

**“In or ‘Out?’”:
An Examination of the Effects of School Climate
on Same-Sex Attracted Students in Australia**

Jacqueline Anastasia Mikulsky

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Education and Social Work

University of Sydney

November 2006

“In or ‘Out?’”: An Examination of the Effects of School Climate on Same-Sex Attracted Students in Australia by Jacqueline Anastasia Mikulsky

ABSTRACT

Research has shown that the school-based experiences of same-sex attracted (SSA) young people are frequently less than ideal, often fraught with verbal and physical harassment and social isolation from peers. School-based victimisation of SSA students has been correlated with their negative mental health outcomes, drug and alcohol use, decreased academic outcomes and lowered tertiary aspirations. These outcomes raise issues related to duty of care for educators, including the general responsibility of schools to create safe, equitable learning environments for all of their students.

In order to better meet the needs of SSA students in Australia’s secondary schools, this nationwide study examined the current school climate toward same-sex attraction as described by SSA young people aged 14-19 through their reported experiences and perceptions of environmental stresses and supports, using Margaret Spencer’s PVEST model as the theoretical framework. A web-based survey instrument, advertised through both mainstream and lesbian/gay/bisexual-orientated youth sources, was used to sample Australian SSA students ($N = 282$). The relationships between SSA students’ perceptions of their school climate (including the treatment of SSA students and topics), their sense of connection to their school community, and their reported academic self-concept and motivation toward learning were investigated using bivariate and multivariate techniques, including structural equation modelling. In-depth interview sessions were conducted with six SSA young people in order to further examine these findings.

Results indicated that SSA students’ perceptions of their school climate were directly related to their sense of safety within the school environment, their social connection to their peers and teachers, and their feelings of connectedness to the school environment in general. SSA students’ connection to their teachers and their school environment had the strongest total impact on their academic self-concept and motivation to learn. Of key import was the clear indirect impact of SSA students’ perceptions of their school climate on both of these important academic outcomes, through their connection to both their school community and general school environment. These findings allow for the generation of informed recommendations for school policy and practice with the academic outcomes of Australia’s SSA students in mind.



The University of Sydney
Faculty of Education and Social Work
Division of Graduate Studies

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

This is to certify that:

- I. This thesis comprises only my original work towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
- II. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used
- III. The thesis does not exceed the word length for this degree.
- IV. No part of this work has been used for the award of another degree.
- V. This thesis meets the *University of Sydney's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) requirements for the conduct of research.*

Signature(s):

Name(s):.....Jacqueline Anastasia Mikulsky.....

Date:

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the invaluable input of my supervisor, Associate Professor Gerard Sullivan, whose skilled supervision has, most of all, continually stretched me harder and further as a researcher, writer and critical thinker, in order to elicit my best work. This thesis would not have been possible without the support of my associate supervisor, Dr. Lina Markauskaite, whose many hours of labour, close readings and dedicated feedback above and beyond the ‘call of duty’ have helped shape this document into what it is today. I would also like to recognize the assistance I received from Dr. Rachel Wilson, as an additional associate supervisor.

To those who have come before me and illuminated this path: Dr. James Hanson, Dr. Tai Peseta, Dr. Cannas Kwok, Dr. Kitty Te Riele – thank you for your inspiration. It was to you I turned my gaze during difficult moments. To my PESSA ‘comrades’ and ‘soulmates’: Menraj Sachdev, Kelli McGraw, Kelly Lester and Karin Ishimine – you were my rock. I am so thankful to have found you.

To my husband Adam, whose love and support has been a constant recharge for my very drained batteries, the absolute joy you have given me has buoyed this work. The light you bring to my life makes me a better person.

