frequency of intervention. I had mixed results, overall. While there was a significant correlation for staff supportiveness and staff intervention at school, there was less significant correlation for student acceptance and student intervention. I found no significant correlation between personal intervention and staff or student intervention. This led me to more closely examine the factors of intervention than I had originally planned. To explore the factors that do contribute to frequency of personal intervention, I combined all of the relevant open text box answers and performed a thematic analysis for both school and CTYI. Overall, there were 488 responses given. The most frequent factor of intervention was the context of the remark, for both school and CTYI. I found this interesting as it may indicate that many students do not connect how casual homophobic language use informs an environment. While the person making the remark may feel they are 'just joking with friends', any LGBTQ student cannot hear that remark without an innate understanding that this means lesser. Many participants spoke about context in terms of having support from friends, the attitude of the remark maker and the overall setting. The factors reported in the questionnaire were mirrored in the interview and focus group data.

While data is presented for two sites, school and CTYI, this study is not designed to directly compare them. Students are in school for a far greater time period than programmes at CTYI. There is greater variance in schools in terms of how issues can be managed, whereas CTYI has the liberty of a small full time team and takes place in a more progressive university setting. However, the distinctions made by students for each setting are relevant in terms of determining strategies and practices that can create a more positive climate at any school and at CTYI.

## Chapter 5: Presentation and Analysis Part 2

### 5.1 Introduction

While this study began with four overall research questions, a fifth question emerged during the qualitative data collection and analysis.

RQ5- What are the experiences of identity development for gifted LGBTQ post primary students in Ireland?

As discussed in Chapter 4, one benefit of a mixed methods study is that it allows for the development of a detailed view of the phenomenon for the individuals in the study. During the qualitative data collection period (in particular the interview process), I realised that a new theme was emerging- identity development. During each interview participants were asked how they identify their gender and whether they identify as being LGBTQ. For almost all interview participants, these questions led to longer conversation and dialogue about gender and sexual orientation generally. This was interesting, as I had already been surprised by the rich detail some questionnaire participants had chosen to give about their identity. During the focus groups, some participants also chose to openly speak about their identity development in terms of gender identity and sexual orientation. Identity development is a key theme in several other gifted LGBTQ studies (Hutcheson & Tieso, 2014; Peterson & Rischar, 2000; Stewart, 2006; Wikoff et al., 2021).

To analyse the data for RQ5, I imported all of my transcriptions to Taguette before analysing. As discussed in Chapter 3 (Methodology), an inductive approach to thematic analysis was used through the study. An inductive approach means the themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves, for example if the data has been collected specifically for the research (e.g. via interview or focus group), the themes identified may bear less relation to the specific questions that were asked of the participants (Braun and Clarke, 2006). While all interviewees were asked similar questions to the questionnaire, many of the conversations were (naturally) more personal than the questionnaire responses.

As discussed in Chapter 1, there is limited research on gifted LGBTQ young people generally. In particular, almost no research exists outside of the United States setting, making the findings presented here unique to the field of gifted education research in Ireland and internationally. With this in mind, I chose to separate my Presentation and Analysis into two chapters. The aspects of identity development discussed in this chapter provide a



background for the experiences described by interview and focus group participants, as well as how these experiences have shaped them. The first sections will give greater detail on gender identity and sexual orientation within this sample. Following this, gifted identity development will be discussed and how this interacts with being LGBTQ. LGBTQ identity development will then be considered, in terms of coming out and how participants engaged in identity affirmation and identity rejection, both internally and externally.

**5.2 Overview of Participants’ Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the majority of questionnaire participants identified as LGBTQ (64.3%) in some way. Just under a third (26.1%) identified their gender as something other than cisgender. Within the non-cisgender group, the most frequent identifier was nonbinary and participants who were younger were more likely to identify as a gender other than cisgender. In terms of the intersection of gender identity and sexual identity, I found that participants who reported gender identities other than cisgender were more likely to report multiple identifiers within the LGBTQ identity question. This is in line with existing research on adolescent identity that found similar combinations of traditional versus expansive gender identities and sexual orientations (White *et al.*, 2018; Garrett-Walker and Montagno, 2021).

Each interviewee was asked about how they identify their gender, while focus group participants were asked for their pronouns. This was to avoid putting any focus group participants on the spot in a group environment. The two tables below (as also displayed in Chapter 3) give a breakdown of the interview and focus group participant demographics. All eight of the interviewees identified as LGBTQ in some way, while three focus group participants also chose to discuss being LGBTQ.

Participant ID Code	Name	Age	Gender	Sexual Orientation
INT1	Benedict	23	Transgender Male	Bisexual
INT2	Joan	21	Cisgender Female	Bisexual
INT3	Olivia	20	Transgender Female	Lesbian
INT4	Dillon	19	Non binary	Queer
INT5	Carlos	20	Cisgender Male	Asexual
INT6	Steven	23	Transgender Male	Gay
INT7	Joe	22	Non binary	Gay
INT8	Suzie	19	Cisgender Female	Queer

Table 2- Interview Participants

Participant ID Code	Name	Age	Pronouns	Sexual Orientation
FG1	Ken	18	He/ him	Asexual
FG2	Emma	18	She/ her	Straight
FG3	Dennis	19	He/ him	Undisclosed
FG4	Enda	19	He/ she/ they	Queer
FG5	Jackie	19	Any	Gay

Table 3- Focus Group Participants

### *Gender Identity*

Each interviewee was asked ‘How do you identify your gender?’ Suzie was the only participant who gave a singular, short definition of her gender.

‘Woman, female.’

For Carlos, he identified as cisgender male but revealed that his gender identity was perhaps limited by his perception and fear of external reactions.

‘I am comfortable with he/him [pronouns] and male identity. In theory I have no problem with they/ them pronouns or identifying as nonbinary. It’s not something... Like it just seems perfectly normal to me. However I don’t [identify as nonbinary] because it just causes confusion and makes it awkward, and I am very comfortable using he/him pronouns so... I just stick with them... If we were living in a magical world where everyone was perfect with pronouns and gender identity and everything then I would probably identify as... I would probably use he/him and they/them pronouns. But just as it is now I am comfortable with using he/him so I stick with that.’

For Benedict, Olivia and Steven, each noted their desire to be seen in their gender first and being transgender second.

‘Well, I’m a woman first and foremost. I am trans but like I don’t introduce myself and say that. You know, I’m a girl, that’s what I am! There are some people who do introduce themselves as trans first off, and that’s fine, but... Like I’m proudly trans but if I’m introducing myself, I introduce myself as a woman first and foremost, because it’s no one’s business but my own.’

Olivia

'I'm a man first. A transgender man second. A gay man, I guess, third.'

Steven

'I guess trans man, I just go by man at this point, I think my transition is fairly finished so it's not something I think really too much about anymore? I think when I was going through the process of transitioning it was something that you kind of had to think about and acknowledge, you had to inform people of it, whereas now it's such a non issue in my day to day life that it's not really something that even comes to my mind anymore!'

Benedict

For Benedict, he expressed that his transition is 'finished'. Benedict's experience is slightly unique in terms of other transgender people in Ireland. By his own knowledge, he was one of the first patients in what is now the National Gender Service in Loughlinstown hospital. Through this, he was able to start taking testosterone at 16 and he subsequently travelled for surgery when he was 18.

Both Dillon and Joe's description of nonbinary identity involved resistance, in terms of labels or traditional ideas of gender.

'Nonbinary. I haven't really used anything else. I think when I was first coming to terms with it, and everything... After thinking about it for a while I think what I wanted was to detach myself from the like stereotypes and assumptions with like identifying as one particular thing, so the idea behind calling myself non binary is to be literally nonbinary. And to be kind of separate from everything that's already what people might assume if I gave them more information about my gender.' Dillon

'I consider myself nonbinary. I had really specific identities when I was a teenager but now I'm happy to leave it at non-binary because I don't like to put that much of a label on it...' Joe

The non cisgender interviewees gave more nuanced descriptions of their gender, perhaps as a result of having naturally undergone a more lengthy gender reflection process than their cisgender peers. Katharine spoke about how living as a trans male for two years as a teenager has made her more comfortable now in her cisgender identity,

'I'm glad I did that whole exploration of it because afterwards I realised that I am cisgender and I'm really comfortable in that. I've been through the whole like, you know 'am I, am I not' and I think if I hadn't done that whole journey of coming out to my parents, coming out to everybody at my school, I think I wouldn't be as sure of myself as I am now.' Katharine

### *Sexual Orientation*

In terms of sexual orientation amongst this study's interviews, Benedict and Katharine identify as bisexual, Dillon and Suzie identify as queer, Steven and Joe identify as gay, Olivia identifies as a lesbian and Carlos identifies as asexual. Steven noted that he associates being gay as more part of his gender identity and expression than sexual orientation,

'Being gay is more related to my gender than, like, my actual sexuality... Because my sexuality is very much like the label queer- I don't really feel like gender is a factor when I'm attracted to somebody. But I also feel like the gay male archetypes are very important to my gender identity, expression and my feeling of gender euphoria I suppose!'

Joe's description of being gay was different, in that they separate it entirely from male gay archetypes.

'I still consider myself gay even though I'm not strictly a man so to speak. My experience of being a gay man is different enough from our understanding of masculinity that I think it warrants its own gender. It falls outside the notion of gender as binary. That's kind of my understanding of it. I consider myself in a gay relationship when I am dating men. If men are attracted to me, that's gay of them. I would consider myself nonbinary in the sense that I don't fit the standard idea of masculinity, whether that is gay masculinity or straight masculinity.'

The majority of interviewees came out to some degree while at school (Dillon came out as queer before coming as nonbinary later). Suzie was the exception, having only come out during her first year at university (when her interview took place). Stewart (2006) states that gifted LGBTQ students may engage in strategies of self-preservation by developing disparate personal and private personas to avoid harassment. Suzie described the 'dual life' she is leading between her two groups of friends, those from school and those from college.

'I've been way more open about it to new people I meet but it's been harder for me to tell people who think I'm straight right now that I'm bi. There is no one in my life that I have been friends with in my life since secondary school who knows. It's funny, I am kind of living a dual life, where my new college friends know I'm on the LGBTQ society committee and my old friends don't even know I'm part of the society. It's just a weird thing... It's not even conscious sometimes. I just unconsciously switch the conversation topic.'

When discussing this, I asked Suzie how she manages this in terms of social media, particularly in terms of attending various events in college. Social media is often utilised by LGBTQ adolescents as a crucial strategy in identity management (McConnell *et al.*, 2017), but Suzie does not use social media a lot, which is unusual given her age and the saturation of social media. This is perhaps a deliberate choice in terms of identity management, as she describes avoiding telling her friends where she is going.

'I'm not really a big poster on social media. I don't have Instagram or anything like that so I just don't tell them where I'm going. I told one friend I was going to an event and they said 'that's part of the LGBTQ society?' So I just said that it sounded fun so I decided to go.'

### **5.3 New Contributions to the Field**

In these next two sections, I will discuss findings related to two labels in particular; queer and asexual. While previous research exists with specifically gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender gifted young people, this study has the highest percentage of participants who identify as queer. I believe there are no other gifted LGBTQ studies with a population of asexual participants, therefore these findings are quite unique.

#### *Queer*

'To appropriate the power of naming and to reclaim the derogatory name that one never chose nor willed is to rebel against the speech of hate intended to injure.' Brontsema (2004)

While older generations of sexual minorities often reject the term 'queer', associated with its use as a negative epithet, younger generations of sexual and gender minorities have accepted and adopted the term as an identity label, associating the label with various aspects of gender identity, sexual orientation or even a complete rejection of labels (Brontsema, 2004; Morandini, 2017). Out of the total LGBTQ questionnaire participants, seventeen (15.7%) described included the word 'queer' in their description of how they

identify as LGBTQ. Of this number, only one participant identified as a cisgender man, five identified as cisgender women and the remainder identified as different non-cisgender identities. Using queer as an identifier reflects the complex relationship between gender and sexual orientation. One pilot study participant wrote the following about their relationship to the term,

'I prefer to use deliberately vague terminology for myself, like 'queer'. I find the ambiguity empowering, because while it differentiates me from cisnet people, it also does not put me into another box.'

