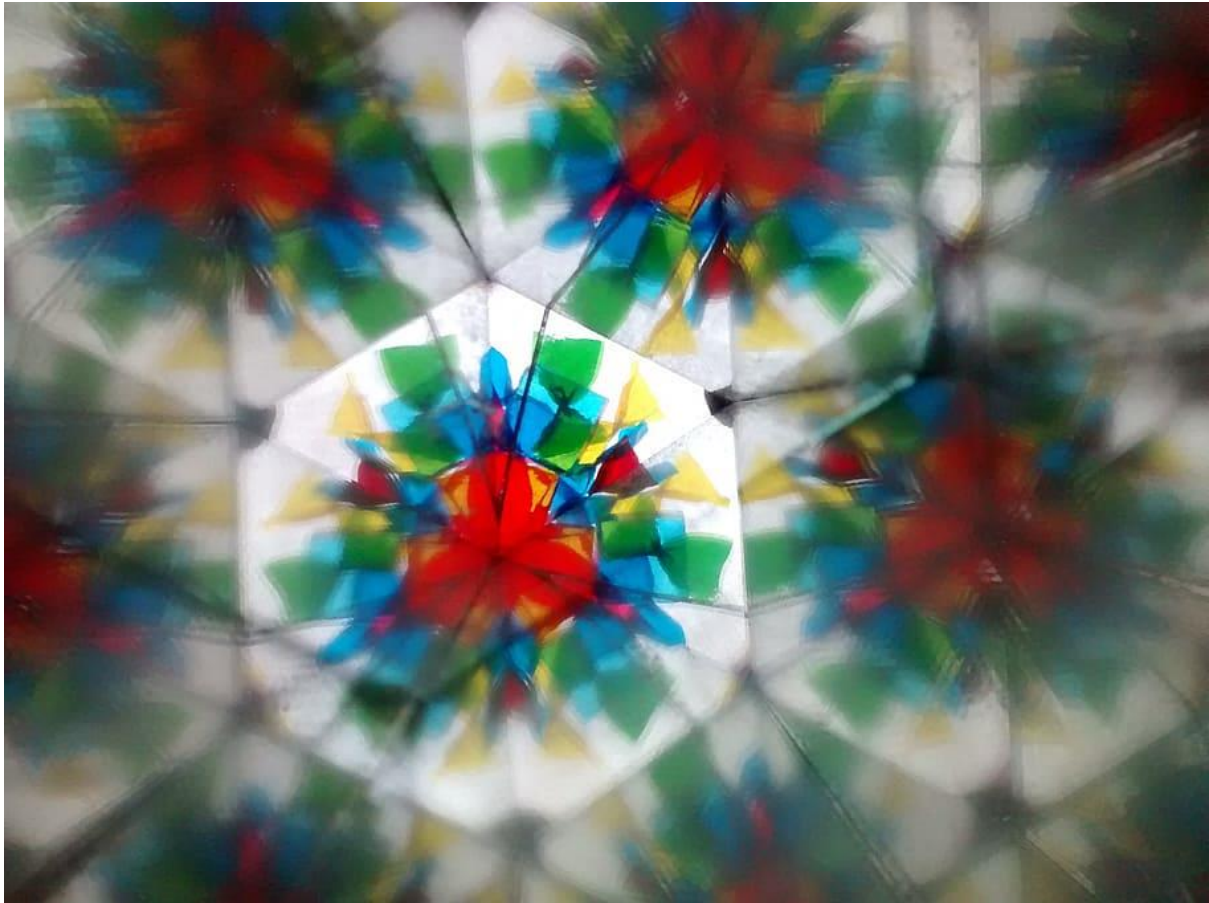


MSc Thesis Chair Group COM

Empowerment in a kaleidoscope of identities: Intergroup dynamics and the empowerment process in a Gender and Sexuality Alliance



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Daphne Visser
Supervisor: Margit van Wessel

Summary

Empowerment is a multidimensional and interdependent transformative process where people are enabled to organise themselves to increase their self-reliance and to participate meaningfully in shaping their own futures. As empowerment theory deals with group work, a tendency to regard this group as homogenous is apparent in research and practice. The current research problematises this assumption by studying what the different identity aspects of participants of the Gender and Sexuality Alliance mean to the empowerment process. Face-to-face, online and telephone interviews with twenty-two GSA participants and two facilitators from ten different GSAs were conducted. By using analysis of narratives, this study found that the GSA has an empowering effect, especially when looking at personal empowerment, close relationship, and social empowerment, but that the political and collective empowerment that participants experienced was limited. New aspects that influence empowerment within the GSA were furthermore discovered, namely mental health as empowerment opportunity, participants' specific use of the safe space; the use coalition-building within the school community to influence school policy, certain conditions under which collective empowerment is possible; important themes for power-sharing between youth and adults; and specific barriers to empowerment. Simultaneously being the first to consider many different and intersecting social groups as understood by participants themselves, the research discovered that different groups within the GSA based on participants' network of friends, age, activeness, gender, being a student or their SOGIE were established. Indications of how these groups each created their own intergroup dynamics and how these could influence empowerment in a particular manner are provided. These findings emphasise the importance of looking at the intersections of identity and how they shape the dynamics within a certain empowerment context.

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List of abbreviations

AMB	Assigned Male at Birth
GSA	Gender and Sexuality Alliance
GIE	Gender identity or expression
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Other
PV	Paarse Vrijdag (Purple Friday)
PVK	Paarse Vrijdag Krant (Purple Friday Paper)
SOGIE	Sexual orientation, gender identity or expression
SO	Sexual orientation

Chapter 1: Introduction

Empowerment is a multidimensional and interdependent transformative process where people are enabled to organise themselves to increase their self-reliance and to participate meaningfully in shaping their own futures (Pettit, 2012; Rowlands, 1995). Empowerment theory deals mostly with group work, where marginalised groups, such as youth, women or the poor are empowered. This has caused a tendency in research and practice with an empowerment focus to regard this group as homogenous. One speaks of the empowerment of “women”, “youth”, and “nurses”, to name a few examples, all considered homogenous groups which can be defined based on their shared marginalised identity (see e.g. Clifford, 1992; Sardenberg, 2007; Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam, & Lamb, 2009). The presumption of these homogenous identities disregards the differences between members based on other identity aspects such as their race, age, gender, class, or ability (Lloyd, 2005) that make their identities intersectional. Furthermore, it overlooks that within an empowerment context different groups based on these differences can be formed, which could create specific dynamics within the context that might influence empowerment.

Even when research adopting an empowerment focus is done on more heterogeneous groups, researchers are prone to endow the group with a shared social identity. An example of this is Russell and colleagues’ (2009) research on Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs). GSAs are student-led high school-based clubs in middle and high school where lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other (LGBTQ+) students and straight students work together to advocate for a better school climate for LGBTQ+ students (Fetner & Kush, 2008; Heck, Flentje, & Cochran, 2011). Instead of considering the GSAs as groups where youth of different sexualities, genders, and ages could be empowered and studying how power relations among the different identities of the youth influence the empowerment process, Russell and colleagues (2009) studied the “empowerment of youth”.

However, GSAs are often spaces of dilemma, where it is difficult for participants to associate with one another as “youth” across their differences based on their sexualities, genders, and age groups (Mayo, 2017). Many participants have already formed a dominant form of affiliation with their sexuality, class, or age, either due to pressure within or outside of school (Mayo, 2017). Nonetheless, the work done by students of all sexual orientations and gender identities or expressions (SOGIE)s in GSAs and their insistence, in rare cases, that LGBTQ+-related organising also includes other aspects of identity or attends to sexism, racism,

and so on, have shown that issues of marginalisation are connected, interlocked, and intersectional (Mayo, 2017).

Since 2005, GSAs have formed in Dutch high schools to provide a safe environment for LGBTQ+ students at school. Although the Netherlands is known for its tolerance of same-sex attraction, LGBTQ+ youth still have a significantly higher risk of experiencing bullying and violence at school, and discrimination and homophobic remarks are frequent (van Beusekom & Kuyper, 2018; Enzerik, Volman, & Bos, 2015; Movisie, 2019; Pizmony-Levy, 2018). This is because heterosexuality is still assumed, expected, and naturalised as the social norm in the Netherlands (van Lisdonk, 2018). Heterosexuality is normalised through a system of power and knowledge called heteronormativity, which does not exist as a discrete and easily identifiable body of thought, rules, and regulations, but is instead encompassed of the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality coherent and privileged (van Lisdonk, 2018; Sullivan, 2003). Two principles characterise the heteronormative conceptualisation of sexual orientation (SO). Firstly, SO and gender are considered closely interrelated (van Lisdonk, 2018). Consequently, the stereotypes of gay men and lesbian women are based on the notion that they do not conform to gender norms; gay men are assumed to be un-masculine and lesbian women are presumed to be unfeminine (van Lisdonk, 2018). Secondly, a person is considered to be either a woman or a man and one is either attracted to the opposite gender, the norm, or the same gender which is considered abnormal (van Lisdonk, 2018). Besides forming rigid conceptualisations of sexuality, these principles also erase the experiences of those who have a different gender identity or expression (GIE) (van Lisdonk, 2018).

This research will inquire into the empowerment that participants experience in these Dutch GSAs by taking an intersectional approach. This approach considers that an individual possesses intersecting identities which influence their experiences of marginalisation and empowerment. The research will, however, also recognise that participants might also adhere to a dominant affiliation by studying the social identities that the youth themselves ascribe to and the intergroup dynamics these identities create. In doing so, it hopes to gain more insight into the empowerment experienced within the GSA, while also distilling indicators on how this process is influenced by the different, sometimes intersecting, social identities that the participants adopt. As such, this research envisions to enlarge scientific understanding on empowerment by problematising the assumption of homogenous group identities that still happens too often in empowerment theory and provide directions on how empowerment is influenced by the different social identities of participants. Furthermore, this research has a

social purpose, as it expects that such an enhanced understanding of empowerment will enable practitioners, organisations, and facilitating teachers to devise strategies to enhance the empowerment that participants experience within the GSA.

To do so, the main research question of the current study is: “what do the different social identities of the participants mean for the empowerment process within the GSA?”. There is evidence to assume that GSAs are empowering to their members, as they provide them with empowerment opportunities (Mayberry, 2012; Russell et al., 2009). However, little of the empowerment research that has been conducted was sensitive to the fact that the GSA is also a space of dilemmas. Furthermore, these studies either only interviewed GSA leaders, as in the case of the study of Russell and colleagues (2009), or had a small sample size of GSAs and GSA participants, as in the case of Mayberry (2012). Hence, more information is needed on how all participants, those with and without leadership positions, experience empowerment before the main research question can adequately be answered. Therefore, the first sub-question of this research will be “how do the participants experience empowerment within the GSA?”. The second sub-question, “How do the intergroup dynamics within the GSA influence the empowerment that participants experience?” will use the concept of intergroup dynamics, the dynamics between different social groups, to study the various social identities that the youth ascribe to and how these identities influence empowerment.

This thesis report will start by an overview of the theoretical framework in which the current research is situated. Subsequently, the methodological considerations and methods of the research will be discussed in chapter three. In chapter four, an analysis of the empowerment that participants experienced in the GSA is given and will be discussed. Chapter five will answer and discuss the second sub-question by focussing on the different social identities adopted and the intergroup dynamics which are created by them. Lastly, chapter six will contain an overall conclusion which will answer the main research question and discuss limitations.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

The current chapter will discuss the theoretical framework in which the research is situated by examining the theory and previous research on empowerment, intergroup dynamics, and allyship. This framework guides the research by providing a structure for analysing the research data. It will furthermore provide a conceptual framework for understanding the research findings. Each concept is introduced with an exploration of its conceptualisation within the research. After this examination, the concept is applied to what is already known about the GSA and the participants' experience. As such, an overview of the theoretical framework will be given.

2.1 Empowerment: a multidimensional concept

In this research, empowerment is defined as a multidimensional and interdependent transformative process whereby people are enabled to organise themselves to increase their self-reliance and to participate meaningfully in shaping their own futures (Pettit, 2012; Rowlands, 1995). This means that empowerment is about bringing people into formal or intangible social, economic, or political decision-making processes (Rowlands, 1995). Empowerment is experienced on three levels, namely personal, close relationships, and collective empowerment (Rowlands, 1995). Personal empowerment is perceived as developing a sense of self, individual confidence, individual capacities, and undoing the effects of internalised oppression (Rowlands, 1995). Close relationships empowerment relates to developing the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of relationships and the decisions made within them (Rowlands, 1995). In collective empowerment, individuals work together to achieve a more extensive impact than each could have had alone, including involvement in political structures and collective action (Rowlands, 1995).

Empowerment furthermore operates in three different domains, namely the social, the political, and the economical (Pettit, 2012; Rowlands, 1995). As this study is focused on high school students, only social and political empowerment will be examined. Social empowerment is about changing society as such that the marginalised are respected and recognised on their own terms (Pettit, 2012). Political empowerment relates to bringing people who were outside decision-making processes into those very processes by creating access to political structures and formal decision-making proceedings (Rowlands, 1995). This means equity of representation in formal and informal political institutions and an enhanced voice for those who

are the least vocal, for the marginalised to engage in making the decisions that affect their lives and the lives of others like them (Pettit, 2012).

The conceptualisation of empowerment just reviewed is based on the empowerment of marginalised adults. Youth empowerment differentiates from adult empowerment in its perspective on power. The sharing of power between youth and adults has a central position within youth empowerment (Úcar Martínez, Jiménez-Morales, Soler Masó, & Trilla Bernet, 2016). According to DiBenedetto (1991), who studied youth empowerment, the emotional nurturance and intellectual challenge conducive to youth empowerment, should be set in a context of shared power with an adult leader (DiBenedetto, 1991). Critical youth empowerment theory also states that equitable power sharing between youth and adults is of high importance (Jennings, Parra-Medina, Messias, & McLoughlin, 2008). When adults with more power, such as teachers, join the GSA as coordinators or facilitators, they generally tend to take over, rather than to encourage the youth to do it themselves (DiBenedetto, 1991). To enable empowerment, all stakeholders in an initiative should however be engaged in the process of clarifying the intentions of the initiative (Pettit, 2012). Hence, it is important to note how these adults share power with the youth. Anything more authoritarian than the role of helper or facilitator becomes problematic, as empowerment cannot be effective when the methodology is top-down or encourages dependency (Pettit, 2012; Rowlands, 1995; Sardenberg, 2007).

The GSA as empowerment context

Multiple studies have shown that GSAs are contexts where participants can experience empowerment (Mayberry, 2012; Russell et al., 2009). Participants report higher levels of self-esteem and feel they can be themselves in the GSA (Mayberry, 2012; Russell et al., 2009), which are indicators of personal empowerment. GSA participants also develop confidence and the feeling that they could make a difference through engaging in actions within and outside of school to improve the school environment (Mayberry, 2012; Russell et al., 2009; van der Velden, 2011). However, some straight participants, especially male allies, obtain a negative reputation at school by participating in the GSA, as the GSA is seen as a “gay club” (van der Velden, 2011). This might decrease their self-esteem and confidence, which could lead them to experience less personal empowerment.

An important aspect of personal empowerment is the recognition of power relations by the marginalised through consciousness-raising (Sardenberg, 2007). Consciousness-raising starts with creating a separate time and space for the marginalised to re-examine their lives collectively and critically, develop a new consciousness, undo themselves of negative social

constructions, organise, and act for change (Sardenberg, 2007). The research of DiBenedetto (1991) shows that this safe space is essential for the empowerment of youth, as the feeling of being appreciated by facilitators and other participants is a significant factor in enhancing their self-esteem. Most participants in Mayberry's (2012) study stated that GSAs created safe spaces where daily challenges could be discussed (Mayberry, 2012). As such, it seems that GSAs can provide a space for the marginalised to develop critical consciousness.

An essential part of critical consciousness is critical reflection: a social analysis and moral rejection of societal inequities, such as social, economic, racial, age, and gender inequalities that constrain well-being and human agency (Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011). Those who have developed a critical reflection, view societal problems and inequalities in systemic terms, instead of individual (Watts et al., 2011). In the study conducted by Russell and colleagues (2009), participants experienced empowerment through having and using knowledge. GSA leaders gained knowledge about their situation and rights by participating in their GSAs (Russell et al., 2009). This knowledge can be interpreted as a form of critical consciousness, as students learned about their own rights and gained knowledge about their situation, which was used for advocacy. GSA members are furthermore aware of their social environment and the system of heteronormativity, which indicates a form of critical reflection (Mayberry, 2012).

There is also some evidence that GSA participants experience close relationship empowerment, as according to Russell and colleagues (2009), participants felt they had a voice and were listened to by their peers. LGBTQ+ youth also stated they learned the skills to react to negative reactions connected to them being LGBTQ+ (Mayberry, 2012). GSAs, thereby, helped LGBTQ+ youths in providing them with comfort, courage, and confidence to initiate friendships and romantic relationships (McCormick, Schmidt, & Clifton, 2015). The relations they formed in the GSA helped them to understand intimacy and friendship better, which helped them realise that some of their previous relations were unhealthy or harmful. Participants then felt encouraged to terminate those relationships (McCormick et al., 2015). Hence, the GSA supports youth in negotiating relationships. Many youths, thereby, stated that their GSA involvement helped them in coming out to their family members, influencing their relations with their parents and family members (McCormick et al., 2015). Hence, GSA members, especially LGBTQ+ members, were able to negotiate and influence the relations with their peers, which is conducive to close relationships empowerment.

Many of the participants who Russell and colleagues (2009) interviewed, focused in their discussions on themselves as individuals and their relationships, rather than on the larger

community. Russell and collages (2009) hypothesised that this could point towards a limitation for adolescents to pursue sexual justice through collective means, which could be due to less accessibility of these types of resources for youth. Still GSA participants felt that they were part of a broader community and they made some efforts to develop relationships between their GSA and the community (Mayberry, 2012; Russell et al., 2009). However, according to Mayberry (2012), GSAs were limited in their ability to influence school policy and practice, and there was no evidence of coalition-building activities within the school community. Furthermore, GSA participants were restricted in their efforts to bring about structural change in their high school due to a fear of parental resistance (Mayberry, 2012). Hence, one can conclude that even though members of GSAs might experience collective empowerment, it is limited.

There is also evidence that the empowerment that youth experience in the GSA takes place on the social and political domain (Pettit, 2012; Rowlands, 1995). GSAs are increasingly orienting their missions towards disrupting heteronormative society (Mayberry, 2012). Many youths also felt that they could speak out against anti-gay sentiments and behaviours within their high school, which empowered them socially (Mayberry, 2012; Russell et al., 2009). Another indicator of social empowerment was the emphasis that GSA participants placed on a sense of empowerment experienced by exceeding expectations for young people (Russell et al., 2009). By changing society's expectation of their capability, participants felt empowered (Russell et al., 2009). Nonetheless, GSAs are commonly regarded as "gay clubs" by non-members, which could create a stigma and marginalise GSA participants (Herdt, Russell, Sweat, & Marzullo, 2006). This stigma and marginalisation might lead to a decrease in social empowerment.

In terms of political empowerment, it seems that GSAs are not often involved in formal political structures. Mayberry (2012), for instance, concluded that there was no evidence of GSAs being involved in school or state-level decision-making. The decision-making within GSAs could, however, provide opportunities for political empowerment. Previous research, for instance, identified that GSAs could encourage leadership qualities through providing participants with opportunities to develop different initiatives within schools or communities (Griffin et al., as cited in Poteat, Sinclair, DiGiovanni, Koenig & Russell, 2012). In this manner, the GSA might provide political opportunities which may otherwise be unavailable to the participants.

2.2 Intergroup dynamics

The different intersecting identities of the participants and their effects on empowerment will be studied through the concept of social identities and the intergroup dynamics that these social identities create. According to social psychology, a social group is conceptualised as a collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category, have some emotional involvement in this common definition of themselves, and have achieved a degree of social consensus about how they consider their group and membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social groups provide their members with an identification of themselves in social terms called a social categorisation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These social categorisations are cognitive tools that segment, classify, and order the social environment and enable people to act (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The identity that individuals adopt consists of those aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories of the groups to which they belong (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This research has an intersectional approach, in that it recognises that participants might ascribe to a multiplicity of social identities making up an intersecting identity. The research, however, also recognises that participants might adhere to a single dominant affiliation based on a specific social identity, for instance, their SOGIE.

Social identity theory predicts that the mere perception of belonging to two distinct social groups triggers a cooperative orientation towards ingroup members, those who belong to the same group, and competition between ingroup and outgroup members, those who are perceived not to be part of the same group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This kind of negative intergroup dynamics, which also includes prejudice, bias, and discrimination, is related to how the similarity and dissimilarity between the groups are evaluated by their members (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). Negative intergroup dynamics, for instance, occur when differences of the outgroup are regarded as a challenge to the validity of the group's norms and values in such a way that it is perceived necessary to evaluate and treat the outgroup negatively (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). However, these negative intergroup dynamics might also be established due to a lack of difference between the groups, which motivates differentiation and differential treatment in favour of one's ingroup (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999).

According to social identity theory, positive intergroup dynamics develop in two situations (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). Firstly, differences between the groups can be perceived as insurmountable and hence social identity descriptions are not regarded to be shared between the groups (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). Then the outgroup would be considered an incomparable outgroup and as such non-threatening. Secondly, both groups could ascribe to a superordinate identity. This is an inclusive category or shared identity

between the different groups, such as youth, Dutch or high schoolers, which is presented in such a vague and complex way that different groups are considered to belong to this category (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). This would cause the outgroup to be considered an ingroup based on this superordinate identity, causing members of both groups to be likely to cooperate. The political solidarity model of social change, furthermore, theorises that a superordinate identity is paramount for a privileged group's willingness to actively challenge authority in solidarity with a marginalised group (Subašić, Reynolds, & Turner, 2008). Through a psychological change through communication or interaction, to name a few examples, the majority assumes a shared group membership with the minority based on a superordinate identity (Subašić et al., 2008). Then, subgroup differences between the majority and minority become less critical, as they are regarded in the context of this superordinate identity that is built on shared norms, values, and beliefs (Subašić et al., 2008). Political solidarity will be more likely the more the minority is perceived as sharing a superordinate identity with the majority (Subašić et al., 2008).

The intergroup dynamics within the GSA

GSA's are often spaces of dilemma (Mayo, 2017). On the one hand, they can bring students from different social groups together. They can, on the other hand, remain highly separated, as youth still choose a dominant affiliation with a particular social identity group, for instance, their gender, education level or their SOGIE (Mayo, 2017). If participants choose such a social identity and perceive others as belonging to a different group, social identity theory predicts that a cooperative orientation towards ingroup members is triggered, while negative intergroup dynamics are established between the two groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For instance, a negative intergroup dynamic might be established between straight students and LGBTQ+ students, when participants from both groups choose their SOGIE as a dominant affiliation. Levesque (2019), for instance, noted that straight students who identify as women rarely sat together with Lesbian, Bisexual and Queer students who identify as women during GSA meetings, forming two groups based on their SOGIE. LGBTQ+ students might also be focused on finding people like themselves, which could lead to a cooperative attitude towards other LGBTQ+ students and hostility towards straight students. Straight GSA members are furthermore labelled as "gay" by their peers because of their participation within the GSA. This might lead them to emphasise their heterosexuality, perform stereotypical gender norms or by "othering" LGBTQ+ participants (Levesque, 2019; van der Velden, 2011). As such, they highlight their belonging to a different group, which, according to social identity theory, might

trigger competition between them and members of the LGBTQ+ group. This furthermore reconfirms gender norms and heteronormativity as such.

Nonetheless, many GSAs feel that the participation of straight students has an added value (van der Velden, 2011). According to Mayo (2017), those participants who have already adopted multiple affiliations with different groups and regard their identities as complex can bridge groups, for instance, through asserting that their identity is complex and as such communicating that it is possible to have commitments to different groups (Mayo, 2017). GSAs could, furthermore, be important places for the creation of a superordinate identity. GSAs can create unity as they provide a context and space from where participants can advocate for a common goal. Furthermore, as heteronormativity affects all youth, and as anyone can become engaged in the GSA to alter it, heteronormativity as the subject of activism could unify students across SOGIEs (Herdt et al., 2006). This might lead youth to adopt a superordinate identity based on their experiences of being young, being an advocate or heteronormativity. If this is the case, social identity theory hypothesises, there will be potential for cooperation and empowerment (Drury & Reicher, 1999).

2.3 Allyship

Students might adopt a dominant affiliation based on their SOGIE, creating the existence of a social group of straight students within the GSA. These straight students could have an ally role in working against heteronormativity or working for the acceptance of LGBTQ+ youth. Allies are defined as individuals who strive to end oppression through supporting and advocating on behalf of the oppressed (Salter & Migliaccio, 2019). Allyship is characterised by a continuous, reflective practice of proactively interrogating privilege from an intersectional framework (Erskine & Bilimoria, 2019; Salter & Migliaccio). This reflection should be based on a structural analysis of oppression and privilege (Carlson, Leek, Casey, Tolman, & Allen, 2019). An ally should amplify the voices of marginalised people without taking over, listen actively, and educate oneself and others (Carlson et al., 2019). It is a process that involves an active, lifelong and consistent practice of unlearning and re-evaluating beliefs and actions, working in solidarity with marginalised individuals or groups, and building relationships as a privileged group member in support of a marginalised group. In this way, allies leverage their position of power and privilege to interrupt the status quo (Carlson et al., 2019; Erskine & Bilimoria, 2019). Allies will make mistakes, so welcoming criticism and being accountable are furthermore important qualities (Carlson et al., 2019).

Ally activism for LGBTQ+ individuals can be considered as happening on a scale where one end represents ally behaviour that tends to reinforce existing power structures and the other end ally behaviour which is apt to challenge existing power dynamics (Russell & Bohan, 2016). The first type of ally activism is grounded in a motivation based on relationships with LGBTQ+ individuals. Their efforts are unlikely to be directed towards profound structural change, as allies tend to focus on providing nurturing or protection to LGBTQ+ individuals in the face of violations. By providing this, allies gain an elevated standing without learning ways to reflect on their own privilege, power dynamics or sexual inequalities (Levesque, 2019; Russell & Bohan, 2016). Hence, their actions are unlikely to empower LGBTQ+ individuals and might preserve disempowering structures. The second type of activism is motivated by values and principles, such as justice, civil rights, and moral or religious ideas to which allies want to live up to (Russell & Bohan, 2016). These allies tend to perform their activism because they see sexual prejudice and heteronormativity as a violation of universal principles of justice. They are more likely to ponder about systemic change in hierarchies of power and privilege and undoing existing structures (Russell & Bohan, 2016). This type of ally might enable the empowerment of LGBTQ+ youth.

Allyship in the GSA

Many straight participants join the GSA to stop bullying or because they feel that it is vital that people can be themselves (Enzerik et al., 2015), which indicate motives that ground the second type of allyship for LGBTQ+ individuals. Nonetheless, the GSA does not always offer allies opportunities to examine their privilege, as homosexuality and coming out are discussed within GSAs, but heterosexuality and heteronormativity are less talked about (Levesque, 2019; van der Velden, 2011). Straight participants are thereby allowed unconditional access to GSA meetings and are often acknowledged for their support without being asked to reflect on their privilege (Levesque, 2019). Lapointe (2014) also pointed out that straight participants wish to demonstrate their allyship by occupying visible roles in the events organised by GSAs, which suggests a tendency of straight students to take over, instead of amplifying LGBTQ+ voices. Members of GSAs furthermore see themselves mostly as a support group which stands up for the interests of LGBTQ+ youth and provide the participants with a community (van der Velden, 2011). This suggests that straight members participating in GSAs are likely to perpetuate existing power relations, instead of questioning them.

Hence, Carlson and colleagues (2019) questioned whether structures of privilege can be subverted by allies and whether solidarity across identity is even possible. For example,

playing a straight ally role can bolster the status of straight students who identify as women, since it is a way to embody feminine qualities, such as caring and nurturance, and would reward them for acting in accordance with gender norms (Herdt et al., 2006). However, allies are not always merely supporters of LGBTQ+ others. Social oppression based on gender norms affects all youth and can supply a way to unify GSA members across SOGIE and enable solidarity across identity (Herdt et al., 2006).

Chapter 3: Methods

3.1 Methodological approach

This research follows the methodology of a case study on the one hand, and the methodologies of phenomenology and narrative inquiry on the other. Case studies are defined as the intensive study of a relatively bounded phenomenon, where the aim is to elucidate features of a larger class of similar phenomena (Gerring, 2004). The empowerment process within a specific GSA is a relatively bounded phenomenon, and thus, the methodology of a case study was chosen. Case studies furthermore allow for the use of multiple methodologies and strategies (Yin, 2003), enabling the research to adopt a phenomenological and narrative approach as well. The research has a multiple case study design, as numerous GSAs were selected to be analysed in depth. However, due to the corona crisis, high schools were closed for half of the data collection period (Rijksoverheid, 2020). Therefore, sometimes only one respondent from a GSA was willing to do an interview, which made it challenging to analyse the GSAs in depth. As such, instead of regarding the GSA as a case study, the experienced empowerment of its participants and the intergroup dynamics they experience was studied in depth. These experiences are less bounded phenomena, however through focusing only on these experiences in the context of the GSA and by being reflective of how other phenomena shape these experiences outside of the GSA, it is believed that the methodology of a multiple case study design still applies.

The other chosen methodology, phenomenology, emphasises the lived experiences of participants and their interpretations to explain a certain phenomenon (Zipf, 2016). Phenomenology combines well with empowerment theory, as it accords priority to the experiences of the participants within the empowerment process (Pettit, 2012; Sardenberg, 2007). Furthermore, the different research questions can only be answered through examining the experiences and perspectives of the participants of the GSA. The study, however, ascribes to a soft interpretation of phenomenology. A phenomenological methodology, namely, stipulates refraining from beliefs and assumptions about the phenomenon under study and being led by the experiences collected (Zipf, 2016). However, as the current study is guided in its analysis of the experiences of participants by a theoretical framework, the study can only ascribe to a soft interpretation of the methodology of phenomenology.

This phenomenological approach of the research is apparent in the adoption of narrative inquiry as methodology and method. Narrative inquiry inquires systematically into the experiences of people and the stories that they create to understand and interpret those experiences (Clandinin, Caine, Lessard, & Huber, 2016; Josselson, 2011). Narrative inquiry

presumes the importance of the ordinary that frequently goes unnoticed (Kim, 2016). It enables the study of complex and abstract concepts, such as empowerment and intergroup dynamics, through the stories of the participants. Narration or the telling of stories is a significant way in which people make sense of their experiences (Kim, 2016). The themes under study, empowerment and intergroup dynamics, become apparent in the everyday school life of the participants, which might make it difficult for them to be aware of them and able to talk about them. Narration can be used to inquire into the ordinary aspects of a person's life, as stories are important vehicles of sense-making (Kim, 2016; Wengraf, 2001). The stories of their life can be used to discover aspects that might be connected to empowerment and intergroup dynamics, while using a medium that makes sense to the participants, namely their own stories. It is easier to tell a story than to collect your day-to-day activities in a detailed manner.

3.2 Methods & data collection

As the data for this research was collected during the corona pandemic, two stages can be discerned within the data collection process. In the first stage, the researcher was still able to travel, and high schools were still open. This period lasted until the 15th of March (Rijksoverheid, 2020), after which all high schools were closed, and civilians were advised to take social distancing measures into account. In this period, the researcher had selected 7 GSAs that were within a perimeter of 2.5 hours from Wageningen. The website of COC, a civil society organisation which facilitates the GSAs nationally, registered all schools with a GSA and was used for this selection. The researcher sent a message to the school board asking for permission to conduct the research, which was usually forwarded to the coordinators of the GSA, who could then agree to the research. Eventually, two GSAs decided to participate in the research. One of them was located at the old high school of the researcher and had been selected as the researcher assumed they would be willing to participate in the study.

In the second stage, the corona measures advised to reduce personal contact and to only use public transport when necessary. This made it impossible to meet participants face-to-face and as such online and telephone interviews were conducted with the participants. The researcher expected schools to be less willing to participate in the study, due to the uncertainty and the rapid changes that the pandemic brought. Therefore, she first approached COC to help her contact GSA participants who would be willing to participate in the research. COC posted the call on their social media platforms and asked around, after which two participants, namely respondent 3.1 and 4.1, agreed to the study. Meanwhile, the researcher also continued to approach high schools. As the barrier of travel time was lifted, she could contact high schools

that were located all over the Netherlands. Again, she used the COC website and randomly selected and approached 63 more high schools. Five schools and GSAs agreed to partake in the study. In total, 42 GSA participants and facilitators were invited for an interview. Of this number, 24 people decided to do the interview. Finally, 22 participants from ten different GSAs and two facilitators have partaken in the research. Four of them were interviewed in person, ten were interviewed by phone, and ten by skype. Unfortunately, during one phone interview, the recording device did not work. As that day, three more people were interviewed, the researcher did not have enough time to make notes from memory. Hence, this interview was not included in data analysis.

Narrative interviews were conducted with every respondent. In narrative interviews, the interviewee is considered the narrator whose stories are accorded a central stage, while the interviewer takes the role of an attentive listener (Kim, 2016). The narrative interviews were based on two broad topics, namely empowerment, operationalised as stories on how the GSA has helped participants, and intergroup dynamics, operationalised as stories on being together with people with the same or a different identity, what happened during those events, and whether this contributed or limited the experienced empowerment. Participants were also asked to reflect on the different groups within their GSA and how those acted towards each other.

For each narrative interview, the researcher used a list with single questions which were designed to elicit full narratives about the topic under discussion. In each narrative, there was a narration phase and afterwards, a conversation phase (Kim, 2016; Wengraf, 2001). During the narration phase, the researcher restricted her interventions and questions to a minimum while the respondent narrated. Once the respondent was done with their narration, a conversation phase was entered where the researcher asked follow-up questions or probed (Kim, 2016). Nonetheless, especially in the case of the intergroup dynamics, this format did not provide enough data. Hence, after five interviews the researcher started to ask the students to compare their GSA with two theoretical GSAs, namely one with only LGBTQ+ participants and one with only straight students¹, and to name the differences, benefits, and challenges they expected from each.

Through the methods that have been selected for this research, it will be difficult to study the intergroup dynamics, as the collected data is mediated by the participants' experience of these dynamics. Furthermore, as the research is not an experiment, the researcher cannot say for sure that the intergroup dynamics influenced the empowerment that the participants

¹ In case their GSA only had LGBTQ+ students, the participant was asked to compare their GSA with a GSA with only straight students and a GSA with a mix of straight and LGBTQ+ students.

experienced. As such, this research will be an explorative research and only indicators on how intergroup dynamics could influence empowerment will be analysed.

3.3 Ethical considerations

The principles of self-determination and autonomy state that each participant should be given sufficient opportunity to understand the nature, purpose, and anticipated consequences of their participation for them to give informed consent to participating in the study (Farmer & Lundy, 2016; Nationaal Ethiek Overleg Sociale & Gedragwetenschappen, 2018). To protect this right, participants received an informed consent form at the beginning of each interview (see appendix 1). In the case of in-person interviews, the participants first received an oral explanation after which they were asked to read the form and sign it. Due to the nature of the online and telephone interviews, the researcher sent the informed consent form a few days before the interview for participants to read and sign. Only after the researcher had received the signed informed consent form would she proceed with the interview. During each interview, the researcher inquired at the start whether the respondents understood the information given in the informed consent form and whether they had any questions.