Most importantly, this thesis is dedicated to my brother Steven – this journey began from constantly trying to be as incredible as my older brother – and to my loving and inspirational parents, Connie and Thomas. If not for your encouragement, pride, reassurance and unconditional support, none of this would have ever happened. I share all of my successes with the three of you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
AUTHOR'S DECLARATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	x
GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	xi
PREFACE	xiii
Organisation of the Thesis	xvii
CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW	1
1.1 Heterosexuality as “Social Capital”	1
1.2 Same-sex Attraction in Youth Populations	3
1.3 Same-sex Attraction Through the Lens of the School Climate	4
1.3.1 School Staff Members’ Attitudes Toward Same-sex Attraction.....	5
1.3.2 Secondary School Students’ Attitudes Toward Same-sex Attraction.....	8
1.3.3 Final Thoughts on Attitudes Toward Same-sex Attraction at the Classroom Level.....	12
1.4 Victimization and Same-Sex Attracted (SSA) Youth	12
1.4.1 Covert Victimization of Same-Sex Attracted Youth.....	13
1.4.2 Overt Victimization of Same-Sex Attracted Youth within the School Setting	15
1.4.3 Victimization in Australian Secondary Schools	18
1.5 Correlates of School-Based Victimization of Same-Sex Attracted Youth	20
1.5.1. Risk Outcomes for Same-sex Attracted Youth in the United States and the United Kingdom .	21
1.5.2 Risk Outcomes for Same-sex Attracted Youth in Australia.....	24
1.6 School-Related Outcomes for Same-Sex Attracted Youth	26
1.7 Resiliency of Same-Sex Attracted Youth	30
1.8 Framing the Present Research Study	35
CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL INFLUENCES	37
2.1 Socio-historical Perspectives on Sexuality	38
2.2 Social Construction of Sexuality and Related Social Stigma	39
2.3 The Impact of Schools	41
2.4 The PVEST Theoretical Model	43
2.5 PVEST and Same-sex Attracted Students	46
2.5.1 Component One: Risk Factors.....	46
2.5.2 Component Two: Net Environmental Stresses and Supports.....	48
2.5.3 Component Three: Reactive Coping Methods (Adaptive and Maladaptive)	49
2.5.4 Component Four: Emergent Identities	50
2.5.5 Component Five: Coping Outcomes	51

2.6 PVEST Components in Practice: The Impact of Marginalisation and Social Acceptance on School Outcomes	51
2.7 PVEST and Resilience for Marginalised Young People.....	57
2.8 Framing the Current Research	60
2.9 Concluding Remarks.....	63
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS	64
3.1 Research Design – Overview.....	64
3.1.1 On-line questionnaire	65
3.1.2 In-depth interviews.....	65
3.2 General Sample Characteristics.....	65
3.3 Ethical Considerations.....	66
3.4 Measurement Instrument: Construction.....	67
3.4.1 PVEST Component One: “Risk Factors”	68
3.4.2 PVEST Component Two: “Net Environmental Stresses and Supports”	73
3.4.3 PVEST Component Three: “Reactive Coping Methods”	75
3.4.4 PVEST Component Four: “Emergent Identities”	77
3.4.5 PVEST Component Five: “Coping Outcomes”	78
3.5 Participant Recruitment.....	79
3.6 Questionnaire Distribution	79
3.7 Instrument Construction, Design and Functionality	83
3.8 Instrument Testing and Pilot-Informed Alterations.....	88
3.9 Participant Characteristics	90
3.9.1 Age and Sex	91
3.9.2 State of Origin	91
3.9.3 Participant Ethnicity	93
3.9.4 School Type	93
3.9.5 Tertiary Education.....	94
3.9.6 Socio-Economic Status (SES).....	96
3.9.7 Location of Completion and Mode of Solicitation.....	97
3.10 Survey Data Analysis	97
3.10.1 Quantitative Analysis Techniques.....	97
3.10.2 Analysis of Open-Ended Survey Items.....	98
3.11 Interview Analysis	99
3.11.1 Interview Schedule.....	99
3.11.2 Participant Selection	99
3.11.3 Interview Protocol.....	101
3.11.4 Interview Data Analysis.....	102
3.12 Concluding Remarks.....	102
CHAPTER 4: CHARACTERISTICS OF MEASURES.....	104
4.1 Data Preparation	104
4.1.1 Phase One: Exclusion of Duplicates/Blanks	104
4.1.2 Phase Two: Deletion of Unwanted Cases.....	105
4.1.3 Phase Three: Deletion of Inconsistent Cases.....	105
4.1.4 Phase Four: Deletion of Cases with Missing Data (AMOS preparation).....	106

