

SAME-SEX PARENTS OF SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN: SELF  
REPORTS OF EXPERIENCE AND PERCEPTIONS  
WITH INCLUSION AND DISCRIMINATION

by

KIA BOYD

PATTI HARRISON, COMMITTEE CHAIR  
HEATHER BRITNELL  
STEVE THOMA  
FELICIA HOUSTON  
CLAIRE MAJOR

A DISSERTATION

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## ABSTRACT

Government data from the 2010 United States Census indicate that there are over 594,000 same-sex couple households, with over 115,000 reporting having live-in children (Lofquist, 2011). Given these statistics, it is important for schools and school psychologists to be willing to act as change and progression agents (Zirkel, 2008). The purpose of the current qualitative study was to examine the school experiences of same-sex parents, specifically looking at their experiences with discrimination and inclusion. The current study was guided by the following research questions: 1) How do same-sex parents engage in the school culture?, 2) How do same-sex parents describe their experiences with discrimination in schools?, 3) How inclusive are schools for families with same-sex parents?, and 4) What policies, that same-sex parents are aware of, are in place in schools to support same-sex parents?

The current dissertation study included a total of five families with same-sex parents of at least one middle-school age child (n=5) and, for comparison, two families with opposite-sex parents of at least one middle-school age child (n=2). Data collection included a series of three individual interviews with at least one parent in each family, for a total of three rounds of interviews for each participant. Data analysis utilized a phenomenological hermeneutic analysis approach and in vivo coding. Participants within the study generally reported positive experiences in the school. Four major themes emerged from the data as contributing factors to the experiences reported among parents in the study. The findings and themes from this study contribute to research knowledge on supporting families with same-sex parents in schools nationwide.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving parents and my extended family. Thank you all for always being supportive of my dreams. In particular, a special thank you to my late grandmother for your life lessons on wisdom, determination, and strength.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The present dissertation study was designed to investigate the experiences of same-sex parents of school-age children in schools. The study specifically examined experiences with discrimination and inclusion in schools. Schools are largely heteronormative (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010), and research demonstrates that the majority of school culture is more accepting of heterosexual norms (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; Kozik-Rosabal, 2000). Research also shows that schools may fail to address crucial areas of inequality due to the overarching culture of heterosexism, and schools often choose to maintain a status quo or sense of “normalcy” due to fear of parent complaints or parental disruption (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2011). Thus, same-sex parents often feel that schools fail to acknowledge or incorporate families with same-sex parents into school culture, whether through social events or curriculum and instruction (Kozik-Rosabal, 2000). The current dissertation study employed a qualitative research method, specifically a phenomenological research approach, to examine the experiences of families with same-sex parents of school-age children in schools.

#### **Same-Sex Parents and Schools**

According to the 2010 United States Census, there are more than 594,000 same-sex couple households in the United States (Lofquist, 2011). Of this number, 115,000 reported having live-in children in the household (Lofquist, 2011). Additionally, statistical estimates suggest that as many as 2 million to 3.7 million children in the United States may have a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender parent (Gates, 2015). The majority of current research literature

examines the school-based experiences of children of same-sex parents, not same-sex parents themselves (Jeltova & Fish, 2005; Goldberg & Smith, 2014). This gap in literature supported the need for the current dissertation research study, specifically examining the experiences of same-sex parents.

Due to the limited research on same-sex parents and their experiences in schools, estimating exact instances of discrimination and social exclusion in schools for same-sex parents is difficult. Lindsay, Perlesz, Brown, McNair, De Vaus, and Pitts (2006) found that many families with same-sex parents utilize “secrecy” to navigate through school environments. Lindsay et al., (2006) found that many families with same-sex parents did not disclose their family structure due to fear of rejection, isolation, bullying, and social disadvantages to the child in school settings. Parents within the study indicated that school personnel play a large role in their decision to not disclose their familial structure. In fact, one parent within the study indicated that their child had been subjected to homophobic remarks made by a teacher. Other parents within the study commented that school personnel associated their sexual orientation with a greater need to discuss sexual practices or sexual behaviors, more so than the perceived experiences among heterosexual families.

Ray and Gregory (2001) conducted a research study to examine the school experiences of 117 children of same-sex parents. The study investigated strategies used by same-sex parents and their children to navigate their way through school environments. Researchers utilized a mixed-methods approach, specifically using questionnaires and focus groups. The results found that over 73 percent of same-sex parents were concerned about their children being teased or bullied in schools. The study also found that over 62 percent of same-sex parents were concerned that school social curriculum would not include or acknowledge families with same-sex parents. To

possibly avoid bullying or teasing, children raised in families with same-sex parents reported that they were selective in who they told about their family status. Over one-third or 36 percent of the students from families with same-sex parents ages 12-16 chose not to disclose of their parent's sexual orientation.

Kozik-Rosabal (2000) conducted a meta-analysis of research studies that examined the nature of concerns and fears that same-sex parents have about their children's well-being in schools. The same-sex parents within the study reported beliefs that schools reinforce heterosexual familial structures. Parents within the study expressed fears that their children may begin to question their familial structures due to the absence of families with same-sex parents within overall school culture. Same-sex parents within their study also reported frustrations with the misinformation about what it means to be a member of the LGBTQ community in schools. Despite research literature supporting the positive development and growth of children raised in families with same-sex parents, same-sex parents still battle with stereotypes regarding pedophilia, drug addiction, emotional sickness, and physical sickness, simply based on their sexual orientation (Kozik-Rosabal, 2000).

Additionally, Kozik-Rosabal (2000) found that same-sex parents worried that school administrators were not as proactive in addressing instances of verbal harassment, because levels of harassment may never reach physical violence. The study revealed that same-sex parents reported that when instances of verbal harassment were presented to school administrators, the responses were often met with resistance. Same-sex parents within the study reported that school administration responses were dismissive and oftentimes resorted to blaming the victim or assuming victims will just get over it. Although exact instances of discrimination and exclusion in schools for families with same-sex parents is not currently available in the literature, schools

need to be proactive in supporting families with same-sex parents in areas of school culture.