Another questionnaire participant identified using queer as a rejection of gender norms,

'Queer with both relation to gender and sexuality. I don't relate to gender as a framework at all, and don't make attempts to conform either way, combining masculine and feminine traits in my appearance. For sexuality, I don't consider gender relevant to my attraction to someone.'

For further reading on the linguistic reclamation of the word 'queer', see Brontsema (2004).

### *Asexual Spectrum*

There are also some sexual identity labels which do not signify the gender(s) to which one is attracted to, but rather the degree of sexual attraction one experiences (Walton et al., 2016; Hammack et al., 2022). These labels fall under the larger asexual umbrella. Asexual is a sexual orientation generally characterised by not feeling sexual attraction or a desire for partnered sexuality, it can also be used as an umbrella term. Demisexual is a label on the asexual spectrum, where the person only experiences sexual feelings when an emotional bond is present. Those who identify as on the asexual spectrum may experience romantic feelings towards others, on a consistent or inconsistent basis. In this study the following terms were used which signify types of romantic attraction: aspec, biromantic, demiromantic, grey-romantic, idemromantic, panromantic and quoirromantic. A full description of each term is contained in the Appendix.

Out of the LGBTQ identified questionnaire participants, 15.7% of questionnaire participants listed identifiers within the asexual spectrum (n=17).

### *Questionnaire Participants and Asexual Identities*

Age	Gender	Do you identify	
		as LGBTQ?	If yes, how do you identify?
18	Female	Not sure	Asexual
18	Female	Yes	Demisexual and pansexual
18	Female	Yes	Demisexual
18	Male	Yes	Aromantic Asexual
18	Male	Yes	Unsure. Likely bi/pan romantic probably aspec (demisexual)
19	Male	Yes	Not sure but not heterosexual. For the purposes of the study, biromantic asexual
19	Male	Yes	Asexual (no sexual attraction to any other people is all that means for me) (it doesn't really change my attitude towards relationships or sexual activities except my sex drive seems to be quite low for someone my age)
19	Neutrois	Yes	Queer, pansexual, nonbinary, neutrois, aromantic, quoiromantic, idemromantic.
19	Genderfluid	Yes	Genderfluid, demisexual, demiromantic
16	Nonbinary/Genderfluid	Yes	Non-Binary, Asexual, Lesbian
15	Nonbinary	Yes	non-binary, aromantic and asexual
15	Nonbinary	Yes	Panromantic Demisexual
16	Nonbinary	Yes	Asexual panromantic
17	Nonbinary	Yes	Nonbinary and aromantic
18	Nonbinary	Yes	Lesbian, aspec

Table 10

Individuals on the asexual spectrum in Galupo et al. (2014)'s study articulated that their identities were often outside the conceptualisation of the sexual orientation scales commonly used in research, as these scales assume an underlying sexual desire and do not distinguish between sexual and romantic desire, making their experiences impossible to represent. Therefore, the open text boxes in this study allowed any participants within these categories to include as many, or as few different identifiers as they liked, or to expand further if needed. The table above shows the many different ways someone on the asexual spectrum might describe their identity.

One interview participant, Carlos, and one focus group participant, name, also identified as asexual. Interview participant Carlos described his relationship to asexuality as follow,

'I found for me, being ace... I don't find anyone good looking at all. That's all that means to me. I find my sex drive is a lot lower than a lot of people. But I would love to be in a relationship at some point, I would love to do all the intimacy and sex at some point but I don't feel any need to do that now. I feel like, for me, I always view it as something that will be on the to do list for the future, for the next fifteen years. Maybe I'm never actually going to do it but I'm always going to feel like I should do it... That's all it means for me, that I don't find people good looking.'

Focus group participant Ken, who was still in school at the time of participating, described an incident with a classmate which had frustrated him slightly.

'Two days ago, in class, we were talking about scientists of the past and someone brought up the fact that Sir Isaac Newton died a virgin. So I, identifying as aro-ace (aromantic and asexual), asked what about it? I was told that anyone who dies a virgin is a freak. The person who came out with it is academically very clever and comes across most of the time as reasonably mature so it was quite surprising to hear that out of his mouth specifically. But to be honest from other things I've mostly learned to ignore what I get told by people in school. I just thought that was ace-phobic, but I moved on...'

#### **5.4 Gifted Identity Development**

All participants across the three data collection sites in this study (n=155) previously attended, or currently attend, CTYI programmes and have therefore been identified as gifted, either through the CTYI Talent Search or via an educational psychologist report. A small number of study participants chose to speak directly about being gifted, or how they viewed their academic identity in school. However, most participants across all three data sites reported that it was the experience of attending various gifted programmes at CTYI that significantly impacted their identity development. This section will discuss identity development in terms of giftedness amongst participants and identity development in terms of being LGBTQ. Each section begins with a flow chart of the themes.



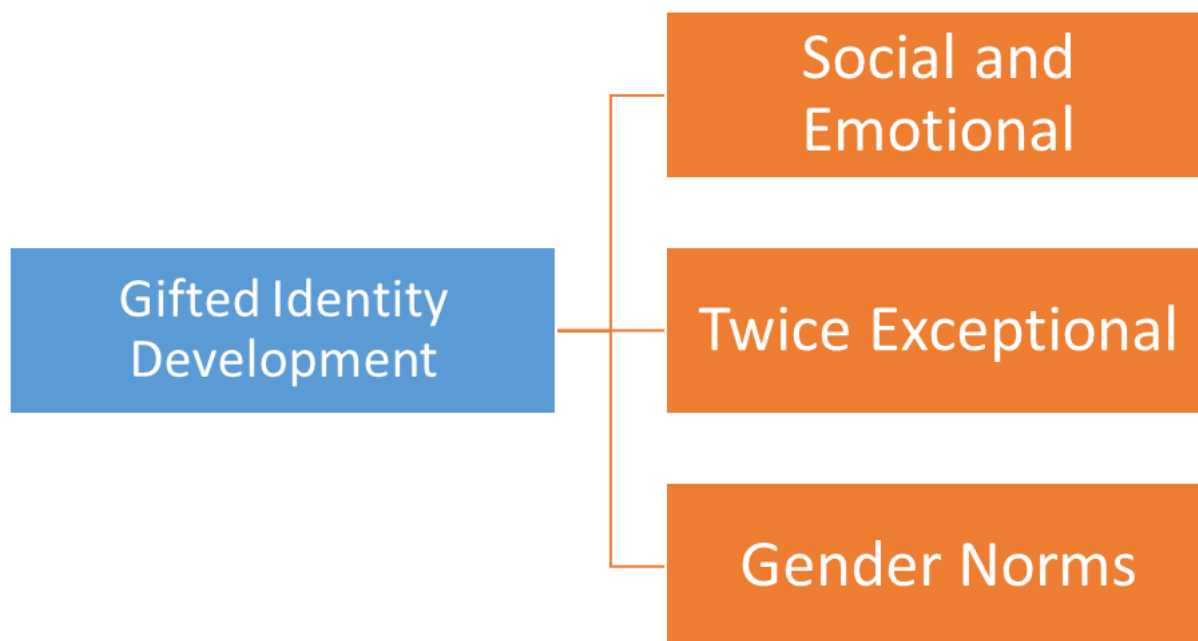


Figure 15

#### *Social and Emotional Development*

Gifted summer programmes can have a significant impact on gifted students' socioemotional development (Kim, 2016), by nurturing self-concept (Rinn, 2006), creating strong connections to peers and building relationships (Lee *et al.*, 2015). Olivia identified her first year attending CTYI under her affirmed name and gender as a powerful moment of social and emotional development,

'Getting to just be myself for two weeks was an experience like no other and my confidence grew so much. I started to be really outspoken, social and friendly, way more than I ever was before.' Olivia

A greater number of participants spoke about the value of friendships and peer relations at CTYI than specifically academic interests. Benedict found the change in his social life very positive, 'I've never had more of a social life than in CTYI. Like outside of it I was friendly with people but I didn't have friends.' Joe spoke about his desire to attend CTYI being rooted in potential friendships with like-minded people,

'I found CTYI because my best friend from primary school went and I became friends with his friends. I saw that CTYI [was attended by] people who have a level of

freedom with their expression that you don't get in the country and you don't get in a rural Catholic kind of environment.'

One questionnaire participant, who did not identify as LGBTQ, stated that their happiness in seeing friends flourish at CTYI.

'Individuality was celebrated and I think people really felt they could be themselves. I saw many of my friends thrive in this atmosphere, which was so different from school, both academically and socially.'

### *Twice Exceptional*

Laffan et al. (2022) found that LGBTQ and twice-exceptional participants scored significantly lower on satisfaction with life and significantly higher on negative outcomes compared to other gifted participants in their study. Of the overall participants (n=195), just under half identified as LGBTQ and 5% reported that they had a diagnosis of autism (Laffan et al., 2022). Two participants in this study identified themselves as having a diagnosis of autism, one interview participant (Steven) and one questionnaire participant. Both also identify as transgender males. When asked about negative remarks in school, the questionnaire participant reported that the comments were specifically about him being 'weird (read: autistic and non-passing)'. Steven spoke about his identity discovery process, in terms of both giftedness and gender identity, being directly influenced by having autism.

'For most of my life I've essentially been performing to people's expectations of me, in more ways than one. Gender and autism kind of both fell into [the feeling that] I have to keep up with this performance because other people have these expectations of me that I can't always meet but I feel the need to perform to them...'

'I feel like I'm almost gifted because of my autism. Like a lot of it is skills that I've picked up to account for my impairments. If I'm not going to be the social one, I'm the smart one.'

### *Giftedness and Gender Norms*

Kerr and Multon (2015) note that along with diverging from heterosexual and gender norms, gifted adolescents may also struggle with diverging from the intellectual norms of their environment. The authors give an example of 'the gifted gay boy who hates sports' (p. 189). Joe expressed that he felt certain subjects in his school were valued over others, in particular that creative subjects (e.g. art and home economics) were considered less valuable,

particularly for boys. He also voiced frustration at how sports was celebrated in school over academic pursuits.

‘The school made one social media post about a national science competition and genuinely thirty posts about the senior rugby final... It was interesting because a lot of the same people that were being celebrated in these sports teams were the same people that were making life a living hell, not only for teachers, but for gay people in the school. So it didn’t feel good [knowing] the school loves these people and they are my bullies.’

For Jackie, she felt a sense of isolation from her female peers, as she defied multiple norms within her school environment.

‘The girls were under a lot of social pressure to fit feminine standards. I didn’t fit those standards, because I rejected them. But I also couldn’t fit them because of how high achieving I was academically. Me being gay allowed me to... I had already broken one norm, so it gave me the freedom and under less pressure to be seen as passive and feminine. [The other girls] would not talk to any of the boys, they would all be very quiet in class... I don’t think I ever heard a single girl answer a question in class the entire time I was there. It was also things like the school announced who did the best in the [standardised test], so I kind of couldn’t escape being seen as academically high achieving.’

I find the above quote interesting in terms of how it reflects the difficulty in LGBTQ adolescents’ lives; Jackie states she ‘rejected’ the standards set but she also felt she couldn’t fit them in the first place, by virtue of her academic abilities. Jackie’s choice of how to act was essentially removed from the situation, as the school announced the standardised test results, directly revealing her academic status to her peers.