4.2 Construct Reliability and Validity	106
4.2.1 Background on Principal Component Analysis and Related Statistics	106
4.2.2 Preparation of Data for Latent Component Examination	108
4.2.3 Principal Components Analysis Results	113
4.2.4 Index Reliability: Academic Self-Concept, Motivation to Learn, Connection to Teachers and School, Connection/Sense of Safety with Peers and Self-esteem Indices	122
4.2.5 Index Construction: School Climate Indices	123
4.2.6 Index Construction: Total Disclosure and Total Comfort Indices	126
4.3 Concluding Remarks.....	127
<i>CHAPTER 5: CHARACTERISICS OF SCHOOL CLIMATE, SCHOOL COMMUNITY CONNECTION, AND SCHOOL-RELATED OUTCOMES</i>	<i>128</i>
5.1 Characteristics of School Climate.....	128
5.1.1 Verbal Homophobia	128
5.1.2 Physical Homophobia	133
5.1.3 Support/Positivity Regarding Same-Sex Attraction.....	136
5.1.4 School Climate Index Distribution.....	142
5.1.5 Relationship between School Climate Indices and Support/‘Positivity’ with Regards to Same-sex Attraction	143
5.1.6 Relationship between School Climate and Sex/School Type.....	145
5.2 Characteristics of Participants’ School Community Connection	148
5.2.1 Connection to Teachers and School & Connection/Sense of Safety with Peers Indices.....	148
5.2.2 Relationship between School Community Connection Indices and School Climate	149
5.2.3 Relationship between School Community Connection Indices and Participants’ Sex/School Type.....	152
5.2.4 Disclosure/Comfort Indices	153
5.2.5 Relationship between Comfort/Disclosure Indices and School Climate	154
5.2.6 Relationship between Comfort/Disclosure Indices and Participants’ Sex/School Type	156
5.3 Psychological, School-Related Outcomes.....	156
5.3.1 Self-Esteem, Motivation to Learn and Academic Self-Concept	157
5.3.2 Truancy, Early School Leaving, and Tertiary Education vs. School Cessation.....	158
5.3.3 Relationships within Psychological, School-Related Outcomes.....	159
5.3.4 Relationship between Psychological, School-Related Outcomes and School Community Connection	160
5.3.5 Relationship between Psychological, School-Related Outcomes and Participants’ Sex/School Type.....	163
5.4 Concluding Remarks.....	164
<i>CHAPTER 6: EXPLAINING OUTCOMES FOR SAME-SEX ATTRACTED STUDENTS – IMPACTS OF SEX, DISCLOSURE, SCHOOL CLIMATE AND COMMUNITY CONNECTION</i>	<i>165</i>
6.1 Re-Orientation: The PVEST Theoretical Model.....	165
6.2 Model Testing: Path/SEM Analysis.....	166
6.2.1 Organising and Preparing the Data	167
6.2.2 Determining Included Variable Structure.....	168
6.2.3 Structural Equation Modelling (SEM): Key Theoretical Aspects	170
6.2.4 Generic Theoretical Model.....	171
6.2.5 Specific, Theoretical Model.....	175
6.3 Concluding Remarks.....	179
<i>CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION</i>	<i>181</i>

7.1 Discussion of Key Findings	181
7.1.1 Perceptions of the School Environment.....	181
7.1.2 Relationship between Environment and School Outcomes.....	185
7.1.3 Academic Self-Concept and its Key Associations.....	189
7.1.4 Importance of the Current Findings.....	192
7.2 Theoretical Contributions	194
7.2.1 Risk for Same-sex Attracted Youth and Application of PVEST Model.....	194
7.2.2 Methodological Considerations and Model Modifications.....	196
7.2.3 Suggestions for Future PVEST Model Applications.....	199
7.3 Limitations of the Current Study.....	201
7.3.1 Sampling Effects.....	201
7.3.2 Survey-Related Issues.....	202
7.3.3 Modelling Issues.....	202
7.4 Summary of the Findings and Suggestions for Future Research	204
7.5 Recommendations for School Practice.....	207
REFERENCES.....	210
APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE	221
APPENDIX B: MEDIA RESOURCES USED FOR PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT	234
1. Mainstream Media Sources.....	234
2. Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Targeted Media Sources.....	237
3. Other Methods of Contact.....	239
APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION	240
APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT CONTACTS.....	242
APPENDIX E: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS, INDEX ITEMS	247
APPENDIX F: QUESTIONNAIRE ITEM ABBREVIATIONS.....	248
APPENDIX G: RELIABILITY TESTS FOR CROSSLOADINGS.....	249
APPENDIX H: BOOTSTRAPPED STANDARDISED TOTAL EFFECTS	251