Kozik-Rosabal (2000) also found that LGBTQ parents reported feeling neglected, excluded or even mistreated by other members of their school communities, especially by other parents.

Depalma and Atkinson (2010) examined the nature of institutional heteronormativity and homophobia in schools. Specifically, the study sought to understand the nature of heteronormativity as a cultural phenomenon within schools. Researchers in the study conducted in-depth interviews with a pre-set interview protocol that addressed homophobia and sexual inequalities. Researchers within the study interviewed an unspecified number of current teachers and prospective teachers over a four year period from 2004-2008. The results of their study found that teachers within schools fail to address crucial areas of inequality because the overarching culture of heterosexism in schools creates a sense normalcy or maintains historical practices with little external disruption. Additionally, the study found that stereotypes or widely-held misconceptions about members of the LGBT community often prevent teachers from exploring familial or cultural images of families with same-sex parents in the classroom.

Chesir-Teran and Hughes (2009) conducted a research study examining the relationships between perceived heterosexism in high school policies and programs, social environments, and victimization rates among students who identified as LGBTQ. The research study surveyed 2037 student-respondents and utilized the internet survey of queer and questioning youth. The results of the study revealed that respondents perceived that schools reinforce heterosexual norms and reinforce invisibility among lesbian women and gay men through school policies. Additionally, research findings in the study indicate that respondents felt an overarching presence of heterosexism in policies, programs and social features within schools.

For schools and school personnel to properly support families with same-sex parents, the current dissertation study sought to investigate any concerns that may impact same-sex parents. The results of the present dissertation study can be utilized and adapted in schools to develop policies that support same-sex parents and their children. The results of the current dissertation study could also shed light on opportunities for school professionals to alleviate any barriers in implementing home-school collaboration and improving overall school culture.

### **Children of Same-Sex Parents**

Critics of same-sex parenting cite several disadvantages for children raised in families with same-sex parents, including the sexual identity of the children (McCann & Delmonte, 2005; Tasker & Golombok, 1995) and the psychological, educational, and social outcomes as concerns (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008; McCann & Delmonte, 2005; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). Research literature does not support any of these claims (McCann & Delmonte, 2005; Patterson, 2006).

Research does show the quality of family relationships as the best indicator of developmental outcomes (Wainright & Patterson, 2006). Specifically, Wainright and Patterson (2006) assessed familial perceptions of trust, understanding, communication, and general qualities of relationships among adolescents of female same-sex parents and children raised in heterosexual-led families. Research participants included 44 adolescents living in female families with same-sex parents and 44 adolescents living in families with opposite-sex parents. The study found that the quality of family relationships was highly associated with positive adolescent outcomes. The results of the study also found that greater perceived care and more positive relationships were associated with lower levels of tobacco use among adolescents in families with same-sex parents and heterosexual-led families.

A study conducted by Kosciw and Diaz (2008) found that children raised in families with same-sex parents reported negative school experiences. Children of families with same-sex parents reported that they often hear negative remarks about the LGBTQ community in schools (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). Specifically, an 8<sup>th</sup> grade student within a 2008 study of children of same-sex parents reported that she had been the victim of verbal harassment in school, reporting that “people saying that I was a lesbian just because my moms were (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008, p. 68).” Another 8<sup>th</sup> grade student within the study reported that another student intentionally spread untrue stories about her mother at school, stating that “a girl at school told a lie that my mom was making out with another woman behind the bleacher at a school event (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008, p. 68).” Thus, children of families with same-sex parents may be confronted with the decision to disclose of their family structure to others, due to potential bullying and mistreatment by school personnel (Ray & Gregory, 2001), and other children. Specifically, Kosciw and Diaz (2008) found that children from families with same-sex parents sometimes experienced mistreatment from peers and adult members of the school community (i.e., parents of other students) because of their family structure. Children of families with same-sex parents have reported children in school settings often use “secrecy” to navigate their way through school environments (Lindsay et al., 2006). Alternatively, research shows that children of families with same-sex parents that did not disclose of their family structure reported having lower self-esteem than those who did (Gershon, Tschann, & Jemerin, 1999).

Rivers, Poteat, and Noret (2008) conducted a study with 18 students, ranging from ages 12-16, all raised in families of female same-sex parents, the study also identified 18 students, ranging from 12-16, that were raised in heterosexual families. The research study sought to examine the psychological and social functioning of children raised by families with same-sex

parents as opposed to children raised in heterosexual families. The results of the study concluded that children raised in families with same-sex parents did not show significant differences in victimization, psychological functioning, and social experiences from those raised in heterosexual families. The study did also find that children of families with same-sex parents would be significantly less likely to use school-based support or services than children raised in heterosexual families. Additionally, Rivers et al. (2008) concluded that schools must be proactive in implementing more anti-discrimination policies and policies that address homophobia in schools.

Research suggests a disconnect with the lack of in-school supports being provided for families with same-sex parents. Specifically, Bliss and Harris (1999) found that school personnel reported feeling unprepared to work with families with same-sex parents. For schools to support same-sex parents and their children, school professionals must be knowledgeable about the issues that families with same-sex parents may face. Specifically, the results of the current study could provide insights into creating a more positive school culture for all families.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Based on previous research, same-sex couples nationwide are becoming parents. At some point, their children will be enrolled in school and need to navigate their way within a school setting. Same-sex parents must interact and collaborate with school personnel within their child's school at some point. Therefore, it is important to ensure that school environments are inclusive and free of discrimination for same-sex parents. Research suggests that many same-sex parents and their children utilize "secrecy" to navigate school environments. Establishing legitimate home-school collaboration requires comfortable, nondiscriminatory communication between parents and school personnel (Goldberg & Smith, 2014).