5.5 LGBTQ Identity Development

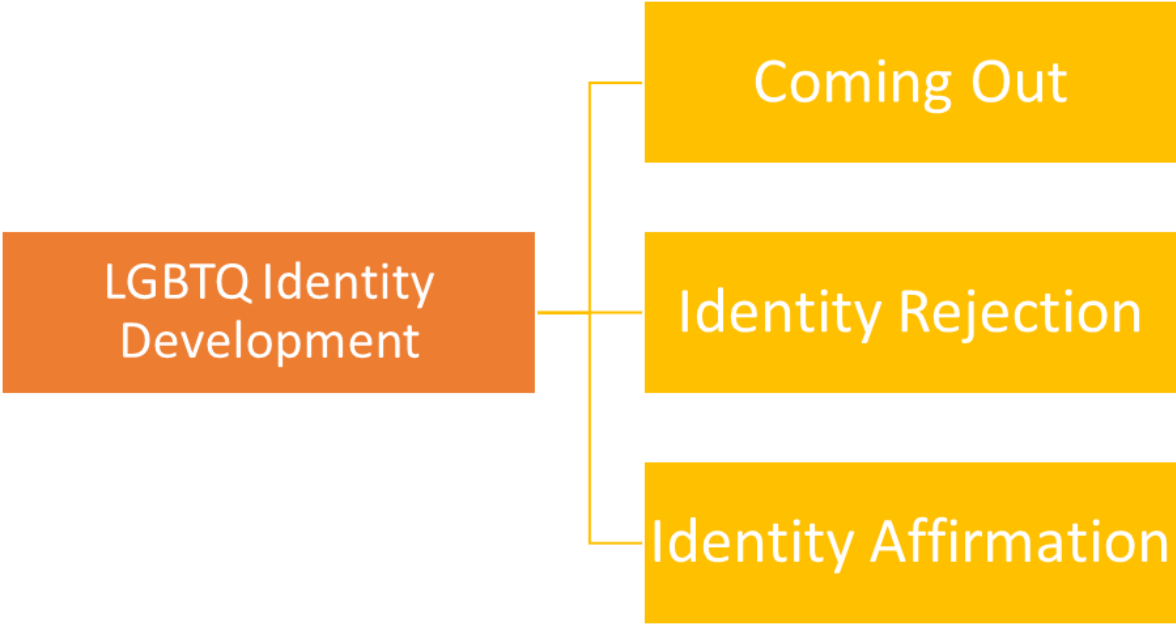


Figure 16

*Coming Out*

Coming out is often seen as a key milestone in the development of LGBTQ identities (Savin-Williams, 1998). For the gifted LGBTQ participants in this study, their experiences of coming out were mixed. As the questionnaire was designed for an overall population which would include non-LGBTQ participants, there was no specific question regarding coming out. Some questionnaire participants shared that the environment of CTYI had a positive impact on their LGBTQ identity development.

‘CTY was one of the first places I felt comfortable expressing my sexuality and in coming out to friends, I never felt like I would be judged or like I was "weird" or "other".’

‘I came out much quicker and with much less internalised shame that I think I would've without CTYI. CTYI made discovering myself an actually positive experience.’

‘I found CTYI to be a safe space for queer teens, and without it, I probably wouldn't have been able to come out to my family.’

For the focus groups, I was very mindful of putting participants on the spot regarding their gender identity and sexual orientation, therefore the question was phrased as ‘How do you think it would have felt to come out while you were in school?’ Three participants chose to speak about their own coming out experiences (Enda, Jackie and Ken) while the two non-LGBTQ participants (Dennis and Emma) spoke generally about the experiences of friends, or whether they would have felt safe to come out. For Enda, his experience of coming out in school was positive.

‘When I came out, I came out really loudly, I made sure everyone knew and that kind of meant that between second and third year, the amount of remarks I heard from other people shot down, because they didn’t want to say anything around me I think.’

Interestingly, Enda stated later in the conversation that he specifically came out in second year, the same year which marked a changeover in school leadership, as a teacher became the new school principal. Enda notes that the new principal was an openly gay man who had been a teacher in the school for many years before and was generally well liked by the student body. Benedict also had a positive experience coming out at school and laughed when recalling it, as it occurred during a confidence building workshop.

‘The workshop leader asked everyone ‘Have you ever been given a compliment that just kind of takes away your confidence?’ So trying to make a point I ended up really flubbing it and saying, ‘well for context I think I’m trans so if someone compliments me in a dress I hate it!’ But I hadn’t told anybody at that point and I didn’t realise my principal was there, my teachers were all there... It just happened. The workshop leader invited me on the stage, put his arm around me and said ‘Everybody give this guy an applause because to be able to do that, it takes confidence.’ So that was lovely!’

For the interview participants, each spoke broadly about their experiences of coming out, which were quite different. For Suzie and Dillon, entering university had a significant effect on their identity development.

‘In the last year of CTYI, between the summer of fifth and sixth year I was definitely questioning my identity... When I left school then went to college, I think I was kind of determined to be myself more in all aspects of life. With that space for questioning myself that I had at CTYI I kind of just jumped straight into it. Also in school you wear the uniform and keep your head down, whereas in college I kind of was just myself in

how I dressed and all the activities I did and people were like we all know you're not straight. We know now! So I think it was less that I made a choice to start telling people but more that because I was living authentically as myself that it became very obvious... that I wasn't straight anymore.' Suzie

'I came out during covid and I also started to understand myself as a person of colour as well. That had a lot to do with everything that was happening in America and also having to focus on myself because of covid and also having time to focus on knowing more about the world... Another reason that happened during covid is because that was my first year of college [studying psychology] so yeah it all kind of collided together.' Dillon

For Steven, an initial 'aha' moment led to further identity development as he explored his feelings about gender,

'I actually remember the exact moment... It was in fifth year, in the first semester in PE class. I was just kind of sitting there considering how I never really thought about my gender before. Then it was like, I was hit with this wave of like, you are not a girl. It smacked me in the face.'

Olivia, who generally received the worst bullying and harassment out of all interviewees, was 'outed' by peers at school who saw her private social media. This led to an extremely stressful year at school.

'Some guys in my school found my Instagram and I was outed as being trans... I was about to go into Junior Cert year and that was very stressful at the time. Going to school I didn't know what was going to happen. For the entire year, I never went to the canteen. When I was walking in the corridor I heard people whisper and laugh and I knew they were talking about me. Everyone knew, but no one would say it to me. But I knew they were joking about it. I had to stop going to PE, I was worried if anything would happen to me it would be there. The idea of going to PE gave me panic attacks.'

Through support from her mother, some teachers at her school and a positive experience at CTYI, Olivia chose to 'officially' come out at school the following year.

‘Moving into TY, that entire summer I got to be myself the entire time and that was amazing. Then the principal and deputy principal had a meeting with my mother and it was decided my name and gender could be changed on the roll, which was great. I didn’t want my class to be told while I was there, so they told them on a day I was at the EUE programme (CTYI Transition Year programme). In fairness to my form class, right away there were very few mistakes, people were really nice about it, which I didn’t expect.’

Katharine had the most unique experience of all participants, in that she came out as a transgender man when she was a teenager and later ‘uncame out’, as she described it.

‘I went through a period where I thought that I was trans, that I was a trans man. I transitioned socially for maybe like a year officially and a bit longer before that amongst close friends. For a while I felt really, really good and I made a lot of really good friends so I thought I must feel really good in these circles of trans people because I am trans... But I realised afterwards that it was less that I was trans and more that I actually had friends with whom I fit in and they happened to be trans, so I associated that with gender euphoria when actually it was just the euphoria of fitting in for the first time...’

In their large study of trans and gender non-conforming adults (n=27,715), Turban et al. (2021) found that the most significant factors leading to detransitioning were external (e.g. pressures from family or partner, facing harassment/ discrimination, societal stigma), as opposed to internal. Katharine described facing issues at school when she came out as transgender male, but states that this did not affect her sense of self. Turban et al. (2021) also found that detransition was more common among participants with a gender identity outside of the binary. Katharine went on to state while she is currently happy identifying as cisgender, she doesn’t rule further identity development out,

‘You know I do believe that gender is quite fluid, I’m not a big believer in the binary... So I also don’t really rule out the fact that maybe I am genderqueer, or something. But I don’t really bother identifying as that, because I’m happy with cisgender.’

### *Identity Rejection*

As discussed in Chapter 2, gifted adolescents may be particularly sensitive to the risk of drawing attention to themselves and can engage in strategies of self-preservation by hiding aspects of their identity (Treat, 2010) or suppressing mannerisms aversive to stereotypical

gender roles (Kerr & Cohn, 2001). The gifted LGBTQ participants in Hutcheson and Tieso's (2014) study faced an internal struggle about their LGBTQ identity and attempted to deny or repress their feelings. Of all interviewees, Suzie described the most struggle in coming to terms with her identity. She described a situation at CTYI which she sees as significant in retrospect,

'The first year I came in I was definitely overwhelmed. My roommate was telling me she was bi and I remember at the time I definitely had homophobic, not that I was being homophobic, but I had homophobic thoughts. I just didn't really understand what bi meant. I would have thought bi meant lesser or weird. It would make me uncomfortable when she was telling me this... I look back and I'm so embarrassed.'

She also engaged in strategies of denial while in school,

'I thought maybe I'm not straight? Immediately I thought no I can't be, I have to be straight. I had to immediately lock that thought down. So I didn't even consider it for basically my whole secondary school experience. It just couldn't be an option for me because of the environment of the school.' Suzie

Several LGBTQ questionnaire participants also identified fear of social isolation as their key reason for not intervening during incidents of homophobic and transphobic language. This will be discussed later in the next chapter.

For Joe, one of the most significant challenges to his identity development was being encouraged to 'tone it down' in terms of being LGBTQ. This is something he mentioned multiple times in our interview, indicating it was a significant source of frustration in his early years at school. Joe was also told to simply ignore his bullies, which bothered him immensely.

'I really wanted to put myself out there at different points in secondary school. I did debating and stuff but there was a level I could be performative and it was fine but like my school never has a drama club or whatever. I experienced a handful of teachers where I would be told to "tone it down" for my own safety but it's not nice hearing that. I specifically remember a fashion design competition and I said to the teacher I really want to model this and I would do a good job. She said you can't model it because first of all what are people going to think and second no one is going to vote if it's a



man in a dress. She thought she had my best interests at heart but in retrospect, that's just homophobic.'

While she was grateful for the staff support at her school when coming out, Olivia reported a later upsetting incident where a peer (who had previously bullied her) made an extremely transphobic remark. She felt the blame directed at her overshadowed what had occurred.

'The deputy principal sat me in a room with him. In that room, this guy was allowed to say that being trans was a mental illness, that I was mentally ill, how he doesn't think it's fair that he gets corrected by people when he misgenders me or deadnames me. Basically saying how he's the victim, he called me mentally ill for being trans. And she (the deputy principal) let him. But when I swore, because I was angry, I got in trouble for swearing...'

### *Identity Affirmation*

Busby et al. (2020) found that positive identity affirmation moderated the link between experiences of interpersonal victimisation and depression for their study's LGBTQ participants. Gillig et al.'s (2021) study of youth at an LGBTQ supportive summer camp found that campers experienced improvements in identity affirmation, which correlated with a reduction in depressive symptoms and subsequent improvements in campers' wellbeing and social skills, persisted after the camp experience. Several interview participants spoke of the increased confidence they felt when their identity was supported for the first time.