According to the principle of beneficence, research participants should, when possible, benefit from the research, while no harm should be afflicted (Mustanski, 2011). The primary risks for adolescent participation in research based on interviews are disclosure of sensitive information to others and possible distress evoked by certain interview questions (Mustanski, 2011). To limit distress, participants were told during the interview and in the informed consent form that they could choose not to answer specific questions. They were furthermore informed that they could stop the interview at any time. Their privacy and confidentiality were protected by using a number system to ensure anonymity throughout data collection, analysis, and report. Subsequently, the research will not disclose the names of the schools or their location to protect the respondents further. The narrative aspect of the research, however, raises another concern about confidentiality, as stories are collected, individuals might become identifiable (Kim, 2016). As the researcher herself is an outsider within the school, she might not always be able to decide whether the reported data could lead to identification. Hence, every respondent was asked permission in the informed consent form to be contacted before the hand-in-date of the thesis report for them to check their quotes and grant the researcher permission for the use of their quotes in the final product.

Almost half of the respondents were LGBTQ+ students, which brought the additional risk of unwanted disclosure of their SOGIE to others, especially parental figures (Mustanski,

2011). Research that is conducted in the Netherlands among adolescents before they are 16 years old requires parental approval, while between the ages of 16 and 18, researchers are advised to inform the parents (Nationaal Ethiek Overleg Sociale & Gedragwetenschappen, 2018). However, according to Kuyper (2015), only 66% to 70% of the LGBTQ+ youth are out to their parents. In this situation, asking parents for permission to interview their children could unintentionally out them. This would impose a high risk on the participants, as parents might react negatively to their child's SOGIE, which can have negative effects, such as family rejection, homelessness or even suicide (Mustanski, 2011).

Therefore, the researcher had reached a conundrum, as she expected that there would be a selection bias if she would ask parents directly. Namely, those who are not out to their parents might choose not to participate in the research when parental approval is required. However, they might also have a lower personal empowerment, and as such, the fact that they do not participate in the research might influence the research findings. Still, the researcher was also reflective that indirectly asking parental approval could be a high burden to the school and teachers during the corona pandemic. Furthermore, the schools or facilitators will be better able to make an informed decision about the risks of requesting parental approval and how many students in the GSA were out. Hence, the researcher decided to let the schools or facilitators choose which method of parental approval they preferred, namely, indirect or direct parental approval. Through the indirect method, parental approval was acquired by sending all parents and guardians a notice detailing that there would be a study conducted at the school about the effects of the GSA. Those who did not want to give permission for their children to be a part of the study were invited to contact the researcher stating this decision (see appendix 2). As such, the participants would then not be outed to their parents, as all parents and guardians received this message, while parents were still informed and could give their permission or abstain from doing so.

In schools who chose a direct form of parental approval, the GSA facilitator would first ask participants if they wanted to be a part of the study with the caveat that their parents would be informed. The researcher then received the mail addresses from those who chose to participate. She thereupon messaged the participants asking them to give their parents the parental permission form (see appendix 3). After receiving this form from either the parents or the participant, the researcher would contact the participant again to agree on an interview date. Except for one, GSA 2, all schools, GSAs, or facilitators chose this method. Hence, it is expected that this research has a selection bias, as it is unlikely that those who are not out to their parents were interviewed. As it can be assumed that those students who are not out to their

parents are likely to experience less empowerment, it is expected that the research overestimates the empowerment participants can generally experience in the GSA.

3.4 Data analysis

The analysis of narrative inquiries knows two types, namely the analysis of narratives and narrative analysis (Kim, 2016). This research adopts the method of the analysis of narratives, which attempts to fit the individual details of the different stories told by participants into larger patterns (Kim, 2016). The collected data was examined with a focus on common themes. Firstly, the concepts from the theoretical framework were applied to the data by deductive analysis. These findings were combined with inductive coding, allowing new meaningful results and findings to emerge from the data (Kim, 2016). After these themes were established, the researcher analysed them to discover patterns. In the following chapters, the results of this analysis will be presented, following the general outline of the different research questions. In each section, verbatim quotes from the interviews will be used, which will be presented in the language the interviewee used, namely Dutch, to do the stories and respondents justice without the barrier of translation. In appendix 4, one can find the translation of the quotes. This method of presentation has been chosen to enable a diverse range of readers to understand the research while ensuring the readability of the research report.

Chapter 4: The empowerment process in the GSA

This chapter will discuss how the GSA participants experienced empowerment within the GSA. The empowerment concept used in this research is a multidimensional and interdependent transformative process whereby the participants can organise themselves to increase their self-reliance and to participate meaningfully in shaping their own futures (Pettit, 2012; Rowlands, 1995). The concept divides empowerment into three levels, personal, close relationship, and collective empowerment. Personal empowerment deals with a participant's development of a sense of self which undoes the effects of internalised oppressions. It furthermore explores the individual capacities and critical consciousness that they develop to organise themselves. Close relationship empowerment examines the development of the ability to influence and negotiate the nature of relationships and the decisions that are made within them. Through collective empowerment, participants work together with others to achieve a collective impact (Rowlands, 1995). These levels of empowerment happen in two domains, namely social and political empowerment. Social empowerment revolves around changing society for individuals to be respected and recognised on their own terms (Pettit, 2012). Political empowerment is about the process through which people who are outside decision-making processes are brought into them by creating access to political structures, and formal and informal decision-making processes (Rowlands, 1995).

By analysing this process of empowerment from different angles in a systematic manner new aspects of the empowerment that participants experienced in the GSA were discovered, namely participants' mental health and their discussions about this, the specific use of the safe space created by the GSA, how coalition-building is used by participants to influence school policy, the possibility of collective empowerment under certain conditions, and specific barriers to empowerment. This chapter will furthermore lay a foundation from which the main research question and the second sub-question can be answered. Namely, to adequately answer what social identities mean to a particular process, one first needs to characterise this process. Indicators on how the intergroup dynamics created by the participants' social identities influence the experienced empowerment can thereby only be found by examining the experienced empowerment of participants.

The chapter will first discuss the findings for the three different empowerment levels. Subsequently, it will discuss the results that were found for the two empowerment domains. Afterwards, a discussion will be given on youth empowerment, which examines the strategies that the adult facilitators use and the way power is shared between teachers and youth. The

section will then delve into the barriers to empowerment that were identified by the GSA participants. To conclude the chapter, a discussion of the findings will be presented in which the new insights discovered by this research will be further analysed.

4.1 Personal Empowerment

Development of self

Part of personal empowerment is developing a sense of self (Rowlands, 1995). LGBTQ+ participants were able to develop such a sense of self, as they encountered diverse SOGIEs within the GSA.

“Eh bij ons wel, op school, er zijn echt leerlingen bijvoorbeeld die, eh ja, bijvoorbeeld leerlingen die aseksueel waren en die nog niet helemaal begrepen wat het was en er online over hadden gelezen, nou die kwamen toen bij ons, en ja en zij, ze kwamen er ook echt achter dat ze aseksueel waren. En het was niet voor ons om er dan een label aan te plakken, maar wel voor die leerlingen een vorm van duidelijkheid, nou ja dat is meerdere keren gebeurd.” (Respondent 4.1, LGBTQ+, interview 30.03.20).

Participants came across these diverse SOGIEs in the coming out stories that others shared or through the information sessions and presentations that some of them hosted for their GSA. One participant also noted that the very existence of a GSA at their high school was a motivator for them to accept their GIE. This helped them in coming out, enabling their development of self and self-confidence.

“[...] en toen had ik zoiets van ‘you know fuck it, kom er gewoon voor uit en probeer mensen een beetje te helpen’. Dus toen ben ik erbij gegaan.” (Respondent 9.3, non-binary, interview 19.04.20).

Straight participants also reflected on their SOGIE due to the environment that was created in the GSA. This enabled them to establish their sense of self further, as some participants became strengthened in their straight identity, while others noted that they accepted that they simply did not precisely know their SOGIE.

“[...] maar wel dat ik, voordat ik naar de GSA kwam, eigenlijk dacht van ik ben hetero en toen ik erbij kwam toen begon ik wel na te denken ‘uhm vind ik meisjes leuk, vind ik jongens leuk en ben ik überhaupt al verliefd geweest?’, enzo, en ik denk nu dat ik het weet, maar ik weet het nu niet zeker en eigenlijk boeit het me ook niet dat ik het al weet want ja.” (Participant 7.5, straight, interview 18.04.2020).

According to Mayberry (2012) and Russell and colleagues (2009), participants felt they could be themselves in the GSA and as such experienced heightened levels of self-esteem. This was reflected in the current research by almost all interviewed participants observing that they felt that they could be themselves in the GSA. This feeling of being able to be oneself was

established, as participants felt that other participants shared their experiences or that they were understood and accepted.

“Eh ja ik heb er zeker wat aan, elke, het voelt gewoon als een veilige plek waar je totaal jezelf kan zijn [...] het is toch fijn om hoe gek of anders je ook bent, dan wordt er echt niks over gezegd of geen opmerkingen en we hebben het altijd heel gezellig met elkaar. Ja.” (Respondent 7.3, interview 13.04.20).

Some participants also noted that this feeling also raised their self-esteem and self-acceptance, which is likely to contribute to their development of self. As one participant observed:

“Uhm ja ik weet het niet echt precies, maar ik denk dat uhm, dat zeg maar uhm, dat het laat zien dat het niet uitmaakt met wie je omgaat, dat je altijd gewoon jezelf moet zijn. En dan komt het altijd wel goed.” (Respondent 7.1, straight, interview 08.04.20).

This self-esteem was also nurtured through the support they received from other members when they had problems or went through difficult experiences. Another way in which participants' self-confidence was developed, was by practicing or gaining skills through participating in the activities that were organised. Through their participation, they became more comfortable with using those skills, which could enable them to feel self-confident in situations where they would need to use the same skill set. As one respondent noted:

“Ja de eerste paar keer is het een beetje eng, maar daarna kun je dat gewoon heel goed uitleggen en sta je er echt en ben je ook niet heel erg onzeker, terwijl normaal gesproken bij presentaties of mondelingen sloeg ik altijd helemaal dicht, ging ik stotteren en gehuil en weet ik veel allemaal. Dat is daardoor wel minder geworden heb ik gemerkt.” (Respondent 4.1, LGBTQ+, interview 30.03.2020).

This development of self-confidence, especially the self-confidence of LGBTQ+ participants, seemed to be influenced by the school environment. Mayberry (2012) and Russell and colleagues (2009) found that participants' self-confidence was enlarged as participants felt they could make a difference, which enabled their self-confidence. In this research, however, participants gained more self-esteem, as they felt more accepted within their school through the activities that the GSA organised, such as Paarse Vrijdag (PV), Purple Friday. This also made them feel safe enough to be themselves.

“En toen heb ik volgens mij meegeholpen met Paarse Vrijdag eerst en toen was het zo van 'oh nou dit gaat best wel, ja dit lukt nog wel'. 'Het gaat goed ook bij hen'.” (Respondent 2.2, transgender & pansexual, interview 17.03.2020).

Many participants, however, also received negative remarks about their SOGIE or their participation in the GSA, which could lower their self-esteem. Still, the GSA is also a space where participants can learn to deal with those negative reactions.

“Het is denk ik echt wel een soort van platform om elkaar te kunnen helpen met problemen. [...] Beetje dealen met homofobie enzo eigenlijk, dus dat is wel [...].” (Respondent 1.3, gay, interview 13.02.2020).

Still, due to the reputation of the GSA, which is considered a gay club by fellow students, participants needed to have a certain level of self-esteem to join the GSA and not be deterred by its reputation. Hence, before participants can benefit from the effects of the GSA, they already need a certain level of self-esteem and personal empowerment, which was also found by van der Velden (2011).

Another factor that influences the personal empowerment that participants experience, and which is closely related to the development of a sense of self, is their mental health. This factor was noted by almost all participants, as they recounted their encounters with other members who were dealing with mental health issues or their own issues. Participants tried to support those members who struggled by giving advice, by lending a sympathetic ear or giving them support.

“Uhm ik denk het wel ja, want er zijn ook wel wat mensen die eh op mentaal vlak niet altijd helemaal stabiel zijn, uhm en wij proberen ook gewoon zo veel mogelijk elkaar te supporten en elkaar steun te bieden waar dat kan.” (Respondent 7.4, straight, interview 14.04.20).

However, not all participants had the same response to these mental health problems. For instance, in one GSA, participants struggled with providing a place to talk about mental health, which eventually led to tensions.

“Nou ja er zijn natuurlijk wel discussies geweest. Er is een hele grote discussie geweest rondom mentale gezondheid of we het daarover kunnen hebben, want een groot deel van onze GSA die uhm was wel redelijk depressief kan ik wel zeggen. Uhm en er waren best wel grote discussies ontstaan over in hoe mate, in welke mate we het hier over kunnen hebben, want uhm ik ben daar best wel wat makkelijker in, dus ik address die grote dingen wat makkelijker, maar andere mensen ervaren het als zeer onprettig, eh als we het over suicidaliteit hadden of over iets anders, dus daar was wel een hele grote discussie over ontstaan van uhm waar heb je het wel met elkaar over en waar niet. En uhm die openheid in hoeverre is dat zo.” (Respondent 2.3, straight, interview 18.03.20).

A few participants felt that they were too busy with planning awareness-raising activities to provide a space to discuss mental health, while others had not realised that the GSA could be used as such. In one GSA, the facilitator stimulated participants to address mental health issues. As a result, participants learned more about mental health in general and gained more knowledge on how to support other participants with issues relating to mental health.

“Ja alle, er zijn ook niet echt taboes ofzo, dus je kan het overal over hebben. Uhm meestal wordt dat wel een beetje geleid dan door B. [begeleider] die dan zegt van 'ja er was laatst een meisje bij mij, zelfmoord gepleegd, in mijn dorp' en dan gaat ie het daar een beetje over hebben en dan vertellen wij onze verhalen. En dan heb je toch weer iets geleerd, maar

dan worden, het wordt niet heel zwaar ofzo.” (Respondent 7.5, straight, interview 18.04.20).

Individual capacities

Gaining individual capacities is another substantial aspect of personal development (Rowlands, 1995). By participating in the activities of the GSA, participants learned skills such as planning, organising and interpersonal skills. Participants also indicated that because of explaining the GSA, its activities, or their own sexuality, they gained more experience with presenting their ideas within a conversation or presentation.

“En ik merk ook dat sinds ik bij de GSA zit dat ik er makkelijker over kan praten, over mijn seksualiteit, dat ik eh het beter uit kan leggen.” (Respondent 3.1, asexual, 30.03.20).

Other participants noted they learned how to collaborate with others and how to be a leader.

“Uhm samenwerken denk ik, ik ben niet supergoed in samenwerken, dat weet ik, ik ben nooit goed geweest in samenwerken, maar daardoor is het wel beter geworden denk ik. En eh ja communicatie in het algemeen denk ik ook. En eh ja ik weet het niet, ja misschien leidinggeven, dat dat er eentje is. Ja ik weet niet voor de rest eh. Ja voor de klas kunnen staan zonder dicht te slaan.” (Respondent 4.1, LGBTQ+, interview 30.03.2020).

Participants also acquired more information about the different identities within the LGBTQ+ community and as such, were able to understand each other better.

“Eh ja verder, vaardigheid, ook gewoon dat ik andere mensen heb leren begrijpen, want ik was best wel sceptisch over uhm bijvoorbeeld dat soort mensen die nou ik vind het, ik weet niet of ik heel gemeen maak [...]. Uhm ja gewoon mensen die bijvoorbeeld transgender zijn en dan best wel eh ja, die dan, bijvoorbeeld een man die dan een vrouw wil zijn en dan verder niks nog heeft eh gedaan, maar dan bijvoorbeeld wel een pruik draagt, ik kan dat niet heel goed begrijpen, maar dat, waarom je zo iets zou doen, want ik denk dan alleen maar van 'oh dan ga je heel veel meningen over je krijgen, omdat het er zo apart uitziet', maar ja omdat we dat gesprek ook hebben geopend, natuurlijk met die mensen, daar leer je ook van, want dan heb je ook natuurlijk ook soort vaardigheden om mensen beter te begrijpen of andersom mensen beter te begrijpen.” (Respondent 2.3, straight, interview 18.03.20).

Another skill that participants mastered within the GSA, was reacting to homophobic remarks connected to their SOGIE or the reputation of the GSA. These skills will likely enhance participants' self-reliance, and enable them to work for social, political and community empowerment. What kind of skills participants develop, however, depends on the type of tasks or roles participants take on within the GSA. As such, each participant probably experiences the development of individual capacities differently.

Consciousness-raising in the GSA

Almost all participants noted that they felt safe within the GSA, as has been indicated by Mayberry (2012). The GSA creates a safe space for consciousness-raising, which starts with creating a space and time for the marginalised to critically re-examine their lives together

(Sardenberg, 2007), as participants noted that they felt safe enough to discuss their daily challenges with other GSA participants.

“[...] en dan merk ik ook dat mensen blij zijn dat het GSA er is om even over dingen te kunnen praten die mensen uit de GSA wel begrijpen, maar andere vrienden niet.” (Respondent 3.1, asexual, interview 30.03.20).

Next to a safe space, consciousness-raising also entails that people who are marginalised develop a critical consciousness, by recognising their situation and how this relates to their marginalisation within society (Sardenberg, 2007). Participants noted that they were able to learn about the experiences of their peers through the daily challenges shared by them.

“Eh ja over seksualiteit en eh of genderidentiteit, zulke dingen over ja, over vervelende eh ja een moment dat je gediscrimineerd werd, je bent vanwege je genderidentiteit of je seksuele identiteit en ja het zijn wel dingen waar je met je vrienden over kan praten, maar het meeste hebben ze natuurlijk niet meegemaakt, kunnen ze niet zeggen hoe het, hoe het voor hen opgelost is. En zij hebben, de meesten hebben daar wel meegemaakt of die weten wel een goede oplossing hierover omdat ze iemand kennen die dit heeft meegemaakt.” (Respondent 7.2, transgender, interview 09.04.20).

The sharing of these challenges furthermore enabled self-development, as participants learned more about different SOGIEs and mental health issues. Participants could also recognise themselves in the stories of others, allowing them to not feel alone and learn from one another.

“Maar eh ja er zijn dan ook een paar bi's en zo dus die herkennen wel van 'owh ja dat', dat soort dingen. Bijvoorbeeld dat een paar meiden die bi zijn laatst een discussie van 'eh ja ik krijg altijd alleen maar jongens, maar ik heb nooit een meisje dat mij leuk vindt' of zo, weet je wel, en dat is soort van, daar herkennen ze elkaar dan in, dat is dan wel grappig en fijn voor hen.” (Respondent 1.1, transgender, interview 11.02.20).

Importantly, many participants stated that effectively understanding these stories required a certain experience which was connected to a certain SOGIE.

“Maar als je bijvoorbeeld praat over eh de problemen waar je tegenaan loopt dan kan het wel uitmaken dat mensen natuurlijk niet eh dezelfde ervaring hebben als eh je hebt wanneer je wel LGBTQ+ bent.” (Respondent 9.3, non-binary, interview 19.04.20).

Some GSA facilitators also stimulated these discussions by creating a space for them within GSA meetings, by asking students to prepare something or by stimulating group discussions about specific challenges. In this manner, some participants learned more about mental health, society, heteronormativity, and sexism, becoming aware of their social environment.

“[...] en soms zegt meneer H. [begeleider] dat die iets hoorde van een andere leerling die waarbij het dus mentaal heel slecht ging en dat, dan delen we onze zelf, eigen verhaal met mensen om ons, onze omgeving of wat we zelf hebben meegemaakt op dat gebied en dan praten we daar gewoon over.” (Respondent 7.3, interview 13.04.20).

Participants, however, mostly engaged in sharing their daily challenges and stories to gather support from others within the GSA.

“Dan ging ik gewoon naar een specifiek iemand toe van 'ja dit is weer gebeurd' en dan kreeg ik een positieve peptalk waarvan ik zat van 'okay ja dat was best wel weer fijn om te horen eigenlijk'. [...] Eh dat waren de mensen waarbij ik wist dat ik het kwijt kon.” (Respondent 2.2, transgender & pansexual, interview 17.03.20).

This support, together with the safe space that the GSA provided, can enable participants to undo themselves of negative social conceptions (Sardenberg, 2007). Some participants thereby observed that they gained more insight in how they related to others. For instance, as daily challenges were shared within the GSA, some participants gained more knowledge about the experiences of others. Others learned more about how they related to others through the information sessions that they hosted, where they were confronted with students who had different opinions or students whose religion did not accept the LGBTQ+ community.

“En eh je leert gewoon ook gewoon meer over mensen zeg maar over hoe ze, sommige mensen denken over bepaalde dingen en dat is wel leuk. Ja.” (Respondent 7.3, interview 13.04.20).

Through this, some participants were able to reflect on their position in society and in which ways they had certain advantages.

“En persoonlijk, kijk ik heb niet zeg maar het ergste, want ik heb ook gewoon met mannen enzo en ik heb lang haar, ik zie er gewoon redelijk vrouwelijk uit, dat vind ik leuk om mij zeg maar typisch als een vrouw te kleden, gewoon stereotypisch, maar er zijn ook andere mensen die het dan gewoon nog erg heb, dan denk ik van ja, als ik het gezeik al krijg, [...] Hoe is het dan voor die anderen [...] Gewoon meer zo van of van die personen die dan thuis als pot worden aangezien, want die willen dragen wat ze leuk vinden, dat ik denk van ... [maakt hand gebaar] (Respondent 1.2, bisexual, interview 11.02.20).

In this manner, the GSA provided a platform for some participants to reflect on their social position. As such, the GSA seems to contain all the conditions that are necessary for raising critical consciousness. However, critical reflection, resulting from an analysis of the structural causes that underpin daily challenges, disparities, and advantages (Watts et al., 2011), was lacking as participants seemed to focus on explanations based on themselves and their relations instead of explanations of structural causes. For instance, participants did not note that the challenges they shared or heard were connected to power relations, and heteronormativity and heterosexuality were not often discussed. Instead, participants are using the safe space to gather support and share their experiences. As such, it seems that the undoing of negative social conceptions, gaining self-esteem, and developing a sense of self in the process is a more significant effect of the safe space created in the GSA than critical consciousness-raising.

4.2 Close relationship empowerment

Close relationship empowerment is the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of relationships and the decisions that are taken within them (Rowlands, 1995). According to McCormick and colleagues (2015), GSAs can provide LGBTQ+ youth with comfort, courage, and confidence to initiate new friendships and romantic relationships and to terminate those relations that are harmful. Many participants stated that they had made new friends through the GSA. They, nonetheless, did not observe the effect of developing an ability to negotiate friendships and relationships as stipulated by McCormick and colleagues (2015). Still, as already mentioned in the section on personal empowerment, participants also gained and developed interpersonal skills, such as communicative skills and presentation skills, which can stimulate close relationship empowerment. The GSA also enabled participants to react to negative remarks about them being LGBTQ+ or the negative reputation of the GSA. For instance, participants can share their experiences with negative comments and give each other advice on how to deal with them. According to some participants, they were better able to stand up for themselves when they received negative remarks.

“[...] toen was het uiteindelijk gewoon dat ik heel veel tijd met eh nou eigenlijk het GSA groepje ging doorbrengen en dan gewoon was het zo van 'ja maar ik doe het gewoon en ik heb daar geen last van dat mensen daar wat van zeggen, omdat ik zelfverzekerd zeg dat ik dit ben en dit zo doe'. Dat is uiteindelijk iets wat ik heb overgenomen van ze en eh ja ik doe nu ook gewoon mezelf zijn. Fack wat anderen denken.” (Respondent 2.2, transgender & pansexual, interview 17.03.20).

As such, the GSA is a context where participants can develop close relationship empowerment, as they practice the skills necessary to influence their relationships and gain skills to react to negative remarks within those relationships.

Members of the GSA furthermore support LGBTQ+ participants in their coming out to family, friends, and fellow students, which fosters their ability to negotiate their relationships with those people. This is on the one hand because participants give each other support in coming out to their family, for instance, by sharing their coming out stories with other participants and giving each other advice when family or friends do not react well.

“Het is denk ik echt wel een soort van platform om elkaar te kunnen helpen met problemen. [...] Beetje dealen met homofobie enzo eigenlijk, dus dat is wel [...].” (Respondent 1.3, gay, interview 13.02.20).

On the other hand, the higher self-esteem that participants gain within the GSA might enable them to come out to family, friends, and fellow students. As one participant observed:

“Uhm misschien wel dat ik, met de GSA's overkoepelende organisatie wel, dat steeds meer mensen uit de kast komen op jongere leeftijd omdat ze niet meer bang zijn.” (Respondent 6.1, bisexual, interview 08.04.20).

This enables them to negotiate and influence their relations with others from a stronger position created by their higher self-esteem.

4.3 Collective empowerment

Building relationships within the school community

In collective empowerment, participants work together with others to enable collective change (Rowlands, 1995). An important aspect of collective empowerment is building relationships with others that are not part of the GSA to create a coalition of people that want to have the same type of change. These relationships can, for instance, be built within the school community, such as with teachers, the school board, or other school clubs (Mayberry, 2012). Some participants noted that there were no other student clubs at their schools with whom they could connect based on their goals.

“Eh we hadden de, we hebben natuurlijk een feestcommissie enzo, en de examencommissie, maar dat, en een leerlingenraad, maar die werkten niet echt samen. Eh omdat die leerlingenraad echt ook eh hun eigen doelen had en niet echt te combineren viel. Die leerlingenraad was bijvoorbeeld meer voor eh nou er moet een klok in die klas, in alle klassen komen, maar niet eh voor dingen organiseren. Daar waren wij echt voor of een examencommissie met een examenstunt.” (Respondent 4.1, LGBTQ+, interview 30.03.20).

Some participants, especially those who were from GSAs that were still quite new, noted that they were still planning to build relationships with other school clubs. At one school, the GSA collaborated with another school club in organising their activities, as the GSA facilitator was also the facilitator for this club.

“Ja meestal de, de, de school, de, in onze school hebben we een feestgroep die dan feesten organiseert, en die helpen eigenlijk bijna altijd bij dit, bij het organiseren van de GSA, eh de Paarse Vrijdag dag. Dus daar, die helpen dan mee met de boxen enzo en de muziek [...] Omdat B. [begeleider] daar ook begeleider is.” (Respondent 7.2, transgender, interview 09.04.20).

In some GSAs, teachers or school board members could also get to know the GSA participants by joining a meeting, to support them or to ask them for advice on, for instance, sexual education. Whether teachers joined, seemed to be based on their own initiative.

“Ja nou ja een collega van mij komt regelmatig en die is ook gewoon getrouwd met een man en die vindt het gewoon fijn om nou ja, net zoals ik, steun te geven aan leerlingen die het moeilijk hebben met dit onderwerp. Nou prima.” (Respondent 1.4, facilitator, straight, interview 10.03.20).

Besides this type of contact with the school community, many participants noted that their GSA had specific contacts within the administrative team or contacts with individual teachers to be able to arrange their activities.

“Maar ook met mevrouw H. bijvoorbeeld van communicatie enzo kunnen we best wel gewoon even langs, ook met dat krantenbericht van F. heeft dat ook heel erg geholpen hoor.” (Respondent 1.3, gay, interview 13.02.20).

According to Mayberry (2012), there was no evidence of building coalitions within the school community. However, although this research found that it differed among the GSAs how many contacts they had with other school groups, clubs, and teachers, some GSAs did engage in coalition-building activities.

Although participants had some connection with their school community, many participants also observed that they had little knowledge about their school board, which made it difficult to establish relations with them.

“Nou, ik weet eerlijk gezegd niet wie de schoolleiding is.” (Respondent 7.1, straight, interview 08.04.20).

Some participants, however, stated that they did have some contact with their school board but that this was generally based on asking for a budget or permission for their activities.

“Eh ja we moeten natuurlijk wel aan de schoolleiding vragen van eh of het mag wat we gaan doen en we hebben ons budget is, maar ja meestal doet B. [begeleider] dat gewoon.” (Respondent 7.2, transgender, interview 09.04.20).

This type of contact made it difficult to discuss policy or other changes within the school, and to work collectively for social change at school. Still, some participants did get the opportunity to address educational and policy changes with their school board and were, partly through these kinds of conversations and their own activities, able to change school policy.

“Oh absoluut ja. Uhm we hadden een, een jongetje dat, het uhm vreemd lag en dat wilde een meisje worden uhm eh toen hebben we ook op school gevraagd, want hij wilde graag anders heten, of zij moet ik zeggen wilde anders heten en uhm eigenlijk iedereen noemde in principe haar al zo, en toen hebben we met school overlegd of het misschien die naamsverandering kan, doorgevoerd kon worden in magister. Uhm en dat hebben, is uiteindelijk ook gelukt en uhm dat heeft een nieuwe schoolpas gekregen en uhm dat is [een] andere naam vooral.” (Respondent 2.1, straight, interview 17.03.2020).

As such, it seems that the GSA is a space form where participants can connect to the broader school community. When participants connect with a school club, teacher, or school board, this is mostly to help them in the organisation of activities, and less to work together to influence school policy. Nonetheless, there were some instances where participants used their relationships with the school board to work for change within the school.

Building relationships with the larger community

Another way to work for collective empowerment is by developing relationships with those outside the school community, such as with the larger LGBTQ+ community. Some LGBTQ+ participants noted that the GSA and their activities made them feel part of a larger community, as they were able to gain LGBTQ+ contacts outside of the school.

“Eh en toen heb ik daar, daar heb ik aan mee gedaan en ja daardoor ook mensen ontmoet die eh ook bij de community horen dus ja door die GSA kun je veel meer mensen te leren kennen en je gaat overal heen, dat is wel leuk.” (Respondent 4.1, LGBTQ+, interview 30.03.20).

LGBTQ+ youth have noted that this identification with the LGBTQ+ community is of high importance to them (Wagaman, 2016) and LGBTQ+ youth have also identified such a connection in previous research (Mayberry, 2012; Russell et al., 2009). Still, most participants who felt part of the larger LGBTQ+ community had connected with this community on their own initiative and less through the work of the GSA. Furthermore, many of the traditional spaces of the LGBTQ+ community, such as gay bars, are still difficult to access for youth, which made it difficult for LGBTQ+ participants to connect to the LGBTQ+ community, as one participant observed:

“[...] maar aan de andere kant doe ik er nog niet zo heel veel mee, want kijk weet je, ik kan nog geen gay bar in [...] Daar ben ik te jong voor, dat vind ik echt zo jammer ook trouwens. Dan denk ik van ‘man je kan ook gewoon, je komt er gewoon nergens in’.” (Respondent 1.2, bisexual, interview 11.02.20).

Many of the participants stated that their GSA had some sort of contact with other GSAs in their city or region.

“Hmm een tijdje terug hadden we wel contact opgenomen met de GSA van die [school die] hiernaast zit, [andere school] Uhm er is volgens mij een appgroep gemaakt waarin mensen, wij dan, met z'n allen zitten.” (Respondent 1.1, transgender, interview 11.02.20).

These contacts were established by participants who already knew members from other GSAs, through group meetings or events. Participants used these types of connections to share experiences and learn from one another, but not to organise collective events.

“Ze [GSA andere school] hebben wel, we hebben wel met elkaar gepraat over Paarse Vrijdag enzo en hoe hun het dan zouden doen enzo, dus dat was wel fijn. Want je weet ook wel een beetje van andere GSAs dan hoe hun het doen.” (Respondent 1.3, gay, interview 13.02.20).

Sometimes, participants from different GSAs were connected by another organisation, namely the PVK foundation. This is a foundation that tries to destigmatise SOGIE diversity, through creating awareness and addressing homophobia, while supporting LGBTQ+ students by connecting them with other LGBTQ+ students and sharing their stories (Stichting PVK, n.d).

One way in which they achieve this is by organising GSA gatherings where GSA participants or other LGBTQ+ students can meet each other and support one another.

“Ja zeker eh we zijn een keer naar [stad] geweest. Daar hebben we een film gekeken en eh zijn met eh allemaal GSAs van daar want daar was het nog helemaal, daar wilden ze het op gang laten komen, maar daar was het nog niet alles helemaal rond en dan hebben we ook met de mensen uit [stad] gesproken van 'nou zo doen wij het' en eh dat vond ik heel leuk.” (Respondent 7.4, straight, interview 14.04.20).

Furthermore, the PVK also connected GSA participants with other organisations to organise events within the region, such as a city Pride.

“[...] laatste keer hadden we iemand die ging [stad] Pride organiseren geloof ik en die gaat dan een beetje uitleggen en die gaat dat een beetje vragen 'we hebben nog een paar mensen nodig die dit en dit willen doen en we dachten misschien is dat wel leuk om iemand uit de GSA te hebben' en dan zeggen een paar mensen van 'owh dat lijkt me wel leuk' ofzo.” (Respondent 7.5, straight, interview 18.04.20).

The participants from GSAs that were not in contact with this foundation had little contact with other LGBTQ+ organisations within their community, city, or region.

“Ja verder als je connecties hebt met iets van een andere GSA of LHBTI dan is dat vanuit jezelf en niet voor de GSA.” (Respondent 2.2, transgender & pansexual, interview 17.03.20).

Most participants also noted that their group did not have any contact with COC apart from requesting their PV package. None had gone to the GSA specific days organised by COC. Those GSAs which had not been in contact with the PVK foundation were also less likely to engage in collective actions outside of school. This is mostly a result of participants being focused on their school environment.

“We hebben daar buiten school niet echt een rol in, maar wat we zouden kunnen doen is gewoon proberen uhm samen te werken met andere groepen die ongeveer dezelfde visie hebben voor [stad] en dan eh soort van info dingen gaan doen. Maar ik weet niet echt of dat een heel goed idee is, want dan eh stel je jezelf natuurlijk ook echt open voor eh laten we zeggen negatieve aandacht.” (Respondent 9.3, non-binary, interview 19.04.20).

In this observation, one can also read that some participants are afraid of a negative backlash from the community. The participants in Mayberry's (2012) study stated that they were fearful of parental resistance, which restricted them in bringing structural change to their schools. In the current research, it seems that participants are not so much afraid of resistance from parents at the school but are mindful of backlash from the community. One respondent also observed that the GSA might have difficulty in changing their community and reaching collective empowerment, as the participants themselves might still lack the capacities that are needed for this.

“Het is niet dat ik, eh de GSA ze doen bloed goede dingen, maar ze zijn nog niet zo ver in zich van ‘hey we kunnen een hele gemeenschap ondersteboven zetten’ dat is met de mankracht, de mensen die we nu hebben niet mogelijk, simpelweg omdat de meesten die we nu mee hebben nog niet capabel genoeg zijn om zulke situaties echt te handelen, hoe volwassen ze zich ook gedragen, qua mentaliteit en stabiliteit hebben we die mensen niet.” (Respondent 6.1, bisexual, interview 08.04.20).