Same-sex parents, like all parents, serve as vital information sources for school personnel when working with children of families with same-sex parents. Therefore, it is important that communication between parties is respectful and the school environment is inclusive for same-sex parents. To identify barriers for school inclusion and to eliminate school-based discrimination, it was important to understand specific experiences of same-sex parents within schools. The current dissertation study was designed to examine the experiences of same-sex parents, specifically their experiences with discrimination and inclusion within schools. The current dissertation study sought out to examine the experiences of same-sex parents from a first-hand perspective or a qualitative research approach, specifically a phenomenological method of data collection. Previous research literature has revealed the negative school experiences of children of families with same-sex parents, however, research on same-sex parents in schools is limited (Jeltova & Fish, 2005; Goldberg & Smith, 2014). Therefore, the current dissertation study sought to contribute to the current research base on same-sex parents in schools.

### **Purpose of the Dissertation Study**

The purpose of the current dissertation study was to examine the self-reported experiences of same-sex parents of school-age children, specifically, investigating experiences with discrimination and inclusion in their children's schools. Previous research has identified some of the negative school experiences that same-sex parents and their children face within schools. Research literature exposed the culture of heteronormativity that currently exists within many schools (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010), thus creating an environment of exclusion for some families with same-sex parents.

This dissertation study utilized a qualitative research approach to examine specific experiences with discrimination and inclusion within schools for same-sex parents. Specifically,

the study utilized a phenomenological research design, which places an emphasis on in-depth interviews. Per Savin-Baden and Major (2013), the phenomenological research design is designed to “not only uncover an individual’s experience but also how they experience the phenomenon” (p. 215). Data was collected in three rounds of in-depth interviews, and from five families with same-sex parents and two families with opposite-sex parents, all of whom had a child of middle school age. Interviews were conducted in local library conference rooms and/or by telephone. Data collection spanned over the course of five months from October 2016-February 2017 with three rounds of interviews across participants.

### **Specific Research Questions**

#### **Research Question One. Same-Sex Parents within School Culture**

*How do same-sex parents engage in the school culture?*

*Specific purpose.* Research question one was chosen to address previous research findings on schools being largely heteronormative (Depalma & Atkinson, 2010), and same-sex parents reporting feeling excluded, neglected, and even mistreated by other members of their school communities, especially by other parents (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). Research question one sought to gain insight on the actual experiences from same-sex parents.

#### **Research Question Two. Same-Sex Parents’ Experiences with Discrimination**

*How do same-sex parents describe their experiences with discrimination in schools?*

*Specific purpose.* Research question two was chosen to address previous research findings on the experiences of same-sex parents with discrimination in schools. Depalma and Atkinson (2010) contend that schools fail to address crucial areas of inequality and discrimination because the overarching culture of heterosexism in schools creates a sense of normalcy or maintains historical practices with little external disruption. Oftentimes,

discrimination in schools goes unnoticed because schools inadvertently reinforce heterosexual norms and further reinforce invisibility among lesbian women and gay men (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009). Research question two sought to understand individual experiences with discrimination in schools among same-sex parents.

**Research Question Three.** Same-Sex Parents' Experiences with Inclusion

*How inclusive are schools for families with same-sex parents?*

**Specific purpose.** Research question three was chosen to address previous research findings on reported negative school-based experiences among same-sex parents. Kosciw and Diaz (2008) found that same-sex parents reported feeling excluded from school communities. In addition, Ray and Gregory (2001) found that over 62 percent of same-sex parents were concerned that school curriculum would not include or acknowledge families with same-sex parents. Research question three sought to understand specific experiences with school inclusion among families with same-sex parents.

**Research Question Four.** School-Based Policies to Support Same-Sex Parents

*What policies, that same-sex parents are aware of, are in place in schools to support same-sex parents?*

**Specific purpose.** Research question four was chosen to address previous research findings that indicates the lack of clear policies in schools when working with families with same-sex parents. Bliss and Harris (1999) found that teachers reported that their respective schools did not have clear policies for working with or supporting families with same-sex parents. In addition, DePalma and Atkinson (2010) found that current school policies do not fully address institutional discrimination. Rivers et al. (2008) found that schools must implement more policies to prevent discrimination and homophobia against children of families with same-sex

parents and same-sex parents. Research question four sought to understand the current policies in place in schools that support same-sex parents.

### **Significance of the Study**

The current dissertation study focused largely on the experiences of same-sex parents within schools. Previous research studies mostly examined the school experiences of children of families with same-sex parents, more than looking at same-sex parents. The nature of this study serves as a foundation for future research within this area. Again, there is a growing number of same-sex couples that are choosing to become parents and schools need to be prepared to properly collaborate with same-sex parents. Research in this area also needs to be proactive and continual to inform best practices across all school-based positions, including teachers, administrators, and support staff. Research findings from this dissertation study can be used to inform professional development trainings and curriculum development for schools. Specifically, curriculum development, as many same-sex parents have indicated that schools are largely heteronormative and often accommodate traditional, heterosexual families (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010). In addition, the findings of the current dissertation study can help bridge the relationships between families with same-sex parents and schools nationwide. Same-sex parents, like most parents, are information sources on their children in schools. Previous research has shown that parental involvement has been linked to greater student achievement (Hill & Tyson, 2009). The collaborative relationship between same-sex parents and school personnel is important, not only for the parents, but it also further supports student achievement.

The data and information discovered from this study can be used to inform best practices among school personnel nationwide, particularly when working with families with same-sex parents. Previous research shows that teachers have reported feeling unprepared to work with

families with same-sex parents (Bliss & Harris, 1999). The findings of the current dissertation study can be interpreted and adapted to schools nationwide, specifically incorporated into professional development trainings for school professionals.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The current dissertation study has limitations that need to be addressed. First, the current dissertation study included five families with same-sex parents and two families with opposite-sex parents. Given the smaller sample size of this study, the results of the current study cannot be generalized to all families with same-sex parents in schools, nor can the results be generalized to all families with opposite-sex parents. The research participants within the study can only speak about their specific experiences, and their experiences within schools may be unique or exclusive to those individuals. Thus, future research will need to be done to quantifiably address issues faced by families with same-sex parents nationwide.