'That first year, it was so exciting. Being in a girls RA group straight away, my name being Olivia, that was amazing. Those two weeks were some of the most important... I'd say arguably the two most important weeks of my life.' Olivia

When asked 'how did you feel expressing your LGBTQ identity at CTYI compared to school?', Joe responded with 'oh god, relief.' He went on to further describe his experience of expressing himself,

'I felt like there wasn't a whole lot I could do to express my queerness or whatever... It wasn't until I met people from CTYI, or thought about going, that I realised actually in most situations people should just be okay with this. It's not a case where I should always have to compromise on my identity.'

In adolescence, developmental processes occur within broader contexts, including new groups of diverse individuals, sources of information and contexts within which they gain awareness of and affirm their identity (Watson, Wheldon and Puhl, 2020). Carlos spoke of the effect of seeing LGBTQ people his own age,

'Where I'm from, being gay was something that happens in Dublin, or Cork or cities, or it happens in America. When we were going through RSE in primary school there were questions of 'what is being gay or bi' and I remember learning it off, like in the same way you learn off a theory question, like 'what's the capital of France?' It's like you know it exists but you don't actually understand it... I had never met a homosexual couple until CTYI, I think. That was a culture shock! It just felt so strange to think these are actual gay people. I'm studying (subject) now and it's like with science, you've done all the theory of it and you know in theory how it is but then you do a practical application and it's like whoa! That's not what I was expecting going through the theory of it.'

## **5.6 Intersecting Identities**

The experiences of adolescents with multiple oppressed identities can be distinct to their counterparts with one oppressed identity, by virtue of how their identities intersect (Watson et al., 2020). Two interview participants (Olivia and Dillon) described struggling with having multiple identities within the LGBTQ spectrum.

'I found it harder to come to terms with my sexual identity than my gender identity, which I find funny, because you'd think it would be the other way around! Actually the reasons I had problems with it was because of internal misogyny and internal transphobia, because I thought being a lesbian would make me less of a woman, when I was like 16/17... It was deep seated in internal misogyny and internal transphobia. I was worried people would take me less seriously as a woman if they knew I still liked girls.' Olivia

'When I was starting to realise that I wasn't cis and coming out as nonbinary, it was kind of stressful for me because I felt like it was another tier away from normal that I was going to have to contend with. Especially because I'm already sitting at the intersection of race and queerness and everything else. Adding transness into the mix just made me feel like life was going to be more difficult. I'd have to explain so much more to different people and also you kind of can't separate yourself from the internalised shame, about being different' Dillon

Students who are gifted, LGBTQ and part of another marginalised group may feel torn between balancing various aspects of their identity (Sewell, 2020). I did not include a demographic question on race or ethnicity for the questionnaire, however Dillon chose to speak about the interactions of their identity development in terms of gender and race.

'I came out during COVID and I also started to understand myself as a person of colour as well. Like that was a lot to do with everything that was happening in America and also having to focus on myself because of COVID and also having time to focus on knowing more about the world. So when I guess thinking about all of that I feel that I started to think a lot about my identity, not just as something contained within me or as an extension of individuality, but as placing myself with another group of people, or recognising that I'm part of another group within a community. I almost came out as Asian in a way. I had kind of a duality with me just from being mixed race to begin with, and also the stereotypes that are associated with gender.'

Sewell (2019, p. 47) describes his internal conflict as a gifted, black and gay youth, 'suppressing different points of my identities became critical to my success in school, perhaps especially by influencing my interactions with peers.' While the context is, naturally, very different in terms of history and culture, Dillon expressed a similar angst about conforming to certain standards in order to succeed. For them, the gender they were socialised as, their affirmed gender and their race were closely linked together in terms of identity development.

'It is like a huge source of oppression and has been for me, particularly growing up in an Irish all girls school, there were a lot of expectations for conformity. Not just in the sense of being like a 'proper' girl, but as being a white girl as an extension of that... Not being able to meet the standard of white girl meant that I started to recognise that I wasn't going to meet the standard of 'girl' generally either.' Dillon

## **5.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have presented my findings on gender, sexual orientation and how each of these play into the identity development of the gifted participants in my study. Overall, the themes which arose are similar to other studies on gifted LGBTQ young people, in terms of social and emotional development, gender norms and experiences of identity affirmation, or rejection. Participants spoke at greater length about LGBTQ identity development than they did their gifted identity. Participants often spoke about shifts and developments in their

LGBTQ identity, whereas they predominantly connected giftedness to their attendance and experience of CTYI. The gifted LGBTQ participants in Wikoff et al's (2021) study believed that gifted identity was more of an assigned identity, whereas sexual orientation and gender identity was more of a discovery process. This was a limitation of the research and one I would hope to adjust in another iteration of this study.

This data is the first of its kind within the field of gifted education research in Ireland and internationally, as the majority of gifted LGBTQ research has thus far only focused on the United States. The data here is also (as far as I am aware) the only data that exists on gifted young people who identify as being on the asexual spectrum. This is also a largely under researched field generally in Ireland.

## Chapter 6: Discussion

### 6.1 Discussion of Chapter 4 Findings

#### 6.1.1 The Climate for Gifted LGBTQ Post-Primary School Students in Ireland

Internationally, scholars have increasingly recognised the role of climate, or environment, for LGBTQ adolescents in terms of feelings of safety (Toomey, McGuire and Russell, 2012; Day *et al.*, 2020), mental health (Peter, Taylor and Campbell, 2016), bullying and harassment (Birkett, Espelage and Koenig, 2009; Kosciw *et al.*, 2018) and overall social and emotional growth (McGuire *et al.*, 2010). School climate is a key factor in overall prevention of bullying (Wernick, Kulick and Inglehart, 2013) and the promotion of a positive school climate has been linked to reductions in anti-LGBTQ victimisation, as well as reducing negative impacts of this kind of victimisation (Birkett, Espelage and Koenig, 2009; Ancheta, Bruzzese and Hughes, 2021). Kosciw *et al.* (2013) identified the negative impact of harassment on psychological adjustment of LGBTQ young people, and how this serves as a pathway to poorer academic outcomes. All participants were asked about negative remarks and language at both school and CTYI, as research shows this to be a significant factor in school climate for LGBTQ adolescents (Thurlow, 2001; Guasp, 2014; Poteat, Slaatten and Breivik, 2019).

#### *Factors Contributing to a Negative Climate*

Overall, there was a strong correlation between the frequency of anti-LGBTQ language and overall perception of student acceptance, as questionnaire participants who reported more frequent anti-LGBTQ language also reported lower rates of student acceptance in school. My consensus from the qualitative data is that students in post-primary schools in Ireland largely accept that casual language use is part of the fabric of school life. Almost all interview and focus group participants stated that slurs were used daily. Suzie remarked that this created an atmosphere 'where it was completely unacceptable that someone could actually be gay or trans or anything.' In terms of peer acceptance, other gifted LGBTQ studies have reported mixed results; 61% of participants in Peterson and Rischar's (2000) study expressed expressing that their high school peers were accepting, while others expressed fear ('I had to move away from everyone I knew to begin coming out' p. 239) and the hope that university would bring more like minded peers. The gifted transgender participant in Sedillo's (2018) case study reported having almost no supportive peers. Overall, half of the questionnaire participants (50.7%) responded positively and stated that their peers at school were 'somewhat' accepting, while the majority of participants stated that their peers at CTYI were 'very' accepting (95.8%). Several interviewees and focus group participants described

negative interactions with peers at their school (Suzie, Joe, Katharine Jackie, Dennis) and Olivia described a particularly upsetting incident with a peer at CTYI.

Lack of support from staff and leadership was also identified as contributing to a negative climate, with many participants expressing frustration at a lack of adequate response to incidents of both anti-LGBTQ language and anti-LGBTQ bullying. The frequency of intervention from staff and teachers at school was quite low, with half of questionnaire participants reporting that staff members never intervened when they heard negative remarks at school. Dennis, Olivia, Joe, Katharine, and Suzie all spoke about difficulties with teachers and the perceived lack of appropriate interventions at their school. As discussed in the previous chapter, several questionnaire participants cited the attitudes of teachers as having a more significant negative impact on anti-LGBTQ sentiment in the school overall. In particular, one questionnaire participant wrote that she would never confront an issue due to fear she would be outed, specifically to her teachers, and that this would affect her academic outcomes. Carlos, Joe and Dillon all stated that they would have felt more comfortable at school with an LGBTQ focused club for students. However, this was met with resistance for those who proposed it. Dillon spoke about feeling frustrated at the rejection of their proposal for an LGBTQ club at the school and how the principal equated being LGBTQ with mental health issues.

'I remember her equating what a GSA would look like to a group of students talking about self harm and mental health issues. She said the school couldn't facilitate that because it could be triggering to students but that was just generally her particular brand of ignorance. The school understood mental health issues and being queer as something to be pitied about. It all went into this category of 'too much for the school to handle' so please deal with this in your own time.'

### *Factors Contributing to a Positive Climate*

Peterson and Rishchar's (2000) study of gifted LGBTQ adolescents identified that over-involvement in extra-curricular activities was occasionally used as a coping strategy for the participants. This did not appear within this study, as most participants reported positive interactions with their extra-curricular activities. Participants in Wikoff et al's (2021) study spoke of the value of connecting with peers who shared either gifted and/ or LGBTQ identities, through gifted programming, advanced classes and extracurricular activities. Similarly, the majority of participants spoke positively about attending programmes at CTYI, in terms of an academic and social perspective. One of the recommendations from Kerr and Multon (2015) is that gifted LGBTQ adolescents can be supported through the use of

specialised learning focused on their identity, with clubs that foster talents (e.g. creative writing, art, drama) and community experiences for their talent (e.g. theatre, music). Olivia, Joe and Enda all spoke about the positive experience of drama, music and performance in their lives, now and during school.

Kosciw et al.'s (2013) study examined the effects of school climate on achievement and found that the strongest predictor of a less hostile school climate, and greater self-esteem for LGBTQ students, was the number of supportive educators within a school. A number of respondents in this study stated that affirmation and guidance from CTYI staff members and teachers had an impact on their identity development and feeling of inclusion. A social environment that affirms LGBTQ identity can improve overall psychological well-being for the LGBTQ adolescents present (Gillig & Bighash, 2021). Supportive leadership also extends to the overall environment. Mentorships can be highly influential for gifted students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Siegle et al., 2015). Several studies have indicated that LGBTQ youth fare better (e.g., feel safer, hear fewer negative remarks, have more academic success) in schools who actively address their needs and concerns (McGuire *et al.*, 2010; Toomey, McGuire and Russell, 2012; Poteat, Scheer and Mereish, 2014; Day *et al.*, 2020). I would argue that this is in keeping with my overall findings regarding the positive climate at CTYI. Students reported fewer negative remarks, feeling more accepted and greater trust in staff members at CTYI, as well as the active nature of staff in addressing issues that arose.

### **6.1.2 Interventions Against Anti-LGBTQ Language**

Few studies have directly examined how school climate might affect the likelihood of students to intervene in instances of anti-LGBTQ harassment (Wernick et al., 2013). Adelman and Woods (2006) utilised an adapted version of the GLSEN Local Climate Survey in a summer camp setting, with questions about students' experiences in school. The authors found that the critical theme amongst factors of intervention was that students felt disempowered or otherwise unable to respond to it due to social norms or rules enforced by the school.