In conclusion, it seems that, as Russell and colleagues (2009) suggested, adolescents still experience limitations in pursuing sexual justice through collective means. Sometimes participants were able to establish relations within their school community and contacts with other GSAs, but these relations do not yet lead to collective empowerment. Most participants had, furthermore, little contact with other organisations and did not engage in collective actions. Those participants that did, had been actively supported by another organisation, namely the PVK foundation. Hence, participants need to be supported more in establishing coalitions within their school and to be supported by outside organisations for community change.

4.4 Social empowerment

Social empowerment through school-based actions

By organising school-based actions, participants can work for social change and empowerment. As most of these actions are organised to promote acceptance for the LGBTQ+ community, the social empowerment that is established mainly focused on changing the heteronormative society for different SOGIEs instead of changing expectations about young people. According to Mayberry (2012), GSAs were increasingly orienting their missions towards the disruption of the heteronormative society. However, the GSAs in this research profoundly differed in how involved they were in organising actions for awareness-raising and social change within their school. Participants from one GSA noted that they were not very active in organising activities, while another participant stated that the goal of her GSA was to have at least one action per month. The incidence of activities of other GSA were somewhere in between these two examples.

All participants, nonetheless, noted that their GSA had organised some sort of PV action, which is a day where high schoolers are stimulated to wear purple to show that they accept the LGBTQ+ community (GSA Netwerk, n.d.). Nevertheless, it differed per GSA how big this event was. GSAs varied in how many of their peers and teachers, participants were able to stimulate to engage in the PV. This seemed to be connected to how long the GSA had existed and how active they had been before organising the PV, as one participant observed:

“Maar het is dus, [we] zijn echt heel erg gegroeid en we blijven groeien en eh we pakken ook steeds Paarse Vrijdag, pakken we bijna elk jaar steeds groter aan en meer bewustheid creëren bij de leerlingen, dus.” (Respondent 7.3, interview 13.04.20).

Some participants observed that their school had become more accepting of LGBTQ+ people after their actions, in effect, creating social empowerment.

“Nou na die grote Paarse Vrijdag actie die we dan twee jaar terug, weet ik veel, toen hadden gedaan, toen waren er heel veel leerlingen denk ik die er ook over gesproken hebben met elkaar en ik denk dat dat gesprek het er wel voor heeft gezorgd dat heel veel mensen er minder afkeer tegen hebben. Kijk als er een leerling uhm door een thuissituatie ja een soort afkeer ertegen heeft en die door andere leerlingen aangesproken wordt van 'ja die mensen kunnen er niks aan doen, die zijn nou eenmaal zo geboren' dan denkt die andere waarschijnlijk ook van 'ja het is gewoon normaal, alleen bij mij thuis is het niet normaal'.” (Respondent 4.1, LGBTQ+, interview 30.03.20).

A few participants also observed that fellow students started showing their acceptance more, while other participants got invited to join their school's open day. Some participants were also able to disrupt the heteronormativity present in their school community by calling on their school to adopt gender-neutral toilets and changing rooms.

“Ja want uhm we hadden zeg maar van die gender neutrale wc-stickers die hadden, konden we bestellen via een pakket, maar van meneer de V. [de conrector] mochten we die niet op de toiletten doen, maar dat hebben we toch gedaan [grinnikt]. Omdat wij gewoon vonden: 'het moet een keer gebeuren, dus dan doen we dit gewoon'. En volgens mij zijn er ook daadwerkelijk jongens, we hebben twee meisjes-wc's en een jongens-wc, dus volgens mij zijn er ook daadwerkelijk jongens naar die wc gegaan.” (Respondent 8.1, straight, interview 12.04.20).

However, participants sometimes observed that their fellow members were still hesitant to organise actions that would disrupt the heteronormative society too much, as they were afraid to be considered “gay”.

“En dat verschil op een gegeven moment heb je dan dus wel zo'n mini discussie van 'hoe opvallend het moet zijn'. Want ja ik zit zo van hang lekker die vlag op, wat maakt het uit en dan zitten ze zo van 'ja, maar dat is dan weer dat we heel erg gay lijken als GSA zijnde en dat willen we dus juist niet uitstralen' en dan zit ik zo van 'ja maar het is ook wel weer Paarse Vrijdag'.” (Respondent 2.2, transgender & pansexual, interview 17.03.20).

This fear of being considered gay, also affected LGBTQ+ participants who were not yet out to their fellow classmates. Due to the GSA's reputation of being a gay club, those who are not yet out do not want to participate in the GSA's actions recognisably. As such, the negative reputation of the GSA or the fear thereof reduces the social empowerment that participants experience. This is because actions are less effective, as not all participants want to be a part of them, since they are afraid of being outed.

“Maar het is soms ook wel een beetje jammer want je kan niet altijd een goed gezicht geven omdat gewoon sommige mensen die willen gewoon niet gezien worden, gewoon alleen

omdat zeg maar de cultuur nog niet helemaal volledig geaccepteerd is.” (Respondent 1.2, bisexual, interview 11.02.20).

Van der Velden (2011) also noted this negative reputation but stated that this reputation would likely have adverse effects only for the straight participants. This research, however, shows that LGBTQ+ participants might also be affected, especially those who are not yet out, and that it can lower the social empowerment that they can experience.

Information sessions

Another way in which participants tried to change their school was by hosting information sessions. In general, participants were either already hosting such information sessions or were planning to host them next year. These information sessions provided their fellow students with information about diverse SOGIEs, helped raise awareness about the position of LGBTQ+ people within the school and Dutch society and promoted acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community.

“Uhm nou we willen gewoon dat, dat de mensen op deze school, gewoon allemaal veilig zijn eigenlijk. Dat ze zich niet schamen of bang zijn voor hoe ze zich voelen. En als je er een les in geeft dan kan je eigenlijk aan, aantonen wat, wat iemand fout, eh dwars zou kunnen zitten. (Respondent 7.1, straight, interview 08.04.20).

As such, these information sessions helped to socially empower LGBTQ+ participants, as they had the opportunity to provide information about the LGBTQ+ community on their own terms (Rowlands, 1995). Consequently, they were also able to promote the recognition of LGBTQ+ people among their fellow students (Rowlands, 1995). Through participating within or hosting information sessions, members of the GSA also learned more about themselves, different SOGIEs and the LGBTQ+ community in general, enhancing their individual capacities and development of self.

“Eh ja want toen ik de eerste paar voorlichtingen heb ik niet heel veel gepraat omdat het mijn eerste paar voorlichtingen waren en ik wilde ook zelf een beetje kijken van hoe werkt dat nou precies. En toen heb ik ook zelf van die presentatie uhm wat dingen geleerd die ik zelf ook niet helemaal precies wist en dat is dan fijn.” (Respondent 7.4, straight, interview 14.04.20).

By hosting these kinds of information sessions, participants provided information about the LGBTQ+ community that was not yet included in the school curriculum. This also enabled them to indirectly call on their school to provide students with adequate information about the LGBTQ+ community, subsequently disrupting the heteronormativity still present in the educational material.

“Uhm het doel wat wij nu eigenlijk eh voor ogen hebben is dat we, ze bij biologielessen, ze meer aandacht besteden aan eh LGBT+ issues en ook eventueel uhm een zeg maar eh les

tijdens de projectweek hebben die daar gewoon over gaat.” (Respondent 9.3, non-binary, interview 19.04.20).

Standing up against homophobic or transphobic sentiments at school

Participants can also disrupt heteronormativity by standing up against homophobic or transphobic sentiments or behaviours. Participants can learn the skills necessary to do so within the GSA meetings or can receive support from other participants to make them feel comfortable in speaking out. Some of the participants stated that they spoke out against these kinds of sentiments, but that they did mostly within their friend groups or one-on-one.

“Ja nou ik heb, ik heb vooral in mijn vriendengroep dat ik gewoon iemand, dat die echt een hele, ik ben vergeten wat voor opmerking die maakte, maar het was ongelooflijk transfobisch en ik was zo van ‘dat gaan we dus niet doen he [...] Er zitten hier dus gewoon mensen die hebben, die hebben daar problemen mee en dan ga je zo tegenover ze doen, dat vinden we niet kunnen’.” (Respondent 1.2, bisexual, interview 11.02.20).

Some participants, noted that because they knew the experiences and stories of other participants, they had more information and knowledge, which enabled them to speak up when they heard homophobic or transphobic remarks, as exemplified above. According to Russell and colleagues (2009), GSA participants also experienced a sense of empowerment as having and using knowledge. This research shows how knowledge about the experience of others enabled participants to work for social empowerment. Although participants did not directly link this to empowerment, it likely enables them to work for the acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals within the school or society, enhancing social empowerment. Speaking up in friend groups or one-on-one also relates to close relationship empowerment, as participants negotiate their relationships by speaking out against transphobic or homophobic sentiments.

Many participants, however, also stated that they still had difficulties in speaking out against this type of sentiment.

“Nou ja ik vind het nog steeds eh wel lastig om daar wat aan de ene kant wanneer je iets hoort wil je er wat van zeggen, maar aan de andere kant denk je van 'maar wat, hoe moet ik hier op reageren?' dus ik ben daar nog steeds een beetje zoekende in.” (Respondent 7.4, straight, interview 14.04.20).

Furthermore, some participants also noted that by hosting information sessions, they would be able to provide information about the effect of these kinds of remarks. Once their fellow students would know what the result was, participants believed that they would eventually stop making these kinds of remarks.

“Omdat best veel mensen nog niet echt weten wat de GSA is of de LGBTQ+ community weten ze daar niet zo veel van af en we hebben ook best veel mensen die daar gewoon grappen over maken enzo. Dus we wilden graag dat ze misschien wat serieuzer kunnen nemen en kunnen begrijpen wat we eigenlijk willen bereiken.” (Respondent 9.2, straight, interview 13.04.20).

In this manner, they used their knowledge to speak out against transphobic or homophobic sentiments indirectly.

4.5 Political empowerment

Political empowerment within the GSA

Political empowerment relates to bringing people who were outside decision-making processes into those very processes by creating access to political structures and formal decision-making proceedings (Rowlands, 1995). Earlier research has indicated that although participants usually do not have access to formal decision-making processes, participants could learn leadership qualities through organising GSA activities (Griffin et al., as cited Poteat et al., 2012). In the studied GSA, there were usually one or multiple participants who took on a leadership role during meetings or in the organisation of activities. As observed by this participant:

“Maar meestal hebben T. en ik wel een voortrekkende rol, zeg je dat zo? Dus dat is wel fijn.” (Respondent 1.3, gay, interview 13.02.20).

These leaders made sure certain activities were planned and that the meetings were well structured. In these positions, participants gained leadership qualities, communication skills, learned ways in which to organise their group or activities, and got experience with planning.

“Ja nou dat zeker. Ik heb dingen organiseren altijd leuk gevonden, maar als je dan echt voorzitter bent en verantwoordelijk bent, dan leer je toch echt het goed, het organiseren van acties en wat er nou allemaal bij komt kijken en dan ja. Het contact opnemen met mensen, het sociale deel. En het organisatie dat heb ik wel echt heel erg veel van geleerd daar.” (Respondent 3.1, asexual, interview 30.03.20).

Furthermore, those in leadership positions also learned how to take responsibility. Those who did not take on such a role, were sometimes still able to practice these qualities by participating in the brainstorming, devising new ideas or helping organise the different activities.

“En met van die organisatie dag, dagen doe ik wel veel, help ik enzo en dat paarse hartjes ding is begonnen omdat ik een keer paarse eyeliner twee jaar geleden mee naar school had en toen dacht ik van 'hey laat ik op iedereen van de GSA paarse hartjes tekenen' en toen kwamen op een gegeven moment ook andere kinderen kwamen 'mogen wij ook zo'n paars hartje?' en dat is zeg maar, het is wel dat we nu dat elk jaar doen, elke keer.” (Respondent 7.3, interview 13.04.20).

By practicing leadership qualities, the participants could gain skills which could enable them, once they start participating in formal decision-making processes later in life, to do so from a stronger position.

According to Pettit (2012), full political empowerment, however, is only accomplished when the voice of those who are the least vocal is enhanced (Pettit, 2012). A few participants

who had a leadership position stated that they tried to ensure that everyone was able to voice their opinions and pitch ideas.

“Dus meestal ik en mijn vriendin M., mijn beste vriendin, die uhm, wij nemen altijd wel een beetje de leiding op ons gewoon omdat wij, ja wij vinden dat leuk ofzo, wij vinden, wij zijn daar ook goed in, dus dan zeggen we zo van ‘jongen nu stil, dit gaan we bespreken wat vinden jullie ervan?’ en dan gaan we het per persoon langs.” (Respondent 8.1, straight, interview 12.04.20).

However, only some participants reflected on ways to ensure that everyone was able to do so and whether their methods were effective. Furthermore, the two facilitators who were interviewed noted that some participants were structurally less likely to participate within decision-making, as generally within meetings the same people were speaking. These were usually the younger participants or those who are likely to have been the least empowered.

“Eh dat is eh sommige kinderen zijn heel open over hun verhaal hun, hun, wat ze willen vertellen, wat ze hebben meegemaakt en die zijn best wel spraakzaam bij, hé, op dinsdag in, bij mij in het lokaal, bijvoorbeeld als ik kijk gewoon naar degene GSA van het [school] kijk, eh maar er zijn ook leerlingen die eh ja veel stiller zijn die of wel uhm dat vanuit zich zelf of omdat ze een bepaald trauma hebben of omdat ze geleerd hebben dat ze er niet over mogen praten. En eh hun aan het woord laten terwijl, weet je, ook de leerlingen die wel heel veel praten en heel veel te vertellen hebben eh in hun waarde laat, zodat eigenlijk uiteindelijk iedereen zijn verhaal kan doen, dat kan soms best lastig zijn.” (Respondent 7.6, facilitator, straight, interview 27.04.20).

As participating in the GSA is open-ended, not all members are engaged within the brainstorming, organisation, and decision-making. Furthermore, usually, the participants who pitched their ideas were also the ones who would make sure that they were implemented and can then practice and gain new skills. As such, it seems that not all participants experience political empowerment equally and that those who are already more personally empowered are more likely to take on leadership positions and benefit from it.

Participation in policy decision-making processes

Political empowerment is also about participating in formal decision-making (Rowlands, 1995), such as at the school or on the level of municipality. In general, participants were not participating in formal decision-making processes, such as the participation council at school, which had also been observed by Mayberry (2012). One reason for this could be that, as mentioned above, some participants, had difficulty identifying who the gatekeepers were, as they did not know who the school board was or what kind of decisions they made.

“Poeh. Geen idee. Ik zou niet echt weten wat voor besluiten zij moeten maken dan.” (Respondent 1.1, transgender, interview 11.02.20).

A few participants, nevertheless, noted that their GSA was participating in informally influencing policy decision-making at school. For instance, in one GSA, participants were planning to talk with their school board about how school policy could be improved for LGBTQ+ students, and another participant had already had such conversations for his GSA.

“Eh ik denk dat ze zeker wel, omdat ik ook eh, ik merk qua voor de LHBT, om dat duidelijk te maken heb ik meegewerkt met de eh, nou ja, de vertrouwenspersoon, maar ook de school, de directrice ook.” (Respondent 6.1, bisexual, interview 08.04.20).

Other participants stated that they addressed their teachers if they observed that their curriculum did not include the right information about LGBTQ+ people and also invited teachers to come to the GSA if they had questions about the LGBTQ+ community.

“Eh ja soms als we horen dat een docent eh iets heel raars aan het vertellen is ofzo, wat niet klopt, dan als GSA gaan we er wel even naar die docent van ‘misschien kunt u het anders aanpakken?’. En eh andere docenten komen ook wel eens naar ons toe van ik wil graag divers lesgeven, maar hoe doen we, hoe doe ik dat dan precies?’. ” (Respondent 7.3, interview 13.04.20).

According to Mayberry (2012), GSAs were not involved in state-level decision-making processes. Most participants in this research also stated that their GSA was not in contact with the municipality. Only one participant said that her fellow members had had a meeting with their municipality.

“Ik weet niet precies meer hoe dat ging, want ik ging daar niet over, dat waren wat andere mensen die dat gingen doen, maar volgens mij hebben we toen wel gesprekken mee gehad, echt bij de gemeente van ‘oh supercool dat jullie dit doen, hoe wil je dit vormgeven en [wat] willen jullie?’ en volgens mij wilden ze ook echt een dag bij het gemeentehuis organiseren. [...] Uhm ik denk het vooral bijvoorbeeld met die gemeente dat het de gemeente heel veel inzicht heeft gegeven van hoe ze dit moeten organiseren en vooral natuurlijk, ze wilden vooral het perspectief van de jongeren weten. Ik weet niet hoeveel wij eraan hebben gehad, maar het is natuurlijk indirect wel prettig dat we de gemeente hebben kunnen helpen, dus dan hebben wij er ook weer iets aan.” (Respondent 2.3, straight, interview 18.03.20).

Hence, with a few exceptions, participants are not involved in formal policy decision-making processes at their school or municipality. However, some participants were engaged in informally influencing their school board or teachers to make changes to the curriculum or the school climate. It seems that some participants can use their leadership qualities, other skills, and contacts within the school to influence their school even when they are not participating in formal decision-making processes.

4.6 Youth empowerment

Youth empowerment stipulates that the possibility of empowerment depends on how power is shared between the adult facilitator and the participants (DiBenedetto, 1991; Jennings et al.,

2008; Úcar Martínez et al., 2016). Furthermore, an adult coordinator should not take on a role more authoritative than that of a facilitator (Pettit, 2012). It varied between GSAs how power was shared between participants and the facilitating teachers. All participants from one GSA, for instance, noted that they did not have any facilitating teachers but that they could ask questions to two teachers.

“[...] de leraren waren ook wel heel erg van 'ja jullie moeten het gewoon allemaal organiseren, als je hulp nodig hebt, kun je het altijd vragen en er is ook wel een klein budget ervoor dus dat kan je altijd vragen', maar het was wel met de leraren heel erg van 'jullie moeten het vooral gewoon zelf doen, want dat is ook gewoon het leukst voor jullie'.” (Respondent 9.4, LGBTQ+, interview 21.04.20).

Other participants were reflective of the amount of power of their facilitating teachers and wanted to keep this power to a minimum.

“En uhm dat er heel wat leraren ook graag mee willen beslissen in de GSA. Nou kan dat helaas niet want we wilden het wel een soort van de leerlingen, voor de leerlingen idee houden, uhm maar het is heel fijn om te weten dat de docenten heel graag hun steentje bij willen dragen.” (Respondent 2.3, straight, interview 18.03.20).

Nevertheless, in general, power was shared between the facilitator and the participants in the GSA, for instance, during activities or in GSA meetings.

The role that the different facilitators took on also differed across GSAs. Some participants noted that their teacher was only there to maintain order during meetings and address students if they did not do their tasks.

“Uhm nou ja zorgen dat het allemaal geordend blijft een beetje, dat niet iedereen door elkaar gaat schreeuwen bij vergaderingen en dat uhm, en ook dat het realistisch blijft, want we willen graag altijd heel veel en kan het wel?.” (Respondent 3.1, asexual, interview 30.03.20).

This was especially the case in GSAs with a chairperson, board, or leading students. Other participants observed that their facilitator had a more hands-on approach and, for instance, supported them in devising solutions to problems.

“Nee maar we gaan gewoon kijken hoe we kunnen bereiken wat we willen bereiken en eh als het, nou als het niet lukt dan zoeken we een oplossing, maar vaak dan, uiteindelijk met een eh, met mevrouw N. [begeleider] erbij.” (Respondent 2.2, transgender & pansexual, interview 17.03.20).

Another facilitator took on an active part in facilitating a safe space and in the discussions about daily challenges. A few participants also noted that their facilitating teacher supported their actions by signalling LGBTQ+ days, making flyers and buttons or forming the groups for the information sessions.

“[...] want B. [begeleider] maakt altijd gewoon de groepjes aan van eh die samen voorlichting gaan geven.” (Respondent 7.2, transgender, interview 09.04.20).

However, in each GSA, the students themselves eventually decided what happened and whether they would participate in the activities that were being organised, always keeping a certain amount of power.

Mental health was also a theme that facilitators were confronted with. For instance, one participant noted that they had contacted their facilitating teachers to support them in assisting other participants dealing with mental health struggles by referring them to the psychological help at school. This was, because they felt they lacked the skills to support their fellow participants with this adequately.

“En [leerlingen die] toch wel aandacht te kort komen, en eh je merkt toch wel bijvoorbeeld uhm ja daarin vond ik het fijn om toch een link te hebben met een docent die dan gewoon zo'n persoon kan doorsturen naar bijvoorbeeld het zorgteam. Want uhm dat, je bent gewoon, als leerling eh uhm kan je erover praten en dat is op zich ook wel fijn natuurlijk mochten mensen daarover willen praten, maar je kan niet op, eh actie ondernemen of dat dus.” (Respondent 2.1, straight, interview 17.03.20).

It differed per facilitator how they dealt with these kinds of problems. One participant, from the same GSA, noted that her facilitators were afraid that students did not have enough skills to speak about mental health issues.

“Uhm ik denk dat de leerlingen vooral waren van ‘dit is maar een discussie dit gaat wel over. Ik denk dat we er, er uiteindelijk wel weer gewoon uit gaan komen en eigenlijk brengt het alleen maar goede dingen’ en de docenten die waren gewoon heel bang, ook omdat er discussies gingen over mentale gezondheid, die waren gewoon heel bang van ‘oh straks gaat een leerling iets doen of uhm eh gaat, gebeuren der heel erge dingen’, weet je wel.” (Respondent 2.3, straight, interview 18.03.20).

However, in another GSA, the facilitator stimulated discussions and openness about mental health.

“Ja ze praten er ook wel over, maar meestal gaat dat gewoon 1 op 1 met B. [begeleider], want B. die ziet dan bijvoorbeeld dat iemand een beetje down is ofzo en dan gaat hij naar diegene toe en dan gaat die gewoon er mee praten en vraagt ie wat er aan de hand is en dan weet ie gewoon een oplossing te zoeken en soms eh praat die bijvoorbeeld wel met de hele groep over een, bepaalde mentale problemen.” (Respondent 7.2, transgender, interview 09.04.20).

Many participants in this GSA stated that they felt supported by this and that they gained more knowledge about mental health in general. As such, talking about mental health problems can lead to positive results, but as not all participants might feel comfortable enough to support their fellow students with their mental health, these kinds of discussions will need an adult facilitator to guide them.

Generally, the facilitating teacher supported the contact between the participants and the school board, other teachers, or other school clubs when arrangements had to be made for activities. In this way, the adult facilitators gave the GSA access to money and permission.

“[...] en ook gewoon eh lokalen enzo, zo van de, de, de organisatorische dingen op schoolniveau van 'hey jongens is het okay dat deze leerlingen uhm 50 euro besteden aan verf, vlaggetjes en een grote vlag, dat soort dingen, of kerstballen?'. Uhm ja om dat als leerling te doen is een beetje ja [...] dat dat wordt dan minder naar geluisterd.” (Respondent 2.1, straight, interview 17.03.20).

The reason which was given for this division of labour was that other teachers or the school board would more readily listen to a teacher than to students. On the one hand, this means that teachers use their status as teachers to support the participants. On the other hand, this can perpetuate the idea that teachers or school boards do not need to listen to the participants and might cause participants to not be acquainted with what the school board does.

Adequate communication between participants and teachers seems to be an important component of power-sharing. If the facilitating teachers did not effectively communicate with the participants, this could restrict the empowerment the GSA provides. For instance, one participant noted that their teacher had forgotten to inform them about the possibility of hosting an information session. Another participant observed how their teachers had taken over the shopping for PV and changed some of their ideas without communicating this to the participants.

“[...] alleen aangezien de docenten alles zeg maar omdat ze, ik weet niet wat er was maar, zij hebben alles geregeld en het was echt super slecht geregeld, van ten minste, want we wisten niet dat er een smoothie zouden worden gemaakt en terwijl ik en S., dat is een uhm transgender bij mij op school, die eh hij wist dat ook niet en wij zouden koekjes gaan bakken, dus dan werd er allemaal heel veel.” (Respondent 8.1, straight, interview 12.04.20).

Consequently, both activities were less effective and, as such, the communication restricted the social empowerment that could have been established through the activities. Hence, although power seems to be shared between the participants and their facilitator in many GSAs, it depends on the strategies that the adult facilitator uses whether this leads to empowerment. Although many adult facilitators enabled the activities hosted by the participants by, for instance, gaining permission from the school board, this might eventually perpetuate the idea that students are unable to have these kinds of conversations. Still, power-sharing between a facilitator and participants might be necessary for youth empowerment, especially in discussions about mental health, as this can help students to gain individual capacities without becoming overwhelmed.

4.7 Barriers to empowerment

School context

Whether the potential to empowerment is utilised in a GSA partly relies on the context in which it operates. This context can be enabling, but also restricting. For instance, one of the GSAs that was interviewed was established in a Christian region at a school with a reformed and evangelistic Christian identity. At this school, not all teachers accepted the GSA, and some were vocal about this, as one participant observed:

“Ja op school hadden we wel Paarse Vrijdag gedaan. Dus ook een leraar die had een mailtje gestuurd dat die het niet vond kunnen op een Christelijke school. Dus ook dat ik dacht van ‘okay meneer. Gezellig’.” (Respondent 1.2, bisexual, interview 11.02.20).

This restricted the participants’ social empowerment, as teachers opposed the PV. It thereby caused the facilitator to become more mindful of the backlash that the GSA could receive and hesitant in stimulating the GSA participants to be disruptive in their actions.

“Nou dit was, nou ja, je moet eerst even mensen laten bezinken dat we in de krant hebben gestaan en dat een godsdienstleraar zo'n groep heeft” (Respondent 1.4, facilitator, straight, interview 10.03.20).

It also caused tensions between the GSA and those teachers who were vocal about their opposition. Other participants also observed the effect of religion as a barrier to social empowerment.

“Uhm maar aangezien er ook nog veel geloven zijn die eh homo-zijn niet accepteren, en je altijd wel zulke kinderen op een school hebt, is het niet 100 procent mogelijk.” (Respondent 7.3, interview 13.04.20).

The amount of support that the GSA receives from the school board can be another barrier for empowerment. If a school board is unsupportive, it can influence the effect of the GSA’s actions, reducing social empowerment.

“Dat was ja op, om even een school van in [stad] aan te halen, eh er was daar een groep leerlingen die Paarse Vrijdag heeft proberen te organiseren eh, maar waar de conciërge gewoon letterlijk de posters die ze hadden opgehangen had weggehaald en zei van 'nou ja als we hier al posters voor op gaan hangen kunnen we overal posters gaan, voor op gaan hangen' [...] En dat was gewoon vanuit het feit dat ja de schoolleiding zei van 'joh hier hebben we geen behoefte aan' en dat de conciërge zei van 'hier gaan we geen posters voor ophangen, dit is onzin'.” (Respondent 7.6, facilitator, straight, interview 27.04.20).

High turnover problem

Another barrier is the high turnover experienced within the GSA. This turnover seems to be created, as participants can become less interested or notice they do not have enough time. It is also since the members of the GSA will eventually graduate, as the GSA is a high school club.

“Eh alleen het enige waar ik over in zit is natuurlijk degene die het opgericht hebben, tussen haakjes, die gaan volgend jaar van school af. Aan het eind van het jaar. ‘Eh komt er wel een vervolg in?’ [...]. Want nu hebben we een vaste groep van een man of 10, 15. Maar je ook oppassen dat het over twee jaar niet doodgebloed is.” (Respondent 1.4, facilitator, straight, interview 10.03.20).

Participants noticed that when those who had established the GSA had graduated, that the GSA disintegrated. On the one hand, this was because they lost a lot of members, but on the other hand, this was also because people who had joined as their friends were members of the GSA, became less involved once their friends had graduated.

“Uhm nou ja het maakt uit in het opzicht dat, er was iemand die was voorzitter en daardoor waren haar vriendinnen ook heel fanatiek, maar toen zij geen voorzitter meer was, toen waren haar vriendinnen ook minder fanatiek.” (Respondent 3.1, asexual, interview 30.03.20).

In many GSAs, furthermore, the contact with other GSAs was the sole responsibility of one person, which could create difficulties for collective empowerment if this participant would graduate. Some participants had already observed this problem and were trying to reach out to younger members, for them to continue the work of the GSA once they had graduated.

“Want nu merk ik wel dat heel erg de vierdeklassers vooral heel veel dingen doen, omdat we gewoon maar heel weinig onderbouwers hebben, maar als alle vierdeklassers afstuderen dan valt gewoon driekwart van de GSA weg. Dus ja ik wil ook wel voor de mensen die daarna nog er zijn, dat die wel gewoon er mee door kunnen gaan en dat ze wel gewoon zeg maar dat het een beetje loopt soort van.” (Respondent 9.4, LGBTQ+, interview 21.04.20).

However, they noticed that this was difficult as few young students seemed to be interested in the topics of the GSA.

The coronavirus measures

One of the immense barriers that the participants faced was, nevertheless, the social distance measures due to the coronavirus. In the Netherlands, the schools were closed due to the virus from the 15th of March and have only been completely reopened on the 1st of July (Rijksoverheid, 2020). This meant that many participants had to cancel their planned activities.

“Eh nou zeg maar ja dus niet zo veel eigenlijk, aangezien dus met eh we hadden, zouden volgens mij twee dingen zeg maar zouden binnen de GSA, zouden we iets van film kijken en nog een dag, maar dat ging niet door door corona.” (Respondent 10.1, straight, interview 22.04.20).

Furthermore, since the schools were closed, participants were no longer able to meet up for their meetings. As a result, the safe space and the discussions about daily challenges were no longer present. Sometimes, facilitators or other participants tried to create this space within the GSA's WhatsApp group, but they noticed that this was less effective.

“Uhm ja ik denk wel als er wordt gevraagd van eh, laatst ook met nu natuurlijk met de corona crisis dan wordt er ook wel gevraagd van 'hoe gaat het met jullie?' en eh 'hier kan je het ook allemaal in vertellen' en dan zegt iedereen wel van 'ik verveel me wel een beetje of ik doe dit of ik doe dat' en dan is het niet zo per se dat iemand dan opstuurt van 'oh laten we dan een spelletje gaan doen om verveling te verdrijven.” (Respondent 7.5, straight, interview 18.04.20).

These measures also made it impossible to host collective events, such as regional prides, making it challenging to work towards collective empowerment.

“Eh ik was zelf mee bezig met de medeorganisatie van de [stad] Pride. Ja dat gaat helaas niet door want corona.” (Respondent 7.6, facilitator, straight, interview 27.04.20).

Consequently, the social distance measures taken against the coronavirus had a detrimental effect on all forms of empowerment that participants experienced in the GSA.

4.8 Discussion: the empowerment process in the GSA

By adopting a multi-dimensional concept of empowerment with a youth empowerment focus, the current research was able to explore the empowerment that GSA participants experience from different angles in a schematic manner. This chapter has shown that the GSA has an empowering effect, especially when looking at personal empowerment, close relationship, and social empowerment, which confirms earlier findings (Mayberry, 2012; Russell et al., 2009). As indicated by Mayberry (2012), this research discovered that the GSA establishes a safe space, where participants can develop a sense of self by encountering other SOGIEs and gaining self-esteem. Furthermore, participants can obtain support and advice from their fellow members when dealing with daily challenges, negative remarks, and mental health issues. In this space, LGBTQ+ participants moreover received support and help by their coming out to family, friends, and the school, enhancing their close relationship empowerment. This empowerment was further heightened, as participants obtained an ability to react to negative reactions. Those who actively participated in the activities, developed individual capacities through gaining and practising different skills, which was also indicated by van der Velden (2011).

By organising actions, such as the PV and information sessions, within their school, mostly LGBTQ+ participants could experience social empowerment. These actions provided them with the opportunity to promote acceptance, raise awareness, and give information about the LGBTQ+ community on their own terms. Sometimes, participants were also able to disrupt the heteronormative society through their actions. It is, nevertheless, clear that due to the reputation of the GSA, which is considered a “gay club”, participants received a certain stigma and already needed to have a certain level of personal empowerment to join the GSA.

The political and collective empowerment that participants experienced was limited, which had also been indicated by previous research (Mayberry, 2012; Russel et al., 2009). Participants made some efforts to establish relations between themselves and the school community and other GSAs. Although the contacts with other GSAs were created mainly to share experiences and ask for advice, the relations developed with other school clubs were sometimes utilised by the participants for their actions. Some GSAs were also able to develop ties with other LGBTQ+ organisations and participate in collective efforts because another organisation, the PVK foundation, closely supported them. This means that there is potential for collective empowerment, but participants will need to be supported in this by other (adult) organisations to gain access to collective means.

The political empowerment that participants experienced was mainly by informally influencing the school board and teachers in their education and policy decisions, but not through formal political structures. This partly confirms the results from Mayberry (2012), who found no evidence of GSAs being involved in policy decision-making processes. Another indicator of political empowerment was that participants learned individual capacities by taking on leadership positions, which had also been noted by earlier research (Griffin et al., as cited in Poteat et al., 2012). The participants can use these capacities to participate in a stronger position once they enter formal decision-making processes later in life. An important caveat is that this type of political empowerment is reserved for those who take on these positions.

The overall empowerment of the participants depended, furthermore, on the amount of power-sharing between them and the facilitator, and on what kind of strategies the facilitator used. This supports preceding theories and research on youth empowerment (DiBenedetto, 1991; Jennings et al., 2008; Úcar Martínez et al., 2016). In every GSA, there was some form of power-sharing between the participants and the facilitator, as no facilitator took an authoritative stance. Power-sharing was especially important in discussions about mental health, as this could enable students to learn how to deal with mental health issues without becoming overwhelmed. Another important example of power-sharing is the way facilitators allow participants to gain permission for their activities. Facilitators could use their status as teachers to enable participants' activities, but as they were the ones communicating with the school board they might also perpetuate the idea that students are unable to have these kinds of conversations.

Through its focus on the stories that the participants told, the current research discovered new aspects that influence empowerment within the GSA, namely: mental health is not only a barrier but also an empowerment opportunity; the specific use of the safe space

created by the GSA; how coalition-building is used by participants to influence school policy; the possibility of collective empowerment under certain conditions; themes whereby power-sharing between the youth and adults becomes important; and the coronavirus measures and school context as specific barriers to empowerment. These new aspects will now be further discussed.

The current research found that mental health was both a barrier and an empowerment possibility. It could on the one hand, cause tensions, but on the other hand the discussions about mental health could enable participants to learn more about mental health in general and how to have conversations about these issues. It was, furthermore, shown that the mental health of participants should be an important consideration in the sharing of power between facilitator and participants, as a facilitator who stimulates the youth to examine and discuss mental health can enhance their empowerment. Further research can discern what other types of strategies facilitators can use to deal with mental health effectively.

