Georgia Safe Schools Coalition
Collective Memory Work
Project Rationale and Description

The brutal murder of gay adolescent, Lawrence King, by his 14-year old classmate is one of many examples for the dire need for research on effective youth interventions designed to reduce homophobia and heterosexism in schools. This homophobic hate crime happened in Oxnard, CA; however, Athens has its own challenge of addressing LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) bullying. On March 4, 2008, three youth circled a 17-year old gay student at Cedar Shoals High School in Athens and punched him in the back of the head, while shouting anti-gay epithets at him. The very next day, the same student who was attacked rode the bus with his three attackers, peers at his very own high schools. To say schools continue to be unsafe for LGBTQ students is an understatement. Rather, in truth, LGBTQ students live in a war-zone when they attend schools, and there are very few community interventions designed to keep them safe.

Bullying towards LGBTQ students has long been a challenge in schools; however the issue has been gaining more attention from scholars recently (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Maha, Varjas, Dew, Meyers & Singh, 2007). A recent 2005 school climate survey of 3450 students who identified as LGBTQ, age 13-18 years old, (Harris Interactive & GLSEN, 2005), found that 75.4% of students reported hearing anti-gay epithets, such as "faggot" or "dyke." Over half of the students have experienced physical harassment due to their sexual orientation or gender expression, with almost 30% of youth in the survey reporting being physically assaulted due to the same reason. The survey also demonstrated that LGBTQ youth are five times more likely to skip school due to bullying. For those in the survey experiencing the highest levels of bullying, the students demonstrated lower grade point averages in high school and were two times more likely to not attend college. Survey results concluded that LGBTQ students feel unsafe at school at a rate three times that of their heterosexual peers. In a matched sample of 97 high school students, LGBTQ youth reported similar higher rates of bullying and sexual harassment due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

These statistics of school bullying and violence toward LGBTQ youth are alarming when considering that research in general has shown a decrease of school bullying and violence in general (Youth Risk Behavior Survey as cited by Orpinas & Horne, 2006). Researchers conclude this increase of LGBTQ bullying is due to school personnel (e.g., teachers, counselors, psychologists) "looking the other way" when heterosexist incidences of bullying occur (Mahan et al., 2007; Singh, Orpinas, & Horne, in press). In a qualitative study urban service provider's responses to LGBTQ bullying incidences, LGBTQ advocates reported school personnel asserting that there were not LGBTQ students who attended their school; therefore, there was not a "problem" of LGBTQ-bullying. In addition to denying the existence of LGTBQ students, school personnel did not hold students perpetrating LGBTQ bullying accountable because anti-gay sentiments—such as "that's so gay"—were socially accepted norms in the schools. Although research, interventions, and evaluation of specific LGBTQ bullying prevention programs are lacking (Mahan et al., 2007), research has demonstrated that LGBTQ students report feeling a greater sense of safety and reporting fewer instances of LGBTQ bullying in schools where

LGBTQ-bullying has pointed out the failure of school administration protest LGBTQ students, or those perceived to be LGBTQ (D'Augelli, Pilkington & Hershberner, 202; Mahan et al., 2007; McFarland & Dupuis, 2001; van wormer & McKinney, 2003).

Despite the ethical and legal duty to keep students who are LGBTQ or are perceived as LGBTQ safe (McFarland, 2001), school personnel have made few strides in doing so. This lack of progress seems not to be due to a lack of studies showing the need to reduce LGBTQ-bullying, but rather to the insidious nature of heterosexism and homophobia within school systems. Heterosexism has been defined in the literature as the socio-political valuing of heterosexuals as normative; it has also been name the "root" of homophobia (Herek, 1996; Corteau, Lark, & Lance, 2005). These systems of discrimination and prejudice appear to be main obstacles in implementing school personnel training on heterosexism and homophobia (Singh, Orpinas, & Horne, in press). Heterosexist and homophobic values of school principals and other school personnel is also used to stop students who want to form GSA's; even literature on intervention efficacy data has demonstrated that GSA's contribute to a more positive school climate for not just LGBTQ students, but for *all* students (Szalazha, 2003). Considering the negative school climate for LGBTQ students and the lack of progress in reducing LGBTQ-bullying due to heterosexist and homophobic attitudes of school personnel, the proposed study becomes even more critical as a way to investigate alternative approaches to reducing LGBTQ-bullying.