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Operationalisation of Component One Variables	68
Table 2: Operationalisation of Component Two Variables.....	73
Table 3: Operationalisation of Component Three Variables.....	75
Table 4: Operationalisation of Component Four Variables	77
Table 5: Participants' Secondary School Types	94
Table 6: Participants' Secondary School Attendance	95
Table 7: Participants' Tertiary Enrolment.....	96
Table 8: Participant Characteristics, Interviews	101
Table 9: Number of Identified Cases Based on Sample Parameter Non-fit.....	105
Table 10: Correlation Matrix for Variables in the PCA Analysis (Parts 1-3).....	109-111
Table 11: Pattern Matrix for PCA Analysis (1).....	115
Table 12: Structure Matrix for PCA Analysis (1).....	116
Table 13: Pattern Matrix for PCA Analysis (2).....	118
Table 14: Structure Matrix for PCA Analysis (2).....	119
Table 15: Component Correlation Matrix	122
Table 16: Component Descriptive Statistics	122
Table 17: Internal Consistency Reliability Analysis.....	123
Table 18: Descriptive Statistics – Verbal and Physical Homophobia Indices	143
Table 19: Correlations - School Climate Indices and Positivity/Support Items	144
Table 20: Correlations – School Climate Indices and Community Connection Scales.	150
Table 21: Correlations – ‘Positivity’ Toward SSA and Community Connection Scales	150
Table 22: Descriptive Statistics - Comfort and Disclosure Indices	153
Table 23: Correlations – Disclosure and Comfort Indices and Positivity/Support Items	155
Table 24: Reported Frequency of Truancy.....	158
Table 25: Correlations – Academic Self-Concept and Other School Outcomes.....	159
Table 26: Correlations – Academic Self-Concept and School Community Indices.....	160
Table 27: Correlations – Self-Esteem/Motivation to Learn with School Community Connection	161
Table 28: Variables Excluded from the Analysis	168
Table 29: Variables Included in the Model	169
Table 30: Fit Indices for Generic Theoretical Model.....	172
Table 31: Additional Paths for Specific Theoretical Model.....	174
Table 32: Fit Indices for Specific Theoretical Model	175
Table 33: Fit Indices for More Parsimonious Model.....	177
Table 34: Standardised Total Effects – More Parsimonious Model	178
Table 35: Key Research Questions and Emerging Answers	204
Table 36: Research Objective.....	207

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST).....	46
Figure 2: PVEST Model Adaptation.....	63
Figure 3: Research Design.....	64
Figure 4: Survey Welcome Page – Screen Shot.....	84
Figure 5: Survey Response – Screen Shot.....	87
Figure 6: Participant Age and Sex.....	91
Figure 7: Number of 14-19 Year Old Persons by State and Territory.....	92
Figure 8: Percentage of 14-19 Year Old Persons by State and Territory – Population.....	92
Figure 9: Percentage of 14-19 Year Old Persons by State and Territory – Sample.....	92
Figure 10: Parents’ or Guardians’ Highest Level of Completed Education.....	96
Figure 11: Place of Survey Completion.....	97
Figure 12: Method of Survey Information.....	97
Figure 13: Scree Plot for PCA Analysis (2), Five Factor Solution.....	120
Figure 14: School Climate – Verbal Homophobia Schematic.....	124
Figure 15: School Climate – Physical Homophobia Schematic.....	126
Figure 16: Reported Frequency of Homophobic Language.....	129
Figure 17: Reported Frequency of Teacher Intervention – Verbal Homophobia.....	130
Figure 18: Reported Frequency of Physical Homophobia.....	133
Figure 19: Reported Frequency of Teacher Intervention – Physical Homophobia.....	134
Figure 20: Reported Tenor of (Non-Heterosexual) Sexualities Discussion.....	137
Figure 21: Reported Frequency of Positivity/Support for SSA Topics/Persons.....	140
Figure 22: Distribution of School Climate – Verbal Homophobia Index.....	143
Figure 23: Distribution of School Climate – Physical Homophobia Index.....	143
Figure 24: Verbal Homophobia Index by Sex.....	146
Figure 25: Verbal Homophobia Index by School Sex Composition.....	147
Figure 26: Verbal Homophobia Index by Secondary School Type.....	147
Figure 27: School Community Connection Indices.....	149
Figure 28: Connection to Teachers and School Index by Participants’ Sex.....	152
Figure 29: Connection/Sense of Safety with Peers Index by Secondary School.....	152
Figure 30: Comfort and Disclosure Indices.....	153
Figures 31a and 31b: Disclosure/Comfort Indices by Participant Sex.....	156
Figure 32: School Outcomes Indices.....	157
Figure 33: Scatterplot – Academic Self-Concept and Connection to Teachers and School.....	161
Figure 34: Academic Self-Concept Index by Sex.....	163
Figure 35: Self-Esteem by Sex.....	163
Figure 36: PVEST Theoretical Model.....	166
Figure 37: Path Model #1 as based on PVEST Model.....	166
Figure 38: Specific Theoretical Model.....	175
Figure 39: More Parsimonious Model.....	176