Another significant finding was that the research discovered that the social space was not so much used by the participants to reflect on power structures or acquire a critical consciousness but more to gain a positive sense of self and to lift internalised oppressions, through asking for support and giving each other help and advice. Findings by previous research had indicated a type of critical consciousness based on participants' knowledge about their situation and rights and that members were aware of their social environment and the system of heteronormativity (Mayberry 2012; Russell et al., 2009). This research, nonetheless, did not encounter such critical consciousness and found instead that the knowledge participants gained was used to stand up against homophobic or transphobic remarks and sentiments.

According to DiBenedetto (1991), the safe space is essential for youth to develop their self-esteem and empowerment, as it lays a strong foundation from where youth can experience intellectual challenge and growth. In this, the safe space is the first step in the process of developing a critical consciousness. Still, Watts and colleagues (2011) note that to develop critical reflection, which is an important component of critical consciousness, group discussions in which there is listening, dialogue, humility, respect, and critique are necessary. In one GSA, the facilitator already enabled group discussions, and, in this GSA, participants had more knowledge about mental health and heteronormativity. In many GSAs, participants are already practicing with listening, respecting and humility, but an active critique might still be missing. As such, if the GSA is to be used for critical consciousness-raising, facilitators will need to facilitate these types of discussions and play an active role in enhancing critical reflection, without taking over (Watts et al., 2011).

Previous research had furthermore found that there was no evidence of coalition-building activities within the school community or participation of GSA members in policy decision-making processes (Mayberry, 2012). The current research, however, showed that some participants engaged in coalition-building activities within their school community and that through informally using these relations, they were sometimes able to change school policy. As formal decision-making processes might still be inaccessible for participants (Mayberry, 2012), this finding might indicate that for changing school policy, coalitions need to be built. Furthermore, the fact that some GSAs in this research engaged in coalition-building within the school could have led to the discovery that in fact some participants were able to change school policy decision-making by informal influence. Further research might be able to indicate the effects of this informal influencing and how this relates to social and political empowerment.

This research has simultaneously demonstrated that collective empowerment is possible when GSAs are supported by other organisations, such as the PVK foundation, in the creation of relations with the larger community. Russell and colleagues (2009) indicated that there might be less access to collective resources for youth. This research provides evidence for this idea by showing that firstly, youth still have difficulty accessing traditional LGBTQ+ spaces, and that secondly, when GSAs are supported in accessing these resources by another (adult) organisation, they can organise collective actions and work for collective empowerment. This indicates important steps for COC and other organisations who are interested in the participation of high school students in collective action, namely building coalitions with local GSAs.

By also adopting a youth empowerment focus, the current research demonstrated that the empowerment of participants depended on power-sharing between them and the facilitator and on what kind of strategies the facilitator adopted. Even though this finding supports preceding theories and research on youth empowerment (DiBenedetto, 1991; Jennings et al., 2008; Úcar Martínez et al., 2016), this research adds another layer by its finding that power-sharing and the strategies used by the facilitators are especially influential in discussions around mental health and school board permission. The strategies that facilitators adopt when encountering these two themes influence the empowerment that participants can experience.

The research has also been able to indicate specific barriers to empowerment, namely the school context, the high turnover problem, and the measures against the coronavirus. The measures against the coronavirus showed how much GSA participants depend on their school environment for the facilitation and activities of the GSA. Given that the number of corona

infections is increasing again in both the Netherlands and worldwide (RIVM, 2020 ;WHO, 2020), schools could close again. By better understanding, the effects of the measures against this virus, such as social distancing and the closing of high schools, on the empowerment experienced by participants, schools, teachers, and facilitators strategies can be devised to counter these effects in the future. The school environment can, nonetheless, be conducive to empowerment or restrict it, and the current research provides indicators of important players in this context. Educators and GSA facilitators could use this information to make the school environment more conducive. Further research can thereby study these barriers further with different research methods, such as observation, action research or ethnography to discern their effects on the empowerment process in the GSA or other youth empowerment initiative.

Chapter 5: Intergroup dynamics and empowerment

The participants ascribed to a multitude of different social identities, such as age, gender, religion, their SOGIE, their roles within the GSA and more. These social identities and the groups that were formed based on them, created intergroup dynamics within the GSA. These dynamics were determined through interviews and as such, are mediated by the participants' experiences. This chapter is, therefore, a review of the patterns that were discovered within participants' experience and retelling of the intergroup dynamics within the GSA. Hence, they are only indicative of the intergroup dynamics in the GSA. Although the results can only be considered indicative, this chapter will demonstrate the importance of considering the multiplicity of the different social identities that the students ascribe to, within research conducted on empowerment. It will show that each of the identities adopted by the participants created a different intergroup dynamic that influenced their empowerment in a certain way.

The chapter is composed of three parts. The first part will deal with the different social identities the youth ascribed to and the intergroup dynamics these formed. The second part will delve into the intergroup dynamics which were created by one of the dominant affiliations many participants subscribed to, namely a social identity based on their SOGIE. In these two parts, social identity theory and the political solidarity model will be used to discern whether these intergroup dynamics are positive or negative. An intergroup dynamic can be positive when different social groups cooperate or collaborate and is usually caused by a superordinate identity (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999; Subašić et al., 2008; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). An intergroup dynamic is negative when the two groups compete with one another, which might lead to bias, prejudice, and discrimination (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In the third part, the theoretical lens of allyship will be applied to analyse further how these two social groups relate to one another. In each section, indicators are given on how the social groups and the intergroup dynamics that are formed could influence empowerment. These indicators are based either on what participants themselves have observed or what can be deduced from the results in chapter four.

5.1 Intergroup dynamics

This research takes an intersectional approach, which considers that people's identity is made up of multiple social identities which shape their experiences. Many participants ascribed to multiple different groups which were based on their SOGIE, religion, age, gender and more.

This section will try to give an overview of the types of groups and intergroup dynamics that participants themselves observed and might be found among participants in a GSA.

Firstly, most students sat together and stuck together with other students which they had already been in contact with, such as their classmates, peers, or friends. Participants noted that although these different groups could communicate with each other freely, most members kept within their groups.

“Nee niet echt, ik zit bijvoorbeeld dan, ik zit ook wel, we hebben eigenlijk wel allemaal een beetje vaste plekken waar iedereen zit in het lokaaltje en dan zit links van mij een ander groepje en rechts van mij de rest van mijn groepje zeg maar. Eh en als links van mij dan iets, iemand iets zegt eh, dan val ik soms wel daarmee in en dan hebben we het daar weer even over.” (Respondent 7.5, straight, interview 18.04.20).

Occasionally, some participants joined the GSA, but did not become part of any group. That students stuck together with people in this way, was mostly since participants joined the GSA because they saw that their friends were part of the GSA or because they were invited by them.

“[...] en een andere vriendin van mij zat ook bij de GSA, dus ja dat leek me wel leuk.” (Respondent 9.1, lesbian, interview 12.04.20).

As such, participants seemed to construe their social identity on pre-formed friend groups and acquaintances (Mayo, 2017).

These dynamics could hinder the empowerment participants could experience within the GSA. For instance, one participant noted that these groups could lead to members not participating independently within the GSA meetings or activities and to hide behind their friends.

“Nou eigenlijk is het gebaseerd op 'hey jou ken ik, bij jou blijf ik zitten want jou ken ik als enige hier'. En dan heb je uiteindelijk van 'ja er zijn 5 mensen binnengekomen omdat [eigen naam] de GSA in is gegaan, die blijven achter hangen bij [eigen naam]. Ja eh oh okay, dat gebeurt.” (Respondent 2.2, transgender & pansexual, interview 17.03.20).

This might lead participants to be less able to profit from the political empowerment that the GSA can provide. This political empowerment is, namely experienced by participants by taking on leadership positions or organisational tasks. Furthermore, the fact that participants stick to their own group could lead to less communication between the groups in bigger GSAs. This would limit the kind of safe space that is achieved within the GSA, as participants might not feel comfortable sharing their daily challenges with and asking for support to those who they do not consider a part of their group. Even though participants might still be able to gather support from their friend group, other participants are less likely to learn from their experiences.

Another effect is that when people join the GSA because they are friends with other participants, they tend to become less active in the GSA when their friends leave.

“Uhm nou ja het maakt uit in het opzicht dat, er was iemand die was voorzitter en daardoor waren haar vriendinnen ook heel fanatiek, maar toen zij geen voorzitter meer was, toen waren haar vriendinnen ook minder fanatiek.” (Respondent 3.1, asexual, interview 30.03.20).

As high turnover is a problem that is experienced by many GSAs, this can eventually limit the social empowerment that the GSA is able to achieve, as a sufficient number of active members is needed to organise school-based activities, such as the PV.

Many of the friend groups were based on the grade students were in, since participants were more likely to be acquainted with those from their own class and grade.

“Dus je hebt natuurlijk wel bepaalde groepjes in de GSA die wel echt een groep vrienden zijn, maar, en die dan ook met elkaar afspreken, maar meestal zitten ze dan bij elkaar in de klas enzo of in hetzelfde leerjaar. Dan heb je sowieso wel al een band met elkaar.” (Respondent 7.2, transgender, interview 09.04.20).

As such, the participants' age was an important social indicator and participants compared the various ages and grades with one another when talking about the different groups in the GSA.

“Eh toen was het nog heel klein en ik was ook de jongste, ik was zeg maar, ja ik was 13 ofzo en de degene die daarvoor het jongste was die was 15.” (Respondent 7.3, interview 13.04.20).

In this manner, age and grade can be defined as a social identity, as participants feel some emotional involvement in this common definition of themselves and have achieved a degree of social consensus on what they consider their group to be, for instance, what it means to be in a certain grade or to have a certain age (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As many participants stayed in groups that had the same age, an intergroup dynamic between people from different ages was established. This dynamic could take different forms, either contributing to empowerment or negatively affecting it. For instance, some older participants felt that they could give younger people advice and help them with their daily challenges, which could be characterised as a positive intergroup dynamic, as it demonstrates cooperation (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999).

“Ja ik heb natuurlijk wel meer levenservaring dan, ja ook al is het maar 4 jaar of 2 jaar met sommigen, dus dan kan ik soms wel, bijvoorbeeld, ja iets meer advies geven over als ze wat ouder zijn wat er dan kan gaan gebeuren.” (Respondent 7.2, transgender, interview 09.04.20).

As such, they would be able to give the support younger participants sometimes looked for when sharing their challenges. By also sharing their experiences, these older participants can also enable learning, as they might have different experiences compared to younger participants. Younger participants can then use those stories to, for instance, learn more about how growing up relates to their SOGIE, enhancing their self-development. However,

sometimes younger participants were also less able to voice their opinions, as older participants were talking more.

“Nou het enige wat moeilijk zou kunnen zijn is het leeftijdsverschil. Dat een 14-jarige en een 18-jarige is wel een groot verschil. Dat ze eh wel eens ondergesneeuwd worden de jongeren. Dat merk ik wel. Het zijn bijna altijd wel dezelfde die aan het woord zijn.” (Respondent 1.4, facilitator, straight, interview 10.03.20).

Political empowerment of participants in the GSA is mostly based on the possibility to develop individual capacities by taking on leadership positions and participating in the GSA meetings. Hence, the fact that younger participants have more difficulty raising their voice might limit the empowerment they experience. At the same time, some participants noted that younger participants experienced problems differently.

“Want ja je hebt dan toch mensen met verschillende, niet alleen denkwijzen, maar ook gewoon hoe volwassen je bent.” (Respondent 10.1, straight, interview 22.04.20).

This could mean that older participants were considering younger participants to belong to a different social group and that this sentiment was an expression of prejudice or bias of the other group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This bias would make it more difficult for participants to support one another, as these negative intergroup dynamics might intervene with adequately understanding each other's problems. If taken at face value, the fact that younger participants experience problems differently would also make it more difficult for participants to support one another or to recognise each other's daily struggles, as such limiting the effect of the safe space created by the GSA.

Another intergroup dynamic that was noticed was the difference between those who identify as men and those who identify as women. In many GSAs, there were more participants that identified as women than those identifying as men, which had already been indicated by previous research (Perrotti & Westheimer, 2001; Levesque, 2019). One participant noted that due to the fact that he was one of the only participants who identified as man, he could not easily share his struggles with other participants or recognise the struggles of others, which could decrease the amount of empowerment this participant felt.

“Ja. Meiden hebben natuurlijk andere problemen waar ze tegenaan lopen en daar kan ik natuurlijk niet altijd over mee praten en ja ik heb natuurlijk ook bepaalde problemen, maar als jongen zijnde maar ja als 99 procent van de groep meisje is ja die, ze kunnen wel advies geven, maar ze kunnen natuurlijk nooit weten hoe het zeg maar is. Dus ja dat is eigenlijk vooral gewoon ja dat meiden en jongens gewoon anders door de wereld heen lopen.” (Respondent 7.2, transgender, 09.04.20).

Some participants also observed that, since the GSA mostly consisted of those identifying as women, it might make it difficult for those who identify as men to join the GSA.

“Eh dan zou je ook wat meer eh aan kunnen werken bijvoorbeeld dat eh AMB mensen, assigned male at birth, dat die er makkelijker voor uitkomen [dat ze bij de GSA zitten], etc. Nu zie je eigenlijk wel dat eh je veel eh mensen hebt die zich of identificeren als vrouwelijk of vrouwelijke geboren zijn. [...] Eh ja dat zou zeker mensen af kunnen schrikken denk ik. Want mensen voelen zich waarschijnlijk comfortabeler eh als ze met zeg maar dezelfde mensen als zij in een groepje zitten.” (Respondent 9.3, non-binary, interview 19.04.20).

This effect was also noted by Herdt and colleagues (2006) who observed that straight students who identified as women are generally regarded to adhere to societal sexual and gender norms when joining a GSA and are, due to heteronormativity, in general less likely than straight students who identify as men to be suspected of having another sexual orientation. This might make it easier for them to join the GSA.

Sometimes, intergroup dynamics also formed based on the status of participants in the GSA. In some GSAs, there was a group of people who had leadership positions, for instance, since there was a board, and a group of people who did not. In one GSA, this group of leaders took on different tasks, had a different status, and had their own WhatsApp group. This group was also closer to one another than other participants were to each other.

“Je hebt natuurlijk gewoon dat bestuur daar zitten echt mijn beste vriendin ook gewoon, dus dan heb je wel contact met elkaar, maar de groepjes onderling denk ik niet heel veel.” (Respondent 2.3, straight, interview 18.03.20).

This led to some people having more access to leadership positions, information, and decision-making opportunities than others, as one participant recounts:

“Eh maar dat werkt altijd wel heel goed, want we hebben gewoon een groepsapp met een bestuur dan, noemen we het dan, en dat, daar zitten dan twee docenten in en een 5 aantal leerlingen [...]. Uhm wat we meestal hebben als, als we, als we bijvoorbeeld uhm uhm als we dus iets gaan organiseren, Paarse Vrijdag, dan hebben we dus een lijstje en dat delen we dan gewoon in de groep van 'hey jongens wie vindt het leuk om hier ook te helpen bij, heeft iemand andere ideeën?'. En dan heb je vaak een aantal enthousiastelingen die dan zeggen 'owh jongens ik wil dit wel doen' of 'oh misschien kan ik dit doen' uhm 'kan ik daarbij helpen?' en dus hoeveel uren, we helpen daar wel bij, maar het is wel van belang dat je gewoon dat organisatorisch groepje klein houdt, overzichtelijk houdt.” (Respondent 2.1, straight, interview 17.03.20).

This group is likely to benefit from the political empowerment possibilities, as they can, by taking on leadership positions, gain new skills that might help them in accessing formal and informal decision-making processes later in life. As participants entered this board for an extended period, only a small group of participants in those GSA likely benefited from this political empowerment.

In each GSA, there was a group of people who took on more tasks and organised more than others, who also tended to be closer to one another.

“[...] maar ik merk ook dat uhm dat de mensen die dan echt fanatiek zijn met de GSA, dan maakt het helemaal niets uit in welke vriendengroep je zit of leerjaar je zit, en dat mixt gewoon allemaal heel goed.” (Respondent 3.1, asexual, 30.03.20).

This also meant that, in each GSA, there was a group of participants who were less committed. Participants also noted that there was a group of participants who had difficulty finishing their tasks.

“Maar ik merk inderdaad wel dat er best wel wat mensen zijn die zich dan niet aan afspraken houden of iets en dat ik dan uit mijn fanatisme samen met nog iemand die ook fanatiek is, willen we, gaan we dan met z'n tweeën alles doen. Dat wordt dan eigenlijk te veel. Wat dat betreft zou het fijner zijn inderdaad als meer mensen echt mee zouden doen. Ja.” (Respondent 3.1, asexual, 30.03.20).

Hence, those who were more active ended up taking on more tasks and leadership positions, which could make the between the active group and the other members bigger. This would lead the participants who take on more tasks to benefit more, as they are able to practice their skills and gain individual capacities, enhancing their personal empowerment. Likely, those who take on more tasks are also the ones who already have a higher personal empowerment. This could mean that this intergroup dynamic could lead to a Matthew effect, namely that those who already have an advantage are able to profit more (Perc, 2014). This group dynamics could furthermore harm the continuation of the GSA if those who are more active are also older. In one GSA, those who were more motivated happened to be the ones who were seniors, and most of them graduated. In the year after, this GSA mainly consisted of less motivated participants, as only a few people who had been motivated the year before remained. This then led to communication falling apart between the two groups, according to one participant, which led her to quit the GSA.

“Ja dit jaar. Ja ik weet niet of ik dat zo kan zeggen, maar eh ik en mijn beste vriendin zijn nog steeds bij de GSA, de rest is allemaal geslaagd van mijn vriendengroep en nu zijn er een paar leerlingen die over zijn gebleven die eigenlijk, ja die niet echt begrijpen waarvoor die GSA is en eigenlijk ook niet bezig zijn met eh het uitvoeren van de taken en dus meer een beetje pauze zitten te houden daar als vriendengroep. Ja dat is niet echt de bedoeling [...] Ja dat, dat is, dat is nu bijna niet meer aanwezig die communicatie [...]. Ja ik en mijn beste vriendin, we zitten beiden in ons examenjaar, wij hebben nu ook gezegd 'wij trekken beetje onze handen ervan af, want er wordt door jullie ook niks gedaan!'” (Respondent 4.1, LGBTQ+, interview 30.03.20).

According to a handful of participants, there was also an intergroup dynamic around the identity of student vis-à-vis the social identity of teachers. Some participants identified themselves as high school students and thought that it was sometimes difficult to speak openly when the facilitator teacher was present.

“Nou sowieso is er ook op een gegeven moment dat hij [de begeleider] ook een leraar is, weet je wel en sommige dingen die zeg je ook gewoon niet tegen je leraar, als ie erbij is.” (Respondent 1.2, bisexual, interview 11.02.20).

This could limit the safe space, as some participants might have difficulty sharing specific experiences and daily challenges when their facilitator is present. Whether this specific intergroup dynamic was formed, seemed to be influenced by whether the students knew the teacher well.

“Nou dat maakt het natuurlijk wel iets stroever ofzo, want ja wij kennen meneer C. ook amper, we hebben nooit les ofzo van hem gehad en hij is niet eens onze, eh nou ik denk voor een groot deel niet onze conrector ofzo geweest.” (Respondent 1.3, gay, interview 13.02.20).

Although some GSAs were based at schools in religious areas, most participants that were interviewed did not ascribe to a religious identity. A few participants did note that they were religious. Still, as most other participants were not, religion did not have a place within the GSA.

“Niet echt. Ik ben zelf wel bijvoorbeeld Christelijk, alleen ja we hebben het nooit echt over geloof, gewoon omdat niemand bij ons in de groep behalve ik dan en mijn beste vriendin.” (Respondent 4.1, LGBTQ+, interview 30.03.20).

One religious participant did state that he was supported by the fact that his facilitator was religious, as this made him feel more accepted within his own religion.

“Wat ik dan wel net bedenk, je vroeg aan het begin van wat heb je aan de GSA. Wat ik wel bedacht is, ik ben zelf Christelijk en ik had in het begin ook daar een beetje moeilijk mee van, weet je, ‘er staan bepaalde dingen in de bijbel’, dus voor mij is het ook heel erg fijn dat dan een godsdienstleraar die zelf ook heel erg geloofd, dat dan de groep leidt zal ik maar zeggen, dat vind ik zelf wel, eh dat heeft mij echt, daar heb ik echt wat aan gehad zal ik maar zeggen.” (Respondent 1.1, transgender, interview 11.02.20).

This could help him develop more self-esteem, as it enabled him to feel that he could be himself within his religion.

Even though these social groups existed within the GSA, participants felt they could still communicate with others from different groups. Instead, the groups seemed to be based more on habit and the dominant affiliation of the students (Mayo, 2017), than that participants were unwilling to communicate with each other.

“[...] ik merk zelf dat ik met klasgenoten of oude klasgenoten of vrienden die ik al langer ken, dat ik daar eerder bij ga zitten dan iemand die ik eigenlijk niet heel goed ken.” (Respondent 7.4, straight, interview 14.04.20).

Furthermore, during activities, many participants did not feel that there was a division between participants from different groups, and they felt that they were able to work well together. According to social identity theory and the political solidarity model, the formation of a

superordinate identity, which is a shared identity between different groups, can lead participants from different social groups to work together (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999; Subašić et al., 2008). Many participants felt that, although they belonged to different groups, they shared something with other participants, namely a common goal, situation and even in some cases a community.

“Maar aan de andere kant was het ook wel een hele fijne groep mensen en een groep mensen waar je toch wel weer iets van, iets mee deelt. Allemaal heb je hetzelfde doel.” (Respondent 3.1, asexual, 30.03.20).

These types of descriptions suggest that the creation of a superordinate identity would be possible, since the superordinate identity is presented in such a vague and complex way that the different groups can consider themselves as belonging to this category (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). Furthermore, one facilitator also observed that participants might share this superordinate identity based on their common experiences with sexual and gender stereotyping, as stipulated by Herdt and colleagues (2006), which might be what is suggested by other participants who stated that they share a common goal or situation.

“Ja dat het zijn uiteindelijk allemaal leerlingen en en of je homo bent of niet, je hebt wel een verhaal. [...] Kijk ik ben zelf dat ik zei ook hetero, maar toch ben ik dit ooit gaan doen en dat is niet eh omdat ik er niets mee te maken had, dat was voor een vriend of dat was eh vanuit, en dat was voor mij ook vanuit ook eigen ervaring dat iedereen altijd maar dacht dat ik homo was en dus heel erg stereotypering.” (Respondent 7.6, facilitator, straight, 27.04.20).

Others feel that the whole GSA is a group of friends, which could also be considered a superordinate identity.

“Ik denk dat die van ons beetje meer een clubje is. We zijn ook gewoon, de meesten zijn ook gewoon supergoed bevriend met elkaar.” (Respondent 9.2, straight, interview 13.04.20).

The development of a superordinate identity was also stimulated in some GSAs. For instance, at one GSA, the facilitator encouraged students to form friendships across groups by mixing the different groups.

“Eh nou ja het is makkelijk mixen in die zin dat ze allemaal hetzelfde, eh iets eh gemeen hebben, namelijk ze zitten in een GSA en ze zijn daar allemaal vrijwillig naar toe gekomen eh dus en dat mixen gebeurt automatisch eh wanneer leerlingen iets gaan organiseren en degene die dan zeggen van 'hey ik wil dit doen, ik wil dit doen' zitten vaak niet, komen niet uit hetzelfde groepje. Dat doe ik dan ook wel expres natuurlijk. Uhm dus dan mix je ze een beetje.” (Respondent 7.6, facilitator, straight, interview 27.04.20).

Other GSAs tried to actively create a space where all GSA participants could come together regardless of friend group, grade, or SOGIE.

“We hebben een, een, eigenlijk een soort van plaats in de school, daar gaan de GSA-leerlingen zitten en dat weet eigenlijk ook iedereen een beetje, want bij dat bankje daarzo enzo dat daar de [GSA] leerlingen zitten vaak.” (Respondent 2.1, straight, 17.03.20).

5.2 Intergroup dynamics based on SOGIE

All participants, whether they were straight or LGBTQ+, ascribed to a social identity and affiliation based on their SOGIE. For instance, both LGBTQ+ and straight participants told the researcher their SOGIE during the interview. There were, however, also some participants in the GSA who were still figuring out their SOGIE and their social identity connected to this.

“[...] maar er zijn ook gewoon best veel mensen in de uhm in die groep dus die hetero's zijn maar nu ze in de GSA zitten, die voelen nu een beetje, zeg maar, die beginnen nu te twijfelen en ik ben ook zo 'n geval die eigenlijk begint te twijfelen.” (Respondent 7.1, straight, interview 08.04.20).

Some LGBTQ+ participants also had an emotional connection to this social identity, as stipulated by Tajfel and Turner (1979), as they specifically joined the GSA to get to know other LGBTQ+ students.

“Uhm ja eigenlijk wou ik gewoon meer in contact komen met LGBTQ+ mensen, omdat ja ik kende, zeg maar een vriendin van mij was dat dan en ik en dan verder eigenlijk niemand kende ik dan en ja het leek me gewoon heel leuk om meer mensen te ontmoeten.” (Respondent 9.4, LGBTQ+, interview 21.04.20).

Although most LGBTQ+ participants felt part of the LGBTQ+ identity, some noticed that there was a divide within this group between those with a diverse SO and those with a diverse GIE, which made it, for instance, difficult for those who had a diverse SO to recognise the struggles of people with a diverse GIE. This might make those participants hesitant to share their daily struggles, limiting the effects of the safe space.

“Eh ja ik ben wel de enige transgender, dus ik zit wel een beetje in m'n eentje op dat front.” (Respondent 1.1, transgender, interview 11.02.2020).

Negative intergroup dynamics

Participants noted both negative and positive intergroup dynamics between the SOGIE based social identity groups. This section will discuss those intergroup dynamics, which were negative. A few LGBTQ+ participants noted that they were less comfortable to behave a certain way or to talk about specific topics when there were straight participants present.

“Ik, nou dat is algemeen is dat, dat je die angst hebt, maar dan denk je ook vaak wel gewoon uit automatisme denk je gewoon van 'deze persoon is straight, dus ik doe wat voorzichtiger', ook binnen de GSA. [...] Nou ja, niet openly gay grapjes maakt, niet openly extra gay gedrag vertoont, ja heel stereotypisch gay gedrag enzo, maar het is wel duidelijk dat je een beetje oplet met niet te veel open zijn, omdat je ja, je weet dat je dan soms haat reacties gaat krijgen en dat die sneller komen van mensen die hetero zijn dan mensen die niet hetero zijn.” (Respondent 2.2, transgender & pansexual, interview 17.03.20).

At the same time, some straight participants also felt that some LGBTQ+ participants did not fully accept their participation.

Dus uhm, maar wat ik net al zei, toen ik inderdaad de eh, het moet geen uhm hetero-haast worden. Het is niet erg om straight te zijn. En die sfeer wordt soms wel opgewekt, merk ik. Als er gepraat [wordt] over uhm dit soort onderwerpen.” (Respondent 2.1, straight, 17.03.20).

These dynamics could be created, as certain behaviours or topics demonstrated the differences between the two groups, regardless of the superordinate identity that could be created in the GSA (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). As such, some participants expected or experienced negative intergroup dynamics, such as bias or discrimination, from the other group, as indicated in the quote above (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These negative intergroup dynamics can influence the personal empowerment that participants experience. Participants who feel less comfortable in the GSA will be less likely to share their daily challenges and experiences, which would limit the support they could gain from others.

Many LGBTQ+ participants also noted that straight participants could not or did not understand, acknowledge, or recognise some of their problems, which could make it more difficult to share their daily challenges with them.

“Misschien dat ze, ja sommigen ja, ze maken natuurlijk niet mee wat wij meemaken, dus ze kunnen er wel over meepraten, maar ze kunnen nooit natuurlijk ja ze kunnen wel advies geven, maar ze kunnen nooit weten hoe het is om in de schoenen te zijn van degene die het echt mee heeft gemaakt. Omdat ze eigenlijk zoiets nooit zouden kunnen meemaken.” (Respondent 7.2, transgender, 09.04.20).

This was as, according to these participants, their challenges related to specific experiences connected to their SOGIE, for instance, coming out to their parents, which straight participants simply did not have. Straight participants also observed that they would probably experience difficulties relating to the experiences of LGBTQ+ participants.

“Nou misschien wel dat als het overwegend hetero is dat je dan misschien wel meer neigt naar een groepje die niet zo veel inzicht heeft in hoe het is om bi te zijn of homo, dus dat is denk ik wel een groot voordeel van de GSA, ten minste onze, dat die uit een groot, dat die ja een grote, grote groep homo’s heeft.” (Respondent 7.5, straight, 18.04.20).

One straight participant, nevertheless, observed that even though she might not have the same experiences as the LGBTQ+ participants, she would still be able to understand certain feelings and difficulties that are connected to their daily challenges.

“Ik kan alsnog steun bieden van ik begrijp je, ik kan er alleen niet over meepraten, maar ik begrijp je wel van dat het moeilijk kan zijn en ik heb natuurlijk wel hetzelfde meegemaakt dat ouders uit elkaar, gescheiden zijn, want als iedereen, als iedereen eh hetzelfde zeg maar hebben meegemaakt, dan, dan heb je ook geen verhalen meer om te vertellen. [...] Hmm ligt eraan op welk oppervlakte want stel het gaat uhm want stel eh je hebt, want je hebt natuurlijk verschillende onderwerpen en over sommige dingen kan je weer wel meepraten en over sommige dingen dan weer niet.” (Respondent 8.1, straight, interview 12.04.20).

Some participants also observed that as straight students lacked LGBTQ+ specific experiences, this would make it more difficult for them to work for social empowerment for LGBTQ+ people.

“Ja, want het is heel, eh je kan heel lastig zeg maar iets gaan verdedigen waarvoor je geen ervaringen mee hebt, weet je wel. Ik kan bijvoorbeeld wel opkomen voor vluchtelingen, maar ik heb, ik ken, ik heb maar een vriendin die is vluchteling en dat is gewoon de enige ervaring die ik heb met, met vluchtelingen dus ik kan daar gewoon niet zo heel erg persoonlijk over zeggen.” (Respondent 1.2, bisexual, 11.02.20).

They also noted that some straight persons might have certain prejudices about the LGBTQ+ community, which would characterise a negative intergroup dynamic (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This prejudice might then lead to more stereotypical actions which would be less socially empowering.

“Eh ik denk dat als je alleen maar cis hetero mensen erin had, dat je dan eh wat meer stereotypische acties zou hebben en ook wat minder, eigenlijk alleen bijvoorbeeld tijdens Pride maand. [...] Eh bijvoorbeeld dat eh niet hetero-zijn betekent dat je, weet ik veel, flamboyant bent of per se, eh dat je mannelijker als vrouw of vrouwelijker als man, etc. En gewoon een soort van primitievere kijk erop. [...] Eh vaak wel want eh het enige waarmee die mensen eigenlijk in aanraking komen is bijvoorbeeld Pride Amsterdam en dat is natuurlijk, eh ja heel joviaal en flamboyant etc.” (Respondent 9.3, non-binary, interview 19.04.20).

However, the GSA could decrease the likeliness of this, as straight participants are able to learn more about diverse SOGIEs, which could curb prejudice and bias.

“Nou als de, als de hetero mensen met mensen die niet hetero zijn, als die met elkaar om kunnen gaan, dan is het al gewoon best goed, weet je, en dan leren ze ook gewoon iedereen respecteren eigenlijk, omdat je dan gewoon ziet hoe hun persoonlijk is, hun persoonlijkheid is, en niet per se alleen maar voor de label die ze hebben.” (Respondent 7.1, straight, 08.04.20).

Another issue that participants mentioned was a sense of ownership that LGBTQ+ participants felt about certain issues. This sometimes led to tensions within the GSA, since some LGBTQ+ participants observed that they had difficulties to accept straight participants' opinions about certain topics, as these were their issues.

“Nee. Ja, het is persoonlijk soms onhandig, want dan zit je van 'hou gewoon je bek' [...] Nou dan bijvoorbeeld van 'ja het hoeft niet zo opvallend' dan zit, ik persoonlijk, zit dan zo van 'hou gewoon je mond, ik wil het wel opvallend, mijn issue, laat mij gewoon lekker'. Dan zit ik aan de andere kant zo van 'je hebt wel gelijk'.” (Respondent 2.2, transgender & pansexual, interview 17.03.20).

Straight participants also noted these ownership claims and showed difficulty accepting them.

“[...] dat er wat mensen waren die zeiden, ‘hey maar we zijn LGBTQ dus wij kunnen, wij mogen deze beslissing wel maken ofzo, wij mogen deze beslissing nemen’, wat natuurlijk ook een beetje vooroordelend, dat is best wel oneerlijk en dan krijg je natuurlijk ook soort van ongelijkheid van 'hey we willen hier juist voor normalisering gaan en nu worden eigenlijk de hetero's onderdrukt?’.” (Respondent 2.3, straight, interview 18.03.20).

This led one participant to observe that there was still reluctance within the LGBTQ+ community to work together with straight people, as some LGBTQ+ students feel that straight students are against them, which makes it challenging to accept straight students claiming space.

“Ik denk dat het dan meer gaat lijken dat heteroseksuelen, ja een deel van de LHBT, dat zie je wel die hebben een soort van onderliggende haat voor heteroseksuelen. Dat is makkelijk als jij daar, als je daarin te veel van een focuspunt van maakt, bijvoorbeeld in je verhalen laat het weer zien dat zo'n organisatie als de GSA misschien wel vervreemd, de LHBT verraadt, en dan geloven ze je niet meer, dus dat, dus dat gevaar heb je wel. [...] Ja het is gewoon een groep, dat echt gezien is, een groep is van alleen homoseksuelen, iedereen van de LHBT, maar heteroseksuelen worden weer gezien als de vijand, want ja je vecht tegen hun, hun zijn tegen jou, en die mentaliteit is van beide kanten wel een, tja het is niet, het is niet altijd zwart en wit.” (Respondent 6.1, bisexual, interview 08.04.20).

These tensions could reduce the safe space that the GSA can provide and can also make it more difficult for participants to work together during their activities.

5.3 The GSA and the creation of allyship

The concept of allyship will be used to analyse further the effects of the social identity groups based on participants' SOGIE. Allyship for LGBTQ+ people takes place on a scale, where one end represents ally behaviour that tends to reinforce existing power structures and the other end ally behaviour that is apt to challenge these structures (Russell & Bohan, 2016). Allies who challenge existing power dynamics are motivated by values and principles such as justice or moral ideals (Russell & Bohan, 2016). Many straight participants joined the GSA to work for the acceptance of all SOGIEs, and many were motivated to work for equality for LGBTQ+ people.

“Ja ik denk dat ik zou zeggen dat onze GSA een groep is met leerlingen die graag staan voor normalisering van alle seksualiteiten, alle identiteiten en dat we gewoon graag staan voor een tolerante school en dat we, dat, zoveel mogelijk daarbij ons steentje bij willen dragen.” (Respondent 2.3, straight, 18.03.20).