'Mild homophobia and transphobia in school was something I had come to expect over time. It often seemed like a hopeless effort if I tried to do anything about it since people would likely think I'm just too sensitive or crazy.' Questionnaire Participant

Wernick et al. (2013) identified that seeing peers intervene when witnessing harassment based on sexual orientation was significant and positively related to the likelihood of personal

intervention in similar situations. Martín-Castillo et al. (2020) highlight peer support as the most decisive factor to overcome situations of transphobic victimisation, however relationships with teachers and a general social support structure also play a significant role. Teachers have significant potential to influence student interventions, by intervening when witnessing bullying and harassment related behaviours (Kam, Greenberg and Walls, 2003) and by modelling intervention skills (Hirschstein *et al.*, 2007). However, teachers may feel barriers to intervention that are not present in other types of harassment and bullying. O'Higgins Norman and Galvin (2004, p. 10) found that the majority of teachers surveyed in their study (89%) cited a lack of formal policy or guidelines as hindering any improvements in dealing with such issues. While one would hope that given O'Higgins Norman and Galvin's (2004) study took place ten years before the introduction of the *Anti-Bullying Guidelines* (2013), more recent research reveals that this is still an issue, as policy may exist but does not necessarily translate to guidelines for practice. O'Donoghue and Guerin (2017) identified that lack of training in the area and a lack of priority given to homophobic and transphobic bullying were key barriers to Irish post-primary teacher interventions. An absence of professional development training on related issues (Poteat, Slaatten and Breivik, 2019), individual beliefs and attitudes toward sexual minority issues (Nappa *et al.*, 2018) and an underestimation of the risks and consequences of this form of bullying (Greytak and Kosciw, 2014) are all key factors in teacher intervention in anti-LGBTQ harassment.

O'Donoghue and Guerin (2017) identified one of the main supports in addressing homophobic bullying was school leadership. Farrelly et al. (2017) identified a significant discrepancy between Irish school principal's perceptions of homophobic language use and homophobic bullying, specifically a lack of awareness of the impact of such language being used casually and pervasively. Meyer (2008) identified that while teachers often have internal motivators to intervene, they may struggle due to the external social and institutional barriers to intervention present, including lack of institutional support, lack of formal education on the issue and inconsistent responses from colleagues. Teachers may also fear drawing further attention on themselves, particularly those who identify as LGBTQ. Five participants in the questionnaire referenced gossip or rumours about teachers being LGBTQ as part of the negative language at their school, 'Teachers often got slagged for seeming gay or d\*kes.' Until it was amended in 2015, Section 37(1) of the Employment Equality Act allowed religious run organisations, including schools, to actively discriminate against employees on the grounds that their sexual orientation may undermine the ethos of the organisation (McNamara & O'Higgins Norman, 2010). Fahie (2016) found that this had an impact on teachers dealing with issues relating to homophobia or homophobic bullying, as they believed to directly intervene may draw attention to themselves and speculation on their



personal lives. While Section 37(1) was amended several years ago, one cannot help but think of teachers who have worked for the majority of their careers with this uneasiness about their personal lives.

## **6.2 Discussion of Chapter 5 Findings**

### **6.2.1 Expanding Understandings of LGBTQ**

In an article titled, 'Are Teens Post-Gay?', Russell et al. (2009) found that in their analysis of responses from 2,560 adolescents in California, that historically typical sexual identity labels were endorsed by the majority of non-heterosexual youth in the survey (71%), with 13% questioning, 5% queer and 9% offering labels that described ambivalence or resistance to sexual identity labels, or fluidity in sexual identities. Over ten years later, Hammack et al. (2021) state that there is compelling evidence that contemporary adolescents in the United States, Canada, and other Anglophone societies are increasingly using an expanded vocabulary to describe their gender and sexual identities. The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) surveyed what they termed gender 'expansive' youth and found that 33% of participants identified as transgender, whereas the remaining 66% identified as "other" and wrote in labels such as genderqueer, genderfluid, and other identities (Baum et al., 2012). In their study of 1863 LGBTQ young adults, Garrett-Walker and Montagno (2021) found that 34% of the sample endorsed a similarly expansive gender identity while 40% endorsed an expansive sexual identity. This increase in the breadth of identifiers being used could be attributed to societal changes, greater knowledge of individual identities and an openness to multiple, or even a total lack of, labels. I opted to give an open text box for participants to identify their gender and then how they identify as LGBTQ. This avoided any pre-determination on the part of participants, or privileging one answer over another (e.g. using the word 'other'). A key limitation identified in another study with LGBTQ youth was that while the option to 'write in' was present, it was given alongside a list of traditional labels, which perhaps led to participants seeing the traditional labels as preferable (Russell, 2009). Some of the identifiers recorded in the questionnaire were new even to my (fairly strong) knowledge of LGBTQ identities. For the question 'How do you identify your gender?' participants expressed similar enough gender identities that they could be coded into fourteen unique gender identities. Participants were then asked 'Do you identify as LGBTQ?' and subsequently, 'If you marked yes to the last question (and are comfortable answering), please use this box to describe how you identify.' The responses to this question were varied and many participants gave multiple identifiers. Some examples of multiple labels are below.

'Bisexual, but often use queer as an umbrella term'

'Non-Binary, Asexual, Lesbian'

'Queer, trans, non-binary'

I coded seventeen unique sexual orientation labels. By allowing complete self-identification in categories of gender and sexual orientation, the full spectrum of diversity beyond traditional taxonomic systems that centre attraction to a binary gender identity can be better captured (Hammack et al., 2021). However, the sexual orientation label with the highest response was, by far, bisexual. Bisexual would be considered a 'traditional' sexual orientation label, however I believe it also reflects the expansiveness of identity discussed in the studies mentioned.

For gender, the identity with the highest response was cisgender female. For non cisgender identities, nonbinary had the highest number of responses. Cisgender individuals may be more likely to have binary views of gender, or at least view themselves within a binary, whereas individuals who do not identify as cisgender may consider gender as more of a spectrum and can therefore gravitate toward a sexual orientation not dependant on a binary system (Garrett and Montagno, 2021). Hammack et al. (2022) found that adolescents in their study were generally resistant or ambivalent toward labels which enforced strict ideas of gender identity or sexual orientation. In Chapter 4, I outlined Joe and Dillon's understandings and experiences of their nonbinary identity. Similar to the data described by Hammack et al. (2022), Dillon described wanting to separate themselves from any type of preconceived ideas of gender, or rigid labels.

'I just don't want anything associated with it [gender]... The [idea that] nonbinary is specifically a third gender or something that can exist within a spectrum between male and female, is kind of just restrictive as it was in the first place. It's another set of stereotypes that people have in their head... I just want to deconstruct the whole thing entirely.' Dillon

This finding contributes to the existing literature that demonstrates how identity labels are varied and allowing for complete self-identification allows people to choose options that more closely align with their experience (Sevelius et al., 2017).

### **6.2.2 Identity Development for Gifted LGBTQ Youth**

My findings were largely consistent with previous studies on gifted LGBTQ young people, in terms of overall identity development themes. Peterson and Rischar, 2000) found that being LGBTQ, along with related challenges, affected the social and emotional development of the

adolescents in their study. Similarly, participants in my study expressed social difficulties at school (Olivia, Joe, Katharine), difficulty coming to terms with their identity (Suzie, Dillon) and having divergent interests from their peers (Joe, Jackie). Hutcheson and Tieso (2014) found that some of the gifted LGBTQ participants in their study considered whether to disclose or hide being LGBTQ as an intellectual problem, which could be solved by examining the 'data' of the situation. The framework of visibility (Cross, 1997; Cross et al., 1991) as relevant to this challenge, as gifted LGBTQ students must choose whether to hide and deny, or express and embrace, their identity/ identities (Hutcheson & Tieso, 2014; Kerr & Huffman, 2018). Suzie's experience speaks the most closely to this, in the way that she describes her 'dual life', avoiding telling her friends from school that she is attending LGBTQ university events because she is part of the society. The quote from Jackie where she describes being unable to fit the feminine standards at her school due to being gay and academic is also relevant here, as her decision on how to act was essentially forced due to the school's announcement of standardised test results. While Jackie states that she outright rejected the gender norms at her school, she also was left with little choice. Stewart (2006) notes that gifted LGBTQ adolescents may develop disparate personal and private personas, which I found in terms of two participants' use of social media as an identity management technique. Olivia had two separate social media presences before she came out and Suzie spoke about avoiding it altogether, which keeps her identity compartmentalised for the two friend groups.

Adolescents may fear losing their social support networks if they disclose their LGBTQ identity (D'Augelli, Pilkington and Hershberger, 2002; Diamond and Lucas, 2004; Gato *et al.*, 2020). Peers are an important source of support for LGBTQ youths, particularly friends who are also LGBTQ, as they could understand the issues they were experiencing (Roe, 2017). Being among gifted peers can also provide a sense of belonging, shared interests and increased ability to communicate effectively (Cross *et al.*, 2019). Several participants mentioned the value of friends in their lives, in particular those they met at CTYI.

'I think that if I had not met people from CTYI and not made a significant number of queer friends and just went through the whole secondary experience and that was my life for six years, I would have gone insane.' Joe

'I feel very fortunate that I had a lot of queer and trans friends that I met through.'  
Dillon

'It really was a big part of my life, obviously it was like my whole life for a while. It showed me who my friends were and that my friends were going to support me through anything.' Katharine

Overall, I found that the gifted LGBTQ young people in my study had a more positive experience at CTYI, than in their school. This echoes previous findings on the positive experiences generally of enrichment programmes (Kim, 2016; Rinn, 2006; Lee et al., 2015), at CTYI (O'Reilly, 2010; Healion, 2013; Ledwith, 2013; Breslin, 2016; Carroll, 2020) and the impact on gifted LGBTQ attendees at these programmes (Hutcheson and Tieso, 2014; Tuite, Rubenstein and Salloum, 2021). This type of social and emotional development can be immensely valuable for gifted adolescents when returning to their home or school environment (Gilheany, 2005) and this is evident in the experiences of several interviewees after they attended a summer programme.

When considering their identity development, the gifted LGBTQ participants in Wikoff et al.'s (2021) study considered their gender identity and sexual orientation as a discovery process, whereas giftedness was an assigned identity. One limitation of this study is the lack of a question on giftedness directly for questionnaire participants.

### **6.3 Further Research**

One model which may be particularly useful to build positive practices for gifted LGBTQ students is the Talent Development Model of giftedness (Kerr and Huffman, 2018). This model focuses on developing individuals as they interact with their environment and challenges (Dai, 2017). Current models of talent development emphasise the need to consider both cognitive and psychosocial factors (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2011). A safe and affirming environment is crucial to self-actualisation and talent development for gifted LGBTQ students (Hutcheson & Tieso, 2014), whereas a negative and unsupportive environment may only serve to further hinder this (Kerr & Huffman, 2018). In terms of general school research, Ancheta et al. (2021) found that LGBTQ students in schools with more positive school climates generally reported fewer depressive symptoms compared to students in less positive school climates. Foley-Nicpon et al.'s (2017) study of the experiences of gifted students who also have a disability (twice-exceptional) or social difficulties and a talent development model focused summer programme had very positive outcomes for all participants. One particular interviewee, Steven, spoke very candidly about his experience with being gifted, autistic and having mental health issues.

Steven attended CTYI throughout his teenage years and was, by his own accounts, high achieving academically in school. However, he faced intense difficulty when he first entered university. This also coincided with being diagnosed with autism.

'Being the smart one was a huge part of my identity. More specifically, being able to do things without putting any effort into them. So like when I had to start putting effort into doing things, it was really strange. So I failed my first third level degree. And I got diagnosed with autism. It was this wave of feeling like I can't try because if I try, it means I'm not smart. Everything fell around my ears... I dropped out of university. I actually spent a couple of years just laying perfectly still in my bed.'

Being twice different (or more) can lead to isolation and mental health issues for gifted LGBTQ youth (Levy & Plucker, 2003), as they must deal with their intellectual deviance from the mainstream and stigmatised sexual orientation and gender identity (Kerr and Multon, 2015). Steven spoke about how this contributed to overwhelming depression. After taking up some courses with a national learning organisation, he found his perspective changed as they focused on executive functioning techniques which really helped him.