Using the qualitative approach of collective memory work, these two research projects sought to explore how lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth made meaning of their sexual identity through their high school experiences. Our guiding research questions included: What high school experiences positively informed student's sexual and/or gender identity? What high school experiences negatively informed student's sexual and/or gender identity? How do individuals learn to negotiate the experiences of high school when they are marginalized sexual and gendered identities? What can school administrators, teachers, and counselors learn from the experiences of marginalized youth in order to make schools safer for LGBT youth?

Dr. Singh and Dr. Johnson recruited participants from LGBT resource centers in the state of Georgia. After consent was secured, the participants were asked to write about one positive and one negative memory that impacted their sexual identity development or their gender identity development/expression. Once the stories were written they were collected and distributed to be read prior to the focus group session.

During the focus groups lasting 1-2 hours in length, the researchers guided the participants to express opinions and ideas about each story, look for similarities and differences in each story and identify generalizations and overarching themes regarding sexual and/or gender identity. In addition, the researchers focused the discussion around questions: How do we define sexual identity? How do we define gender? How has school experiences influenced our understandings of these terms? How do these stories (discuss one at a time) influence our attitudes and understandings sexual identity and gender in schools?

Each focus group session was tape recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by researchers and written up for both academic and practitioner based publications. In addition, five of the twelve participants volunteered to share their positive stories in the first documentary: "be there for me: Collective Memories of LGBTQ youth in High School. In the second documentary, "We Exist": Collective Memories of Transgender, Queer and Questioning Youth, three youth offer up their experiences in school. In both films the youth, school counselors and researchers make

suggestions and recommendations about what needs to be done to create safer schools for LGBTQQ youth.

Using the Documentaries
- ➢ Preview the video once or twice prior to showing it to your participants.
- ➢ Review this facilitation guide to determine which discussion questions you will pose to the participants and be prepared for a variety of answers and emotional reactions.
- ➢ Review your Georgia Safer Schools Coalition resource binder to familiarize yourself with appropriate terminology, ethics, law, and strategies for support.
- ➢ You may also consider adding activities that compliment each section. Many of these activities can be located at in the "further information" section provided for each chapter.
- ➢ Encourage active listening and create a safe space for discussion. To achieve these goals facilitators should develop and use processing skills that are explicitly designed to empower participants to apply their learning to social action and transformation, recognizing their ability to act to create a more humane social order, and become effective voices of change within their social world. These goals may seem lofty, and it is often difficult for participants to know how to effectively contribute to discussions where many and different ideas are valued. Therefore, some simple guidelines are offered to help construct a safe and supportive environment for the exploration and sharing of ideas while maintaining ownership of what can be learned. While these guidelines are important to incorporate it may take some practice.
  - o Respect each other and try to hear what every person is saying.
  - o Attempt to dismantle power relationships in the group so that everyone has the opportunity to be heard. Older or more vocal participants do not necessarily have better things to say. Every participant should have the opportunity to be heard.
  - o Respect the privacy of those who participate and keep the discussion in the space; transfer the learning.
  - o Share responsibility for the learning process and learning products of the discussion.
  - o Do not to blame ourselves or others for the inaccurate information we have learned in the past but accept responsibility for not repeating it.
  - o Do not blame victims for the conditions of their lives but instead look at the social conditions that have created those individuals existence.
  - o Agree to combat myths and stereotypes by challenging them
  - o Speak from your own position and realize that nobody is a spokesperson for an entire group of people.
  - o Recognize that while tolerance may be a step toward acceptance it does not necessarily unmask or challenge the larger issues of misunderstanding that exist in marginalization and discrimination
- ➢ Be prepared to direct participants toward additional resources based on their curiosity or need/desire for support
- ➢ Be prepared to direct participants toward advocacy and activist activities if they are inspired to become more involved.