Importantly, allies use their privileged position to advocate on behalf of the oppressed (Erskine & Bilimoria, 2019). Some straight participants wanted to propagate that they supported LGBTQ+ individuals. They believed this would help their fellow students to realise that they should do the same.

“Eh ja ik denk van wel, want de meeste mensen, ja je hoeft niet per se een, je hoeft niet per se in de community te horen om het te supporten en daar zijn wij dan een soort van voorbeeld van. En ja dat is soort van ook een voorbeeld voor andere mensen dan.” (Respondent 9.2, straight, 13.04.20).

Furthermore, their status as straight could also reduce the reputation of the GSA as a gay club. In this manner, by visibly participating, straight students could counter this reputation that has a negative effect on participants' social empowerment. Straights students who experience personal empowerment in the GSA, through gaining a higher self-esteem and by gaining individual capacities, can thereby enhance the social empowerment of LGBTQ+ people by joining the GSA actions or speaking out against homophobic and transphobic sentiments, advocating on behalf of the oppressed (Salter & Migliaccio, 2019).

“En uhm ik merkte ook dat als dan mijn vrienden een beetje negatief ofzo over homo's gingen praten dat ik het dan wel voor hen opnam.” (Respondent 7.5, straight, 18.04.20).

Facilitating teachers could also use their privilege, such as their status as a teacher, access to a classroom, their contacts within the school, and their lessons to support the GSA.

“Nou we hebben sowieso wel B. [begeleider] en die is de grootste GSA-man van Nederland ongeveer, want hij organiseert Paarse Vrijdag Krant en zit, is leider van de grootste GSA van Nederland en reist [het] hele land door voor informatie en is aardrijkskundeleraar en die krijgt het ook wel voor elkaar om aan de hogere schoolleiding een beetje door te geven van 'we gaan dit doen of we gaan dat doen'.” (Respondent 7.5, straight, 18.04.20).

As also noted in chapter four and illustrated in this example, the facilitating teacher could use his status as teacher to get permission for budgets or for the actions of the GSA. At one GSA, the teacher also used his privilege as a religion teacher to work for the region's acceptance of the GSA.

“Uhm nee, want we hebben meneer L. [begeleider] aan onze kant natuurlijk en dat is echt wel de docent godsdienst hier op school. Ik denk volgens mij ook wel de sectieleider, dus dat is wel heel fijn. Ja ik denk niet echt dat we daar problemen mee hebben.” (Respondent 1.3, gay, interview 13.02.20).

They can furthermore support the GSA by amplifying the participants' voices without taking over, as stipulated by Erskine & Bilimoria (2019), by taking on a facilitating role during meetings and activities, so that participants can gain and practice their individual capacities.

“Dus ja dat is hun eh ja handvatten geven om eh die sterkheid die ze hebben met z'n allen of de, en, in ieder geval sommigen die eh die heel graag ook willen laten zien aan de wereld van 'hey dit ben ik of hier sta ik voor', maar tegelijkertijd ook daar een verhaal over kunnen vertellen, hun handvatten geven en ondersteunen daar waar nodig eh om, om, zodat ze dat uiteindelijk ook durven en gaan doen en op een handige manier.” (Respondent 7.6, facilitator, straight, interview 27.04.20).

To use their privilege to challenge power structures constructively, allies should also reflect on their privilege, and re-evaluate their beliefs about society and the marginalised community they advocate for (Carlson et al., 2019; Erskine & Bilimoria, 2019). According to Erskine and Bilimoria (2019), allyship is defined by this continuous, reflective practice of

interrogating one's privilege. By participating in the GSA, straight participants could learn more about other perspectives and the LGBTQ+ community, which could help them with this re-evaluation. One participant, for instance, noted that the GSA could be a space for straight participants to learn more about how they can use their privilege for the LGBTQ+ community.

"[...] ik vind het juist fijn als bijvoorbeeld hetero's komen dan kunnen zij ook horen wat zij kunnen doen om het leven makkelijker te maken voor LHBT-leerlingen, voor hun vrienden, voor als ze volwassen, later een baan hebben of een werkgever zijn dat ze ook bijvoorbeeld hun werknemers erin kunnen helpen." (Respondent 7.2, transgender, interview 09.04.20).

Furthermore, this knowledge can also help them in organising better actions for the social empowerment of LGBTQ+ individuals and giving support in the safe space. Some straight participants noted that they tried to be open to educating themselves about things they do not understand about the LGBTQ+ community.

"Eh ja verder, vaardigheid, ook gewoon dat ik andere mensen heb leren begrijpen, want ik was best wel sceptisch over uhm bijvoorbeeld dat soort mensen die nou ik vind het, ik weet niet of ik heel gemeen maak [...] Uhm ja gewoon mensen die bijvoorbeeld transgender zijn en dan best wel eh ja, die dan, bijvoorbeeld een man die dan een vrouw wil zijn en dan verder niks nog heeft eh gedaan, maar dan bijvoorbeeld wel een pruik draagt, ik kan dat niet heel goed begrijpen, maar dat, waarom je zo iets zou doen, want ik denk dan alleen maar van 'oh dan ga je heel veel meningen over je krijgen, omdat het er zo apart uitziet, maar ja omdat we dat gesprek ook hebben geopend, natuurlijk met die mensen, daar leer je ook van, want dan heb je ook natuurlijk ook soort vaardigheden om mensen beter te begrijpen of andersom mensen beter te begrijpen." (Respondent 2.3, straight, 18.03.20).

In the GSA, straight participants are also confronted by what it means to be straight, which can lead them to reflect on the naturalness of heterosexuality and the system of heteronormativity.

"[...] maar wel dat ik, voordat ik naar de GSA kwam, eigenlijk dacht van ik ben hetero en toen ik erbij kwam toen begon ik wel na te denken 'uhm vind ik meisjes leuk, vind ik jongens leuk en ben ik überhaupt al verliefd geweest?', enzo, en ik denk nu dat ik het weet, maar ik weet het nu niet zeker en eigenlijk boeit het me ook niet dat ik het al weet want ja." (Participant 7.5, straight, interview 18.04.2020).

Nonetheless, in interviews with straight participants and facilitators, some participants had difficulty recognising their privileged position or power structures, which makes it unlikely for them to challenge these structures constructively.

"Want ik vond dat dat niet nodig was. Ik daagde hem uit he. Ik vond dat het niet nodig was [dat iemand van de GSA uit de kast kwam in de les] omdat, eh ik zei van 'we zitten met dertig in de klas, dat betekent dat ik 29 lessen hierna mensen uit de kast moet laten komen dat ze hetero zijn'. Dus." (Respondent 1.4, facilitator, straight, 10.03.20).

This was also noticed by Levesque (2019), who observed that in the GSA, allies did not learn ways to recognise their privilege or improve their ally work. Facilitators in this GSA also missed opportunities to help allies to check their privilege (Levesque, 2019). Without this

reflection on their privilege and power structures, straight participants are less likely to plan activities that disrupt the heteronormative society.

“En dat was, dat is dan bijvoorbeeld, eh over hoe opvallend Paarse Vrijdag moet zijn in de aula. En over hoe mensen eh de aandacht willen trekken van de medeleerlingen. En dan heb je vaak de mensen ja die niet straight zijn zo van 'het moet zo opvallend mogelijk, fucking hang een regenboogvlag op' en dan heb je de straights die zijn zo van 'zet gewoon een tafel neer dat is prima'. En dat verschil, op een gegeven moment heb je dan dus wel zo'n mini discussie van 'hoe opvallend het moet zijn'. Want ja ik zit zo van hang lekker die vlag op, wat maakt het uit?' en dan zitten ze zo van 'ja, maar dat is dan weer dat we heel erg gay lijken als GSA zijnde en dat willen we dus juist niet uitstralen' en dan zit ik zo van 'ja maar het is ook wel weer Paarse Vrijdag'.” (Respondent 2.2, transgender & pansexual, 17.03.20).

Another effect is that straight participants might question the usefulness and need for a safe space for other LGBTQ+ participants, such as one participant noted:

“Nou weet je zo werkt de wereld ook niet, weet je. Je kan niet, je kan niet in een bubbel blijven voor altijd en dan verwachten dat iedereen ook in die bubbel zit. Weet je, je bent een individu, je bent een mens, je bent verantwoordelijk voor je eigen doen, dus je gaat in situaties komen, waarin je uhm waarin je je moet identificeren als een uniek persoon en als 'okay dit ben ik, en uhm ik ben nu, zelfstandig moet ik omgaan met de situatie' dus je kan niet altijd terugvallen op een community als het ware en ik vind het denkbeeld dat uhm dat je je moet verschuilen omdat je je veilig voelt in zo'n groep vind ik gewoon gevaarlijk. Want ik denk van 'ja dan ga je denk ik later, ga je heel erg uhm eh ja, daartegen aanlopen'.” (Respondent 2.1, straight, 17.03.20).

As such, it seems that straight participants are still not prone to reflect and interrogate their own privilege, which makes it unlikely that they will use their privilege adequately to disrupt the heteronormative society. However, the GSA is also a place where straight participants can learn more about other perspectives and the LGBTQ+ community, which could eventually help them to question their position and heteronormative society. By engaging in the GSA and learning more about diverse SOGIEs, a seed is being planted, which could, once students learn more about the different power structures and dynamics within society, enable them to reflect on their own privilege and use it to disrupt heteronormativity.

5.4 Discussion: Intergroup dynamics and empowerment

The current research has shown, through its intersectional approach that respects the affiliations that some students have with a specific social identity, that the participants ascribed to different groups, which establish a complex intergroup dynamic within the GSA. It is the first time that intergroup dynamics have been considered while examining the effects of the GSA. This research has been the first, to the researcher's knowledge, to consider in a study on empowerment this many different and intersecting social groups as understood by participants themselves. Other research that regarded intergroup dynamics between two groups mostly

focused on the existence of empowerment as a whole (see, for instance, Bond & Keys, 1993). Instead, the current research provided indications of how these intergroup dynamics influence the different levels and domains of empowerment, which will be discussed now.

Almost all participants seemed to identify with a superordinate identity that was created within the GSA. This identity was based on a common goal, a similar situation, a shared community or being a friend group (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). At the same time, all participants identified with different groups within the GSA based on, for instance, their network of friends, age, or activeness. Each of these social identities caused their own intergroup dynamics influencing empowerment in different ways, unfortunately mostly negative. The intergroup dynamics which was formed based on friend networks could negatively impact some participants' political empowerment, as they hid behind their friends and hence did not profit from independently engaging in the GSA. These dynamics could also influence the safe space that participants were able to create, as it might lead participants to be less willing to share their daily challenges or ask for support to those participants they do not consider part of their friend group.

The intergroup dynamics that formed around the age of the participants could either be negative or positive (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999) and participants indicated multiple effects on empowerment. For instance, older participants shared their experience with and gave advice to younger participants, giving them support and enhancing their self-development. However, there might also be bias and prejudice between younger and older participants (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and it was stated that younger participants experienced the world differently which would make it difficult to recognise each other's daily challenges. Older participants thereby tended to take over in meetings, making it more difficult for younger participants to voice their opinions. This could restrict their political empowerment, as it would be challenging to then develop leadership qualities.

Another intergroup dynamic that was formed in some GSAs was based on how active participants were. More active participants tended to be closer to each other. Since them being a more active group meant that there was also a less active group, those who were more committed ended up taking on more tasks and leadership positions. As such, they were able to experience more political and personal empowerment. When boards were formed, or only a few people took on leadership positions, those who were more active had more access to the empowerment opportunities created in the GSA. This indicated a Matthew effect (Perc, 2014). According to van der Velden (2011), the GSA as an intervention targets the more empowered youth and youth already need to have some form of personal empowerment to join a GSA. This

was also illustrated by this research, as due to the negative reactions and the reputation of the GSA as a gay club, the youth already needed to have a high personal empowerment to join the GSA. However, in the GSA it seems that those who already have a higher personal empowerment are also more able to profit from the initiative by being more likely to be active and as such to take up more tasks and leadership positions, illustrating a Matthew effect (Perc, 2014). It is, of course, a personal choice of a participant whether to become more active and take on leadership positions and tasks. However, those who are less active might likely have other reasons than “just not wanting to participate”, which might be connected to their level of empowerment. If they then also end up not being able to take on new challenges, they might be unable to profit from the empowerment possibilities in the GSA. As such, facilitators must be aware of the different intergroup dynamics that might create this Matthew effect, so that they are able to stimulate those that are the least empowered to profit from the opportunities the GSA can provide.

Although the multiplicity of different social groups and statuses within the GSA show the intersectionality of participants' identity, almost all of the participants stated their SOGIE during the interview, demonstrating that this might be their dominant affiliation (Mayo, 2017). The current research also shows the complexity of how participants, who ascribe to different dominant affiliations based on their SOGIEs, relate to one another. Both positive and negative intergroup dynamics were formed between the social groups based on SOGIE. On the one hand, participants felt that straight participants did not and could not understand or recognise particular challenges that the LGBTQ+ participants shared. It was believed that straight participants lacked the experience of these challenges, as the experiences were considered to be connected to being LGBTQ+. Certain experiences being connected to the LGBTQ+ identity also seemed to relate to a feeling of ownership that LGBTQ+ participants had over certain issues, which sometimes led to tensions. A few LGBTQ+ participants also mentioned that they were less comfortable to behave in a certain way when straight participants were present. At the same time, straight participants did not always feel accepted within the GSA, indicating a negative intergroup dynamic based on expected or experienced bias or discrimination (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These dynamics affected the personal empowerment that participants experienced, as it had a negative effect on the safe space due to participants not feeling comfortable to always be themselves or by creating tensions within the GSA. On the other hand, LGBTQ+ participants considered straight students' perspectives an asset to the safe space, as they kept it grounded. These perspectives could also help the GSA to address their fellow students better and show them that they were doing what they preached. Straight

participants seemed to be considered to give the GSA legitimacy, a sentiment also noted by previous research (Levesque, 2019). Another effect that the participants observed was that straight students could help against the GSA's reputation of being a gay club, which would enhance all participants' social and personal empowerment.

According to social identity theory, people make sense of their lives in terms of the social identity they ascribe to (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Lloyd (2005), who studied feminism and the social identity connected to it, noted that in the adoption of the identity of "woman", feminism connected certain experiences to this identity. Those experiences were seen to relate to all women and even to determine their lives. Other experiences who were not connected to this identity were not acknowledged (Lloyd, 2005), especially in early and certain current forms of feminism, for instance trans excluding radical feminism. Participants in the GSA also adopt such a social identity and see certain experiences and issues as connected to a specific SOGIE. By sharing daily challenges within the GSA, participants gain more knowledge about what experiences and issues connect to their identities. This happens in such a way that they consider these issues and experiences to be only experienced by those that ascribe to being LGBTQ+ and to determine the life of LGBTQ+ individuals. Hence, straight students are considered to miss these experiences and to have different perspectives on the basis of them ascribing to a straight identity.

Through participants' specific use of the safe space, namely to gain a positive sense of self and to lift internalised oppressions, through asking for support and giving each other help and advice, the differences between straight participants and LGBTQ+ participants are highlighted. Participants gain more knowledge about the experiences and issues connected to their identities by the daily challenges that are being shared. This knowledge is, nonetheless, not connected to a critical reflection, namely an analysis based on systems and power structures (Sardenberg, 2007; Watts et al., 2011). Without this critical reflection challenges are not explained as results of a certain system of oppression, such as heteronormativity, but as something individuals with a certain identity deal with. Hence, it is more difficult for participants to recognise that straight students might also experience problems due to the heteronormative society. They might, for instance, have also experienced the policing of their sexual behaviour and gender identity by their fellow students (Herdt et al., 2006). This difficulty would explain how some LGBTQ+ participants feel a sense of ownership, while participants from both groups feel that straight participants would not understand the experiences of LGBTQ+ participants. This could also lead participants to state that straight participants bring different perspectives. Since the social identity straight participants adhere

to is considered to be connected to a different set of experiences, one lacking the experiences that other LGBTQ+ individuals might have, them being straight would lead them to have by definition other perspectives. As their straight identity brings these differing perspectives, the simple act of participation of straight participants would ground the safe space.

To further analyse the effects of the two social identity groups based on participants' SOGIE, especially on social empowerment, the concept of allyship was used. Straight participants were unlikely to reflect on and interrogate their privilege, which makes it less likely for them to use their privilege adequately to disrupt the heteronormative society. This was also indicated by previous research (Erskine & Bilimoria, 2019; Levesque, 2019). The GSA, however, seemed to be a place where straight participants can learn the first steps needed for effective allyship. They, for instance, learned about the LGBTQ+ community, and some also experienced that heterosexuality was not as natural as it seemed. This information, coupled with a critical reflection, could eventually help straight participants to question their own privilege, enabling them to use their position to challenge power structures. As such their engagement in the GSA could eventually lead to a practice of interrogating privilege, which characterises the type of allyship that interrupts the status quo and enables allies to work towards social empowerment (Carlson et al., 2019; Erskine & Bilimoria, 2019; Salter & Migliaccio, 2019).

It is believed that a critical reflection could further benefit the empowerment that can be created within the GSA by decreasing the negative intergroup dynamics created between the two different groups based on participants' SOGIE. On the one hand, this critical reflection could help participants to discover in which aspects heteronormativity influences all of their lives. This could let LGBTQ+ participants to feel more understood and could help straight participants to recognise the challenges of LGBTQ+ participants. Another significant aspect would be that this might further stimulate the creation of a superordinate identity between participants based on their shared experience of heteronormativity (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). Even though many participants already seemed to identify with a superordinate identity based on having a common goal, a similar situation, a shared community or being a friend group, it seems that this might not yet be enough to counter the negative intergroup dynamics that were still created between the two groups. This new superordinate identity created on the share experiences of heteronormativity might add another layer for cooperation (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999).

On the other hand, the development of a critical reflection could further benefit the creation of a type of allyship that challenges power structures. By gaining the ability of critical

reflection, participants might gain the tools and knowledge to engage in the necessary practice of interrogating their privilege. This critical reflection could provide them with a frame of reference in which they could situate their reflections on power structures, systems, and their own social position. So, it is believed that by stimulating group discussions through which critical reflection can be developed, facilitators could further stimulate the empowerment potential of the GSA. Further research, for instance action-based research, should be done to see whether this is the case.

All of the above discussed processes can guide further scientific understanding, as they have provided hypotheses about the type of intergroup dynamics and their influence on empowerment in an empowerment initiative. These hypotheses can be further examined and tested by research using different methods, such as observations, ethnography, action-research, or quantitative methods. Furthermore, those who are responsible for an empowerment initiative can consider these different intergroup dynamics when designing or evaluating an empowerment initiative to ensure that the most marginalised within such an initiative are empowered.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this last chapter, the main research question will be answered, namely “what do the different social identities of the participants mean for the empowerment process within the GSA?”. As each chapter has contributed to the answering of the research question, the main findings and insights will shortly be revisited. Chapter four analysed the process of empowerment that participants experienced from different angles in a systematic manner, illuminating the empowerment process within the GSA. Chapter five gave indicators on the types of intergroup dynamics that were experienced by the participants and how these dynamics could influence their empowerment. In combining the finding and the analysis of these two chapters, this conclusion will show what the different social identities of the participants mean to the empowerment process within the GSA. It will discuss the research’s relevance to the scientific understanding and practice. Afterwards, the limitations will be addressed. Finally, a reflection on the research and researcher will be given.

Empowerment

This research has shown the empowerment possibilities of GSAs by closely examining participant’s stories and the process of empowerment. Furthermore, this research studied the empowerment process from different angles in a schematic manner through its adoption of Russell (1995)’s multi-dimensional concept in combination with a youth empowerment focus. It has demonstrated that the GSA has an empowering effect, especially on personal, close relationship, and social empowerment, but that participants’ experience of political and collective empowerment is limited, as also indicated by previous research (Griffin et al., as cited in Poteat et al., 2012; Mayberry, 2012; McCormick et al., 2015; Russell et al., 2009). Political empowerment was mainly established due to the individual capacities that some participants gained, as already demonstrated by previous research (Griffin et al., as cited in Poteat et al., 2012). Nonetheless, the current research has provided many new insights into the empowerment process in the GSA, namely mental health as a barrier and empowerment possibility, participants’ particular use of the safe space established in the GSA, how some participants use coalition-building within the school community to influence school policy, the possibility of collective empowerment under certain conditions, themes where power-sharing between the youth and adults is important, and the social distancing due to the coronavirus and school context as specific barriers to empowerment. These insights further enhance the understanding of especially collective and political empowerment and the context in which

GSA's operated. Although previous research had found no evidence of coalitions being established in the school community (Mayberry, 2012), this research discovered that participants did form these relationships and used them for informal influencing school policy. The research also demonstrated that collective empowerment is possible as long as GSA's are supported by other (adult) organisations, like the PVK foundation. Simultaneously, by looking at the specific barriers to empowerment, the research has provided an indication of important players in the school context who can be disruptive to the empowerment of the GSA. Furthermore, a relevant and still current contribution of the research is the description of how the measures against the coronavirus have impacted GSA's, given that in many countries the amount of confirmed cases is increasing again, in both the Netherlands and worldwide (RIVM, 2020 ;WHO, 2020), which might mean that schools could close again.

The youth empowerment focus of this study showed that the role of facilitator can be especially useful in discussions about mental health and asking for permission from school boards, but also demonstrated caveats within this role. Furthermore, the research demonstrated that facilitators should adopt strategies that empower the youth, for instance, by not taking over, effectively communicating, sharing power, and facilitating discussions to develop critical reflection. These strategies had already been indicated by previous theory and research on youth empowerment (DiBenedetto, 1991; Jennings et al., 2009; Úcar Martínez, 2016), but this research adds another layer by considering mental health and school board permission.

Intergroup dynamics

The current research has shown, through its intersectional approach, while respecting some students' dominant affiliation with a specific social identity, that the participants ascribed to different groups within the GSA based on their network of friends, age, activeness, gender, being a student or their SOGIE. Each of the identities adopted can cause different intergroup dynamics influencing empowerment in different ways on different levels and domains. The intergroup dynamics established through friend networks could negatively affect participants' political empowerment as they were less likely to profit from independently engaging in leadership positions within the GSA. These friend groups, furthermore, influenced the safe space, as they could lead to participants being less willing to share their daily challenges with those that they do not consider part of their group. The dynamics formed through the different social identities of age could enhance empowerment by enabling younger participants to learn and gain support from older participants, improving their self-development and self-esteem. However, younger participants were also less able to voice their opinions as older participants

tended to take over, restricting their political empowerment. The intergroup dynamics based on activeness thereby seemed to create a Matthew effect, as those who were more empowered were also more likely to experience more empowerment opportunities in the GSA.

The intergroup dynamics based on participants' SOGIE were both negative and positive. Negative intergroup dynamics were formed between the two groups based on expected or experienced bias and discrimination, as indicated by Tajfel and Turner (1979), which are likely to harm the safe space. Another effect was that participants felt that straight participants did not understand or recognise the challenges shared by LGBTQ+ participants due to lack of experience. This lack of experience was believed to negatively influence both the social and personal empowerment of participants. However, straight students could also keep the safe space grounded through their perspectives and their participation could help with legitimacy, already demonstrated by Levesque (2019), and catering school-based actions to fellow students. Furthermore, straight students' participation could help against the GSA's reputation of being a "gay club", which could enhance the social empowerment participants experienced. The theory of allyship showed that straight participants are unlikely to reflect on their social position and privilege, which limits their ability to work for social empowerment by disrupting heteronormative society. Nonetheless, as the GSA enables straight participants to learn about the LGBTQ+ community, it could help them in their first steps towards the reflective practice needed for allyship.

The current research demonstrates the importance of taking into account the multiplicity of participants' different social identities. Even though all participants seemed to identify with a superordinate identity, participants ascribed to different social identities, creating groups within the GSA, establishing complex intergroup dynamics. This research has been the first scientific study to examine the effects of the intergroup dynamics of so many different social identities within one empowerment initiative. This will enhance scientific understanding of the intergroup dynamics that are formed based on the intersecting social identities to which participants ascribe and how these dynamics influence empowerment on different levels. The current research demonstrated, herein, how social identity theory could be used to study the complexity of the intersecting identities of participants in an empowerment process.

Social identities and empowerment

The current research demonstrates what the different social identities of the GSA participants meant to the empowerment process within the GSA, by examining how the intergroup

dynamics created by these social identities influenced the empowerment participants experienced. Personal empowerment was affected, as the positive effects of the safe space could be restricted due to bias and tensions that could be created between different social groups. The safe space could also be influenced when participants became less willing to share their daily challenges or ask for support to those participants that they do not consider part of their social group. The intergroup dynamic based on age, where older participants could share their experiences enabling younger participants to learn and enhance their self-development, nonetheless demonstrated that social identities also could have a positive effect. Another way by which the social identities of the participants influenced the personal empowerment of all participants, was by the creation of a Matthew effect (Perc, 2014). The intergroup dynamics formed between different social identities also shaped political empowerment, since it led some participants to be less likely to take on leadership positions and tasks or to voice their opinions during meetings. They participants were then less able to gain or practice leadership qualities, which could enhance their political empowerment. In the case of social empowerment, the research indicated a negative effect if the intergroup dynamics were coupled with a high turnover problem, showing how those who were less motivated remained, making it difficult for the group to organise school-based activities.

Most participants also ascribed to a social identity based on their SOGIE, which might be their dominant affiliation (Mayo, 2017). This indicated that even though participants have intersecting identities, they consider their SOGIE to be an important social identity. The research furthermore demonstrated the complexity of how participants that ascribe to different social identities based on their SOGIE related to one another and what this meant to both the safe space and social empowerment. The research indicated that the participants did not so much use the safe space to reflect on power structures critically or to acquire a critical consciousness, but more to gain a positive sense of self and to lift internalised oppressions. These effects were accomplished by sharing daily challenges, asking for support, help and advice. Through these activities, participants also learned more about their SOGIE, and consequently about their social identity based on this SOGIE.

In this manner, a discourse was established in which experiences were seen to be shared, recognised, and understood only by those with the same SOGIE identity. Those with a different identity, when they, for instance, were straight instead of LGBTQ+, were considered to, by definition, have different experiences and perspectives. As a critical reflection, an analysis based on systems and power structures (Sardenberg, 2007; Watts et al., 2011), was lacking, it might have been difficult for participants to recognise that straight students also experienced

the effects of heteronormativity, causing LGBTQ+ participants to feel misunderstood by straight participants, feeling ownership about certain issues, and to not engage in behaviour questioning heteronormativity when straight participants are present. In fact, this could cause tensions and make the safe space less effective. It is believed that once participants develop a critical reflection, more understanding and recognition between the different groups based on the experiences of heteronormativity that they might share would be possible. This could furthermore lead to a superordinate identity based on these shared experiences. This superordinate identity might enable more cooperation and reduce the negative intergroup dynamics between participants identifying with different social groups.

The identity based on participants' SOGIE also affected social empowerment. Next to what was mentioned above, participants also felt that the presence of straight participants helped legitimise the GSA, enabled them to have better actions, and helped decrease their reputation as a gay club. Straight participants were, nevertheless, unlikely to reflect and interrogate their privilege, which makes it improbable that they would use their privilege adequately to disrupt heteronormative society. Nonetheless, the GSA can be a place where straight participants could learn the knowledge and skills necessary to take the first steps towards interrogating their privilege. These knowledge and skills that participants are able to gain could be further enhanced by the development of a critical reflection, as this could provide participants with a frame of reference to structure the practice of reflection on their social position.

By focusing on these social identities and the intergroup dynamics established by the different identities participants ascribed to, the current research reiterates the importance of taking intersectionality into account within empowerment initiatives. A participant could, for instance, be young and straight, having a difficulty to speak up, while another participant could be transgender, older and have a leadership position. As such, the research findings problematise a homogenous marginalised identity given to participants of empowerment initiatives that still happens too often in research conducted about empowerment initiatives. It also shows that, due to the intergroup dynamics created, it is too simple to assume that by definition those who ascribe to a marginalised identity will be the most marginalised in empowerment initiatives that target more heterogeneous groups. Hence, the current research emphasises the importance of looking at the intersections of identity within a certain empowerment context and considering how each social identity can bring another form of power and empowerment to participants in a certain context. The research has furthermore given indications on how empowerment is influenced by intergroup dynamics and new insights

about empowerment in the GSA, which can be used as a guide for hypothesis formation for future research. As this research has studied empowerment and intergroup dynamics through interviews, it is recommended that the findings will be corroborated by future research using different methods, such as quantitative research, observation, action-research, or ethnography.

Furthermore, important recommendations for teachers, facilitators and other organisations can be distilled from the research. It was shown that mental health was an important consideration in the sharing of power between facilitators and participants and that the youth who were stimulated by their facilitators to discuss and examine the topic of mental health could enhance empowerment. Facilitators would be wise to investigate ways in which they can stimulate the participants to explore and discuss this topic without becoming overwhelmed. The different intergroup dynamics found by this research are important tools that facilitators can use to reflect on the dynamics within their GSA and see which participants might benefit from extra stimulation for the least empowered to profit. The research thereby showed that GSAs could develop relations within the community and use these for collective actions when they are supported by another (adult) organisation in gaining access to collective means. COC can use these findings to reflect on their national facilitation of the GSAs and to investigate how they can create useful alliances between GSAs and other organisations and between the GSA and themselves.

Another important finding of the research is that although many participants already gained a lot from the safe space that was created, a critical reflection might enable youth to work together across their different social identities and dominant affiliations. This could improve the quality of the safe space by reducing tensions and bias, create a better understanding of shared issues, and create more recognition of the issues that participants with different identities face. It could thereby stimulate the creation of a superordinate identity based on participants' shared experiences of heteronormativity, which could add to participants' willingness to cooperate with one another. This critical reflection will simultaneously provide participants, with more tools, knowledge and a frame to help straight participants to reflect on their privileged position. This would help them to become a constructive ally and work effectively for social empowerment. It would furthermore enhance the personal empowerment that participants experience, as critical reflection is an important step to critical consciousness-raising, an important aspect of personal empowerment. This critical reflection is developed through group discussions where participants listen, show humility and respect, and engage in critique. In many GSAs, participants were already practicing with the qualities of listening, respecting and humility, but an active critique was still missing. Therefore, it is recommended

that facilitators stimulate the development of a critical reflection by encouraging participants to engage in discussion that would enable these qualities to flourish.

6.1 Limitations

As already indicated in the method section, this research is likely to have a selection bias due to the way parental approval was acquired; those students who are not out to their parents have likely not participated in the research. Those students who are not out likely experience less empowerment. So, it is probable that the researcher interviewed a subset of the participants of the GSA who already have more personal empowerment. As the research also indicated the possibility of a Matthew effect, the participants missed by the research likely experienced the opportunities within the GSA differently. This would influence the findings of the research on individual capacities, social empowerment, and political empowerment. As such, the results of this research cannot be generalised to all participants of the GSA.

Due to social distances measures, many interviews had to be done by skype and telephone. Methodological literature has traditionally been wary of using telephone interviews, as it is believed that it is more difficult to achieve rapport, and that visual and non-verbal cues cannot be observed (Irvine, 2010). Although it is difficult to compare the differences between telephone, skype, and offline interviews, in most instances the telephone interviews were the shortest and it was sometimes difficult to check with respondents whether they were still engaged due to the fact that non-verbal cues were lacking. Nevertheless, whether respondents felt comfortable to share their experiences did not seem to be influenced by the interviewing method, as in each interview method some participants were more willing to share their personal experiences and some were less willing to do so. It was, however, especially during phone and skype interviews, difficult to estimate whether a respondent had finished their story and was ready for another question. Hence, sometimes there was a period between the respondent finishing their response and the researcher asking a new question. As a result, silences took longer, which sometimes motivated the respondent to share more, allowing further insight. However, it sometimes took a while before the researcher was accustomed to the way respondents answered questions, which would sometimes lead her to speak over the respondent. Regardless, this also happened in face-to-face interviews, as confirmed by the study done by Irvine (2010).

Another effect of the measures against the coronavirus was that it was difficult to study a small group of GSAs in-depth, as schools were closed, and participants were less willing to do an interview. In GSA 1, three participants and a facilitator were interviewed; in GSA 2, four

participants were interviewed; in GSA 7, five participants and one facilitator were interviewed; and in GSA 9 four participants were interviewed. In all other GSAs, only one participant was interviewed. Due to the methods used in the research, intergroup dynamics were mediated by the participants' experiences. Hence, as for some GSAs, only one participant was interviewed, the researcher had difficulties to check whether other participants of that specific GSA experienced the dynamics similarly. As such, the data about the intergroup dynamics in those GSA might be influenced by the one-sided experiences of the interviewed respondent. Future research should be done. On the one hand, further research could examine, through, for instance, questionnaires, whether the patterns described by this research are generally found in GSAs. On the other hand, further research can investigate the different patterns found in this research in depth by conducting observations or an ethnographic study in a select amount of GSAs.

Even though the research had a specific focus on different social identities, at first, the interview questions were only gathered to one specific social identity, namely participants' SOGIE. This was because it was assumed during data collection that this social identity was the most important. As such, no intergroup dynamics were found on social identities based on race or class, as the researcher had not designed any questions on these identities. As participants might be less likely to think in terms of social identities, this might have caused the research findings not to contain these identities. Participants might furthermore not have been prone to share the intergroup dynamics that they experienced based on class and race with a white higher middle-class researcher. As such, future research into the effects of social identities on the empowerment process must include questions about these two specific social identities.

In the current research, a specific effect of social identities, namely the intergroup dynamics, was picked to study what social identities meant to the empowerment process, which might have obscured other effects. Furthermore, the selected method is presumed to have made it difficult to measure the intergroup dynamics, as these were mediated by the participants' experiences of these dynamics and the stories they tell about them. According to the methodology of narrative inquiry, the construction of a story always involves a constructed account of experience. It will, therefore, not provide a factual record of what has happened (Josselson, 2011). As such, this research can only make statements on how the intergroup dynamics was understood by the participants and the researcher. Nevertheless, as empowerment and intergroup dynamics are complex and abstract concepts, the selection of the methods did make it possible for participants to make sense of these concepts through their

own stories, empowering them within the research context. Still, research using different methods, such as ethnography or observations, or a quantitative methodology should be used to analyse further the indicators found by this research and test the hypotheses that can be formed based on the current research.

6.2 Reflections on the research

As positionality is highly personal, this section of the research report will be written in the first-person narrative. As a researcher, I have a certain positionality, embodiment, and social identity concerning class, race, culture, gender, and SOGIE, which will influence the collected data. As only interviews are conducted, the rapport between the researcher and the research participants had to be established in a short amount of time. This meant that my embodiment, the way that I look, will have had a substantial effect, as trust needed to be built quickly. My embodiment can best be described as conforming to the cultural, sexual and gender norms of Dutch higher middle-class society. This could potentially have two effects. As I interviewed adolescents, who are sensitive to social cues, peer influence and are more likely to imitate peers' clothing, speech, and hairstyle (Rathus, 2011), conforming to standard societal norms might have increased the ease of building rapport. However, my embodiment might have had the opposite effect on LGBTQ+ youth, who might have distrusted me based on this conformation. This embodiment, nonetheless, did not have much impact on those respondents who I interviewed over the phone, which happened in 9 interviews.