The current study is also limited to one middle school in the Southern region of the United States. The results of the current study cannot be generalized across school settings due to external factors that could have an impact on results, such as perceived wealth among most participants, access to resources and information, and educational background across participants. Perhaps, future research could employ a longitudinal approach to follow the experiences of families with same-sex parents throughout each grade level and possibly until their child or children graduate from the traditional K-12 school setting. This information could provide more detailed information on the experiences of families with same-sex parents during each phase of their child's school experiences.

Additionally, purposeful sampling presents limitations to the current study. Initial contacts made to identify research participants could be considered a limitation in that the identified

informant may only have identified personal acquaintances. Thus, research participants may have similar views or beliefs and experiences. In other words, selecting participants that are connected to the same person may result in similar reported experiences or not much variation in responses. Future research should examine experiences of same-sex parents in different middle school settings and maybe even different parts of the world.

Another limitation of this study is the current body of literature of the school experiences of same-sex parents. A large majority of current research literature related to same-sex parenting specifically addresses the experiences of children of families with same-sex parents, not the parents themselves. Future research needs to address the experiences of families with same-sex parents in schools. With the legalization of same-sex marriage nationwide, future research will need to further examine the experiences of families with same-sex parents based on specific geographic locations as well.

Finally, there is a gap in the literature on same-sex parents in schools. Thus, the majority of current literature on same-sex parents is older. For the current study, the researcher included older literature to make the case for same-sex parenting in schools because of this limitation. However, more research will need to be done on same-sex parents in the future to provide a more accurate depiction of their current experiences in schools. Future research should examine specific factors or stressors related to same-sex parenting in schools.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Discrimination.** Discrimination is defined as “treating people differently from others based primarily on membership in a social group (Sue, 2003), or “the unequal treatment of individuals or groups based on personal characteristics, such as race, age, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation (Kassam, Williams, & Patten, 2012, p. 103).”

**Inclusion.** Inclusion is defined as a place where everyone belongs, is accepted, supports, and is supported by his or her peers and other members of the school community in the course of having his or her educational needs met” (Stainback & Stainback, 1990, p. 3).

**Same-Sex Parents.** Same-sex parenting is defined as individuals of the same gender choosing to raise children together as a family unit (Crouch, McNair, Waters, & Power, 2013); it can also be “a single lesbian woman who has children from a previous heterosexual relationship; a co-parenting arrangement between a lesbian couple and a gay male couple; a gay male couple having children through surrogacy; and a bisexual man having children with a heterosexual woman (Crouch et al., 2013, p. 1).” Additionally, same-sex households may have “custody of biological children from previous relationships, while others may take in foster children, adopt children, or employ sperm donors or surrogate mothers in order to bear a biological child (Wexelbaum, 2013, p. 1).”

**Cohabitation.** Cohabitation is defined as “living together as a couple without being legally married” (McMahon, 2015, p. 1). Gates (2015) suggests that close to one million same-sex couples may be cohabitating.

**School Culture.** School culture is defined as “the values, practices, and actions of any particular school community, including the students, teachers, administrators, and related stakeholders, such as parents” (Brown, 2015, p. 1). Additionally, school culture can be viewed as an

“enhancement of current school reform or be a barrier to change, depending on the nature of the culture of the school, and how thoroughly cultural issues have been considered in the reform and implementation processes (Brown, 2015, p. 1).

**LGBTQ.** LGBTQ is defined as “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer” (Cooper, 2016).

**Heteronormativity.** Heteronormativity seeks to “normalize heterosexuality and provides the larger context of homophobia and heterosexism at the intersections of race, class, and gender (Yep, 2003, p. 13-14).” Additionally, heteronormativity is “a source of human oppression, an omnipresent framework for bias and daily acts of violence against individuals and groups who do not conform to the mythical norm of heterosexuality (Mostert, Gordon, & Kriegler, 2015, p. 117).

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

According to the 2010 United States Census, there are more than 594,000 same-sex couple households in the United States (Lofquist, 2011). Of this number, 115,000 reported having live-in children in the household (Lofquist, 2011). For the purposes of dissertation research, this study examined the experiences and perceptions of same-sex parents of school-age children. Specifically, the study investigated the experiences and perceptions of same-sex parents with inclusion and discrimination in schools. The literature consistently identifies specific discrimination occurrences for lesbian women and gay men (Herek, 2000, 2003, 2005); however, research about discriminatory practices toward same-sex parents as a family unit is limited.

Critics of same-sex parenting cite the sexual identity of the children raised in families with same-sex parents as a concern (McCann & Delmonte, 2005), and the psychological, educational, and social outcomes of the children raised in families with same-sex parents as concerns (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; McCann & Delmonte, 2005). The literature does not support any of these claims and consistently shows that children raised by same-sex parents are not at a developmental disadvantage. The goal of this literature review was to examine the current body of knowledge related to same-sex parents, children of same-sex parents, school inclusion, and discrimination.

#### **Same-Sex Parents**

The history of same-sex parenting is rather complex but an increasing number of same-sex parents are achieving parenthood through adoption (Gates, Badgett, Macomber, &

Chambers, 2007), surrogacy (McCann & Delmonte, 2005), donor insemination, foster care, and heterosexual intercourse (Parks, 1998). Thus, families in the United States are becoming more diverse than in the past (Coleman & Ganong, 2014), and more children are being raised by same-sex parents. There is a large body of research that examines the pressures that families with same-sex parents face in schools, including parenting outcomes and how parenting practices among same-sex parents may impact a child's sexual orientation and parental attachment. Further research supports the negative discriminatory experiences and social exclusion of families with same-sex parents in schools. The negative stigma and stereotypes associated with same-sex parenting suggests that research examining specific discriminatory and social exclusion experiences of same-sex parents is needed.