"be there for me":
Collective memories of LGBTQ youth in high school
DVD Facilitators Guide

Executive produced by: Dr.'s Anneliese Singh and Corey W. Johnson
Produced and Filmed by Jyoti Kaneria and Rishi Kaneria
Curriculum & Research Written by: Dr.'s Anneliese Singh and Corey W. Johnson

Chapter 01: lgbtq youth

Central Points
➢ Many youth are tormented and ostracized according to sexual identity before they have even considered it.
➢ Youth are very conscious of how adults behave, ignore or intervene around issues of sexual identity.
➢ Adults have a responsibility to educate and create safer schools for LGBTQ youth.
➢ There are LGBT youth in every community and they need our support in order for their voiceto be heard
➢ Some people in school settings <u>are</u> doing things to support LGBTQ youth

Discussion Questions
➢ What stories do you have about how LGBTQ youth have victimized, marginalized, or ostracized in your school?
➢ What did the adults (the coach and/or dean) do or not do to support Joe in this story?
➢ What terminology have you heard that you are both comfortable and uncomfortable with?
➢ Do you think that your school and the people in it do an effective job at creating a safe environment for LGBT youth? Why or why not?
➢ Why do the researchers feel it is so important to honor the voices/stories of the LGBTQ youth?

Further Information
Savin-Williams, R.C. (2005). *The new gay teenager*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA.

Chapter 02: lacking support

Central Points
➢ Similar to their counterparts, LGBTQ youth are developing important relationships during adolescence, however, they have to balance those feelings against the reactions of heterosexual others, both supportive and unsupportive (friends, parents, etc.).
➢ Youth often do not have the script/terminology to describe their experience as a result of essentialized heterosexuality (heteronormativity).
➢ Adults have authority and youth look to them for support; frequently LGBTQ youth do not find it.

➢ Victimization can occur from both heterosexual and non-heterosexual youth as a result of fear.

Discussion Questions
➢ Considering the developmental processes of relationship building (dating, kissing, etc.) how might heterosexual and LGBTQ youth be similar? How might they be different?
➢ What external forces might complicate this developmental process for LGBTQ youth?
➢ What internal forces might complicate this developmental process for LGBTQ youth?
➢ Why might parents react negatively toward learning their child is involved in a same gender relationship or otherwise identifies as LGBTQ?
➢ Why might school personnel react negatively toward learning that youth in their school are involved in same gender relationships or otherwise identifies as LGBTQ?

Further Information
Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network. GLSEN's 2005 national school climate survey sheds new light on experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students. 2006 [cited 30 June 2008]. Available from http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/library/record/1927.html

Chapter 03: faith

Central Points
➢ Conflict and tension often exist for students in relation to their faith and sexual identity.
➢ Reconciling the conflict and tension between LGBTQ identity and communities of faith can create additional guilt, shame, and fear in the lives of youth.
➢ LGBTQ people can be people of faith.
➢ Communities of faith can be supportive of LGBTQ identities.

Discussion Questions
➢ Why do youth experience such conflict and tension related to their faith and sexual identity? Why did Ande?
➢ Do faith and sexual identity have to be at odds with one another?
➢ Are you familiar with unsupportive faith communities related to LGBTQ identity?
➢ Are you familiar with supportive faith communities related to LGBTQ identity?
➢ If you have a faith community, how does your faith community treat people who identify as LGBTQ and how do you reconcile that with supporting LGBTQ youth?

Further Information
Cole, B. (2007). *Voices form the kingdom: All God's children have keys*. Summit, PA: Kimini Publications.