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

€	Absolute Value
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AGFI	Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index
AIC	Akaike Information Criterion
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AMOS	Analysis of Moment Structures (computer program)
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
ARHS	Affective Reactions to Homosexuality Scale
ASDQ II	Academic Self-Description Questionnaire II
ATH	Attitudes Towards Homosexuality Scale
BHS	Beck Hopelessness Scale
β	Beta; regression weight
BSI	Brief Symptom Inventory
Co-ed	Co-educational (i.e. schools which enrol both girls and boys)
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
χ^2	Computed value of a chi-square test
CGI	Computer Generated Instruction
α	Cronbach's index of internal consistency
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
Δ	Delta; increment of change
DEET	Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria
<i>df</i>	Degrees of Freedom
EDA	Exploratory Data Analysis
<i>F</i>	Fisher's <i>F</i> ratio (ANOVA)
GFI	Goodness of Fit Index
GLSEN	Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Educational Network
GPA	Grade Point Average
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HTML	Hyper Text Mark-up Language
ICE	Identity-Focussed Cultural Ecological Perspective
IFI	Incremental Fit Index
IHP	Index of Homophobia Scale
IP	Internet Protocol
KMO	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic
l/g/b	lesbian/gay/bisexual
l/g/b/q	lesbian/gay/bisexual/queer
l/g/b/t	lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender
MAX	Maximum
ML	Maximum Likelihood
<i>M</i>	Mean
MIN	Minimum

MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
MATHS	Modified Attitudes Towards Homosexuality Scale
MAACL	Multiple Affect Adjective Checklist
MANOVA	Multiple Analysis of Variance
MI	Multiple Imputation
<i>N</i>	Number (Final Sample)
<i>n</i>	Number (Partial Sample)
N/A	Not Applicable
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
<i>p</i> (<i>p</i> -value)	Probability; measure of statistical significance
<i>p.</i> (pp.)	Page number(s)
<i>r</i>	Pearson product-moment correlation
PVEST	Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory
PRELIS	Preparation for LISREL (computer program)
PCA	Principal Component Analysis
Q	Question
QLD	Queensland
QUAL	Qualitative
QUAN	Quantitative
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error Approximation
SA	South Australia
ρ	Spearman rank correlation coefficient (rho)
<i>SD</i>	Standard Deviation
<i>SE</i>	Standard Error
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SPS	Suicide Probability Scale
SQ	Suicide Questionnaire
SRMR	Standardised Root Square Mean Residual
SSA	Same-Sex Attracted
<i>t</i>	Computed value of <i>t</i> test
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TAS	Tasmania
TLI	Tucker Lewis Index
TSC-40	Trama Symptom Checklist-40
URL	Universal Resource Locator
VIC	Victoria
WA	Western Australia

PREFACE

When you're safe, if you're comfortable, and you know that you can be who you are – when you're in that state of mind, you're much more likely to be able to do your work without stressing because you haven't got those things on your mind to put negative thoughts and everything into your head.

'Jacob,' Gay Student, Aged 15

In the autumn of 1997, my final year as an English Education major at university, I began my student teaching placement at a co-educational New York City public middle school on the lower east side of Manhattan. I taught English, literature and grammar, to two classes of Year 7 students, aged mainly 12 and 13 years old. There were many “characters” amongst those 60 students, but one of the most intriguing personalities was “Jarell,” a 13-year old boy who rose a full head higher than many of his classmates and had the brawny build of a high school student.