## **History**

Dating back to the 1950s, gay and lesbian individuals nationwide began to gain a “group consciousness” or a group identity (Rivera, 1984); despite the gay rights movement still being highly invisible. Some historians labeled the gay rights movement as “ten years behind” the African American civil rights and peace protesting movements of the era (D’Emilio, 1983). It was not until 1969, during the Stonewall riots, that the gay rights movement became highly visible around the nation. During this era, the Stonewall Inn was one of the few openly accepting, inclusive bars for members within the LGBTQ community. The Stonewall Riots marked the first time in history that gay people fought back against police harassment (Rivera, 1984). The Stonewall Riots marked the official beginning of the gay civil rights movement. Historically, the Stonewall Riots marked the beginning of open, non-invisible gay and lesbian activism nationwide. Of note, in 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders (Rivera, 1984).

Following the Stonewall riots, several grass roots organizations formed and began advocating nationwide for social progression and gay rights (Pollack, 1995). During the late 1970's and early 1980's, D'Emilio (1983) found that gay people began forming churches, social centers, professional organizations, newspapers, magazines, and advocacy groups. One of the larger organizations formed to advocate for equal rights in the legal system was the Legal Defense and Education Fund (Lambda), now known as Lambda Legal (Pollack, 1995). The vision for Lambda was to provide legal representation and advance gay rights, using a similar model as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The advocacy and policy work that Lambda provided over the course of time, had grown to include and support same-sex marriage and same-sex parenting. In 1989, Lambda created the Family Relationships Project to provide legal support and representation for same-sex parents (Vaid, 1995). Lambda became the first organization to directly provide legal services and representation of this nature to same-sex parents (Pollack, 1995).

After the formation of the Family Relationships Project, many same-sex couples were still fighting nationwide for equality. Though the fight for equality was ongoing and evolving; It finally reached new heights with the Supreme Court in 2003. In the 2003 case of *Lawrence vs. Texas*, the Supreme Court ruled against laws criminalizing oral or sexual practices between consenting adults (Patterson, 2007). This ruling was significant because previous court rulings had used this law to justify discrimination against lesbian and gay parents in child-custody hearings (Swisher & Cook, 2001). It also acknowledged and gave legal privacy to lesbian and gay couples, the same privilege afforded to heterosexual couples.

Herek (2003) found that the public's opinion of same-sex marriage also began to shift. In the early 1980s, only 34% of Americans thought that being homosexual was considered an

acceptable lifestyle. By 2003, over 54% of Americans considered homosexuality to be an acceptable lifestyle choice (Herek, 2003). Even though the statistics show larger societal shifts in the acceptance of the LGBTQ community. Uninformed assumptions continued to influence court rulings for same-sex parents (Patterson, 2007; Swisher & Cook, 2001). Court rulings continually cited a parent's sexual orientation as reasoning for being an unfit parent (Patterson, 2007; Patterson, 2006). The court systems have cited that children raised in families with same-sex parents may be potentially psychological disadvantaged (Polikoff, 1986). Research literature does not support claims of this nature, and even today it is still a widely-believed misconception.

Same-sex parenting is not new in the United States. Mallon (2004) proclaims that “for the last two decades a quiet revolution has been blooming in the gay male community, more and more gay men from all walks of life are becoming parents;” and the trajectory for lesbian women who desire to be parents is similar. Gates and colleagues' (2007) conducted a study on data from the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), results indicated that 41% of childless lesbian women ages 15 to 44 expressed a desire to have children.

The motivation or desire for same-sex couples to become parents is still an under researched area, however, Davies and Neal (1996) concluded that parenting is a basic human issue that all humans think about and desire at some point, same-sex couples included. Riskind and Patterson (2010) found that childless lesbian and gay individuals were less likely than heterosexual couples to openly report a desire to become parents. On the contrary, Riskind and Patterson (2010) found that lesbian and gay individuals expressed or endorsed the value of parenthood just as strongly as their heterosexual counterparts, contradicting any stereotypes related to lack of desire to become parents (Badgett, 2001).

## **Same-Sex Parenting and Families Characteristics and Practices**

In 2005, the American Psychological Association (APA) issued an official report on lesbian and gay parenting, stating that “there is no evidence to suggest that lesbian women or gay men are unfit to be parents or that psychosocial development among children of lesbian women or gay men is compromised relative to that among offspring of heterosexual parents” (p.15).

A large body of empirical research studies related to same-sex parents and their parenting practices and characteristics is limited. A majority of empirical research is related to developmental outcomes of children of same sex parents and how same-sex parenting compares to children raised in traditional heterosexual families (Fedewa & Clark, 2009). Although sexual orientation in parenting creates questions of developmental outcomes, researchers have consistently identified parenting practices as the greatest indicator of child outcomes (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002). In fact, Khaleque and Rohner (2002) found that an individual’s perception of parental warmth and affect greatly impact their psychological adjustment and their development of positive personality dispositions cross-culturally; this finding is not specific to parental sexual orientation.

Furthermore, same-sex parenting has consistently raised questions about the outcomes and development of children of families with same-sex parents (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). A common misconception is that same-sex parents raise homosexual children (McCann & Delmonte, 2005). It is also widely believed that the quality of parent-child relationships among families with same-sex parents lack secure attachments (McCann and Delmonte, 2005). These beliefs are largely a misrepresentation of same-sex parenting and families with same-sex parents.

In reviewing the literature, a large body of previous research studies that sought to address the question of psychological outcomes with children of families with same-sex parents

focused on children with gay fathers or lesbian mothers who were transitioning from a heterosexual identity to a homosexual identity (McCann & Delmonte, 2005; Patterson, 2006; Tasker, 2002). Although legal processes sought to use transitions in sexual orientation as a form of discrimination against gay fathers or lesbian mothers, the research does not support any parenting issues or developmental issues for children with a same-sex parent that may have previously identified as heterosexual (McCann & Delmonte, 2005).