Helminiak, D. A. (1994). *What the bible really says about homosexuality*. Tajique, NM: Alamo Square Press.

Chapter 04: race + lgbtq

Central Points
- ➢ People of color may experience coming out and LGBTQ identity differently than white people as a result of the intersection of racial and sexual identities.
- ➢ LGBTQ people of color face marginalization from the white community, the heterosexual community and their own communities.
- ➢ African-American communities often use a "don't ask, don't tell" message (or silent tolerance) as a way of managing LGBTQ identity.

Discussion Questions
- ➢ Why might youth of color feel compelled to choose between their ethnic identity and their sexual identity?
- ➢ How does silent tolerance (don't ask, don't tell) support a person of color's LGBTQ identity development?
- ➢ How does silent tolerance (don't ask, don't tell) impede a person of color's LGBTQ identity development?
- ➢ What are some of the outcomes you believe are associated with this double bind of marginalization and discrimination related to LGBTQ youth of color?

Further Information
Robinson, T. L., & Howard-Hamilton, M.F. (2000). *The convergence of race, ethnicity, and gender: Multiple identities in counseling*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Chapter 05: finding support

Central Points
- ➢ Coming out can be a positive and validating experience for LGBTQ youth if done in a safe environment.
- ➢ Seeing adults / peers who show support for LGBTQ youth, helps them to feel more comfortable coming out.
- ➢ One sentence or smile can make a difference. Adult's language and reactions are both important.
- ➢ The presence of GSA's (Gay, Straight Alliances) can mark a more supportive campus for many LGBTQ youth.

Discussion Questions
- ➢ What positive stories do you have about how LGBTQ youth have been supported in your school?
- ➢ What did the adults in these stories or the stories from the film do too create a safe and welcoming environment of LGBTQ youth?
- ➢ Are adults and youth at your school "out" in terms of their sexual identity? Why or why not?

Further Information

The Trevor Project offers a 24-hour crisis and suicide prevention helpline for LGBTQ youth. www.thetrevorproject.org

PFLAG- Atlanta (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) provides support and resources to family members and friends of LGBTQQ people. They also offer confidential support to LGBTQQ youth who may be struggling with how to come out their family and friends. More information can be found at http://www.pflagatl.org/

Chapter 06: becoming allies

Central Points
- ➢ Start with love, be someone LGBTQ youth can talk to, listen.
- ➢ Mark your classroom or office with a safe space sticker to indicate that you are nurturing of LGBTQ persons.
- ➢ Honor exploration and difference in each individual's LGBTQ identity development/experience, especially considering faith and race.
- ➢ Be a role model for LGBTQ youth in all your actions, take situations seriously, intervene when necessary.
- ➢ Help LGBTQ youth see role models for healthy relationships.
- ➢ Support the creation of GSA's in your schools.
- ➢ Know your community, know the resources.
- ➢ Talk about sex, sexual identity, and gender presentation across the curriculum – discuss LGBTQ examples in the classroom.
- ➢ Create school and classroom policies to prevent LGBTQ discrimination and to protect all youth.
- ➢ Be open with your sexual orientation and/or support LGBTQ colleagues; you are all role models for either how to treat LGBTQ persons or how to be an open LGBTQ person.

Discussion Questions
- ➢ What can you do and are you willing to do to create a safer school environment for LGBTQ youth?
- ➢ Does your school have a GSA? What would be the reactions/challenges to starting one in your school from the students, administrators, and parents? How would you overcome these challenges?
- ➢ What resources are available in your community to support LGBTQ youth and provide them with healthy role models?
- ➢ Where could you integrate discussions of sexual and gender identity in your school's curriculum to make it more inclusive?
- ➢ What policies exist or could be created to protect LGBTQ youth and make your school safer for all youth?

Further Information
The Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) is a national organization dedicated to creating safer schools for all students. For more information, visit http://www.glsen.org/

The Gay-Straight Alliance Network provides information on starting a Gay-Straight Alliance. Visit http://www.gsanetwork.org for more information.