My positionality, being a higher middle class white cis straight Dutch female, affected the data collection as well, especially among the LGBTQ+ youth. My SOGIE could lead the LGBTQ+ youth to consider me as an outgroup member (Allen, 2010). For instance, I noticed during the interviews that participants were not asking my SOGIE. According to Allen (2010), this is a feature of my straight identity, which could mean that the youth considered me an outgroup member. As a straight cis researcher, I am furthermore likely to reproduce heteronormative practices in my knowledge acquisition, as I am less sensitive to those practices due to my privileged position within the heteronormative system (Allen, 2010).

I was aware of this reproduction of heteronormativity in two different interviews. In one interview, I assumed a participant was queer, as he had stated that he sometimes wore make-up and "women's clothing". He, however, considered himself straight, as he disagreed with the heteronormative assumption that those who identify as men are not supposed to wear these types of clothes or put on make-up. The respondent was, nonetheless, very considerate about my mix-up and was willing to tell me how, although people might assume him to be

queer, he is not. In the other instance, I had expected to be calling with a girl, when instead I heard a deeper voice, I thought that I was speaking to the parent of the respondent. As such, I checked a bit confused whether I was speaking with the right person and got a surprised “yes”. It turned out I had scheduled an interview with a person identifying as non-binary. We both ignored the mix-up, and they still seemed willing to share their personal experiences in the interview. As such, I have noticed over the data collection period that I still have assumptions about gender and that I am not yet accustomed to diverse GIEs. Hence, I expect that there is a particular bias within the research, as I might have been less sensitive to the intricate nature of practises by those with diverse GIEs (Allen, 2010).

Another important aspect of my positionality as a researcher are the implicit theories and biases I bring to the research. I have been educated in both the positivist research methodology, during my study of childhood and education studies and developmental psychology, and the constructivist research methodology, during my current degree, which I assumed would enable me to shift effortlessly between the two methodologies and question their assumptions. However, I noticed quite quickly that I had not yet fully mastered the qualitative research methodology, which caused my thinking to shift back to what I already knew, namely quantitative research. Due to this, I noticed that I wanted to make more objectifying statements than was possible from the data and that I had difficulty structuring my thesis research in such a way that my findings became more clear. I, furthermore, ascribe philosophically, theoretically, and politically to the Western feminist tradition, and am therefore more likely to explain the world based on relationships of power and power systems. This might lead to a positive bias in the way I interpret the possibilities of empowerment and a negative bias in the way I interpret the challenges of the intergroup dynamics within the GSA.

Due to personal reasons, I furthermore had to stick to a 9 to 5 scheme while writing this thesis. This was the first time since I started studying that I only had 8 hours a day to dedicate to my degree, which made me realise that the techniques that I have been using for writing papers were not efficient. Since it was not possible to just study longer, I was confronted by the ineffectiveness of my own strategies, which sometimes led to frustration but also to a reflection on my capacities and techniques, which enabled me to develop my sense of self further. I, thereby, as already indicated above, noticed that I am more comfortable in a quantitative research setting than in a qualitative research setting, as a quantitative research setting seems more straightforward. However, I think it was very useful to do qualitative research, as I was able to practice with this method and enhance my understanding of the process of this type of research.

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Appendix 1: Informed Consent Form

Toestemmingsformulier

Onderzoek GSA, Wageningen Universiteit

Beste Deelnemer,

Je ontvangt hierbij het toestemmingsformulier voor het onderzoek GSA en Empowerment dat wordt uitgevoerd als deel van een masterscriptie aan Wageningen Universiteit. Lees de onderstaande informatie goed door. Mocht je nog eventuele vragen hebben na het lezen van deze informatie, dan kun je die direct stellen. Dit onderzoek zal gedaan worden door binnen het interview te vragen naar voorbeelden waarbij je je geholpen voelde door de GSA en hoe jullie binnen de GSA samenwerken. Deelname aan het onderzoek is vrijwillig en je kan op elk moment tijdens het interview ervoor kiezen om niet meer mee te doen. Je hoeft hiervoor geen reden te geven. Daarnaast ben je niet verplicht om vragen te beantwoorden en kan je ervoor kiezen om dat niet te doen.

De gegevens worden anoniem verzameld, verwerkt en bewaard. Dit betekent dat je gegevens niet aan je naam worden gekoppeld. Daarnaast zal er binnen het onderzoek geen vermelding gemaakt worden van de naam van je school en ook niet van de regio van je school. Dit wordt gedaan om jou te beschermen. In dit onderzoek zal je gevraagd worden om voorbeelden te geven. Binnen dit onderzoek wordt er gebruik gemaakt van quotes als deel van de resultaten. De onderzoekster zal proberen om ervoor te zorgen dat deze quotes niet naar jou persoonlijk herleidbaar zijn. Om zeker te zijn dat je gegevens beschermd worden, vraagt de onderzoekster of ze, als het onderzoeksrapport klaar is, dit rapport naar je op mag kan sturen. Dan kan je zelf controleren je akkoord bent met de weergave van de gegevens in het onderzoeksrapport. Ook hiervoor moet je toestemming geven.

Dit onderzoek is een masterscriptie. Dit betekent dat de begeleider van deze scriptie, Mvr. Margit van Wessel de verzamelde gegevens kan inzien. Dit is voor de begeleiding van de onderzoeker. Deze gegevens worden anoniem ingezien.

Ik heb de informatie gelezen. Ik kon vragen stellen. Mijn vragen zijn voldoende beantwoord. Ik had genoeg tijd om over deelname te beslissen.

Ik weet dat meedoen vrijwillig is en dat ik mijn toestemming kan intrekken op ieder moment van het onderzoek. Daarvoor hoef ik geen reden te geven.

Ik geef toestemming voor het verzamelen, bewaren en gebruiken van mijn gegevens voor de beantwoording van de onderzoeksvraag in dit onderzoek.

Ik wil meedoen aan dit onderzoek.

Daarnaast geef ik toestemming voor opsturen van het rapport zodat ik kan controleren of ik het eens ben met de weergave van de door mij gegeven informatie.

Ja/Nee (omcirkelen wat van toepassing is)

Indien ja, mailadres:

.....

Naam

deelnemer:.....

Handtekening:.....Datum : __ / __ / __

.....

Ik, de onderzoeker, verklaar dat ik deze deelnemer volledig heb geïnformeerd over het genoemde onderzoek.

Als er tijdens het onderzoek informatie bekend wordt die de toestemming van de deelnemer zou kunnen beïnvloeden, dan breng ik hem/haar daarvan tijdig op de hoogte.

Naam onderzoeker:

Handtekening:

Datum: __ / __ / __

.....

Appendix 2: Indirect Parent Approval Form

Beste ouder/voogd,

Voor de komende maanden januari, februari en maart zal er op [naam school] een onderzoek uitgevoerd worden naar de gender en sexuality alliance ook wel bekend als de GSA op [naam school]. Dit onderzoek is deel van een masterscriptie voor de Wageningen Universiteit dat kijkt naar de effecten van deze groep op school. Voor het onderzoek zal de onderzoekster verschillende leerlingen vragen naar hun mening over de GSA. Dit gebeurt door middel van een interview.

Het is mogelijk dat uw kind geselecteerd zal worden voor dit interview. Graag willen wij u vragen dat als u hier bezwaar tegen heeft u dit zou willen aangeven door een mailtje te sturen naar daphne.visser@wur.nl binnen de komende **twee weken**, voor [moment deadline] met daarin de naam van uw kind en de klas, zodat de onderzoekster hen niet zal selecteren om vragen te beantwoorden. Als u hier geen bezwaar tegen wilt maken dan hoeft u verder niets te doen, wij gaan er dan vanuit dat u toestemt met het onderzoek en dat uw kind geselecteerd mag worden voor een interview.

Wij hopen u daar middel van dit bericht voldoende te hebben geïnformeerd. Mocht u nog verdere vragen hebben dan kan u eveneens contact opnemen met de onderzoekster op mailadres daphne.visser@wur.nl.

Graag bedanken wij u voor uw tijd,

Met vriendelijke groeten,

[Directie school]
en Daphne Visser

Appendix 3: Direct Parental Approval Form

Beste ouder/voogd,

Voor de komende maanden zal er op het [naam school] een onderzoek uitgevoerd worden naar de gender en sexuality alliance ook wel bekend als de GSA. Dit onderzoek is deel van een masterscriptie voor de Wageningen Universiteit dat kijkt naar de effecten van deze groep op school. Voor het onderzoek zal ik, de onderzoekster, verschillende leerlingen vragen naar hun mening over de GSA. Dit gebeurt door middel van een interview dat ongeveer een uur in beslag zal nemen. Hierin worden vragen gesteld over de GSA en de mening van de leerlingen over de GSA.

Uw kind is geselecteerd voor dit interview. Graag wil ik u vragen dat als u hier geen bezwaar tegen heeft u dit zou willen aangeven door dit formulier te ondertekenen dat u toestemt met het onderzoek en dat uw kind benadert mag worden voor een interview. Dit zal door middel van mailcontact gaan, waarna er een afspraak gemaakt zal worden voor het interview.

Wij hopen u door middel van dit bericht voldoende te hebben geïnformeerd. Mocht u nog verdere vragen hebben dan kan u contact opnemen met de onderzoekster op mailadres daphne.visser@wur.nl.

Graag bedanken wij u voor uw tijd,

Met vriendelijke groeten,

Daphne Visser

Toestemmingsformulier

Onderzoek GSA, Wageningen Universiteit

Beste ouder/voogd,

U ontvangt hierbij het toestemmingsformulier voor het onderzoek GSA dat wordt uitgevoerd als deel van een masterscriptie aan de Wageningen Universiteit. Dit onderzoek zal door interviews proberen een beter beeld te krijgen van de effecten van *Gender and Sexuality Alliances*, ook wel bekend als de GSA, dat plaats vindt op het [naam school] voor de maanden [tijdsindicatie]. Door het ondertekenen van dit formulier geeft u de onderzoekster toestemming om met uw kind een interview over dit onderwerp af te nemen.

Hierbij geef ik toestemming om mijn kind te benaderen voor een interview, nadat ik bovenstaande informatie gelezen heb en eventuele vragen aan de onderzoekster heb kunnen stellen.

Naam ouder/voogd:

Handtekening:

Datum: __/__/__

Appendix 4: Translated quotes

Chapter 4: The empowerment process in the GSA

4.1 Personal empowerment

Development of self

pp. 22-23: *“Eh bij ons wel, op school, er zijn echt leerlingen bijvoorbeeld die, eh ja, bijvoorbeeld leerlingen die asexueel waren en die nog niet helemaal begrepen wat het was en er online over hadden gelezen, nou die kwamen toen bij ons, en ja en zij, ze kwamen er ook echt achter dat ze asexueel waren. En het was niet voor ons om er dan een label aan te plakken, maar wel voor die leerlingen een vorm van duidelijkheid, nou ja dat is meerdere keren gebeurd.” (Respondent 4.1, LGBTQ+, interview 30.03.20).*

Eh with us, our school, there have been students whom, for example, eh yeah, for example, students who were asexual and who did not fully understand what it was and who had read about it online, well they came to us and yeah, and they, they also really found out that they were asexual. And it was not for us to give them a label, but indeed for those students a sense of clarity, well that has happened multiple times.

p. 23: *“[...] en toen had ik zoiets van ‘you know fuck it, kom er gewoon voor uit en probeer mensen een beetje te helpen’. Dus toen ben ik erbij gegaan.” (Respondent 9.3, non-binary, interview 19.04.20).*

“[...] and then I was like ‘you know fuck it’ just come out for it and try to help other people a bit. So then I just joined”

p. 23: *“[...] maar wel dat ik, voordat ik naar de GSA kwam, eigenlijk dacht van ik ben hetero en toen ik erbij kwam toen begon ik wel na te denken ‘uhm vind ik meisjes leuk, vind ik jongens leuk en ben ik überhaupt al verliefd geweest?’, enzo, en ik denk nu dat ik het weet, maar ik weet het nu niet zeker en eigenlijk boeit het me ook niet dat ik het al weet want ja.” (Participant 7.5, straight, interview 18.04.2020).*

“But indeed, before I came to the GSA, I actually thought like I am straight and then when I joined I certainly started to think about ‘uhm do I like girls, do I like boys and have I, on the whole, ever been in love?’ and stuff like that, and I now think that I know, but now I do not know for certain and actually I do not care that I do not yet know because yeah.”

p. 23: *“Eh ja ik heb er zeker wat aan, elke, het voelt gewoon als een veilige plek waar je totaal jezelf kan zijn [...] het is toch fijn om hoe gek of anders je ook bent, dan wordt er echt niks over gezegd of geen opmerkingen en we hebben het altijd heel gezellig met elkaar. Ja.” (Respondent 7.3, interview 13.04.20).*

“Eh yeah it has been quite some use to me, every, it just feels like a safe space where you can totally be yourself [...] it is still nice that no matter how crazy or different you are, no one says anything about it and no remarks and we just are really cosy together. Yeah.”

p. 23: *“Uhm ja ik weet het niet echt precies, maar ik denk dat uhm, dat zeg maar uhm, dat het laat zien dat het niet uitmaakt met wie je omgaat, dat je altijd gewoon jezelf moet zijn. En dan komt het altijd wel goed.” (Respondent 7.1, straight, interview 08.04.20).*

Uhm yeah I do not exactly know, but I think that uhm so to say uhm that it shows that it does not matter with whom you hang out, you just always have to be yourself. And then everything will always turn out fine.

p. 24: *“Ja de eerste paar keer is het een beetje eng, maar daarna kun je dat gewoon heel goed uitleggen en sta je er echt en ben je ook niet heel erg onzeker, terwijl normaal gesproken bij presentaties of*

mondelingen sloeg ik altijd helemaal dicht, ging ik stotteren en gehuil en weet ik veel allemaal. Dat is daardoor wel minder geworden heb ik gemerkt.” (Respondent 4.1, LGBTQ+, interview 30.03.2020).

“Yeah the first few times it is a bit scary, but after that you can just explain it really well and then you really stand there and you are also not that insecure, while usually with presentations or orals I would not be able to speak, I would start stammering and crying and I know what else. Because of that it has become less, I have noticed.”

p. 24: *“En toen heb ik volgens mij meegeholpen met Paarse Vrijdag eerst en toen was het zo van 'oh nou dit gaat best wel, ja dit lukt nog wel'. 'Het gaat goed ook bij hen'.*” (Respondent 2.2, transgender & pansexual, interview 17.03.2020).

“And then I have, I think, helped with Purple Friday at first and then it was like ‘oh well this is possible, yes this works’. ‘It is also going well for them.’”

p. 24: *“Het is denk ik echt wel een soort van platform om elkaar te kunnen helpen met problemen. [...] Beetje dealen met homofobie enzo eigenlijk, dus dat is wel [...].*” (Respondent 1.3, gay, interview 13.02.2020).

“It is, I think, well a kind of platform to help each other with issues. A little bit dealing with homophobia and stuff actually, so it is that indeed.”

pp. 24-25: *“Uhm ik denk het wel ja, want er zijn ook wel wat mensen die eh op mentaal vlak niet altijd helemaal stabiel zijn, uhm en wij proberen ook gewoon zo veel mogelijk elkaar te supporten en elkaar steun te bieden waar dat kan.*” (Respondent 7.4, straight, interview 14.04.20).

“Uhm I indeed think so, because there are also some people who uhm mentally speaking aren’t always completely stable, uhm and we try to just support each other as much as possible and give each other support where possible.”

p. 25: *“Nou ja er zijn natuurlijk wel discussies geweest. Er is een hele grote discussie geweest rondom mentale gezondheid of we het daarover kunnen hebben, want een groot deel van onze GSA die uhm was wel redelijk depressief kan ik wel zeggen. Uhm en er waren best wel grote discussies ontstaan over in hoe mate, in welke mate we het hier over kunnen hebben, want uhm ik ben daar best wel wat makkelijker in, dus ik address die grote dingen wat makkelijker, maar andere mensen ervaren het als zeer onprettig, eh als we het over suïcidaliteit hadden of over iets anders, dus daar was wel een hele grote discussie over ontstaan van uhm waar heb je het wel met elkaar over en waar niet. En uhm die openheid in hoeverre is dat zo.”* (Respondent 2.3, straight, interview 18.03.20).

“Well there have of course been discussions. There has been a really big discussion about mental health and whether or not we could talk about it, because a big group of our GSA was uhm quite depressed, I can say. Uhm and some quite big discussions arose about how much, how much we could talk about it, because uh I was quite easy going in that, so I address these big topics easier, but other people experienced it as really unpleasant, eh if we were talking about suicidality or about something else, so there indeed arouse a really big discussion about uhm what do you talk about with each other and what not. And uhm that openness, how much is it there.”

p. 25: *“Ja alle, er zijn ook niet echt taboes ofzo, dus je kan het overal over hebben. Uhm meestal wordt dat wel een beetje geleid dan door B. [begeleider] die dan zegt van 'ja er was laatst een meisje bij mij, zelfmoord gepleegd, in mijn dorp' en dan gaat ie het daar een beetje over hebben en dan vertellen wij onze verhalen. En dan heb je toch weer iets geleerd, maar dan worden, het wordt niet heel zwaar ofzo.”* (Respondent 7.5, straight, interview 18.04.20).

“Yeah all. There are not really taboos or anything, so you can talk about everything, uhm usually it is led a bit by B. [Facilitator] who then says like ‘yeah last time there was a girl who committed suicide in my, in my village’ and then he talks about it and then we share our stories. And then you have again learned something, but it does, it does not become very heavy or something like that.”

Individual capacities

p. 25: “En ik merk ook dat sinds ik bij de GSA zit dat ik er makkelijker over kan praten, over mijn seksualiteit, dat ik eh het beter uit kan leggen.” (Respondent 3.1, asexual, 30.03.20).

“And I also notice that since I have joined the GSA that I can more easily talk about it, about my sexuality, that I can eh better explain it.”

p. 25 “Uhm samenwerken denk ik, ik ben niet supergoed in samenwerken, dat weet ik, ik ben nooit goed geweest in samenwerken, maar daardoor is het wel beter geworden denk ik. En eh ja communicatie in het algemeen denk ik ook. En eh ja ik weet het niet, ja misschien leidinggeven, dat dat er eentje is. Ja ik weet niet voor de rest eh. Ja voor de klas kunnen staan zonder dicht te slaan.” (Respondent 4.1, LGBTQ+, interview 30.03.2020).

Uhm collaborating I think, I am not really great at collaborating, I know that, I have never been good at collaborating, but because of that it has become better I think. And eh yeah communication as a whole I also think. And eh yeah I don’t know, yeah maybe taking the lead, that that is one. Yeah otherwise I do not know eh. Yeah standing in front of a class without being unable to speak.”

p. 26: “Eh ja verder, vaardigheid, ook gewoon dat ik andere mensen heb leren begrijpen, want ik was best wel sceptisch over uhm bijvoorbeeld dat soort mensen die nou ik vind het, ik weet niet of ik heel gemeen maak [...]. Uhm ja gewoon mensen die bijvoorbeeld transgender zijn en dan best wel eh ja, die dan, bijvoorbeeld een man die dan een vrouw wil zijn en dan verder niks nog heeft eh gedaan, maar dan bijvoorbeeld wel een pruik draagt, ik kan dat niet heel goed begrijpen, maar dat, waarom je zo iets zou doen, want ik denk dan alleen maar van ‘oh dan ga je heel veel meningen over je krijgen, omdat het er zo apart uitziet’, maar ja omdat we dat gesprek ook hebben geopend, natuurlijk met die mensen, daar leer je ook van, want dan heb je ook natuurlijk ook soort vaardigheden om mensen beter te begrijpen of andersom mensen beter te begrijpen.” (Respondent 2.3, straight, interview 18.03.20).

“Eh yes, what more, skills, also just that I have learned to understand other people, because I was quite sceptic about uhm, for example, the kind of people who well I think, I do not know if I now make it sound really mean [...] Uhm yes just people who are, for instance, transgender and who are then quite eh yes, who then, for example, a man who wants to be a woman and who has not yet done anything, but who, for example, does wear a wig. I do not really understand that well, because that, why would you do something like that, because I only think like ‘owh then you will receive a lot of opinions, because it looks so special’, but yes because we have had that conversation, of course with these people, then you will learn from that, because then you of course also have some kind of skills to better understand people or to vice versa understand people better.”

Consciousness-raising in the GSA

p. 26: “[...] en dan merk ik ook dat mensen blij zijn dat het GSA er is om even over dingen te kunnen praten die mensen uit de GSA wel begrijpen, maar andere vrienden niet.” (Respondent 3.1, asexual, interview 30.03.20).

[...] and then I also notice that people are happy that there is a GSA to talk about stuff that people of the GSA understand, but other friends do not.

pp. 26-27: “Eh ja over seksualiteit en eh of genderidentiteit, zulke dingen over ja, over vervelende eh ja een moment dat je gediscrimineerd werd, je bent vanwege je genderidentiteit of je seksuele identiteit en ja het zijn wel dingen waar je met je vrienden over kan praten, maar het meeste hebben ze natuurlijk niet meegemaakt, kunnen ze niet zeggen hoe het hoe het voor hen opgelost is. En zij hebben, de meesten hebben daar wel meegemaakt of die weten wel een goede oplossing hierover omdat ze iemand kennen die dit heeft meegemaakt.” (Respondent 7.2, transgender, interview 09.04.20).

“Eh yeah about sexuality or eh gender identity that kind of stuff yeah, about irksome eh yeah a moment where you were discriminated, you were, because of your gender identity or sexual identity and yeah those are things which you can talk about with your friends, but most of it they have not experienced,

they cannot tell you how it was solved for them. And they have, most have experienced it, or they know a good solution about it because they know someone who has experienced it.”

p. 27: *“Maar eh ja er zijn dan ook een paar bi's en zo dus die herkennen wel van 'owh ja dat', dat soort dingen. Bijvoorbeeld dat een paar meiden die bi zijn laatst een discussie van 'eh ja ik krijg altijd alleen maar jongens, maar ik heb nooit een meisje dat mij leuk vindt' of zo, weet je wel, en dat is soort van, daar herkennen ze elkaar dan in, dat is dan wel grappig en fijn voor hen.” (Respondent 1.1, transgender, interview 11.02.20).*

“But eh yeah there are a few bis and stuff so they recognise like ‘owh yeah that’, that kind of stuff. For instance, a few girls who are bi had a discussion last time like ‘eh yeah I always only get boys, but I never have a girl who likes me’ or something like that, you know, and that is kind of, they recognise each other in that, that is then quite funny and nice for them.”

p. 27: *“Maar als je bijvoorbeeld praat over eh de problemen waar je tegenaan loopt dan kan het wel uitmaken dat mensen natuurlijk niet eh dezelfde ervaring hebben als eh je hebt wanneer je wel LGBTQ+ bent.” (Respondent 9.3, non-binary, interview 19.04.20).*

“But eh, for instance, when you talk about eh the problems where you run up against then it can matter that people of course do not eh have the same experience as you have when you are indeed LGBTQ+.”

p. 27: *[...] en soms zegt meneer H. [begeleider] dat die iets hoorde van een andere leerling die waarbij het dus mentaal heel slecht ging en dat, dan delen we onze zelf, eigen verhaal met mensen om ons, onze omgeving of wat we zelf hebben meegemaakt op dat gebied en dan praten we daar gewoon over.” (Respondent 7.3, interview 13.04.20).*

“[...] eh and sometimes mister H. [facilitator] says that he has heard something from another student who is struggling with their mental health and then we share our own, own story about people near us or what we have experienced ourselves on that front and then we just talk about it.”

p. 27: *“Dan ging ik gewoon naar een specifiek iemand toe van 'ja dit is weer gebeurd' en dan kreeg ik een positieve peptalk waarvan ik zat van 'okay ja dat was best wel weer fijn om te horen eigenlijk'. [...] Eh dat waren de mensen waarbij ik wist dat ik het kwijt kon.” (Respondent 2.2, transgender & pansexual, interview 17.03.20).*

Then I would go to a specific person like ‘yeah this happened again’ and then I got a positive pep talk about which I was like ‘okay yeah that was actually nice to hear’. [...] Eh those were the people I knew I could tell that to.”

p. 28: *“En eh je leert gewoon ook gewoon meer over mensen zeg maar over hoe ze, sommige mensen denken over bepaalde dingen en dat is wel leuk. Ja.” (Respondent 7.3, interview 13.04.20).*

“And eh you just learn also just more about people so to say about how some people think about certain stuff and that is quite fun. Yeah.”

p. 28: *“En persoonlijk, kijk ik heb niet zeg maar het ergste, want ik heb ook gewoon met mannen enzo en ik heb lang haar, ik zie er gewoon redelijk vrouwelijk uit, dat vind ik leuk om mij zeg maar typisch als een vrouw te kleden, gewoon stereotypisch, maar er zijn ook andere mensen die het dan gewoon nog erg heb, dan denk ik van ja, als ik het gezeik al krijg, wat [...] Hoe is het dan voor die anderen [...] Gewoon meer zo van of van die personen die dan thuis als pot worden aangezien, want die willen dragen wat ze leuk vinden, dat ik denk van ... [maakt gebaar]” (Respondent 1.2, bisexual, interview 11.02.20).*

“Eh personally, look, I do not have it the worst, because I also date men and stuff and I have long hair, I look quite feminine, I like to so to say dress classically like a woman, just stereotypical, but there are also other people who just have it worse, then I think like yeah, if I am already getting shit, what [...] How is it then for those others [...] Just more like those or like those people who are at home being seen as a dyke, because they want to wear what they want, than I think like ... [makes gesture]”

4.2 Close relationship empowerment

p. 29: “[...] toen was het uiteindelijk gewoon dat ik heel veel tijd met eh nou eigenlijk het GSA groepje ging doorbrengen en dan gewoon was het zo van 'ja maar ik doe het gewoon en ik heb daar geen last van dat mensen daar wat van zeggen, omdat ik zelfverzekerd zeg dat ik dit ben en dit zo doe'. Dat is uiteindelijk iets wat ik heb overgenomen van ze en eh ja ik doe nu ook gewoon mezelf zijn. Fack wat anderen denken.” (Respondent 2.2, transgender & pansexual, interview 17.03.20).

“[...] then it was eventually just that I was spending a lot of time with eh well actually the GSA group and then it was just like ‘yeah but I just do it and I do not suffer from when people say something about that, because I confidently say that this is who I am and this is how I do it’. That is eventually something that I took from them and eh yeah I am now just being myself. Fack what other people think.”

p. 29: “Het is denk ik echt wel een soort van platform om elkaar te kunnen helpen met problemen. [...] Beetje dealen met homofobie enzo eigenlijk, dus dat is wel [...]” (Respondent 1.3, gay, interview 13.02.20).

“It is, I think well a kind of platform to help each other with issues. A little bit dealing with homophobia and stuff actually, so it is that indeed.”

p. 29: “Uhm misschien wel dat ik, met de GSA's overkoepelende organisatie wel, dat steeds meer mensen uit de kast komen op jongere leeftijd omdat ze niet meer bang zijn.” (Respondent 6.1, bisexual, interview 08.04.20).

Uhm maybe indeed that I, with the national GSA organisation indeed, that more and more people are coming out at a young age because they are no longer afraid.

4.3 Collective empowerment

Building relationships within the school community

p. 30: “Eh we hadden de, we hebben natuurlijk een feestcommissie enzo, en de examencommissie, maar dat, en een leerlingenraad, maar die werkten niet echt samen. Eh omdat die leerlingenraad echt ook eh hun eigen doelen had en niet echt te combineren viel. Die leerlingenraad was bijvoorbeeld meer voor eh nou er moet een klok in die klas, in alle klassen komen, maar niet eh voor dingen organiseren. Daar waren wij echt voor of een examencommissie met een examenstunt.” (Respondent 4.1, LGBTQ+, interview 30.03.20).

“Eh we have the, we have of course a party committee and stuff, and the exam committee, but that and a student council, but they do not really work together. Eh because the student council really eh had their own goals and those were not combinable. That student council was, for instance, more for eh well there must be a clock in that classroom, in all classrooms, but not eh for organising stuff. That was what we were for or an exam committee for the exam stunt.”

p. 30: “Ja meestal de, de, de school, de, in onze school hebben we een feestgroep die dan feesten organiseert, en die helpen eigenlijk bijna altijd bij dit, bij het organiseren van de GSA, eh de Paarse Vrijdag dag. Dus daar, die helpen dan mee met de boxen enzo en de muziek [...] Omdat B. [begeleider] daar ook begeleider is.” (Respondent 7.2, transgender, interview 09.04.20).

“Yeah usually the the, the school, the, in our school we have a party group who then organises parties and they actually almost always help with this with organising the GSA, eh the Purple Friday day. So there, they help with the boxes and stuff and the music [...] because B. [facilitator] is also the facilitator there.”

p. 30: “Ja nou ja een collega van mij komt regelmatig en die is ook gewoon getrouwd met een man en die vindt het gewoon fijn om nou ja, net zoals ik, steun te geven aan leerlingen die het moeilijk hebben met dit onderwerp. Nou prima.” (Respondent 1.4, facilitator, straight, interview 10.03.20).

“Yeah well a colleague of mine regularly comes [to the GSA] and they are also married with a man and they just feel it is nice to well, just like me, support the students who are having difficulties with this subject. Well that's fine.”

p. 30: *“Maar ook met mevrouw H. bijvoorbeeld van communicatie enzo kunnen we best wel gewoon even langs, ook met dat krantenbericht van F. heeft dat ook heel erg geholpen hoor.” (Respondent 1.3, gay, interview 13.02.20).*

“But also with miss H., for instance, who does communication and stuff we can just walk in, also with that newspaper article from F. it has really helped, you know.”

p. 31: *“Nou, ik weet eerlijk gezegd niet wie de schoolleiding is.” (Respondent 7.1, straight, interview 08.04.20).*

“Well, to be honest, I do not know who our school board is.”

p. 31: *“Eh ja we moeten natuurlijk wel aan de schoolleiding vragen van eh of het mag wat we gaan doen en we hebben ons budget is, maar ja meestal doet B. [begeleider] dat gewoon.” (Respondent 7.2, transgender, interview 09.04.20).*

“Eh yes we of course have to ask the school board like eh if it is allowed what we are going to do and we have our budget, but yeah usually B. [facilitator] just does that.”

p. 31: *“Oh absoluut ja. Uhm we hadden een, een jongetje dat, het uhm vreemd lag en dat wilde een meisje worden uhm eh toen hebben we ook op school gevraagd, want hij wilde graag anders heten, of zij moet ik zeggen, wilde anders heten en uhm eigenlijk iedereen noemde in principe haar al zo, en toen hebben we met school overlegd of het misschien die naamsverandering kan, doorgevoerd kon worden in magister. Uhm en dat hebben, is uiteindelijk ook gelukt en uhm dat heeft een nieuwe schoolpas gekregen en uhm dat is [een] andere naam vooral.” (Respondent 2.1, straight, interview 17.03.2020).*

“Oh absolutely yes. Uhm we had a, a boy who, eh laid strange and that wanted to be a girl uhm eh then we have also asked at school, because he wanted to have another name or she I should say, wanted to have another name and uhm actually everyone in principle already called her that and then we have discussed with the school if maybe this name change could be implemented in magister. Uhm and that has, has eventually succeed and uhm that has gotten a new school pas and uhm that is mostly different name.”

Building relationships with the larger community

p. 32: *“Eh en toen heb ik daar, daar heb ik aan mee gedaan en ja daardoor ook mensen ontmoet die eh ook bij de community horen dus ja door die GSA kun je veel meer mensen te leren kennen en je gaat overal heen, dat is wel leuk.” (Respondent 4.1, LGBTQ+, interview 30.03.20).*

“Eh and then I have participated and yes because of that I met people who eh also belonged to the community, so yeah because of the GSA you can meet a lot more people and you go everywhere, so that is nice.”

p. 32: *“[...] maar aan de andere kant doe ik er nog niet zo heel veel mee, want kijk weet je, ik kan nog geen gay bar in [...] Daar ben ik te jong voor, dat vind ik echt zo jammer ook trouwens. Dan denk ik van ‘man je kan ook gewoon, je komt er gewoon nergens in’.” (Respondent 1.2, bisexual, interview 11.02.20).*

“[...] but on the other hand, I do not do a lot with it, because look, you know, I am not yet allowed into a gay bar [...] I am too young for that, that is so unfortunate by the way. Then I think ‘men you just can’t get, you just don’t get in anywhere.’”

p. 32: *“Hmm een tijdje terug hadden we wel contact opgenomen met de GSA van die [school die] hiernaast zit, [andere school]. Uhm er is volgens mij een appgroep gemaakt waarin mensen, wij dan, met z’n allen zitten.” (Respondent 1.1, bisexual, interview 11.02.20).*

“Hmm a little while ago we had contacted the GSA of the [other school] next to us, H. L. Uhm and I think an app group was made in which people, we, are all together.”

p. 32: *“Ze [GSA andere school] hebben wel, we hebben wel met elkaar gepraat over Paarse Vrijdag enzo en hoe hun het dan zouden doen enzo, dus dat was wel fijn. Want je weet ook wel een beetje van andere GSAs dan hoe hun het doen.”* (Respondent 1.3, gay, interview 13.02.20).

“They [GSA from other school] have indeed, we have talked a bit with each other about Purple Friday and stuff and how they would do it and stuff, so that was quite nice. Because you then know a bit how other GSAs do it.”

p. 33: *“Ja zeker eh we zijn een keer naar [stad] geweest. Daar hebben we een film gekeken en eh zijn met eh allemaal GSAs van daar want daar was het nog helemaal, daar wilden ze het op gang laten komen, maar daar was het nog niet alles helemaal rond en dan hebben we ook met de mensen uit [stad] gesproken van 'nou zo doen wij het' en eh dat vond ik heel leuk.”* (Respondent 7.4, straight, interview 14.04.20).

“Yeah definitely eh we have gone to [city]. There we have watched a movie and eh have with all kinds of GSAs of there, because it was there, there they still wanted to set it up, but there it was not yet finished and then we have spoken with people from [city] like ‘well we do it like this’ and eh I really like that.”

p. 33: *“[...] laatste keer hadden we iemand die ging [stad] Pride organiseren geloof ik en die gaat dan een beetje uitleggen en die gaat dat een beetje vragen 'we hebben nog een paar mensen nodig die dit en dit willen doen en we dachten misschien is dat wel leuk om iemand uit de GSA te hebben' en dan zeggen een paar mensen van 'owh dat lijkt me wel leuk' ofzo.”* (Respondent 7.5, straight, interview 18.04.20).

“[...] last time we had someone who was going to organise [city] pride I think and they would explain it a little bit and then they would ask a bit like ‘we still need a few people who want to do this and this and we thought it would maybe be nice to have someone from the GSA’ and then a few people of the GSA said like ‘owh I think that would be fun’ or something like that.”

p. 33: *“Ja verder als je connecties hebt met iets van een andere GSA of LHBTI dan is dat vanuit jezelf en niet voor de GSA.”* (Respondent 2.2, transgender & pansexual, interview 17.03.20).