When further examining specific concerns related to children of same-sex parents, Patterson (2006) found that children of same sex parents are not anymore developmentally disadvantaged than children of heterosexual parents. The article found that a greater predictor in developmental outcomes was more closely related to qualities of family relationships. Wainright and Patterson (2006) conducted a study that assessed levels of risk behaviors among adolescents of female same-sex parents and explored a variety of factors associated with individual differences within this population. Research participants included 44 adolescents living in female families with same-sex parents and 44 adolescents living in families with opposite-sex parents. The study examined family type and other relationship variables. Specifically, the study assessed familial perceptions of trust, understanding, communication, and general qualities of relationships. The study utilized adolescent in-home interviews and parental in-home interviews, as well as the parent's in-home questionnaire.

Wainright and Patterson (2006) found no statistically significant differences among children raised in families with same-sex parents and children raised in families with opposite-sex parents in adolescents' reports of their frequency in alcohol, tobacco, or marijuana use as a function of family type. The study also found no significant differences among children raised in families with same-sex parents and children raised in families with opposite-sex parents in

problems arising from alcohol abuse, drug use, or delinquent behaviors between children of same-sex couples and children in heterosexual families. Similarly, the study found no differences in adolescents' experiences as victims or witnesses of violence as a function of their family type. The results of the study found that the quality of family relationships were more highly associated with positive adolescent outcomes. Adolescents' tobacco use was greatly associated with reports of parental care and parent-child relationships. Specifically, the study found that adolescent use of alcohol, use of marijuana, and delinquent behavior was associated with parent-child relationship quality. The results found that greater perceived care and more positive relationships were associated with lower levels of tobacco use among adolescents. Adolescents' reported use of alcohol, marijuana use, and delinquent behaviors were associated with parental reports on the quality of parent-adolescents' relationships.

Comparably, Wainright, Russell, and Patterson (2004) conducted a study employing 44 adolescents ranging from 12-to-18 years old, all whom were parented in families with same-sex parents, and 44 same-aged adolescents parented in heterosexual families. The study utilized in-home interviews and questionnaires to assess adolescents' perceptions of parenting in areas of parental warmth, caring from adults and peers, integration into their neighborhood, and autonomy. The study also assessed adolescents perceived level of family's understanding and attention, adolescents' feelings of closeness to parents, romantic attractions, relationships, and behaviors.

Wainright et al. (2004) assessed the parents' perceptions of the quality of their relationship with their child, specifically examining trust, understanding, communication, and the general quality of their relationship with their child. The study found no significant differences between adolescents raised in families with same-sex parents or adolescents raised in

heterosexual-headed families. The study did not find any significant interactions between family types on psychological adjustment or school outcomes. The study did supplement previous findings on the nature of parental relationships and their role in better psychosocial adjustment. The study found that the quality of parental relationships were the best indicators of school outcomes and psychological adjustment. Overall, the study found that adolescents reported positive family relationships and reports of parental warmth were high. The study found that adolescents with same-sex parents reported more school-connectedness than those living with opposite-sex parents.

Erich, Kanenberg, Case, Allen, and Bogdanos (2009) conducted a large-scale study examining factors that affect adolescent attachment, including parent sexual orientation. The study looked at adolescent and parent life satisfaction, relationship satisfaction among adoptive parents, and child satisfaction characteristics. The study sample utilized 154 parent respondents and 210 adolescent respondents, with 61 families with same-sex parents. Researchers examined affective and cognitive relationships with parents and friends, as well as the psychological security of these relationships. Researchers also looked at self-esteem, life satisfaction, affective status (depression, anxiety, resentment/alienation, covert anger, and loneliness), and parent-child attachment. The results of the study did not find any significant differences in adolescent attachment based on parent sexual orientation. The study found that parent sexual orientation was not related to relationship satisfaction among adolescents or the quality of adult-couple relationships. The findings from this study further support previous data on parental sexual orientation and how it does not impact the quality of parent-child relationships or parental attachment.

Patterson (2006) reviewed several research studies on children of lesbian and gay parents. Research findings concluded that children of families with same-sex parents were not developmentally disadvantaged due to their parent's sexual orientation. Patterson's (2006) research review also concluded that a child's developmental outcomes are more closely related to the quality and strength of family relationships.

### **School-related Stressors**

One of the most cited family stressors among families with same-sex parents is that the children raised in same-sex households would be bullied or teased at school or in the community (McCann & Delmonte, 2005; Clarke, Kitzinger, & Potter, 2004; Ray & Gregory, 2001). Stacey and Biblarz (2001) conducted a meta-analysis of research studies related to outcomes of same-sex parenting from 1981-1998. The results of their study found that children of families with same-sex parents may be subjected to homophobic teasing or ridicule that can be difficult to manage. The exact likelihood or statistical support of homophobic teasing or bullying instances is unknown. Tasker and Golombok (1997) reported that children of families with same-sex parents are not any more likely to experience bullying than children of heterosexual-led families, however, their research supports the notion that children from families with same-sex parents may be more sensitive to remarks or comments based on their family identity. Despite the lack of statistical knowledge on specific bullying occurrences, Ray and Gregory (2001) found that when surveyed, over 73 percent of same-sex parents were concerned about their children being teased or bullied. The study also found that over 62 percent of same-sex parents were concerned that school curriculum would not include or acknowledge families with same-sex parents. In an attempt to possibly avoid bullying or teasing, children raised in families with same-sex parents

reported that they were selective in who they told about their family status. Over one-third or 36 percent of the students ages 12-16 chose not to disclose of their parent's sexual orientation.

Lindsay et al. (2006) conducted a study that examined the ways that same-sex parents and their children navigate through school settings. The study utilized a qualitative methodology and interviewed 20 families with same-sex parents. The results of the study varied based on societal factors, age of children in families, and the location of schools. The results consistently cited "secrecy" as the main theme for families with same-sex parents. Many of the families with same-sex parents in the study did not disclose their family structure due to fear of rejection, isolation, bullying, and social disadvantages to the child. The parents in the study indicated that school personnel play a large role in their decision to not disclose their familial structure. One parent indicated that their child had been subjected to homophobic remarks made by a teacher. Others in the study felt that school personnel associated their sexual orientation with a greater need to discuss sexual practices or sexual behaviors, more so than the perceived experiences among heterosexual families.