'I learned about goal setting methods and would speak with someone every few months about what I wanted to, or what I had achieved. There's no judgement. It also was important to me because I was so depressed, and able to have that context that time means something and three months is a lot of time, you can do a lot in three months.... A surprising amount! I sat in my first session and thought three months is nothing, then three months later I had done fifteen times what I thought I could do! I had told one of the psychologists that I didn't see the point in living because in sixty years I'll be dead anyway. And she looked at me and said you can't be philosophical when you're depressed. Which is true, but not really helpful. What would've been helpful for her to say would be that depression messes with your perception of time and its value. So you need to do something to get some perspective on what time. What I learned in those courses was instrumental in my recovery.'

The goal orientation described by Steven is similar to the interventions used in Foley-Nicpon et al.'s study (2017). I found Steven's experience very interesting in terms of the growing discourse in gifted education research that conceptualises giftedness as a context-dependent entity (e.g., Barab & Plucker, 2002; Dai, 2017; Plucker & Barab, 2005). In this theory giftedness emerges as part of optimal interactual transactions between individual and environment (Lo and Porath, 2017) and functional person-in-situ transactions (Barab &

Plucker, 2002). Lo et al. (2019) state that this construction of giftedness moves toward a growth orientation, where giftedness is influenced by developmental opportunities and environment. Therefore, in order to allow gifted students to explore and sustain their unique abilities, talents, strengths, and interests, a constructive learning environment must be maintained (Lo et al., 2019). This is evident in Steven's experience, in the changes in his self-knowledge, and how identifying and cultivating personal goals helped him move through a difficult time. By taking up courses that gave him actual techniques to adapt his thought processes, he began to thrive again. Steven is now in his final year of a degree in education and hoping to pursue a masters degree next.

Kerr and Multon (2015) state that for gifted adolescents, academic and career development cannot be treated separately from gender identity, gender role, and gender relations. One participant in Yang and Gentry's (2022) study on underrepresented students' talent development in STEM disciplines stated that he felt isolated in his field, 'I feel like I'm risking my engineering identity, and I'll be seen as less than [straight men in STEM]... because I'm gay.' In this study, Joe specifically spoke about how valuable they found having a gay Residential Assistant and queer leadership generally.

'My RA in my second year was incredibly gay and I was like this is amazing... It was really heartwarming seeing queer people and people with queer friends that were living full fulfilled lives and not compromising on any part of their identity. Whether it's compromising their ability to do a good job or compromising their ability to be gay.'

As discussed in Chapter 5, Olivia's passion for drama was nurtured by the teacher who managed the school musical. This led to involvement with amateur theatre outside of school and had a direct effect on her decision to study drama at university.

Subotnick, Olszewki-Kubilius and Worrell (2018) state that the aspired outcome of gifted education within a talent development model should be to prepare talented youth to transform their abilities into groundbreaking contributions to the world. Further research is needed on how the field as a whole can build on the existing research to cultivate the talents of gifted LGBTQ young people, ensuring they have the ability to develop their potential to its fullest extent.

## Chapter 7 Conclusion

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter will summarise the findings from this inquiry, consider the research questions, the new knowledge gained, the limitations of the study and future research. Connecting research to action is a key aspect of the transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2009) and I hope to use these findings to contribute to change.

### 7.2 Research Questions Answered

I had four overall research questions I wanted to explore.

RQ1- What is the climate for gifted LGBTQ post primary students in Ireland at school?

RQ2- What is the climate for gifted LGBTQ post primary students in Ireland at a gifted summer enrichment programme (CTYI)?

RQ3- What is the frequency of intervention in situations of negative remarks and language about LGBTQ people and does the climate of a site affect the frequency of intervention?

RQ4- What factors contribute to the frequency of intervention in situations of negative remarks/ language about LGBTQ people?

As discussed in the previous chapter, the climate of an environment plays a key role in prevention of bullying, increased feelings of safety and overall social and emotional growth. For RQ 1, I found the climate for gifted LGBTQ post-primary students is mixed at school. There was a high frequency of anti-LGBTQ language, with two thirds (62%) of questionnaire participants reporting that they heard 'gay' used in a negative way frequently or often, half (52.8%) reporting they heard negative remarks about sexual orientation frequently or often and just over a third (38%) reporting that they heard negative remarks about gender identity frequently or often. This was corroborated by many quotes from interview and focus group participants, as well as the open text boxes in the questionnaire. Half of questionnaire participants reported that teachers and staff at their school were somewhat (40.1%) supportive. However, many participants criticised a lack of support from teachers and school leadership in incidents of anti-LGBTQ language use, both casual and targeted. Several interview and focus group participants also spoke about incidents of bullying in school. Despite the frequency of negative language, about half of participants stated their peers and teachers were somewhat accepting.

For RQ2 participants reported the overall climate for gifted LGBTQ students at CTYI as positive. An overwhelming majority of participants stated that CTYI staff are very supportive of LGBTQ people (88%), as are their peers (95.8%). Several participants used the open text boxes to speak about the value of meeting other like minded peers and the impact this had on their growth. Similarly, questionnaire, interview and focus group participants spoke about the value of having not only supportive leadership, but also openly (and happily) LGBTQ leadership. Affirming extra curricular activities at CTYI also were discussed as having a positive impact. In terms of negative language, two thirds of participants reported that they never heard 'gay' used in a negative way (57.0%), that they never heard negative remarks about sexual orientation (65.5%) and that they never heard negative remarks about gender identity (59.9%). Interestingly, the notion of CTYI as having more LGBTQ students arose within open text boxes and from interview and focus group participants. One questionnaire respondent gave the following as an example of negative language, 'general discontent with the amount of LGBT+ people present, nothing very specific.' As discussed in Chapter 4, Steven and Suzie also spoke a little about the shift in social hierarchies between school and CTYI. It was beyond the remit of this study to explore this further but this would certainly be an interesting avenue for further research.

For RQ3, I found that there were higher rates of intervention for students, staff and respondents at CTYI than at school. The majority of respondents indicated that teachers and school staff members very rarely intervene in instances of negative language regarding sexual orientation and/ or gender identity. Half of questionnaire participants reported that teachers and school staff never intervene on hearing negative language about sexual orientation (46.5%) or gender identity (50.7%). Participants reported that peers also rarely intervened, with half stating that peers never intervened. The highest rate of intervention reported came from respondents themselves, with about 10% stating they would intervene most of the time on hearing negative language about sexual orientation (12.0%) and gender identity (9.9%). For CTYI, these numbers were quite different, with two thirds of participants reporting that they never heard these remarks in the first place. However, after running a Spearman's rho correlation analysis on whether the frequency of teacher/ peer intervention influenced personal intervention, the results were mixed. I believe the measure of the climate of a site is more complex than could be gathered with this data and that overall, reasons for personal intervention have a greater connection to internal factors, than external.

This led me to RQ4 and the factors which contribute to the frequency of intervention. For school, the two most important factors of intervention were the context of the remark (51.4%) and fear (26.3%). For CTYI, the two most important factors were the context of the remark



(57.6%) and variations on positive interventions (22.4%). This was a much higher result than positive interventions at school (7.4%). Several participants reported that the supportive environment would influence the likelihood of intervention. Some important sub-themes also arose within certain themes, in terms of fear this included fear of drawing negative attention, fear of reprisal and for LGBTQ students, the fear of being outed. In terms of remark context, participants differentiated between what they viewed as targeted harassment versus casual language use and their relationship to both the remark maker and victim (e.g. some said they would intervene if either of these people were a friend).

### **7.3 New Knowledge**

Although I identified my four research questions, I was conscious of the very limited research on gifted LGBTQ young people and lack of research outside of the United States context. Therefore, I also chose to explore the experiences and identities of gifted LGBTQ young people in Ireland more broadly in Chapter 4. I believe there has been new knowledge gained in terms of gifted LGBTQ identity development, the coming out process for gifted LGBTQ youth and breadth of identifiers now being used. I believe my decision to simply offer an open text box for gender and sexual orientation allowed for participants to identify exactly how they feel, with no predetermined labels. Wagaman (2016) states that it is imperative that research with LGBTQ adolescents move away from predefined, categorical methods for assigning identities, as many LGBTQ youth use their identities as places to resist the confines of society. Some participants used multiple terms to identify their sexual orientation and terms that reflected the complexity of gender (e.g. genderqueer). The data presented on the asexual spectrum participants is (as far as I am aware) the only data of its kind.

### **7.5 Limitations of the Study**

One limitation of the study was my lack of access to my sample, caused by the pandemic. Due to this, CTYI held no face to face summer courses for two years, when I had intended to do my data collection. Unfortunately time would not allow me to wait another summer! My questionnaire was therefore moved entirely online, along with participant recruitment. However, becoming acquainted quickly with Zoom was extremely helpful for conducting some of my interviews and one focus group over video chat. Although my response rate was low (16%) my total number of participants (n=155) is higher than most of the empirical gifted LGBTQ research available.

## 7.6 Future Research

### *Catholic Ethos*

Another minor theme which arose in the study was the perceived impact of Catholic ethos on support and acceptance for LGBTQ students. Though there has been a significant move towards multi-denominational education (through the Educate Together patron body) and inter-denominational education (through the Vocational Education Committees), control of schools remains firmly in the hands of the established churches (Fahie, 2016). Currently, almost 75% of Irish state-funded post-primary schools are managed by religious patrons or by a religious patron and state partnership (Stapleton, 2020). O'Higgins Norman et al. (2006) found that some teachers (and parents) specifically identified the religious ethos of their school as a barrier to the school dealing with issues of homophobic bullying. Similarly, McBride and Schubotz (2017) found that conservative religious values prevented open and positive dialogue regarding LGBTQ identities, limiting young people's capacity for self-determination and freedom of expression in post-primary schools. Several questionnaire participants identified their school's Catholic ethos as a determinant in how anti-LGBTQ language was dealt with. However, most of these participants added an additional caveat, such as being a single sex school, which leads me to believe that the issue is with the overall school culture. One participant, who identified as male and straight, connected their school being a 'traditional, all-boys, Catholic rugby school.' Another participant stated 'the school I attended was single sex and heavily Catholic so there was not a welcoming atmosphere in any sense to LGBT students.' One interesting piece of data on the impact of ethos in school was from a pilot study participant, who found the time of the marriage referendum in Ireland quite difficult.

'In the lead-up to the Marriage Equality Referendum - the parish priest made remarks that same-sex relationships were not what was intended for the world. Debates on the referendum were facilitated in class, but teachers never stepped in when the arguments turned nasty. The Marriage Equality referendum had, in my experience, a disastrous effect on school students. The principal would tell students to remove vote yes badges from their uniforms, lest it annoy the priest or bishop.'

A religious ethos within a school can affect how Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is taught and the overall content (McNamara & O'Higgins Norman, 2010). Several participants spoke about RSE and how it enforced heteronormativity and gender norms, by isolating or erasing LGBTQ relationships and sexuality.

'We received no LGBTQ inclusive sex education throughout my time in school. I was told that this was an inappropriate topic to bring up in SPHE.' Questionnaire Participant

'In our relationships and sex education talk, the speaker who came in avoided certain LGBT related questions or was very awkward speaking about them.' Questionnaire Participant

'We had relationships and sexual education in sixth year, for the first time. The class was two hour long sessions and the second hour was just watching a documentary about the process of pregnancy. The main message was 'don't get pregnant.'" Suzie

Unfortunately it was beyond the remit of this study to explore the perceived overall impact of Catholic ethos, or even single sex schools, on LGBTQ participants. However, this would be an interesting direction for future research.

### *Mental Health*

Due to the vast amount of qualitative data gathered, it was not possible to explore every theme that arose. For future studies, I would be interested in delving further into mental health for gifted LGBTQ students. In Chapter 6, I included Steven's discussion of the interaction of his mental health, giftedness and autism. Benedict also spoke about his experience of the interaction of gender dysphoria, mental health and a disability. While Benedict chose not to disclose specific details of the disability mentioned, he did state that sensory issues had affected him in school greatly. He also had to finish school early due to illness.