Despite his physical size, Jarell was consistently marginalised by the other students, mostly boys, in both subtle and obvious ways. He was excluded from the boys' cliques and, instead, socialised with his female classmates during both in-class group work as well as in the lunchroom and on the playground during recess. Despite my efforts to curtail this behaviour, students would often roll their eyes or make comments to their neighbours under their breath when Jarell stood to present his written work to the class. Jarell was often subjected to mockery – of his voice and intonation, of his manner of standing, walking; it was as if the students had studied Jarell and decided that he did not “fit.” It didn't help matters when, three months into the school year, Jarell decided to start going by the nickname “Bubbles,” a blithe choice for a young man living in the housing projects of the lower east side.

I was fairly certain that Jarell was gay. I do not know this because he disclosed his sexuality to me or to any other staff members or students; as far as I am aware, Jarell kept his sexuality private and perhaps would not have had the words to vocalise it himself.

Nevertheless, Jarell's sexuality, or potential sexuality, was obvious to me. Other students appeared to think Jarell was gay too, and while homophobic comments were admonished by myself and my supervising teacher whenever they were actually heard in the classroom, some of Jarell's classmates would privately speculate to me about his sexual orientation and it was not uncommon to hear groups of students calling him homophobic names behind his back during recess duty or at the end of the day.

The following year, I began my first full-time teaching position at the same school, again teaching English to several classes of Year 6 and Year 7 students. One of my new Year 7 students was a girl named "Maureen," a quiet girl who rarely volunteered in class and was very reluctant to share her work with the group. In contrast to Jarell's animated personality and strong friendship with a small group of his female classmates, Maureen was more introspective and preferred spending lunchtime in the classroom with me – working on the computer, completing assignments – than in the crowded lunchroom or out on the yard at recess and, from what I could ascertain, did not have even one close friend at the school. Rather than being actively picked on like Jarell, most of the time Maureen was simply left alone by the majority of the students who thought she was weird and was "probably a dyke," because of her baggy, longer clothing, lack of make-up or intricate plaits, unlike those of many of her female classmates, and her general lack of interest in acting "girly."

While I was relatively sure of Jarell's sexuality, I was much less definite about Maureen's, although I had my suspicions. What I did know for certain was that should Maureen or Jarell care to seek out information about same-sex attraction or find support for confusing or anxious feelings about their sexuality, they would need to go elsewhere, as our school did not offer such materials or support. Even when I was asked to teach a short course on sex-education to our students (as was every teacher at the school, regardless of training), homo- and/or bisexuality were not incorporated into the program and, instead the focus was on safe, heterosexual sexual practices and heterosexual attractions during puberty. The environment was virtually silent on issues surrounding same-sex attraction. As a certified secondary school teacher, my university training

never once touched on issues of sexual diversity in the classroom and any work I did towards addressing homophobia in the classroom came from sheer intuition and personal commitment.

As an educator who believes strongly in issues of equity and safety within the classroom, my teaching experience raised a number of questions in regard to the school experience of young people with same-sex attractions. I was curious about whether or not other secondary schools acknowledged the potential existence of same-sex attracted (SSA) young people, how other schools in other countries were addressing same-sex attraction within the curriculum, what systems other teachers had in place for combating homophobia, and whether or not they were mindfully taking steps to establish an environment where SSA students felt confident and safe in their sexuality. Although I had never thought it appropriate to ask Jarell or Maureen, I was eager to understand how SSA students in other schools perceived their school's "climate" with regards to same-sex attraction, in terms of both personal bullying and isolation stemming from others' negative attitudes toward their sexuality, as well as active support of same-sex attraction from both teachers and classmates. How widespread was homophobic harassment at school in the present social climate and how common were positive school experiences related to same-sex attraction? Further, I was curious about what differences in perceptions of school climate might exist for SSA young men and young women and for SSA students attending different types of secondary schools (private vs. public; single-sex vs. co-educational).

While understanding differences in perceptions of school environment was a start, it seemed only a small portion of the picture. I had seen Jarell and Maureen's experiences of isolation and bullying impact their overall enthusiasm for schoolwork and social connection to their peer group, and became interested in exactly how SSA students' experiences of overt and covert homophobia within the school environment impacted their student experience. I wanted to know if what I had witnessed was an isolated experience and to gain a better understanding of both if and how SSA students' friendships, general sense of school connection and motivation, and relationships with

teachers were potentially impacted by their school's climate with regards to same-sex attraction. In addition, a major question which had been raised by my teaching experience was whether or not SSA students' general self-esteem and academic self-concept were affected by these same school climate issues.