“Yeah other than that, if you have connections with something like another GSA or LGBTI than it is on your own initiative and not for the GSA.”

p. 33: *“We hebben daar buiten school niet echt een rol in, maar wat we zouden kunnen doen is gewoon proberen uhm samen te werken met andere groepen die ongeveer dezelfde visie hebben voor [stad] en dan eh soort van info dingen gaan doen. Maar ik weet niet echt of dat een heel goed idee is, want dan eh stel je jezelf natuurlijk ook echt open voor eh laten we zeggen negatieve aandacht.”* (Respondent 9.3, non-binary, interview 19.04.20).

“We do not really have a role in that outside of school, but what we could do is just try to uhm work together with other groups who kind of have the same vision for [city] and then eh do kind of awareness stuff. But I do not know if that is a good idea, because you are really opening yourself up for eh let’s say negative attention.”

p. 34: *“Het is niet dat ik, eh de GSA ze doen bloed goede dingen, maar ze zijn nog niet zo ver in zich van 'hey we kunnen een hele gemeenschap ondersteboven zetten' dat is met de mankracht, de mensen die we nu hebben niet mogelijk, simpelweg omdat de meesten die we nu mee hebben nog niet capabel genoeg zijn om zulke situaties echt te handelen, hoe volwassen ze zich ook gedragen, qua mentaliteit en stabiliteit hebben we die mensen niet.”* (Respondent 6.1, bisexual, interview 08.04.20).

“It is not that I, eh the GSA does bloody good work, but they are not yet so far that they are like ‘hey we can turn around this whole community’ that is with the man power, the people whom we now have, they are not yet capable enough to really handle such situations, even with how much they are acting like adults, qua mentality and stability we do not have those people.”

4.4 Social empowerment

Social empowerment through school-based actions

p. 35: “Maar het is dus, [we] zijn echt heel erg gegroeid en we blijven groeien en eh we pakken ook steeds Paarse Vrijdag, pakken we bijna elk jaar steeds groter aan en meer bewustheid creëren bij de leerlingen, dus.” (Respondent 7.3, interview 13.04.20).

“But it is, [we] have grown a lot and we keep growing and eh also each Purple Friday, we make Purple Friday bigger every year and create more awareness among the students, so.”

p. 35: “Nou na die grote Paarse Vrijdag actie die we dan twee jaar terug, weet ik veel, toen hadden gedaan, toen waren er heel veel leerlingen denk ik die er ook over gesproken hebben met elkaar en ik denk dat dat gesprek het er wel voor heeft gezorgd dat heel veel mensen er minder afkeer tegen hebben. Kijk als er een leerling uhm door een thuissituatie ja een soort afkeer ertegen heeft en die door andere leerlingen aangesproken wordt van 'ja die mensen kunnen er niks aan doen, die zijn nou eenmaal zo geboren' dan denkt die andere waarschijnlijk ook van 'ja het is gewoon normaal, alleen bij mij thuis is het niet normaal'.” (Respondent 4.1, LGBTQ+, interview 30.03.20).

“Well after that big Purple Friday action that we did two years back, or something like that, then we had, then there were a lot of students I think who have talked about it among themselves and I think that that conversation did cause a lot of people having less disdain against it. Look if a student uhm because of their situation at home has a kind of disdain against it and if they are addressed by other student like ‘yeah but these people cannot help it, they were just born that way’ than those others will probably think like ‘yeah it is just normal, only at my home it is [considered] not.’”

p. 35: “Ja want uhm we hadden zeg maar van die gender neutrale wc-stickers die hadden, konden we bestellen via een pakket, maar van meneer de V. [de conector] mochten we die niet op de toiletten doen, maar dat hebben we toch gedaan [grinnikt]. Omdat wij gewoon vonden: ‘het moet een keer gebeuren, dus dan doen we dit gewoon’. En volgens mij zijn er ook daadwerkelijk jongens, we hebben twee meisjes-wc’s en een jongens-wc, dus volgens mij zijn er ook daadwerkelijk jongens naar die wc gegaan.” (Respondent 8.1, straight, interview 12.04.20).

“Yeah because uhm we had so to say gender neutral toilet stickers, we had, we could order those through a package, but Mister de V. [the principle] did not allow us to put them on the toilets but we still did it [laughs]. Because we just felt that it had to happen some time, so then we will just do it, and I think there were even boys who, we have two girls’ toilets and one boy toilet, so I think that there were even boys who went to that toilet.”

p. 35: “En dat verschil op een gegeven moment heb je dan dus wel zo'n mini discussie van 'hoe opvallend het moet zijn'. Want ja ik zit zo van hang lekker die vlag op, wat maakt het uit en dan zitten ze zo van 'ja, maar dat is dan weer dat we heel erg gay lijken als GSA zijnde en dat willen we dus juist niet uitstralen' en dan zit ik zo van 'ja maar het is ook wel weer Paarse Vrijdag'.” (Respondent 2.2, transgender & pansexual, interview 17.03.20).

And that difference, at a certain moment you will then have this kind of mini discussion about ‘how showy it has to be’. Because yes I am like ‘just put up that flag and what does it matter?’ and then they are like ‘yes, but we again do not want to look really gay as GSA and we do not want to render that’ and then I am like ‘yes but it is then also Purple Friday’”.

p. 36: “Maar het is soms ook wel een beetje jammer want je kan niet altijd een goed gezicht geven omdat gewoon sommige mensen die willen gewoon niet gezien worden, gewoon alleen omdat zeg maar de cultuur nog niet helemaal volledig geaccepteerd is.” (Respondent 1.2, bisexual, interview 11.02.20).

“But it is also a bit unfortunate because you cannot always give it a good face, because some people just do not want to be seen, just only because the culture so to say is not yet fully accepted.”

Information sessions

p. 36: *“Uhm nou we willen gewoon dat, dat de mensen op deze school, gewoon allemaal veilig zijn eigenlijk. Dat ze zich niet schamen of bang zijn voor hoe ze zich voelen. En als je er een les in geeft dan kan je eigenlijk aan, aantonen wat, wat iemand fout, eh dwars zou kunnen zitten. (Respondent 7.1, straight, interview 08.04.20).*

“Uhm we just actually want that that the people at this school are all safe. That they are not ashamed or afraid about how they feel. And if you give a lesson about it then you can show what what could be wrong, eh bother someone.”

p. 36: *“Eh ja want toen ik, de eerste paar voorlichtingen heb ik niet heel veel gepraat omdat het mijn eerste paar voorlichtingen waren en ik wilde ook zelf een beetje kijken van hoe werkt dat nou precies. En toen heb ik ook zelf van die presentatie uhm wat dingen geleerd die ik zelf ook niet helemaal precies wist en dat is dan fijn.” (Respondent 7.4, straight, interview 14.04.20).*

“Eh yeah when I, the first few information sessions I did not talk a lot because they were my first few information sessions and I also wanted to observe a bit how it works. And then I also learned some stuff from that presentation that I did not know exactly and that was nice.”

p. 37: *“Uhm het doel wat wij nu eigenlijk eh voor ogen hebben is dat we, ze bij biologielessen, ze meer aandacht besteden aan eh LGBT+ issues en ook eventueel uhm een zeg maar eh les tijdens de projectweek hebben die daar gewoon over gaat.” (Respondent 9.3, non-binary, interview 19.04.20).*

“Uhm the goal that we now actually envision is that we, that they give more attention to eh LGBT+ issues during biology classes and also eventually uhm having a, so to say, eh lesson during the project week that is just about that.”

Standing up against homophobic or transphobic sentiments at school

p. 37: *“Ja nou ik heb, ik heb vooral in mijn vriendengroep dat ik gewoon iemand, dat die echt een hele, ik ben vergeten wat voor opmerking die maakte, maar het was ongelooflijk transphobisch en ik was zo van ‘dat gaan we dus niet doen he [...] Er zitten hier dus gewoon mensen die hebben, die hebben daar problemen mee en dan ga je zo tegenover ze doen, dat vinden we niet kunnen’.” (Respondent 1.2, bisexual, interview 11.02.20).*

“Well I have I have especially in my friend group that I, just someone that they, I have forgotten what kind of remark they made, but it was incredibly transphobic and I was like ‘we are just not going to do that, right’ [...] ‘There are people here who have who have issues with that and then you are going to act like that about them, we do not accept that’.”

p. 37: *“Nou ja ik vind het nog steeds eh wel lastig om daar wat aan de ene kant wanneer je iets hoort wil je er wat van zeggen, maar aan de andere kant denk je van ‘maar wat, hoe moet ik hier op reageren?’ dus ik ben daar nog steeds een beetje zoekende in.” (Respondent 7.4, straight, interview 14.04.20).*

Well I still find it a bit difficult to on the one hand when you hear something you want to say something against it, but on the other hand you think like ‘but what, how should I respond to this?’ So, I am still a bit unsure about it.”

p. 38: *“Omdat best veel mensen nog niet echt weten wat de GSA is of de LGBTQ+ community weten ze daar niet zo veel van af en we hebben ook best veel mensen die daar gewoon grappen over maken enzo. Dus we wilden graag dat ze misschien wat serieuzer kunnen nemen en kunnen begrijpen wat we eigenlijk willen bereiken.” (Respondent 9.2, straight, interview 13.04.20).*

“Because quite a lot of people do not really know what the GSA is or the LGBTQ+ community, they do not know a lot about that and we also have a lot of people who really make jokes about that and stuff. So we really wanted that they can take it maybe a bit more serious and can understand what we actually want to achieve.”

4.5 Political empowerment

Political empowerment within the GSA

p. 38: *Maar meestal hebben T. en ik wel een voortrekkende rol, zeg je dat zo? Dus dat is wel fijn.*

“But usually T and I have a pushing role in the GSA, do you say it like that? So that is nice.”

p. 38: *“Ja nou dat zeker. Ik heb dingen organiseren altijd leuk gevonden, maar als je dan echt voorzitter bent en verantwoordelijk bent, dan leer je toch echt het goed, het organiseren van acties en wat er nou allemaal bij komt kijken en dan ja. Het contact opnemen met mensen, het sociale deel. En het organisatie dat heb ik wel echt heel erg veel van geleerd daar.” (Respondent 3.1, asexual, interview 30.03.20).*

“Yes, indeed. I have always enjoyed organising stuff, but if you are then really the chairperson and you are responsible, then you really learn how to organise those actions and what is involved in it, and then yes. Contacting people, the social part. And the organising, I have really learned a lot from that.”

p. 39 *“En met van die organisatie dag, dagen doe ik wel veel, help ik enzo en dat paarse hartjes ding is begonnen omdat ik een keer paarse eyeliner twee jaar geleden mee naar school had en toen dacht ik van 'hey laat ik op iedereen van de GSA paarse hartjes tekenen' en toen kwamen op een gegeven moment ook andere kinderen kwamen 'mogen wij ook zo'n paars hartje?' en dat is zeg maar, het is wel dat we nu dat elk jaar doen, elke keer.” (Respondent 7.3, interview 13.04.20).*

And with the organisation day, days, I do quite a lot, I help and stuff and that purple hearts thing was started because I had brought purple eyeliner to school two years ago and then I thought like ‘hey let’s draw purple hearts on everyone of the GSA’ and then at a certain point other children came ‘can we also have a similar purple heart?’ and that is so to say, we do that every year, every time.

p. 39: *“Dus meestal ik en mijn vriendin M., mijn beste vriendin, die uhm, wij nemen altijd wel een beetje de leiding op ons gewoon omdat wij, ja wij vinden dat leuk ofzo, wij vinden, wij zijn daar ook goed in, dus dan zeggen we zo van 'jongen nu stil, dit gaan we bespreken wat vinden jullie ervan?' en dan gaan we het per persoon langs.” (Respondent 8.1, straight, interview 12.04.20).*

So usually I and my friend M, my best friend, who uhm, we usually take the lead a bit, because we, yeah we like that or something like that, we think, we are also good in that and then we say ‘guys be quiet now, this is what we are going to discuss, what do you think, and then we ask each person individually’.”

p. 39: *“Eh dat is eh sommige kinderen zijn heel open over hun verhaal hun, hun, wat ze willen vertellen, wat ze hebben meegemaakt en die zijn best wel spraakzaam bij, hé, op dinsdag in, bij mij in het lokaal, bijvoorbeeld als ik kijk gewoon naar degene GSA van het [school] kijk, eh maar er zijn ook leerlingen die eh ja veel stiller zijn die of wel uhm dat vanuit zich zelf of omdat ze een bepaald trauma hebben of omdat ze geleerd hebben dat ze er niet over mogen praten. En eh hun aan het woord laten terwijl, weet je, ook de leerlingen die wel heel veel praten en heel veel te vertellen hebben eh in hun waarde laat, zodat eigenlijk uiteindelijk iedereen zijn verhaal kan doen, dat kan soms best lastig zijn.” (Respondent 7.6, facilitator, straight, interview 27.04.20).*

“Eh that is eh some children are really open about their stories their, their, what they want to share, what they have experienced and those are quite talkative during hé on the Tuesday in my classroom, for instance, when I just look at those, the GSA of [school], eh but there are also students who eh yeah eh are much quieter who or indeed uhm are more quiet or because they have a certain trauma or because they have learned that they are not allowed to talk about it. And giving them the floor while, you know, also eh respecting those students who do talk a lot and who have a lot to share, in order that, actually, eventually everyone can do their story, that can be difficult.”

Participation in policy decision-making processes

p. 40: *“Poeh. Geen idee. Ik zou niet echt weten wat voor besluiten zij moeten maken dan.” (Respondent 1.1, transgender, interview 11.02.20).*

“Oef. No clue. I would not even know what kind of decisions they should be making then.”

p. 40: *“Eh ik denk dat ze zeker wel, omdat ik ook eh, ik merk qua voor de LHBT, om dat duidelijk te maken heb ik meegewerkt met de eh, nou ja, de vertrouwenspersoon, maar ook de school, de directrice ook.” (Respondent 6.1, bisexual, interview 08.04.20).*

“Uhm I definitely think that they, because I also eh, I notice that qua for the LGBTQ, to make that clear I have worked together with the eh well the guidance counsellor, but also with the school, the principal too.”

p. 40: *“Eh ja soms als we horen dat een docent eh iets heel raars aan het vertellen is ofzo, wat niet klopt, dan als GSA gaan we er wel even naar die docent van ‘misschien kunt u het anders aanpakken?’. En eh andere docenten komen ook wel eens naar ons toe van ik wil graag divers lesgeven, maar hoe doen we, hoe doe ik dat dan precies?’. ” (Respondent 7.3, interview 13.04.20).*

Eh yeah sometimes when we hear that a teacher eh is saying something very weird or something like that, something that is wrong, then as being GSA we will go to that teacher like ‘maybe you can approach this differently?’. And eh other teachers also sometimes come to us like ‘I want to teach more diversely, but how do we, how do I do that exactly?’”

p. 41: *“Ik weet niet precies meer hoe dat ging, want ik ging daar niet over, dat waren wat andere mensen die dat gingen doen, maar volgens mij hebben we toen wel gesprekken mee gehad, echt bij de gemeente van ‘oh supercool dat jullie dit doen, hoe wil je dit vormgeven en [wat] willen jullie?’ en volgens mij wilden ze ook echt een dag bij het gemeentehuis organiseren. [...] Uhm ik denk het vooral bijvoorbeeld met die gemeente dat het de gemeente heel veel inzicht heeft gegeven van hoe ze dit moeten organiseren en vooral natuurlijk, ze wilden vooral het perspectief van de jongeren weten. Ik weet niet hoeveel wij eraan hebben gehad, maar het is natuurlijk indirect wel prettig dat we de gemeente hebben kunnen helpen, dus dan hebben wij er ook weer iets aan.” (Respondent 2.3, straight, interview 18.03.20).*

“I do not really know how it went, because I wasn’t responsible for it, it were other people who would do that, but I think we have indeed had conversation with them, at the municipality like ‘oh super cool that you are doing this, how do you want to shape it and [what] do you want?’ and according to me they also wanted to organise a day at the municipality. [...] Uhm I think that it mostly helped the municipality, that it gave the municipality insight in how they should organise it and mostly of course, they wanted to mostly know the perspective of the youth. I do not know what we gained from it, but it is of course indirectly nice that we were able to help the municipality, so then we have gained something from it.”

4.6 Youth empowerment

p. 41: *“[...] de leraren waren ook wel heel erg van ‘ja jullie moeten het gewoon allemaal organiseren, als je hulp nodig hebt, kun je het altijd vragen en er is ook wel een klein budget ervoor dus dat kan je altijd vragen’, maar het was wel met de leraren heel erg van ‘jullie moeten het vooral gewoon zelf doen, want dat is ook gewoon het leukst voor jullie’.” (Respondent 9.4, LGBTQ+, interview 21.04.20).*

“[...] the teachers were also indeed like ‘yeah you have to organise everything, if you need help you can always ask and there is a small budget allocated for it, so you can always ask for it’, but it was indeed with the teachers like ‘you have to just do a lot by yourself because that is also just the most fun for you.’”

pp. 41-42: *“En uhm dat er heel wat leraren ook graag mee willen beslissen in de GSA. Nou kan dat helaas niet want we wilden het wel een soort van de leerlingen, voor de leerlingen idee houden, uhm*

maar het is heel fijn om te weten dat de docenten heel graag hun steentje bij willen dragen.” (Respondent 2.3, straight, interview 18.03.20).

“And uhm that there are quite a few teachers who also really want to co-decide in the GSA. Well that is unfortunately not possible, because we wanted to keep it kind of from the students for the students' idea, uhm but it is really nice to know that the teachers really want to pull their weight.”

p. 42: *“Uhm nou ja zorgen dat het allemaal geordend blijft een beetje, dat niet iedereen door elkaar gaat schreeuwen bij vergaderingen en dat uhm, en ook dat het realistisch blijft, want we willen graag altijd heel veel en kan het wel?.” (Respondent 3.1, asexual, interview 30.03.20).*

Uhm well make sure that everything stays a little organised, that not everyone is screaming through one another during meetings and that uhm and also that it stays realistic, because we always want to do a lot, but is it possible?.”

p. 42: *“Nee maar we gaan gewoon kijken hoe we kunnen bereiken wat we willen bereiken en eh als het, nou als het niet lukt dan zoeken we een oplossing, maar vaak dan, uiteindelijk met een eh, met mevrouw N. [begeleider] erbij.” (Respondent 2.2, transgender & pansexual, interview 17.03.20).*

No but we will just see how we can achieve what we want to achieve eh and if, well if we are unable to find a solution, but then usually, eventually with a eh with Ms. N.”

p. 42: *“want B. [begeleider] maakt altijd gewoon de groepjes aan van eh die samen voorlichting gaan geven.” (Respondent 7.2, transgender, interview 09.04.20).*

“Because B always makes the groups of eh those who together will give the information sessions.”

p. 42: *“En [leerlingen die] toch wel aandacht te kort komen, en eh je merkt toch wel bijvoorbeeld uhm ja daarin vond ik het fijn om toch een link te hebben met een docent die dan gewoon zo'n persoon kan doorsturen naar bijvoorbeeld het zorgteam. Want uhm dat, je bent gewoon, als leerling eh uhm kan je erover praten en dat is op zich ook wel fijn natuurlijk mochten mensen daarover willen praten, maar je kan niet op, eh actie ondernemen of dat dus.” (Respondent 2.1, straight, interview 17.03.20).*

“And [students who] already miss some attention, and eh you do notice, for instance, uhm yeah in that I felt it was nice to indeed have a connection with a teacher who can then direct such a person to, for instance, the care team. Because uhm you are just, as a student eh uhm you can talk about it and in that respect it is nice of course if people want to talk about it, but you cannot eh take actions like that.”

p. 43: *“Uhm ik denk dat de leerlingen vooral waren van ‘dit is maar een discussie dit gaat wel over. Ik denk dat we er, er uiteindelijk wel weer gewoon uit gaan komen en eigenlijk brengt het alleen maar goede dingen’ en de docenten die waren gewoon heel bang, ook omdat er discussies gingen over mentale gezondheid, die waren gewoon heel bang van ‘oh straks gaat een leerling iets doen of uhm eh gaat, gebeuren der heel erge dingen’, weet je wel.” (Respondent 2.3, straight, interview 18.03.20).*

“Uhm I think that the students were mostly like ‘this is only a discussion and it will stop. I think that we would eventually move on and actually this only brings good stuff’ and the teachers were just really scared because there were also discussions about mental health and they were just scared like ‘oh maybe a student will do something or uhm eh goes, bad stuff will happen’, you know.”

p. 43: *“Ja ze praten er ook wel over, maar meestal gaat dat gewoon 1 op 1 met B. [begeleider], want B. die ziet dan bijvoorbeeld dat iemand een beetje down is ofzo en dan gaat hij naar diegene toe en dan gaat die gewoon er mee praten en vraagt ie wat er aan de hand is en dan weet ie gewoon een oplossing te zoeken en soms eh praat die bijvoorbeeld wel met de hele groep over een, bepaalde mentale problemen.” (Respondent 7.2, transgender, interview 09.04.20).*

“Yeah, they talk a bit about it, but usually it just goes 1 on 1 with B. [facilitator], because B he then sees, for instance, that someone is a bit down or something like that and then he goes to that person and then he just talks with them and asks what is going on and then he usually knows how to find a solution

and sometimes he indeed, for instance, talks with the whole group about one, certain mental health issues.”

p. 43: “[...] en ook gewoon eh lokalen enzo, zo van de, de, de organisatorische dingen op schoolniveau van 'hey jongens is het okay dat deze leerlingen uhm 50 euro besteden aan verf, vlaggetjes en een grote vlag, dat soort dingen, of kerstballen?'. Uhm ja om dat als leerling te doen is een beetje ja [...] dat dat wordt dan minder naar geluisterd.” (Respondent 2.1, straight, interview 17.03.20).

“[...] and also just eh classrooms and stuff like the, the, the organisational stuff at school level like ‘hey guys is it okay if these students spend uhm 50 euro on paint, flags and a big flag, stuff like that or Christmas balls?’. Uhm yeah to do that as a student is a little yeah [...] that will be less listened to.”

p. 44: “[...] alleen aangezien de docenten alles zeg maar omdat ze, ik weet niet wat er was maar, zij hebben alles geregeld en het was echt super slecht geregeld, van ten minste, want we wisten niet dat er een smoothie zouden worden gemaakt en terwijl ik en S., dat is een uhm transgender bij mij op school, die eh hij wist dat ook niet en wij zouden koekjes gaan bakken, dus dan werd er allemaal heel veel.” (Respondent 8.1, straight, interview 12.04.20).

“[...] only since the teachers had every, so to say because they, I do not know what it was, but they had arranged everything and it was arranged really badly like, at least, because we did not know that a smoothie would be made and while I and S, that is uhm a transgender at my school, that eh he did not know it either and we would bake cookies and then it became all a lot.”

4.7 Barriers to empowerment

School context

p. 44: “Ja op school hadden we wel Paarse Vrijdag gedaan. Dus ook een leraar die had een mailtje gestuurd dat die het niet vond kunnen op een Christelijke school. Dus ook dat ik dacht van okay meneer. Gezellig.” (Respondent 1.2, bisexual, interview 11.02.20).

“Yes at school we have had Purple Friday. So also a teacher had sent a mail around that he did not think it should happen at a Christian school. So also that I thought like ‘okay sir. Fun’.”

p. 45: “Nou dit was, nou ja, je moet eerst even mensen laten bezinken dat we in de krant hebben gestaan en dat een godsdienstleraar zo'n groep heeft” (Respondent 1.4, facilitator, straight, interview 10.03.20).

“Well this was, well yeah, you have to let people settle that we have been in the newspaper and that a religion teacher has such a group.”

p. 45 “Uhm maar aangezien er ook nog veel geloven zijn die eh homo-zijn niet accepteren, en je altijd wel zulke kinderen op een school hebt, is het niet 100 procent mogelijk.” (Respondent 7.3, interview 13.04.20).

“Uhm but since there are still many religions who eh do not accept being gay, and that you, indeed, will always have such children at a school, it is not 100 percent possible.”

p. 45: “Dat was ja op, om even een school van in [stad] aan te halen, eh er was daar een groep leerlingen die Paarse Vrijdag heeft proberen te organiseren eh, maar waar de conciërge gewoon letterlijk de posters die ze hadden opgehangen had weggehaald en zei van 'nou ja als we hier al posters voor op gaan hangen kunnen we overal posters gaan, voor op gaan hangen' [...] En dat was gewoon vanuit het feit dat ja de schoolleiding zei van 'joh hier hebben we geen behoefte aan' en dat de conciërge zei van 'hier gaan we geen posters voor ophangen, dit is onzin'.” (Respondent 7.6, facilitator, straight, interview 27.04.20).

“That was yeah at, to quote a school in [city], eh there was a group of students who tried to organise Purple Friday eh, but there the janitor literally took down all the posters they had put up and said ‘well yeah if we already have to put up posters for this when can put up posters for everything [...] and that was just due to the fact that the school board said like ‘joh we do not need this’ and then that the janitor said like ‘we are not going to put posters up for this, this is nonsense’.

High turnover problem

p. 45: “Eh alleen het enige waar ik over in zit is natuurlijk degene die het opgericht hebben, tussen haakjes, die gaan volgend jaar van school af. Aan het eind van het jaar. ‘Eh komt er wel een vervolg in?’ [...]. Want nu hebben we een vaste groep van een man of 10, 15. Maar je ook oppassen dat het over twee jaar niet doodgebloed is.” (Respondent 1.4, facilitator, straight, interview 10.03.20).

“Eh the only thing I am worried about is of course that those who have founded it, by the way they will graduate next year. At the end of the year. ‘Eh will there be a continuation?’ [...] Because now we have a regular group of 10 to 15 people. However, you also have to be careful that it will not run dry within two years.”

p. 46: “Uhm nou ja het maakt uit in het opzicht dat, er was iemand die was voorzitter en daardoor waren haar vriendinnen ook heel fanatiek, maar toen zij geen voorzitter meer was, toen waren haar vriendinnen ook minder fanatiek.”

“Uhm well yeah it does matter in the respect that there was a chairperson and because of that her friends were very committed, but when she wasn’t the chairperson anymore, then her friends were also less committed, so that I really noticed, freeriding on each other”

p. 46: “Want nu merk ik wel dat heel erg de vierdeklassers vooral heel veel dingen doen, omdat we gewoon maar heel weinig onderbouwers hebben, maar als alle vierdeklassers afstuderen dan valt gewoon driekwart van de GSA weg. Dus ja ik wil ook wel voor de mensen die daarna nog er zijn, dat die wel gewoon er mee door kunnen gaan en dat ze wel gewoon zeg maar dat het een beetje loopt soort van.” (Respondent 9.4, LGBTQ+, interview 21.04.20).

Because now I notice that really the fourth graders are mostly doing a lot of stuff, because we just have only very little junior graders, but if all fourth graders graduate then three quarters of the GSA will be gone. So yeah I also indeed want for the people who are left, that they can indeed just continue and that it still so to say continues a bit.

The coronavirus measures

p. 46: “Eh nou zeg maar ja dus niet zo veel eigenlijk, aangezien dus met eh we hadden, zouden volgens mij twee dingen zeg maar zouden binnen de GSA, zouden we iets van film kijken en nog een dag, maar dat ging niet door door corona.” (Respondent 10.1, straight, interview 22.04.20).

“Eh well so to say not much actually, since with eh we would have two things so to say within the GSA, we would watch something like a movie and another day, but those didn’t happen because of corona.”

p. 46: “Uhm ja ik denk wel als er wordt gevraagd van eh, laatst ook met nu natuurlijk met de corona crisis dan wordt er ook wel gevraagd van ‘hoe gaat het met jullie?’ en eh ‘hier kan je het ook allemaal in vertellen’ en dan zegt iedereen wel van ‘ik verveel me wel een beetje of ik doe dit of ik doe dat’ en dan is het niet zo per se dat iemand dan opstuurt van ‘oh laten we dan een spelletje gaan doen om verveling te verdrijven.’” (Respondent 7.5, straight, interview 18.04.20).

“Uhm yeah I think that when it is being asked like eh, last time also now with the corona crisis of course, then it is being asked like ‘how are you?’ and eh ‘here you can share it’ and then someone indeed says like ‘I am a bit bored or I am doing this or I am doing that’ and then it is not necessarily that someone will send like ‘oh lets then do a game to ease the boredom’.”

p. 47: “Eh ik was zelf mee bezig met de medeorganisatie van de [stad] Pride. Ja dat gaat helaas niet door want corona.” (Respondent 7.6, facilitator, straight, interview 27.04.20).

“Eh I myself was busy with the co-organisation of the [city] Pride. Yeah that will unfortunately not happen because corona.”

Chapter 5: Intergroup dynamics and empowerment

5.1 Intergroup dynamics

p. 52: *“Nee niet echt, ik zit bijvoorbeeld dan, ik zit ook wel, we hebben eigenlijk wel allemaal een beetje vaste plekken waar iedereen zit in het lokaaltje en dan zit links van mij een ander groepje en rechts van mij de rest van mijn groepje zeg maar. Eh en als links van mij dan iets, iemand iets zegt eh, dan val ik soms wel daarmee in en dan hebben we het daar weer even over.”* (Respondent 7.5, straight, interview 18.04.20).

“No not really, I am ,for instance, then sitting, I also sit, we all actually have a bit of our own usual spot where everyone is sitting in the classroom and then left of me is another group and then on the right of me there is the other part of my group so to say. Eh and if left of me someone says something eh, then I sometimes join the conversation and then we are again talking about that.”

p. 52: *“[...] en een andere vriendin van mij zat ook bij de GSA, dus ja dat leek me wel leuk.”* (Respondent 9.1, lesbian, interview 12.04.20).

“[...] and another friend of mine was already in the GSA, so it also seemed fun to me.”

p. 52: *“Nou eigenlijk is het gebaseerd op 'hey jou ken ik, bij jou blijf ik zitten want jou ken ik als enige hier'. En dan heb je uiteindelijk van 'ja er zijn 5 mensen binnengekomen omdat [eigen naam] de GSA in is gegaan, die blijven achter hangen bij [eigen naam]. Ja eh oh okay, dat gebeurt.”* (Respondent 2.2, transgender & pansexual, interview 17.03.20).

“Well actually it is based on, ‘hey I know you, I will stay with you, because you are the only one I know here’ and then you eventually have like ‘yeah 5 people have joined because [own name] has joined the GSA, who stay behind [own name]. Yeah eh oh okay, that happens.”

pp. 52-53: *“Uhm nou voor mij persoonlijk maakt het niet uit, maar het is natuurlijk wel handiger als je ook andere mensen hebt want ik ben niet even close met iedereen, dus dan is het uhm [...]. Owh nee dat maakt mij helemaal niet uit, maar ik bedoel ik ben bijvoorbeeld closer met de 4e jaars dan met de 3e jaars of met de 2e jaars, eh dan ik ben bijvoorbeeld closer met mijn vrienden dan met mijn dan met de andere mensen die daarin zitten. En als ik dan vraag, als ik dan zeg bijvoorbeeld 'hey hoe gaat het' dan kijken ze zo op van 'okay jij praat nooit met me?' en het is natuurlijk ook je zit niet in dezelfde leerjaar, dus je kan ook niet echt snel vrienden worden, maar ja.”* (Respondent 8.1, straight, interview 12.04.20).

“Uhm well for me personally it doesn’t really matter, but it is of course more convenient if you have other people as well, because I am not that close with everyone, so then it is uhm [...] Owh no, it doesn’t matter for me, but what I mean is that I am, for instance, closer with the fourth years than with the third years or the second years, eh then I am, for example, closer with my friends than with the other people who are in it. And if I then ask, if I then, for instance, say ‘hey how are you’ then they look up like ‘okay you never talk to me?’ and it is of course also you are not in the same grade, so you can also not become friends fast, but yeah.”

p. 53: *“Uhm nou ja het maakt uit in het opzicht dat, er was iemand die was voorzitter en daardoor waren haar vriendinnen ook heel fanatiek, maar toen zij geen voorzitter meer was, toen waren haar vriendinnen ook minder fanatiek.”* (Respondent 3.1, asexual, interview 30.03.20).

“Uhm well yeah it does matter in the respect that there was a chairperson and because of that her friends were very committed, but when she wasn’t the chairperson anymore, then her friends were also less committed.”

p. 53: *“Dus je hebt natuurlijk wel bepaalde groepjes in de GSA die wel echt een groep vrienden zijn, maar, en die dan ook met elkaar afspreken, maar meestal zitten ze dan bij elkaar in de klas enzo of in hetzelfde leerjaar. Dan heb je sowieso wel al een band met elkaar.”* (Respondent 7.2, transgender, interview 09.04.20).