Same-sex parents have reported feeling that school personnel were misinformed and reported feeling that school officials were unwilling to acknowledge issues related to sexual orientation in schools (Herbstrith, 2014). Gartrell et al., (2005) reported longitudinal results from the National Lesbian Family Study. Each series of the study examined different aspects of same-sex parenting, including birth, health, and adjustment. Within the series, report four (T4) provided data on children's psychosocial development and it examined the children's experiences with homophobia. The results found that almost half of the 10-year old's in the study had already experienced homophobia. The children who reported prior homophobic experiences were more likely to report psychological distress compared to those who had not reported

homophobic experiences. Given the age and limited life experiences of the sample population, data was collected using several methods, including standardized self-reports, questionnaires, unstructured interviews, and other structured interviews. The results of this study further reinforce the importance of schools being proactive in addressing homophobia. In addition, the literature and statistical evidence presented in this section indicates that school personnel should work to foster an environment of inclusion.

Kozik-Rosabal (2000) examined the nature of concerns and fears that same-sex parents have about their children's well-being in schools. Information revealed in the article exposed family stressors for families with same-sex parents across the board. First, several same-sex parents believe that schools reinforce heterosexual families in all forms, whether through curriculum and instruction or social events. Heterosexual norms are widely supported in schools, leaving some same-sex parents to fear that their children may question their familial structures. Secondly, same-sex parents were largely frustrated with the misinformation about what it means to be a member of the LGBTQ community in schools. Despite the research literature supporting the positive growth and development of children from families with same-sex parents, misconceptions are still prevalent and intimidating. Many same-sex parents battle with stereotypes of pedophilia, drug addiction, emotional sickness, and physical sickness, simply based on their sexual orientation. Several families with same-sex parents fear that stereotypes or misconceptions of this nature may lead to violence, bullying, cruelty, and even isolation towards their children. Finally, many same-sex parents worry that school administrators are not as proactive in addressing verbal harassment, fearing that it is oftentimes ignored because the levels of harassment never reach physical violence. Same-sex parents reported that when concerns of verbal harassment were brought to administration attention, the responses were met with

resistance. School administration responses were dismissive and oftentimes resorted to blaming the victim or assuming that victims will just get over it.

Rivers et al. (2008) conducted a research study on 18 students, ranging from ages 12-16, all raised in families of female same-sex parents; the study also identified 18 students, ranging from 12-16, that were raised in heterosexual families. The goal of the study was to understand the psychological and social functioning of children raised by families with same-sex parents as opposed to children raised in heterosexual families. Researchers specifically examined three categories of people likely to be approached for support by the children, including each set of parents and school staff. The results of the study concluded that children raised in families with same-sex parents did not show significant differences in victimization, psychological functioning, and social experiences from those raised in heterosexual families. The study did find that children of families with same-sex parents would be significantly less likely to use school-based support or services than children raised in heterosexual families; indicating a greater need for school personnel to be proactive in addressing home-school collaboration for all students.

Previous literature has consistently cited home-school collaboration as important in developing a student's social and academic competencies (Christenson, 1995). Fedewa and Clark (2009) conducted a study on the impact of home-school collaboration among same-sex parents and heterosexual parents. The study utilized data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K). The study sought to address: (1) How families with same-sex parents compare to heterosexual families in parental practices of helping and communicating; (2) How home-school partnerships compare across same-sex and heterosexual families; and (3) Whether a strong home-school collaboration is important for the academic success and positive social outcomes of children with same-sex parents.

Specifically, the study examined *communicating, monitoring, helping, and doing* as parental constructs to be measured. The *helping* dimension was comprised of five items reflecting parents' active involvement in aiding their child's education, including as how frequently do parents read to children, how often parents help children with homework, and how often do parents practice learning activities with their child. The *communicating* dimension assessed parent's tendency to encourage their child's talk about troubles, discuss friends and activities, and listen to the child when they were busy. The *monitoring* dimension assessed parent's communication in seeking knowledge of children's activities and interests. The *doing* dimension assessed parent's over-involvement in their child's education.

The results of the study found that there were no differences between same-sex parents and heterosexual parents in their parenting practices. However, same-sex parents in the study did indicate that because schools lacked in exposing students to sexual diversity topics, the schools enforce stereotypical views of gay and lesbian individuals; school personnel often assume heterosexist parenting (assuming all parents are heterosexual); as well as expressed a lack of communication and respect for their roles as parents. The results also found that specific school climate concerns among same-sex parents were harder to identify, indicating a greater need for more research in this area.

Relatedly, Martino and Cumming-Potvin (2011) conducted a qualitative study examining teachers' approaches to addressing same-sex parenting and heteronormativity in elementary school classrooms. The study utilized a case study research design and examined the experiences of two elementary school teachers. Acknowledging that the research findings are not absolute truths, the researchers reported that the experiences of the two teachers in the study are both from highly heteronormative educational settings. The results of the study found that the

curriculum and instruction employed by the teachers in the study is largely determined at the administrative level. In other words, the curriculum that teachers are instructed to teach is not decided on at the individual teacher level. In fact, one teacher indicated that her personal beliefs about same-sex parenting are not homophobic, but that she would be resistant to introduce the curriculum into her classroom due to parental concerns. The teacher stated that parents maintain a level of control in the school and that she feared that introducing families with same-sex parents into the curriculum may be met with hostility. She also indicated that there are families in her classroom that do not see same-sex parenting as natural and that those parents may be angered about their children being exposed to it. The teachers appeared willing to incorporate families with same-sex parents into school curriculum but feared “parental surveillance” and felt that this level of hostility could potentially leave them more vulnerable.

### **Children of Same-Sex Parents**

The exact numbers vary but statistical estimates suggest that as many as 2 million to 3.7 million children in the United States may have a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender parent (Gates, 2015). With these numbers, members of the LGBTQ community are increasingly becoming parents. Even though research data suggests otherwise, there is still a larger concern for the damaging effects the children may face because of their parents’ sexual orientation (McCann & Delmonte, 2005).