'Obviously body dysphoria is a mental health issue due to being trans and that can be treated with hormone replacement therapy. But depression, or general body issues or anxiety, all those types of things can't be because they are actually separate. A lot of that comes down to the social aspects. So I guess, for myself, though I had mental health issues due to my disability, in terms of being transgender and bisexual, it wasn't actually connected. So when I started testosterone, all my mental health issues were still there. I still had to deal with them!'

There is a great deal of research on giftedness and mental health (Cross, 1997; Cross, Gust-Brey and Ball, 2002; Friedrichs, 2007; Sedillo, 2013; Cross and Cross, 2015) and the mental health of LGBTQ young people (D'Augelli, Pilkington and Hershberger, 2002;

McNamee, Lloyd and Schubotz, 2008; Mayock *et al.*, 2009; Ancheta, Bruzzese and Hughes, 2021) so it would be interesting to explore the interactions this might have.

## **7.7 Creating Change**

### *Creating Change at School*

Stack and Sutherland (2014) state that the interrelationship between legislation, policy and practice is crucial to provide appropriate provision for gifted students. The same is true for all LGBTQ students in Ireland. Efforts to create a more positive environment for gifted LGBTQ young people, and all LGBTQ young people, must be a school wide effort. The *Anti-Bullying Guidelines* (DES, 2013) state that in order to build a positive school culture and climate, staff members must 'consistently tackle the use of discriminatory and derogatory language in the school– this includes homophobic language' (p. 42). As outlined in these findings, the use of anti-LGBTQ language remains a pervasive issue in post-primary schools in Ireland. The high level of participant responses who differentiated between casual language use, or a joke, and more targeted remarks is concerning. Students should not have to engage in this type of context making, as all of this language is unacceptable. I believe a fundamental shift is needed in how we think about anti-LGBTQ language in post-primary schools in Ireland. While the update to the *Anti-Bullying Guidelines* are a welcome and necessary step, the next step should be a set of practices and related teacher training. It might also benefit schools to consider the student voice in this process. Engaging students in decision making and creating a participative democracy structure offers a powerful learning opportunity for students, giving them a chance to listen to others and be listened to themselves (O'Brien *et al.*, 2022).

At the end of each interview and focus group, I asked about changes that could be made in post-primary schools in Ireland. Suggestions included normalising speaking about LGBTQ people and issues in class, having more inclusive curricula, improvements to the RSE programme, policy adaptations to make life easier for students transitioning and more staff training.

Katharine spoke about how she had to constantly self-advocate.

'If I wrote my name on an unofficial list, like for a field trip, I was told I couldn't because it wasn't my official name on the register. I understand if it was for certificates or medical forms but it wasn't. It just felt like this little tiny fight every day. With every new teacher I met, I would always have to tell them myself that I was going by this name and my pronouns. I don't know if they were actually told officially

by anyone else. I think they told each other but if there had been a clear system for me to navigate, with a staff member to help, that would have been easier.'

Both Carlos and Joe spoke about the value of an LGBTQ club, or even informal gathering for students.

'I would have liked it if there was a place for students to talk about being LGBTQ. Even if nothing else, it would be amazing to know you're not the only person. You're not the only two or three people in your friends.'

'Even if it's just something like booking a room during lunch. Because you're in secondary school, you're figuring it out and it could be a place for the queer kids to go and know they are not going to be attacked. Give queer kids the ability to make queer friends, because statistically, they are not going to be the only ones in the school. Whatever the school can do to make them find each other, I think that's one of the best things they can do.'

Suzie spoke about training for staff as a key priority and more stringent policies for negative language.

'I think that in an ideal world, staff would be more educated. Not just the token education that they seem to do but a course that is maybe actually run by LGBTQ people. Because they would know what works and what doesn't, what's tokenism and what's helpful. Teachers should be taught to update their lesson plans so that they are not heteronormative and not exclusionary of different genders. I think a harsher policy on homophobic comments too and guidelines with specific steps on reporting it, and it being taken seriously. I also think that pride should be celebrated. There should be information on how to be a good ally and the support that there is.'

Dillon was thoughtful about changes and noted that change is only helpful if it can be repeated.

'It has to be cyclical and it has to maintain itself after the first action is done. There has to be a dialogue between students and teachers. My school had queer teachers and students, but all of them were so quiet and there just seemed to be some gap in the communication where they felt it couldn't be talked about. I had the option I would make cis people in that secondary school see the queer people that were around

them. I would ensure that any changes brought in were cyclical. I think that would help.'

Sometimes it only takes one change to start a larger reaction. Two participants noted that after one person came out in their school, it had a positive effect on the rest of the student body.

'After the first trans person in my year came out there was initially a fair bit of transphobia but soon after it disappeared almost entirely and as people got used to the idea more people came out.'

'One of my friends came out as a transgender girl in school, obviously in a Catholic all boys secondary there was a bit of slugging the first week she announced it, but people gave up pretty quickly.'

#### *Change at CTYI*

While I can only do my best to improve the experiences of gifted LGBTQ young people in society and at school, I can have a direct effect on their experiences at CTYI. The findings from this study will be used to implement certain changes and inform our overall practice. In terms of staff training, findings from this study indicate that there is a knowledge gap between the academic part-time staff and the residential part-time staff. Going forward, the LGBTQ information and related training will be incorporated into the academic part time staff orientation and training also.

Steven gave excellent, direct feedback for a plan that might help other twice exceptional young people attending CTYI. This will be put in place for our next summer programme.

S: 'For gifted kids who are neurodivergent, and I know for myself, something that I really struggle with in social situations is initiating. I really struggle to ask for help because I don't know what's going to happen, I'm giving somebody else that power over my vulnerability. But it's also that sometimes I don't know the words to use to get someone to understand what I'm trying to say. I've developed some coping skills with it, even my university lecturers comment on my independence and being really good at figuring things out. But it's because I just do not want to ask for help at all! (laughs) Sometimes when I'll try to ask for help I can only do it in a very vague, hand waving, blustery way.'

O: 'Do you think a positive intervention might be to have a really clear document about procedures for bringing an issue to staff? Like a flow chart of here are the steps that will happen. It could make the outcome clear.'

S: 'Yes. I think it's important to let the students know that if they don't have the exact right set of magic words to make things okay then that's fine!'

## 7.8 Actionable Recommendations

This section will summarise the findings into actionable recommendations for supporting all LGBTQ students. While there are some changes which perhaps go beyond an individual level, e.g. changes to the national policy or RSE curriculum, it is hoped that these will be useful for all educators and leaders, within schools and gifted education programmes.

<p><b>Policy</b></p>	<p>It is vitally important to include specifics around anti-LGBTQ language, as this is a key element of bullying and harassment, as well as a factor in the overall climate of a school/ organisation.</p> <p>Ensure that any anti-bullying policies are clear on how anti-LGBTQ bullying is defined, e.g. repeatedly misgendering someone after being corrected will be deemed bullying.'</p> <p>All anti-bullying efforts should be a school/ organisation wide process. Including the student voice can benefit both students and staff.</p>
<p><b>Student Support</b></p>	<p>Create spaces for LGBTQ students to feel safe, meet friends and discuss their experiences. This could be a GSA, or after school club.</p> <p>Several study participants spoke about the value of creative arts and other extra curricular activities which helped their overall confidence. Staff members should extoll the values and successes of these types of activities as much as they might for sports.</p> <p>Create process documents for students who are transitioning. This could include a specific person to speak with who can help the student advocate and details for the process of changing one's</p>

	name or pronouns.
<b>Leadership</b>	<p>Implement staff training on common challenges for LGBTQ students, this can be done internally or with an external organisation.</p> <p>Small displays of allyship and support can communicate to LGBTQ students that they are safe to approach a staff member with any issues. This could be a rainbow flag in a classroom or a poster from an LGBTQ organisation.</p> <p>Support for LGBTQ students begins with school and organisation leaders. Setting the tone for all staff members and colleagues is important to creating an overall positive climate. If negative language is tolerated casually in the staff room, or if LGBTQ teachers do not feel supported, it is difficult (if not impossible) to create a positive climate for LGBTQ students.</p>
<b>Curriculum</b>	<p>Normalise the inclusion of LGBTQ in class content. This could include using gender neutral pronouns for a maths problem or noting the sexual orientation of historical figures and prominent writers, or speaking about relevant legislation during a CSPE class.</p> <p>For any social or relationship focused education (e.g. SPHE- Social Personal and Health Education), ensure that all types of relationships are discussed, not only those between men and women.</p> <p>If a student expresses an interest in LGBTQ topics, encourage them to focus on a relevant project. Several study participants spoke about how valuable they found this type of independent learning.</p>

### 7.9 Conclusion- Hopes for the Future

Some of this study's findings do not paint a positive picture of gifted LGBTQ young peoples' experiences in post-primary school in Ireland. Some are struggling with their identity, with unsupportive peers and with a lack of faith in their school leadership. One of the most



powerful conversations I had during this study was with Dillon, after I stopped recording (naturally). Dillon spoke about their own coming out process and how they feel that coming out is often viewed as rooted only in struggle. This theme also arose in how they spoke about teachers at their school seeing being LGBTQ as something to be pitied, as opposed to a normal part of someone's identity. Dillon and I spoke about reframing this narrative; from struggle to discovery, with the moments of happiness that go along with this. I have that conversation in mind as I conclude this study. My hope for the future is that increasing research on gifted LGBTQ young people will positively influence public policies and practices that will improve the experiences of this population in school and at gifted programmes, in Ireland and internationally. The more we know about their experiences, the more we can do to affirm them in all aspects of their identity, allowing them to reach their potential and be fulfilled while they do it.

The final words come from Suzie, who models the bravery of coming out and stepping into a new identity, and Joe, who models the bravery we should all have in our interventions.

'This year I would like to overcome my fear and tell my friends from school. There are some of them who would be perfectly okay with it and there's definitely some of them who I know wouldn't be. But I want to challenge myself that if they are not okay with that then I can't keep supporting them. If they are people who wouldn't accept me then they are not the people I want to be around anyways. I think being part of the LGBTQ community is so much more than your sexuality and your gender. It's being open minded and that sense of open mindedness extends to so much more than peoples' sexuality and gender pronouns.' Suzie

'CTYI empowered me to speak up. When I was meeting these people I felt like not only can I be myself around these people but I'm sure as hell going to stand up for them because they're my friends. It was the realisation when I went to CTYI when I met more queer people that this isn't just something that happens on the internet, this is people's lives. When I went back to school I started people out who made queerphobic comments, even in my close group of friends. I became a total menace!'