“So of course you have certain groups within the GSA we are really a group of friends, but, and who then meet with each other, but they are mostly in the same class together or in the same grade. Then you will anyhow bond more.”

p. 53: *“Eh toen was het nog heel klein en ik was ook de jongste, ik was zeg maar, ja ik was 13 ofzo en de degene die daarvoor het jongste was die was 15.” (Respondent 7.3, interview 13.04.20).*

“Eh then it was still quite small and I was the youngest, I was so to say, yeah, I was 13 or something and the one who was before me the youngest was 15.”

p. 53: *“Ja ik heb natuurlijk wel meer levenservaring dan, ja ook al is het maar 4 jaar of 2 jaar met sommigen, dus dan kan ik soms wel, bijvoorbeeld, ja iets meer advies geven over als ze wat ouder zijn wat er dan kan gaan gebeuren.” (Respondent 7.2, transgender, interview 09.04.20).*

“Yeah I, of course, have more life experience then, yeah even if it is only 4 years or 2 years with some, so sometimes I can, for instance, give a bit more advice about what can happen if they are a bit older.”

p. 54: *“Nou het enige wat moeilijk zou kunnen zijn is het leeftijdsverschil. Dat een 14-jarige en een 18-jarige is wel een groot verschil. Dat ze eh wel eens ondergesneeuwd worden de jongeren. Dat merk ik wel. Het zijn bijna altijd wel dezelfde die aan het woord zijn.” (Respondent 1.4, facilitator, straight, interview 10.03.20).*

“Well what might be difficult is the difference in age. That a 14-year-old and an 18-year-old that is quite a big difference. That they eh well be overshadowed, the younger ones. Yeah, I do notice that. It is always the same people who are talking.”

p. 54: *“Want ja je hebt dan toch mensen met verschillende, niet alleen denkwijzen, maar ook gewoon hoe volwassen je bent.” (Respondent 10.1, straight, interview 22.04.20).*

“Because yes you then have people with not only different ways of thinking, but also just how much of an adult you are.”

p. 54: *“Ja. Meiden hebben natuurlijk andere problemen waar ze tegenaan lopen en daar kan ik natuurlijk niet altijd over mee praten en ja ik heb natuurlijk ook bepaalde problemen, maar als jongen zijnde maar ja als 99 procent van de groep meisje is ja die, ze kunnen wel advies geven, maar ze kunnen natuurlijk nooit weten hoe het zeg maar is. Dus ja dat is eigenlijk vooral gewoon ja dat meiden en jongens gewoon anders door de wereld heen lopen.” (Respondent 7.2, transgender, 09.04.20).*

“Yes. Girls of course are faced with different problems and I cannot always join a conversation about that and yes of course I also have certain problems, but as being a boy, yeah if 99 percent of the group is female than they, they can give advice, but they can of course not know what it is like so to say. So yes, that is actually above all that girls and boys just walk differently through the world.”

p. 55: *“Eh dan zou je ook wat meer eh aan kunnen werken bijvoorbeeld dat eh AMB mensen, assigned male at birth, dat die er makkelijker voor uitkomen [dat ze bij de GSA zitten], etc. Nu zie je eigenlijk wel dat eh je veel eh mensen hebt die zich of identificeren als vrouwelijk of vrouwelijke geboren zijn. [...] Eh ja dat zou zeker mensen af kunnen schrikken denk ik. Want mensen voelen zich waarschijnlijk comfortabeler eh als ze met zeg maar dezelfde mensen als zij in een groepje zitten.” (Respondent 9.3, non-binary, interview 19.04.20).*

“Eh then you can also a bit more eh can work on, for example, that AMB people, assigned male at birth, that those easily come out for [being in the GSA], etc. Now you actually see that you have eh many eh people who either identify as women or were assigned female at birth. [...] Eh yes that can really deter people, I think. Because people probably are more comfortable eh when they are with the same people as themselves in a group.”

p. 55: *“Je hebt natuurlijk gewoon dat bestuur daar zitten echt mijn beste vriendin ook gewoon, dus dan heb je wel contact met elkaar, maar de groepjes onderling denk ik niet heel veel.” (Respondent 2.3, straight, interview 18.03.20).*

You of course have the board and just really my best friend is a part of it, so then you have contact with each other, but between the other groups, I don't think it is much.”

p. 55: *“Eh maar dat werkt altijd wel heel goed, want we hebben gewoon een groepsapp met een bestuur dan, noemen we het dan, en dat, daar zitten dan twee docenten in en een 5 aantal leerlingen [...]. Uhm wat we meestal hebben als, als we, als we bijvoorbeeld uhm uhm als we dus iets gaan organiseren, Paarse Vrijdag, dan hebben we dus een lijstje en dat delen we dan gewoon in de groep van 'hey jongens wie vindt het leuk om hier ook te helpen bij, heeft iemand andere ideeën?'. En dan heb je vaak een aantal enthousiastelingen die dan zeggen 'owh jongens ik wil dit wel doen' of 'oh misschien kan ik dit doen' uhm 'kan ik daarbij helpen?' en dus hoeveel uren, we helpen daar wel bij, maar het is wel van belang dat je gewoon dat organisatorisch groepje klein houdt, overzichtelijk houdt.” (Respondent 2.1, straight, interview 17.03.20).*

“Eh but that always works really well, because we just have a groups app with a board then, that is how we call it then and in there, there are two teachers and a five number of students [...]. Uhm what we usually do when, when we, when we, for example, uhm, uhm when we are then organising something, Paarse Vrijdag, then we have a list and we share that then just in the group like ‘hey guys who would like to help with this, does somebody have different ideas?’. And then we usually have a few enthusiastic ones who then say ‘owh guys I want to do this’ or ‘oh maybe I can do this’ uhm ‘can I help with that’ and then how many hours, we help with that, but it is important that you just keep that organising group small, keep it clear.”

p. 56: *“[...] maar ik merk ook dat uhm dat de mensen die dan echt fanatiek zijn met de GSA, dan maakt het helemaal niets uit in welke vriendengroep je zit of leerjaar je zit, en dat mixt gewoon allemaal heel goed.” (Respondent 3.1, asexual, 30.03.20).*

“But what I do notice is that, uhm that the people who are really committed to the GSA, then it does not matter at all what your friend group is or in which grade you are, and that mixes just really well.”

p. 56: *“Maar ik merk inderdaad wel dat er best wel wat mensen zijn die zich dan niet aan afspraken houden of iets en dat ik dan uit mijn fanatisme samen met nog iemand die ook fanatiek is, willen we, gaan we dan met z'n tweeën alles doen. Dat wordt dan eigenlijk te veel. Wat dat betreft zou het fijner zijn inderdaad als meer mensen echt mee zouden doen. Ja.” (Respondent 3.1, asexual, 30.03.20).*

“But I do indeed notice that there are quite a few people who do not keep their promises or something and that I in my commitment together with another person who is also committed, we want, then do everything with the two of us. That is then actually becoming too much. In that matter it would be nicer if there are indeed more people who would really participate. Yes.”

p. 56: *“Ja dit jaar. Ja ik weet niet of ik dat zo kan zeggen, maar eh ik en mijn beste vriendin zijn nog steeds bij de GSA, de rest is allemaal geslaagd van mijn vriendengroep en nu zijn er een paar leerlingen die over zijn gebleven die eigenlijk, ja die niet echt begrijpen waarvoor die GSA is en eigenlijk ook niet bezig zijn met eh het uitvoeren van de taken en dus meer een beetje pauze zitten te houden daar als vriendengroep. Ja dat is niet echt de bedoeling [...] Ja dat, dat is, dat is nu bijna niet meer aanwezig die communicatie [...]. Ja ik en mijn beste vriendin, we zitten beiden in ons examenjaar, wij hebben nu ook gezegd 'wij trekken beetje onze handen ervan af, want er wordt door jullie ook niks gedaan'.” (Respondent 4.1, LGBTQ+, interview 30.03.20).*

“Yes, this year. Yeah I do not know if I can see it like this, but eh I and my best friend are still part of the GSA and the others from my friend group have all graduated and now there are a few students who have remained, who actually, yeah who do not really understand the purpose of the GSA and actually are not really busy with, eh, executing the tasks and so are more there having a break as a friend group. Yeah that is not really what is supposed to happen [...] Yes that, that is, that is now not really present

anymore that communication [...]. Yes I and my best friend, we are both in our senior year, we have now said 'we are washing our hands from it, because nothing is being done by you at all'."

p. 57: "*Nou sowieso is er ook op een gegeven moment dat hij [de begeleider] ook een leraar is, weet je wel en sommige dingen die zeg je ook gewoon niet tegen je leraar, als ie erbij is.*" (Respondent 1.2, bisexual, interview 11.02.20).

"Well anyhow, there is a certain point where he [the facilitator] is also a teacher, you know, and some things you just do not say to your teacher, when he is present."

p. 57: "*Nou dat maakt het natuurlijk wel iets stroever ofzo, want ja wij kennen meneer C. ook amper, we hebben nooit les ofzo van hem gehad en hij is niet eens onze, eh nou ik denk voor een groot deel niet onze conrector ofzo geweest.*" (Respondent 1.3, gay, interview 13.02.20).

"Well that of course makes it a bit stiffer or something like that, because, yes, we do barely know mister C, we have never had him teach a class and he is not even our, eh well I think for a big part, he has not been our vice principle or something like that."

p. 57: "*Niet echt. Ik ben zelf wel bijvoorbeeld Christelijk, alleen ja we hebben het nooit echt over geloof, gewoon omdat niemand bij ons in de groep behalve ik dan en mijn beste vriendin.*" (Respondent 4.1, LGBTQ+, interview 30.03.20).

"Not really. I myself, for example, am Christian, only, yes, we never really talk about religion, just because no one in the group, except me and my best friend."

p. 57: "*Wat ik dan wel net bedenk, je vroeg aan het begin van wat heb je aan de GSA. Wat ik wel bedacht is, ik ben zelf Christelijk en ik had in het begin ook daar een beetje moeilijk mee van, weet je, 'er staan bepaalde dingen in de bijbel', dus voor mij is het ook heel erg fijn dat dan een godsdienstleraar die zelf ook heel erg geloofd, dat dan de groep leidt zal ik maar zeggen, dat vind ik zelf wel, eh dat heeft mij echt, daar heb ik echt wat aan gehad zal ik maar zeggen.*" (Respondent 1.1, transgender, interview 11.02.20).

"What I just remembered, you asked at the beginning what is the use of the GSA for me. What I just remember is that I am Christian and in the beginning I had a bit of difficulty with that like, you know, 'there are certain things written in the Bible', so for me it is really nice that a religion teacher who himself believes is leading the group, so to say, I myself find that really, eh that really, that was really useful for me, so to say."

p. 57: "*[...] ik merk zelf dat ik met klasgenoten of oude klasgenoten of vrienden die ik al langer ken, dat ik daar eerder bij ga zitten dan iemand die ik eigenlijk niet heel goed ken.*" (Respondent 7.4, straight, interview 14.04.20).

"[...] I notice that I will sooner sit together with classmates or ex-classmate or friends whom I have known longer than that I would sit together with someone I do not yet know so well."

p. 58: "*Maar aan de andere kant was het ook wel een hele fijne groep mensen en een groep mensen waar je toch wel weer iets van, iets mee deelt. Allemaal heb je hetzelfde doel.*" (Respondent 3.1, asexual, 30.03.20).

"But it was also on the other hand a really nice group of people and a group of people where you still share something from, with. All have the same goal."

p. 58: "*Ja dat het zijn uiteindelijk allemaal leerlingen en en of je homo bent of niet, je hebt wel een verhaal. [...] Kijk ik ben zelf dat ik zei ook hetero, maar toch ben ik dit ooit gaan doen en dat is niet eh omdat ik er niets mee te maken had, dat was voor een vriend of dat was eh vanuit, en dat was voor mij ook vanuit ook eigen ervaring dat iedereen altijd maar dacht dat ik homo was en dus heel erg stereotypering.*" (Respondent 7.6, facilitator, straight, 27.04.20).

“Yes they are eventually all students and whether you are gay or not, you do have a story [...]. Look I am like I said also straight, but still I started doing this and that is not eh because it did not affect me, that was for a friend or that was eh from, and that was for me also from a kind of experience that everyone was always thinking that I was gay and so really stereotyping.”

p. 58: *“Ik denk dat die van ons beetje meer een clubje is. We zijn ook gewoon, de meesten zijn ook gewoon supergoed bevriend met elkaar.” (Respondent 9.2, straight, interview 13.04.20).*

“I think ours is a bit more like a club. We are also, just most are also very good friends with each other.”

pp. 58-59: *“Eh nou ja het is makkelijk mixen in die zin dat ze allemaal hetzelfde, eh iets eh gemeen hebben, namelijk ze zitten in een GSA en ze zijn daar allemaal vrijwillig naar toe gekomen eh dus en dat mixen gebeurt automatisch eh wanneer leerlingen iets gaan organiseren en degene die dan zeggen van 'hey ik wil dit doen, ik wil dit doen' zitten vaak niet, komen niet uit hetzelfde groepje. Dat doe ik dan ook wel expres natuurlijk. Uhm dus dan mix je ze een beetje.” (Respondent 7.6, facilitator, straight, interview 27.04.20).*

“Uhm yeah it is easy to mix in that manner that they all have the same, eh something eh in common, namely they participate in a GSA and they have all come there voluntarily eh so and this mixing happens automatically when students are going to organise something and those who then say like ‘hey I would like to do this, I would like to do this’ usually do not, do not come from the same group. I do that on purpose of course. Uhm so then you mix them a bit.”

p. 59: *“We hebben een, een, eigenlijk een soort van plaats in de school, daar gaan de GSA-leerlingen zitten en dat weet eigenlijk ook iedereen een beetje, want bij dat bankje daarzo enzo dat daar de [GSA] leerlingen zitten vaak.” (Respondent 2.1, straight, 17.03.20).*

“We actually have a, a, actually a kind of place in the school, that is where the GSA students sit and everyone actually knows that a bit, because there at that bench there and stuff that often there the GSA students sit”.

5.2 Intergroup dynamics based on SOGIE

p. 59: *“[...] maar er zijn ook gewoon best veel mensen in de uhm in die groep dus die hetero's zijn maar nu ze in de GSA zitten, die voelen nu een beetje, zeg maar, die beginnen nu te twijfelen en ik ben ook zo'n geval die eigenlijk begint te twijfelen.” (Respondent 7.1, straight, interview 08.04.20).*

“[...] but there are also just quite a lot of people in the uhm in that group who are straight but now that they have joined the GSA, they feel a bit, so to say, they are starting to doubt and I am such a person who is actually starting to doubt.”

p. 59: *“Uhm ja eigenlijk wou ik gewoon meer in contact komen met LGBTQ+ mensen, omdat ja ik kende, zeg maar een vriendin van mij was dat dan en ik en dan verder eigenlijk niemand kende ik dan en ja het leek me gewoon heel leuk om meer mensen te ontmoeten.” (Respondent 9.4, LGBTQ+, interview 21.04.20).*

“Uhm yeah, actually, I just wanted to come more in contact with LGBTQ+ people, because yeah I know, so to say, one friend of my was that then and me and other than that actually no one whom I knew and yes it just seemed really fun to meet more people.”

p. 59: *“Eh ja ik ben wel de enige transgender, dus ik zit wel een beetje in m'n eentje op dat front.” (Respondent 1.1, transgender, interview 11.02.2020).*

“Eh yes I am the only transgender, so at that point I am a bit alone.”

Negative intergroup dynamics

p. 60: *“Ik, nou dat is algemeen is dat, dat je die angst hebt, maar dan denk je ook vaak wel gewoon uit automatisme denk je gewoon van 'deze persoon is straight, dus ik doe wat voorzichtiger', ook binnen de*

GSA. [...] Nou ja, niet openly gay grapjes maakt, niet openly extra gay gedrag vertoond, ja heel stereotypisch gay gedrag enzo, maar het is wel duidelijk dat je een beetje oplet met niet te veel open zijn, omdat je ja, je weet dat je dan soms haat reacties gaat krijgen en dat die sneller komen van mensen die hetero zijn dan mensen die niet hetero zijn.” (Respondent 2.2, transgender & pansexual, interview 17.03.20).

“I, well that is in general, that is, that you have this fear, but I think that you also automatically think just like ‘this person is straight, so I will be a bit more careful’, also within the GSA. [...] Well yeah, not making gay-like jokes openly, not showing extra gay behaviour openly, yeah very stereotypical gay behaviour and stuff, but it is clear that you pay a bit of attention to not being too open, because you yeah, you know that you will then sometimes get hate reactions and that those will sooner come from people who are straight than from people who are not straight.”

p. 60: Dus uhm, maar wat ik net al zei, toen ik inderdaad de eh, het moet geen uhm hetero-haat worden. Het is niet erg om straight te zijn. En die sfeer wordt soms wel opgewekt, merk ik. Als er gepraat [wordt] over uhm dit soort onderwerpen.” (Respondent 2.1, straight, 17.03.20).

“So uhm, but what I already said, when I indeed the eh, it should not uhm become straight hatred. It is not bad to be straight. And that atmosphere is sometimes established, I notice. When one talks about these kinds of subjects.”

p. 60: “Misschien dat ze, ja sommigen ja, ze maken natuurlijk niet mee wat wij meemaken, dus ze kunnen er wel over meepraten, maar ze kunnen nooit natuurlijk ja ze kunnen wel advies geven, maar ze kunnen nooit weten hoe het is om in de schoenen te zijn van degene die het echt mee heeft gemaakt. Omdat ze eigenlijk zoiets nooit zouden kunnen meemaken.” (Respondent 7.2, transgender, 09.04.20).

“Maybe that they, yeah some yes, they of course do not experience what we experience so they can join the conversation, but they can never of course yes they can give advice, but they can not know how it is to walk in the shoes of those who have really experienced it. Because they would actually never experience such a thing.”

p. 60: “Nou misschien wel dat als het overwegend hetero is dat je dan misschien wel meer neigt naar een groepje die niet zo veel inzicht heeft in hoe het is om bi te zijn of homo, dus dat is denk ik wel een groot voordeel van de GSA, ten minste onze, dat die uit een groot, dat die ja een grote, grote groep homo’s heeft.” (Respondent 7.5, straight, 18.04.20).

“Well maybe indeed that if it is predominantly straight that you then maybe verge to a group who does not have much insight in how it is to be bi or gay, so that is I think a big advantage of the GSA, at least ours, that it is made up of a big, that it yes has a big, big group of gays.”

p. 61: “Ik kan alsnog steun bieden van ik begrijp je, ik kan er alleen niet over meepraten, maar ik begrijp je wel van dat het moeilijk kan zijn en ik heb natuurlijk wel hetzelfde meegemaakt dat ouders uit elkaar, gescheiden zijn, want als iedereen, als iedereen eh hetzelfde zeg maar hebben meegemaakt, dan, dan heb je ook geen verhalen meer om te vertellen. [...] Hmm ligt eraan op welk oppervlakte want stel het gaat uhm want stel eh je hebt, want je hebt natuurlijk verschillende onderwerpen en over sommige dingen kan je weer wel meepraten en over sommige dingen dan weer niet.” (Respondent 8.1, straight, interview 12.04.20).

I can still give support like ‘I understand you, I can only not join the conversation about this, but I do understand you like how hard it can be and I of course do have the same experience of parents who separate, are divorced, because if everyone, if everyone eh had the same experience, then, then you would also not have any stories left to tell [...]. Hmm it depends on which area, because imagine it is about eh because imagine eh you have, because you of course have different subjects and about some things you can join the conversation and about some things you can’t.”

p. 61: “Ja, want het is heel, eh je kan heel lastig zeg maar iets gaan verdedigen waarvoor je geen ervaringen mee hebt, weet je wel. Ik kan bijvoorbeeld wel opkomen voor vluchtelingen, maar ik heb, ik

ken, ik heb maar een vriendin die is vluchteling en dat is gewoon de enige ervaring die ik heb met, met vluchtelingen dus ik kan daar gewoon niet zo heel erg persoonlijk over zeggen.” (Respondent 1.2, bisexual, 11.02.20).

“Yeah, because it is really, eh you can hardly defend something with which you do not have any experience, you know. I, for instance, can stand up for refugees but I have, I know, I only have one friend who is a refugee and that is just the only experience I have with, with refugees, so I just can’t say something very personal about it”

p. 61: *“Eh ik denk dat als je alleen maar cis hetero mensen erin had, dat je dan eh wat meer stereotypische acties zou hebben en ook wat minder, eigenlijk alleen bijvoorbeeld tijdens Pride maand. [...] Eh bijvoorbeeld dat eh niet hetero-zijn betekent dat je, weet ik veel, flamboyant bent of per se, eh dat je mannelijker als vrouw of vrouwelijker als man, etc. En gewoon een soort van primitievere kijk erop. [...] Eh vaak wel want eh het enige waarmee die mensen eigenlijk in aanraking komen is bijvoorbeeld Pride Amsterdam en dat is natuurlijk, eh ja heel joviaal en flamboyant etc.” (Respondent 9.3, non-binary, interview 19.04.20).*

“Eh I think that if you only have cis hetero people in it, then you eh would have more stereotypical actions and also less, actually only, for instance, during Pride month. [...] eh, for example, that not being straight would mean that you, I don’t know, are necessarily flamboyant, eh that you are manlier as woman or more feminine as man, etc. And just a more primitive look at it [...] Eh yes that is often the case, because eh the only thing that these people come into contact with is, for instance, Pride Amsterdam and that is of course ,eh yes very jovial and flamboyant etc.”

p. 61: *“Nou als de, als de hetero mensen met mensen die niet hetero zijn, als die met elkaar om kunnen gaan, dan is het al gewoon best goed, weet je, en dan leren ze ook gewoon iedereen respecteren eigenlijk, omdat je dan gewoon ziet hoe hun persoonlijk is, hun persoonlijkheid is, en niet per se alleen maar voor de label die ze hebben.” (Respondent 7.1, straight, 08.04.20).*

“Well when the when the straight people are with people who are not straight, when they can associate with each other, than that is already quite good, you know, and then they actually learn to just respect everyone actually, because you then just see how it their personally is, their personality is, and not just only what kind of label they have.”

p. 62: *“Nee. Ja, het is persoonlijk soms onhandig, want dan zit je van 'hou gewoon je bek' [...] Nou dan bijvoorbeeld van 'ja het hoeft niet zo opvallend' dan zit, ik persoonlijk, zit dan zo van 'hou gewoon je mond, ik wil het wel opvallend, mijn issue, laat mij gewoon lekker'. Dan zit ik aan de andere kant zo van 'je hebt wel gelijk'.” (Respondent 2.2, transgender & pansexual, interview 17.03.20).*

“No. Yes, it is personally sometimes cumbersome, because then you are like ‘just shut your mouth’ [...] Well then, for instance, like ‘yes it does not have to be so showy’ then I am, personally, I am like ‘just shut up, I do want it showy, my issue, let me be’. And then I am on the other hand like ‘yeah you are actually right’.”

p. 62: *“[...] dat er wat mensen waren die zeiden, ‘hey maar we zijn LGBTQ dus wij kunnen, wij mogen deze beslissing wel maken ofzo, wij mogen deze beslissing nemen’, wat natuurlijk ook een beetje vooroordeelend, dat is best wel oneerlijk en dan krijg je natuurlijk ook soort van ongelijkheid van 'hey we willen hier juist voor normalisering gaan en nu worden eigenlijk de hetero's onderdrukt?’” (Respondent 2.3, straight, interview 18.03.20).*

“[...] that there were some people who said, ‘hey but we are LGBTQ so we can, we are allowed to make this decision or something like that, we are allowed to make this decision’, which of course is a bit prejudiced, that is quite unfair and then you of course get a kind of inequality like ‘hey we want to go for normalisation and now actually the straights are being oppressed?’”

p. 62: *“Ik denk dat het dan meer gaat lijken dat heteroseksuelen, ja een deel van de LHBT, dat zie je wel die hebben een soort van onderliggende haat voor heteroseksuelen. Dat is makkelijk als jij daar,*

als je daarin te veel van een focuspunt van maakt, bijvoorbeeld in je verhalen laat het weer zien dat zo'n organisatie als de GSA misschien wel vervreemd, de LHBT verraadt, en dan geloven ze je niet meer, dus dat, dus dat gevaar heb je wel. [...] Ja het is gewoon een groep, dat echt gezien is, een groep is van alleen homoseksuelen, iedereen van de LHBT, maar heteroseksuelen worden weer gezien als de vijand, want ja je vecht tegen hun, hun zijn tegen jou, en die mentaliteit is van beide kanten wel een, tja het is niet, het is niet altijd zwart en wit.” (Respondent 6.1, bisexual, interview 08.04.20).

“I think that it will then seem that straight people, yes a part of the LGBT, you see have a kind of underlying hate against straights. That is easy when you, if you make too much of a focus of it, for instance, in your stories, it will show that a kind of organisation as the GSA would maybe alienate, betray the LGBT and then they will not believe you anymore, so that, so that is the danger you will have. [...] Yes it is just a group, that is considered, a group only for the homosexuals, everyone of the LGBT, but heterosexuals are seen as the enemy, because yeah you are fighting against them, they are against you, and that mentality of both sides is well, yeah it is not, it is not always black and white.”

p. 62: *“Uhm ik denk dat je dan eigenlijk uhm soms een beetje een echokamer kan worden [...] Nou dat zou bijvoorbeeld toxic kunnen worden want ik merk zelf wel dat wij binnen mijn eh groep non-binaire mensen we zijn natuurlijk allemaal erg moe van bijvoorbeeld als we allemaal dingen moeten uitleggen en dat kan dan soms leiden op eh toxic dingen bijvoorbeeld mensen zijn vervelend tegen je dus dan ga je automatisch een soort van afkeer krijgen soms eh van mensen die je niet begrijpen en mensen die eh volgens mij niet non-binair zijn.” (Respondent 9.3, non-binary, interview 19.04.20).*

Uhm I think that you then actually uhm sometimes can become a bit of an echo chamber [...]. Well that could, for instance, become toxic, because I notice myself that when we, my eh group of non-binary people, we are of course all very tired of, for example, when we have to explain all kinds of stuff and that can sometimes lead to eh toxic stuff, for instance, people are mean to you so you automatically gain a kind of aversion sometimes eh to people who do not understand you and people who eh in my opinion are not non-binary.”

p. 63: *“Ja het is praktisch om gewoon altijd terug te kunnen kijken naar ‘okay hoe ziet eigenlijk het grootste deel van de maatschappij het?’” (Respondent 2.2, transgender & pansexual, 17.03.20).*

“Yes it is practical to just always be able to look back to ‘okay how exactly does the biggest part of society see it?’”

p. 63: *“Dus uhm ik weet niet zo goed. Ik denk dat een GSA waar meer mensen in zouden zitten die hetero zijn juist echt de diversiteit aangeeft en laat zien van 'dit is waar we voor staan', we willen iedereen toelaten.” (Respondent 3.1, asexual, interview 30.03.20).*

“So uhm I don't really know. I think that a GSA where more people are participating who are straight exactly really shows the diversity and shows like ‘this is what we stand for’, we want to admit everyone.”

5.3 The GSA and the creation of allyship

p. 64: *“Ja ik denk dat ik zou zeggen dat onze GSA een groep is met leerlingen die graag staan voor normalisering van alle seksualiteiten, alle identiteiten en dat we gewoon graag staan voor een tolerante school en dat we, dat, zoveel mogelijk daarbij ons steentje bij willen dragen.” (Respondent 2.3, straight, 18.03.20).*

“Yes I think that I would say that our GSA is a group of students who want to stand for normalisation of all sexuality, all identities and that we just like to stand for a tolerant school and that we want to pull our weight on it as much as possible.”

p. 64: *“Eh ja ik denk van wel, want de meeste mensen, ja je hoeft niet per se een, je hoeft niet per se in de community te horen om het te supporten en daar zijn wij dan een soort van voorbeeld van. En ja dat is soort van ook een voorbeeld voor andere mensen dan.” (Respondent 9.2, straight, 13.04.20).*

“Uhm yes I think so, because most people, yes you do not necessarily have a, you do not need to belong to the community to support it and we are then a kind of example of that. And yes that is a kind of also an example for other people then.”

p. 64: *“En uhm ik merkte ook dat als dan mijn vrienden een beetje negatief ofzo over homo's gingen praten dat ik het dan wel voor hen opnam.” (Respondent 7.5, straight, 18.04.20).*

“Uhm and I also noticed that when my friends are being a bit negative or were talking like that about gays, that I would stand up for them.”

p. 64: *“Nou we hebben sowieso wel B. [begeleider] en die is de grootste GSA-man van Nederland ongeveer, want hij organiseert Paarse Vrijdag Krant en zit, is leider van de grootste GSA van Nederland en reist [het] hele land door voor informatie en is aardrijkskundeleraar en die krijgt het ook wel voor elkaar om aan de hogere schoolleiding een beetje door te geven van 'we gaan dit doen of we gaan dat doen'.” (Respondent 7.5, straight, 18.04.20).*

“Well we in any case have B. [facilitator] and he is pretty much the biggest GSA person of the Netherlands so what, because he organises the Purple Friday Newspaper and he is in, is the leader of the biggest GSA of the Netherlands and travels all around [the] country for information and is the geography teacher and he will be able to relay ‘we are going to do this or we are going to do that’ to the higher school board.”

p. 64: *“Uhm nee, want we hebben meneer L. [begeleider] aan onze kant natuurlijk en dat is echt wel de docent godsdienst hier op school. Ik denk volgens mij ook wel de sectieleider, dus dat is wel heel fijn. Ja ik denk niet echt dat we daar problemen mee hebben.” (Respondent 1.3, gay, interview 13.02.20).*

“Uhm no because we have mister L [facilitator] on our side of course and he is really the religion teacher here at school. I think in my opinion also the section leader, so that is actually really nice. Yes, I do not think that we have problems with that.”

p. 65: *“Dus ja dat is hun eh ja handvatten geven om eh die sterkheid die ze hebben met z'n allen of de, en, in ieder geval sommigen die eh die heel graag ook willen laten zien aan de wereld van 'hey dit ben ik of hier sta ik voor', maar tegelijkertijd ook daar een verhaal over kunnen vertellen, hun handvatten geven en ondersteunen daar waar nodig eh om, om, zodat ze dat uiteindelijk ook durven en gaan doen en op een handige manier.” (Respondent 7.6, facilitator, straight, interview 27.04.20).*

“So yeah that is providing them, eh yes, with tools to eh that the strongness that they have together or those and at least some who really want to show the world like ‘hey this is me or this is what I stand for’, but who can simultaneously also tell a story about it, provide them tools and support them where necessary eh to, to in order that they eventually also dare to do it and in a clever way.”

p. 65: *“[...] ik vind het juist fijn als bijvoorbeeld hetero's komen dan kunnen zij ook horen wat zij kunnen doen om het leven makkelijker te maken voor LHBT-leerlingen, voor hun vrienden, voor als ze volwassen, later een baan hebben of een werkgever zijn dat ze ook bijvoorbeeld hun werknemers erin kunnen helpen.” (Respondent 7.2, transgender, interview 09.04.20).*

“[...] I like it when, for example, straights come, then they can also hear what they can do to make the lives of LGBT-students easier, for their friends, for when they are adults, have a job later or are an employer that they can also, for example, help their employees with that.”

p. 65: *“Eh ja verder, vaardigheid, ook gewoon dat ik andere mensen heb leren begrijpen, want ik was best wel sceptisch over uhm bijvoorbeeld dat soort mensen die nou ik vind het, ik weet niet of ik heel gemeen maak [...] Uhm ja gewoon mensen die bijvoorbeeld transgender zijn en dan best wel eh ja, die dan, bijvoorbeeld een man die dan een vrouw wil zijn en dan verder niks nog heeft eh gedaan, maar dan bijvoorbeeld wel een pruik draagt, ik kan dat niet heel goed begrijpen, maar dat, waarom je zo iets zou doen, want ik denk dan alleen maar van 'oh dan ga je heel veel meningen over je krijgen, omdat het*

er zo apart uitziet, maar ja omdat we dat gesprek ook hebben geopend, natuurlijk met die mensen, daar leer je ook van, want dan heb je ook natuurlijk ook soort vaardigheden om mensen beter te begrijpen of andersom mensen beter te begrijpen.” (Respondent 2.3, straight, 18.03.20).

“Eh yes, what more, skills, also just that I have learned to understand other people, because I was quite sceptic about uhm, for example, the kind of people who well I think, I do not know if I now make it sound really mean [...] Uhm yes just people who are, for instance, transgender and who are then quite eh yes, who then, for example, a man who wants to be a woman and who has not yet done anything, but who, for example, does wear a wig. I do not really understand that well, but that, why would you do something like that, because I only think like ‘owh then you will receive a lot of opinions, because it looks so special, but yes because we have had that conversation, of course, with these people, then you will learn from that, because then you, of course, also have some kind of skills to better understand people or to vice versa understand people better.”

p. 65: *“[...] maar wel dat ik, voordat ik naar de GSA kwam, eigenlijk dacht van ik ben hetero en toen ik erbij kwam toen begon ik wel na te denken ‘uhm vind ik meisjes leuk, vind ik jongens leuk en ben ik überhaupt al verliefd geweest?’, enzo, en ik denk nu dat ik het weet, maar ik weet het nu niet zeker en eigenlijk boeit het me ook niet dat ik het al weet want ja.” (Participant 7.5, straight, interview 18.04.2020).*

“But indeed, before I came to the GSA, I actually thought like I am straight and then when I joined I certainly started to think about ‘uhm do I like girls, do I like boys and have I, on the whole, ever been in love?’ and stuff like that, and I now think that I know, but now I do not know for certain and actually I do not care that I do not yet know because yeah.”

p. 66: *“Want ik vond dat dat niet nodig was. Ik daagde hem uit he. Ik vond dat het niet nodig was [dat iemand van de GSA uit de kast kwam in de les] omdat, eh ik zei van ‘we zitten met dertig in de klas, dat betekent dat ik 29 lessen hierna mensen uit de kast moet laten komen dat ze hetero zijn’. Dus.” (Respondent 1.4, facilitator, straight, 10.03.20).*

“Because I didn’t consider it necessary. I was challenging him he. I felt that it wasn’t necessary [that someone from the GSA would come out during class] because, eh I said like ‘we are with thirty people in the classroom, that would mean that I would need to let people come out that they are straight in the 29 lessons afterwards’. So.”

p. 66: *“En dat was, dat is dan bijvoorbeeld, eh over hoe opvallend Paarse Vrijdag moet zijn in de aula. En over hoe mensen eh de aandacht willen trekken van de medeleerlingen. En dan heb je vaak de mensen ja die niet straight zijn zo van ‘het moet zo opvallend mogelijk, facking hang een regenboogvlag op’ en dan heb je de straights die zijn zo van ‘zet gewoon een tafel neer dat is prima’. En dat verschil, op een gegeven moment heb je dan dus wel zo’n mini discussie van ‘hoe opvallend het moet zijn’. Want ja ik zit zo van hang lekker die vlag op, wat maakt het uit?’ en dan zitten ze zo van ‘ja, maar dat is dan weer dat we heel erg gay lijken als GSA zijnde en dat willen we dus juist niet uitstralen’ en dan zit ik zo van ‘ja maar het is ook wel weer Paarse Vrijdag’.” (Respondent 2.2, transgender & pansexual, 17.03.20).*

“And that was, that is then, for example, eh about how showy Purple Friday should be in the aula. And about how people eh wanted to attract the attention of fellow students. And then we often have people, yes, who are not straight be like ‘it has to be as showy as possible, fuck put up a rainbow flag’ and then you have the straights who are like ‘just put a table there, that is fine’. And that difference, at a certain moment you will then have this kind of mini discussion about ‘how showy it has to be’. Because yes I am like ‘just put up that flag, what does it matter?’ and then they are like ‘yes, but we again do not want to look really gay as GSA and we do not want to render that’ and then I am like ‘yes but it is also Purple Friday’”.

p. 66: *“Nou weet je zo werkt de wereld ook niet, weet je. Je kan niet, je kan niet in een bubbel blijven voor altijd en dan verwachten dat iedereen ook in die bubbel zit. Weet je, je bent een individu, je bent een mens, je bent verantwoordelijk voor je eigen doen, dus je gaat in situaties komen, waarin je uhm*

waarin je je moet identificeren als een uniek persoon en als 'okay dit ben ik, en uhm ik ben nu, zelfstandig moet ik omgaan met de situatie' dus je kan niet altijd terugvallen op een community als het ware en ik vind het denkbeeld dat uhm dat je je moet verschuilen omdat je je veilig voelt in zo'n groep vind ik gewoon gevaarlijk. Want ik denk van 'ja dan ga je denk ik later, ga je heel erg uhm eh ja, daartegen aanlopen'." (Respondent 2.1, straight, 17.03.20).

“Well you know, that is also not how the world works, you know. You cannot, you cannot stay in a bubble for ever and then expect that everyone is also in that bubble. You know, you are an individual, you are a person, you are responsible for your own actions, so you will come in a situation in which you uhm in which you have to identify yourself as an unique person and as ‘okay this is who I am, and uhm I am now, independently I now have to deal with this situation’ so you cannot always rely on a community in a way and I think the idea that uhm that you have to hide yourself because you feel safe in such a group I think that is just dangerous. Because I think like yes than you will, I think, later, you will really uhm eh yes run into’.”