Chapter 07: the research

Central Points
> ➢ Accessing LGBTQ participants is challenging as a result of long-term marginalization and a lack of trust.
> ➢ Build partnerships to respond to the needs of LGBTQ youth in an honest and sincere way.
> ➢ Never forget the stories of LGBTQ youth, they are in your schools and need you to change how people think and feel about this issue.
> ➢ Conversations around LGBTQ issues are hard to have.
> ➢ Allies need to stand up, be vocal, and make a difference.

Further Information
Additional products of this research project are in progress and will be posted to the Georgia Safe Schools coalition website at: www.georgiasafeschoolscoalition.org as they become available.

"We Exist":
Collective memories of Transgender, Queer, & Questioning Youth
DVD Facilitators Guide

Executive produced by: Dr.'s Anneliese Singh and Corey W. Johnson
Produced and Filmed by Jamie Roberts & Arianna Sykes
Curriculum & Research Written by: Sir Jessie McNutly, Maru Gonzalez, and Dr.'s Anneliese
Singh and Corey W. Johnson

The second DVD in this curriculum was developed in order to differentiate some of the unique challenges and issues faced by teens who may not feel or express their gender in the manner that cisgender students do, as with transgender, queer or questioning youth. [Cisgender refers to the agreement with the assignment male or female at birth]. Often students who identify as LGBQ experience some of the same types of harassment and bullying that students who identify as transgender because of their gender expression; they may be read as non-gender conforming. (i.e. Boys who are "too effeminate"; girls who are too "masculine" – these are sexist cultural perceptions that have very harsh consequences for gender non-conforming youth.)

The statistics detailed in the nation's first comprehensive study on the effects of bullying paint a picture of how violent life can become for gender non-conforming youth when bullying is not addressed- and faculty are not willing/able to step up and intervene.

Greytak, E. A., Kosciw, J. G., and Diaz, E. M. (2009)**.** *Harsh Realities: The Experiences of Transgender Youth in Our Nation's Schools.* New York: GLSEN.

In the report there are findings about how the teachers and staff actually perpetuate the hostile environment.

> Although most transgender students (83%) could identify at least one supportive educator, only a third (36%) could identify many supportive staff.
> A third of transgender students heard school staff make homophobic (32%) remarks, sexist (39%) remarks, and negative comments about someone's gender expression (39%) sometimes, often, or frequently in the past year.

One of the key findings in this report details how damaging biased language can be; this is compounded when the student is early in their gender exploration and may lack key vocabulary to effectively identify themselves.

This DVD can be used to provide insight for faculty and staff to intervene in cases of bullying and alert them to the need for advocates who can help change a school's climate; as well as, refer them for further supportive services.

From Resilience to Thriving

Central Points
➢ When transgender youth don't feel supported in schools, it is difficult for them to succeed in their academic and personal lives.
➢ Some – but not all - transgender youth select to use hormones or other medical interventions to have
➢ Transgender youth will share their identities with those who make them feel safe.
➢ Transgender youth may not share their gender identity with their families first, unless they feel safe.
➢ Transgender youth may use a variety of terms to describe themselves. It is important to support them in developing language that captures their identities and that they feel comfortable using to describe themselves.
➢ Bullying is a serious issue for transgender youth to deal with, and it is important for educators to intervene and stop bullying when it occurs and engage in prevention efforts to make sure it is not an accepted behavior in the school.
➢ Transgender youth are often comfortable with who they are, but maybe unsure of who is safe to share their identities with in school settings.
➢ Sexual orientation is different from gender identity and expression, but there may be some overlaps.
➢ Transgender youth may be bullied with anti-gay slurs and epithets (e.g, "that's so gay", "dyke").