Joe

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Copy of Survey

Question Number	Question	Response Options
1	What age are you?	Open Text Box
2	How do you identify your gender?	Open Text Box
3	Do you identify as LGBTQ?	1- Yes 2- No 3- Not sure
4	If you marked yes to the last question (and are comfortable answering), please use this box to describe how you identify.	Open Text Box
5	For post-primary school, did you primarily attend	1- Mixed 2- All girls 3- All boys
6	Was your post-primary school located	1- In or near a town, or city 2- In a rural area, or village 3- Other
7	Did you previously attend a CTYI post-primary programme?	1- Yes 2- No
8	When did you attend your last CTYI summer programme?	Open Text Box
9	How often did you hear the word 'gay' used in a negative way (such as 'That's so gay' or 'You're so gay') at CTYI?	1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Frequently
10	At CTYI, how often did you hear negative remarks about being gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer?	1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Frequently
11	If you did hear negative remarks, could you give an example of what they were?	Open Text Box
12	Would you say that these types of negative remarks were made by:	1- None of the students 2- A few of the students 3- Some of the students 4- Most of the students
13	If you heard negative remarks about being gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer, how often did a CTYI staff member intervene or do something about it?	1- Never 2- Some of the time 3- Most of the time 4- Always 5- N/A I never heard these remarks 6- N/A a staff member was never present
14	If a CTYI staff member was not present when you heard these remarks, how often did you report these remarks?	1- Never 2- Some of the time 3- Most of the time 4- Always 5- N/A I never heard these remarks

		6- N/A a staff member was always present when I heard these remarks
15	If you reported the remarks, how confident were you that a senior CTYI staff member would deal with it appropriately?	1- Not at all confident 2- Not particularly confident 3- Neutral 4- N/A I would not report these remarks 5- Somewhat confident 6- Very confident 7- N/A a staff member was always present when I heard these remarks
16	If you heard remarks (like the examples above), how often did another student intervene or do something about it?	1- Never 2- Some of the time 3- Most of the time 4- Always 5- N/A I never heard these remarks 6- N/A another student was never present
17	If you heard remarks (like the examples above) at CTYI, how often did you intervene or do something about it?	1- Never 2- Some of the time 3- Most of the time 4- Always 5- N/A I never heard these remarks
18	What factors would have led you to intervene, or not intervene?	Open Text Box
19	Would you like to add anything to your answers in this section?	Open Text Box
20	At CTYI, how often did you hear negative remarks about transgender or gender nonconforming people?	1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Frequently
21	If you did hear negative remarks, could you give an example of what they were?	Open Text Box
22	At CTYI, how often did you hear comments about students not acting "masculine" enough?	1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Frequently
23	At CTYI, how often did you hear comments about students not acting "feminine" enough?	1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Frequently
24	Would you say these types of negative remarks were made by:	1- None of the students 2- A few of the students 3- Some of the students 4- Most of the students

25	If you heard negative remarks, how often did a CTYI staff member intervene or do something about it?	1- Never 2- Some of the time 3- Most of the time 4- Always 5- N/A I never heard these remarks 6- N/A a staff member was never present
26	If a CTYI staff member was not present when you heard these remarks, how often would you report these remarks?	1- Never 2- Some of the time 3- Most of the time 4- Always 5- N/A I never heard these remarks 6- N/A a staff member was always present when I heard these remarks
27	If you reported the remarks how confident were you that a senior CTYI staff member would deal with it appropriately?	1- Not at all confident 2- Not particularly confident 3- Neutral 4- N/A I would not report these remarks 5- Somewhat confident 6- Very confident
28	If you heard negative remarks (like the examples above), how often did another student intervene or do something about it?	1- Never 2- Some of the time 3- Most of the time 4- Always 5- N/A I never heard these remarks 6- N/A another student was never present
29	If you heard remarks (like the examples above) at CTYI, how often did you intervene or do something about it?	1- Never 2- Some of the time 3- Most of the time 4- Always 5- N/A I never heard these remarks
30	What factors would have led you to intervene, or not intervene?	Open Text Box
31	Would you like to add anything to your answers in this section?	Open Text Box
32	At the last CTYI course you attended, were you taught positive things about LGBTQ people, history or events in any of your classes?	1- Yes 2- No 3- Maybe 4- I don't remember
33	At the last CTYI course you attended, were you taught negative things about LGBTQ people, history or events in any of your classes?	1- Yes 2- No 3- Maybe 4- I don't remember
34	In general, how accepting do you think students at CTYI are of LGBTQ people?	1- Not at all accepting 2- Not very accepting 3- Don't know 4- Neutral 5- Somewhat accepting 6- Very accepting

35	How supportive do you think staff at CTYI are of LGBTQ people?	1- Not at all supportive 2- Not very supportive 3- Don't know 4- Neutral 5- Somewhat supportive 6- Very supportive
36	Would you like to add anything to your answers in this section?	Open Text Box
37	At school, how often did you hear the word 'gay' used in a negative way (such as 'That's so gay' or 'You're so gay')?	1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Frequently
38	At school, how often did you hear negative remarks about being gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer?	1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Frequently
39	If you did hear negative remarks, could you give an example of what they were?	Open Text Box
40	Would you say that these types of negative remarks were made by:	1- None of the students 2- A few of the students 3- Some of the students 4- Most of the students
41	If you heard remarks (like the examples above), how often did a staff member or teacher intervene or do something about it?	1- Never 2- Some of the time 3- Most of the time 4- Always 5- N/A I never heard these remarks 6- N/A a staff member/ teacher was never present
42	If a staff member/ teacher was not present when you heard these remarks, how often would you report these remarks?	1- Never 2- Some of the time 3- Most of the time 4- Always 5- N/A I never heard these remarks 6- N/A a staff member/ teacher was always present when I heard these remarks
43	If you reported the remarks how confident were you that a senior staff member (e.g. school principal) would deal with it appropriately?	1- Not at all confident 2- Not particularly confident 3- Neutral 4- N/A I would not report these remarks 5- Somewhat confident 6- Very confident 7- A staff member was always present when I heard these remarks
44	If you heard remarks (like the examples above), how often did another student intervene or do something about it?	1- Never 2- Some of the time 3- Most of the time 4- Always 5- N/A I never heard these remarks

		6- N/A another student was never present
45	If you heard remarks (like the examples above) at at your school, how often did you intervene or do something about it?	1- Never 2- Some of the time 3- Most of the time 4- Always 5- N/A I never heard these remarks
46	What factors would have led you to intervene, or not intervene?	Open Text Box
47	Would you like to add anything to your answers in this section?	Open Text Box
48	How often did you hear negative remarks about transgender or gender nonconforming people at school?	1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Frequently
49	If you did hear negative remarks, could you give an example of what they were?	Open Text Box
50	At school, how often did you hear comments about students not acting "masculine" enough?	1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Frequently
51	At school, how often did you hear comments about students not acting "feminine" enough?	1- Never 2- Rarely 3- Sometimes 4- Often 5- Frequently
52	Would you say these types of negative remarks were made by:	1- None of the students 2- A few of the students 3- Some of the students 4- Most of the students
53	If you heard remarks (like the examples above), how often does a staff member/ teacher intervene or do something about it?	1- Never 2- Some of the time 3- Most of the time 4- Always 5- N/A I never heard these remarks 6- N/A a staff member/ teacher was never present
54	If a staff member/ teacher was not present when you heard these remarks, how often did you report these remarks?	1- Never 2- Some of the time 3- Most of the time 4- Always 5- N/A I never heard these remarks 6- N/A a staff member/ teacher was always present when I heard these remarks



55	If you reported the remarks how confident were you that a senior staff member (e.g. school principal) would deal with it appropriately?	1- Not at all confident 2- Not particularly confident 3- Neutral 4- N/A I would not report these remarks 5- Somewhat confident 6- Very confident 7- A staff member was always present when I heard these remarks
56	If you heard negative remarks (like the examples above), how often did another student intervene or do something about it?	1- Never 2- Some of the time 3- Most of the time 4- Always 5- N/A I never heard these remarks 6- N/A another student was never present
57	If you heard remarks (like the examples above) at school, how often did you directly intervene or do something about it?	1- Never 2- Some of the time 3- Most of the time 4- Always 5- N/A I never heard these remarks
58	What factors would have led you to intervene, or not intervene?	Open Text Box
59	Would you like to add anything to your answers in this section?	Open Text Box
60	During the last year you attended in school, were you taught positive things about LGBTQ people, history or events in any of your classes?	1- Yes 2- No 3- Maybe 4- I don't remember
61	During the last year you attended in school, were you taught negative things about LGBTQ people, history or events in any of your classes?	1- Yes 2- No 3- Maybe 4- I don't remember
62	In general, how accepting do you think students at your school were of LGBTQ people?	1- Not at all accepting 2- Not very accepting 3- Don't know 4- Neutral 5- Somewhat accepting 6- Very accepting
63	How supportive do you think staff at your school were of LGBTQ people?	1- Not at all accepting 2- Not very accepting 3- Don't know 4- Neutral 5- Somewhat accepting 6- Very accepting
64	Would you like to add anything to your answers in this section?	Open Text Box

Appendix 2: DCU Research Ethics Committee Approval

Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City University



**Ms. Orla Dunne**  
Centre For Talented Youth, Ireland

**Dr. Colm O'Reilly**  
Centre For Talented Youth, Ireland

**Prof. Joe O'Hara**  
School of Policy & Practice

18<sup>th</sup> January 2021

**REC Reference:** DCUREC/2020/256

**Proposal Title:** The effects of organisation and school climate on the experiences of gifted LGBTQ post-primary students in Ireland.

**Applicant(s):** Ms. Orla Dunne, Dr. Colm O'Reilly, and Prof. Joe O'Hara

Dear Colleagues,

Further to expedited review, the DCU Research Ethics Committee approves this research proposal.

Materials used to recruit participants should note that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee.

Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further amendment submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Geraldine Scanlon', written in black ink on a light-colored background.

**Dr Geraldine Scanlon**  
Chairperson  
DCU Research Ethics Committee



**Taiside & Nuáisiacht Taisíocht**  
Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath,  
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### *Appendix: 3 LGBTQ Terminology*

<b>Aromantic</b>	Someone who does not experience romantic attraction or experiences little to no romantic attraction.
<b>Asexual</b>	Someone who does not experience, or experiences very low levels of, sexual desire. Sometimes referred to as 'ace'.
<b>Aspec</b>	Aspec or a-spec is an abbreviation of a-spectrum and is an umbrella term for orientations that belong under the aromantic or asexual spectrum.
<b>Biromantic</b>	Someone who is romantically attracted to more than one gender. This may not include sexual feelings.
<b>Bisexual</b>	Someone who is attracted sexually and romantically, to more than one gender.
<b>Demiromantic</b>	Someone who only feels romantic feelings when a strong emotional bond is present.
<b>Demisexual</b>	Someone who only feels sexual feelings when a strong emotional bond is present.
<b>Gay</b>	Someone who is attracted to someone of the same gender. Often used for men but other genders may use it too.
<b>Grey-romantic</b>	Experiencing romantic attraction rarely, lying somewhere on the spectrum of aromantic and romantic.
<b>Homosexual</b>	Someone who is attracted to someone of the same gender.
<b>Idemromantic</b>	Someone who experiences no notable internal differences between platonic and romantic feelings, often categorising relationships (and feelings) as platonic or romantic based on external factors.
<b>Lesbian</b>	A woman who is attracted to other women.
<b>Neutrois</b>	Neutrois is an identity under the nonbinary and transgender umbrellas
<b>Panromantic</b>	Someone who is romantically to people of any gender. This may not include sexual feelings.
<b>Pansexual</b>	Someone who is attracted sexually and romantically to people of any gender. There is overlap with the term 'bisexual' and some people may use both interchangeably.

<b>Polyamorous</b>	The practice of, or desire for, romantic relationships with more than one partner at the same time, with the informed consent of all partners involved.
<b>Queer</b>	Queer means different things to different people and can refer to sexual orientation and/ or gender identity. It is often used as an umbrella term for the LGBTQ community,
<b>Quoiromantic</b>	A romantic identity in which one is unable to distinguish between romantic and platonic interest/attraction/love.
<b>Straight</b>	Someone who is attracted to the opposite gender.
<b>Transfeminine</b>	An umbrella term that describes a transgender person (generally one who was assigned male at birth), and whose gender is feminine and/or who expresses themselves in a feminine way. The label "transfeminine" can be considered either a gender identity, a gender expression, or both.
<b>Transmasculine</b>	An umbrella term that describes a transgender person (generally one who was assigned female at birth), and whose gender is masculine and/or who expresses themselves in a masculine way. The label "transmasculine" can be considered either a gender identity, a gender expression, or both.