Of all the potential effects of school climate toward same-sex attraction for SSA students, this last one carried particular potency for me. Students' academic self-concept, or their feelings about themselves as students (investigated in lieu of actual marks which are typically tricky to access and problematic to compare for students attending different schools), appeared to be one of the best measures of whether or not students are receiving an equitable school experience. While my teaching experience had shown me a great deal about how students' attitudes toward school and feelings about their self-worth as students could be impacted by social factors, I was curious to see exactly what aspects of the school experience had the strongest relationship to SSA students' academic self-concept. Accordingly, I became extremely interested in how SSA students' academic self-concept could be safeguarded and enhanced by practical actions taken by staff members within the school environment.

A move from NYC to Australia extended my interest in this topic, as I was curious as to how same-sex attraction was handled by secondary schools within this new cultural context. Further, as the relationship between school climate and other school-related outcomes had not been explored in great detail, I saw a need to investigate these issues on a national level, surveying a large sample of SSA young people from each state and major territory in Australia. In order to better understand larger trends which may have been apparent and account for some of the limitations of survey data, interviews with some of the young people seemed an appropriate method to further explore school climate while simultaneously lending the results a more personal feel.

Reflecting on my own teaching experiences and students, I approached this research study with the following three research questions and key objective:

Question #1: What are the major variations in how Australian same-sex attracted (SSA) youth perceive their secondary school's environment with respect to treatment of same-sex attraction and same-sex attracted persons?

Question #2: How do variations in how SSA students perceive their school environment relate to their perceptions of their personal academic success (i.e., academic self-concept), practical school-related outcomes and their sense of belonging within the school community?

Question #3: What school climate characteristics and psychological school-related outcomes have the greatest impact, both directly and indirectly, on SSA students' academic self-concept?

Research Objective: Determine practical steps that can be taken by Australian secondary schools to promote positive academic self-concept for their population of SSA students.

Organisation of the Thesis

To answer these research questions and meet the objective of the project, the thesis presentation is structured as follows:

Chapter One outlines a systematic review of the literature surrounding same-sex attraction and schools. The review begins with an investigation of attitudes of school staff members and secondary school students with regards to same-sex attraction and continues with the reported school experiences of SSA students, first in the United States and the United Kingdom, and narrowing to experiences of Australian, SSA students, as the focus of this enquiry. Correlates of personal victimisation for SSA young people are explored, with a primary focus on the impact of victimisation on school-centred outcomes.

In Chapter Two, socio-historical precursors to the modern-day experiences of SSA young people are investigated, highlighting the social implications of marginalisation for SSA youth. This discussion provides the backdrop for the presentation of the theoretical model under investigation, which focuses on the interaction of risk factors, environmental

context, coping mechanisms, and emergent identity formation towards eventual life stage outcomes for individuals, while using a phenomenological approach. The chapter concludes with a presentation of the research questions under investigation and the project objective.

Chapter Three presents an overview of the data collection for the project - a mixed-method design using an online survey instrument and in-depth interview sessions - and analysis. Further, the operationalisation of the concepts included within the theoretical model is discussed through the presentation within the survey instrument and the methods for survey administration are outlined. Finally, key sample demographic information is provided for the final survey cohort of SSA young people ($N = 282$).

Chapter Four charts the necessary steps in data preparation prior to analysis including case deletion and index construction for the latent variables included in the study. Chapter Five continues with results of the subsequent analysis including descriptive statistics, comparisons of means and correlation analysis, with multivariate analysis in the form of the integration of findings from the six in-depth interview sessions. In Chapter Six, more complex multivariate analysis is conducted through the construction and testing of the theoretical model as a structural equation model (SEM). A number of model iterations are presented and a comprehensive analysis of model fit is presented in line with the study's mixed-method design.

These results are synthesised and discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven, in their relationship to other research findings and through the lens of their contributions to theory. Based on analysis, emerging answers for each of the research questions are provided and limitations of the study are addressed, including suggestions for future research in the area. The chapter concludes with an exploration of the research objective in light of the current study.