Discussion Questions
➢ Austin shared that he did not share much about his gender identity with people at school, even though he was exploring his gender identity and finding ways to "be true to himself". What would you do as an educator to develop a safe environment for students like Austin to feel safe to share his identity and exploration?
➢ Charlie shared about being bullied as a bi-gendered/fluid student. How would you respond if you witnessed or heard about students who were bullying a transgender youth.

It's Complicated

Central Points
➢ Being transgender is not a "trend" or a "fad".
➢ Transgender people have lived across many different cultures across times in the world.
➢ Some transgender people's gender identity and expression is fluid and may change with situations, time, people, etc. This does not mean these transgender youth are "confused".
➢ Sometimes transgender youth are excluded from not only the straight community, but also from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer community.
➢ Being transgender is how someone feels inside about their gender identity and expression. [Many transgender people feel as if they were mislabeled birth- assigned the wrong sex].
➢ It is important for others to pay attention to the words and pronouns that transgender youth use to describe themselves.

➤ A feminist perspective is important in working affirmatively with transgender youth, especially because sexism and heterosexism are interconnected.
➤ Schools are often gendered spaces where students learn there are only "two options" – girls or boys.
➤ It is important for cisgender people to self-reflect on their assumptions about their own gender and what they expect from others – how others "should" express their gender identity and sexual orientation.

Discussion Questions
➤ Charlie shared that straight and LGBQ communities have not accepted his gender identity and expression. Discuss why this might be.
➤ Maru discussed the gender binary that exists in school settings. For example, educators divide classes into "boys" and "girls" for activities like line-up's, etc. What are some alternative ways – other than gender – that educators may divide classrooms?
➤ Anneliese discussed the importance of being allies to transgender youth. How might you be an ally to transgender youth?

You Should Be Able to Be Safe

Central Points
➤ Transgender youth are vulnerable to bullying and violence in schools.
➤ Families and friends of transgender youth may also experience bullying and violence based because they have relationships with transgender youth.
➤ Bathrooms can be scary places for transgender youth, because bullying and violence can occur there. It is important to have gender-neutral bathrooms in schools.
➤ Gender is a social construction; sex is not a "fixed" category.
➤ Educators "set the tone" for how students treat one another, including how students treat transgender students; addressing bias and modeling respect is paramount.

Discussion Questions

➤ Natalija talked about how her peers verbally "made fun" of her behind her back. Natalija said she would have liked to talk with them directly and educate them about being transgender. How would you educate people about what it means to be transgender?

➤ Safety is an important concern for transgender youth. How would you make your school safer and more responsive to transgender youth and their concerns?

What Does Action Look Like?

Central Points
➤ There are more than two options related to gender and we need to create more gender complex education
➤ We need more open dialogue, programs and awareness regarding equal treatment of people according to gender identity/expression

➢ Listen to the youth and take them seriously; understand that they may not be ready to assert the language or gender expression that makes them comfortable – family issues can be intertwined.
➢ Be ready to assist in providing access to safe bathrooms and locker room alternatives.
➢ Be ready to assist in asserting chosen names and affirming pronouns.
➢ Be conscious of the gender-power system and build discussions of it into the curriculum
➢ Allow participation in a variety of activities and do not use gender to determine involvement
➢ Support students to start a GSA that is knowledgeable and supportive of the gender non-conformity and trans issues.
➢ Educators are protected by the law and there is legislation to protect transgender students in public schools
➢ Protect a youth's medical/physical privacy; shut down conversations around birth certificates, legal names, and body appearance- be aware that genital remarks are all too common.
➢ Identify resources and services that can assist the youth and their family in developing a healthy path for their gender journey.
➢ Engage in collective memory work in your school system to assess your school climate and use it to make change.

Further Information

Bending the Mold: An Action Kit for Transgender Students:
http://www.lambdalegal.org/publications/bending-the-mold/order-bending-the-mold.html

Additional products of this research project are in progress and will be posted to the Georgia Safe Schools coalition website at: www.georgiasafeschoolscoalition.org as they become available.