Anderssen, Amlie, and Ytteroy (2002) conducted a large-scale analysis on outcome studies from 1978 to 2000. The study assessed the outcomes of over 600 children raised by lesbian mothers and gay fathers. The study examined developmental outcomes on a variety of variables, including: emotional adjustment, sexual preference, stigmatization, gender role behavior, behavioral adjustment, gender identity, and cognitive functioning. The results did not

reveal any evidence that children of same sex parents differed in the researched areas than children of heterosexual parents. However, critics of same-sex parenting have often cited that children raised in families with same-sex parents are at a developmental disadvantage, more so than children raised in heterosexual families (Wainright & Patterson, 2008).

In addition, children raised in families with same-sex parents often face various school-related stressors based on their familial structure (Vogt & McKenna, 1998; Bliss & Harris, 1999). Research has shown that school personnel often hold negative beliefs about children raised in families with same-sex parents. Children raised in families with same-sex parents may also be more susceptible to school-based bullying based on their family structure (Kosciw et al., 2012). Due to the limited literature on school-based bullying among children from families with same-sex parents, it is harder to quantifiably specify instances or occurrences.

### **Developmental Issues**

Tasker (2002) contended that earlier research on lesbian and gay parenting was largely inaccurate due to the basis of the research. Earlier research on lesbian and gay parenting largely evaluated the psychological well-being of school-age children who had previously been raised in a heterosexual family structure (McCann & Delmonte, 2005; Patterson, 2006; Tasker, 2002). In looking at previous research on developmental issues, certain bodies of literature may contain some inaccuracies in the discussion and results sections regarding the outcomes for children of families with same-sex parents. Specifically, previous research on developmental issues and outcomes for children of families with same-sex parents have suggested that children raised in these familial structures are at a developmental disadvantage (Tasker, 2002; Patterson, 2006).

One of the most inaccurate, widely-believed misconceptions is that children raised by a lesbian mother or a gay father or same-sex parents become homosexual or gay themselves

(McCann & Delmonte, 2005; Tasker & Golombok, 1995). It is believed that children of same-sex parents become homosexual or gay by modeling or imitating their parents (Bailey, Bobrow, Wolfe, & Mickach, 1995). The misconception or belief supports the idea that children of same-sex parents may adopt the same model of love as their same-sex parent. Bailey et al., (1995) conducted a study on adult sons with gay fathers. The study sample included 43 sons of gay fathers. The results found that of the sons studied, only 9% identified as non-heterosexual and 91% identified as heterosexual. The results are consistent with previous studies that suggest that lesbian or gay parenting does not influence a child's sexual orientation. The study did have limitations and only looked at the influence of gay fathers on their sons. The study did not examine lesbian mothers and their children.

Patterson (1992) conducted a comprehensive literature review related to children of same sex parents and their sexual orientation. The review found that among all published studies, including over 300 children of same-sex parents, no evidence was found that supports the misconception that same-sex parents influence their children's sexual orientation. Huggins (1989) assessed a group of 36 adolescents, half of the adolescents had been raised by lesbian mothers and the other half of the adolescents had been raised by heterosexual mothers. The study found that none of the adolescents with lesbian mothers identified as non-heterosexual. The study found that the subject raised in a heterosexual household identified as homosexual (Huggins, 1989). The results of this study clearly indicate that children raised by lesbian mothers are not any more likely to identify as homosexual.

Pawelski et al., (2006) compiled a report on the impact that same-sex parenting has on children. The results of the report concluded that children that had either a lesbian mother or gay father were proportionately equal in identifying as heterosexual or homosexual to children raised

by heterosexual parents. The report did also find that children with either a lesbian mother or gay father were likely to be more open or accepting of having a same-gender partner. However, this finding does not imply that same-sex parenting or having a gay father or lesbian mother will lead to the child being homosexual, it simply means that the child would be more open to exploring those feelings. Tasker and Golombok (1997) examined the outcomes of being raised in a lesbian-led family. The results of the literature review found that being raised in a lesbian-led family did not influence a child's sexual orientation. The mother's sexual orientation did not play a role in a child's development of sexual orientation.

Another inaccurate, widely-believed misconception is that children of same-sex parents may experience impaired or compromised personal development (Patterson, 1992). Current research literature does not support the belief that children raised by same-sex parents experience impaired or compromised personal development.

MacCallum and Golombok (2004) conducted a comparative study examining the social and emotional development of children raised in families with same-sex parents. The study used 25 lesbian-led families and 38 single, heterosexual female led families, and compared them to 38 heterosexual-led families. The study assessed social and emotional development using standardized interviews and questionnaires that were administered to the mothers of the family, the children, and the teachers in school where the children were enrolled. The results found that children in fatherless families experienced more interactions with the mother and the children often perceived her as more available and dependable than their peers in father-present families. The study also found that the social and emotional development of children raised in lesbian-led families was not negatively affected compared to their peers. No major differences in development were found among children raised in lesbian-led families. There is no evidence that

a parent's sexual orientation negatively influences parent-child interactions or the social or emotional development of the child.

### **Developmental Outcomes**

Empirical research data shows that long-term psychosocial and developmental outcomes are not significantly different for children of families with same-sex parents (Wainright et al., 2004). Gartrell, Bos, Peyser, Deck, and Rodas, (2012) conducted a longitudinal study on 78 adolescents in families with same-sex parents. Participants in the study had been followed since birth and data was collected in stages. Participants, at the age of 17, reported data on the everyday life experiences of children raised in a same-sex family. The results of the study reveal that the children were academically successful in supportive schools environments. Almost half of participants expressed a desire to seek advanced professional degrees. The study also found that the adolescents rated their overall well-being exceptionally high, with an average of 8.14 on a 10-point scale.

Crowl, Ahn, and Baker (2008) conducted a comprehensive literature review examining the developmental outcomes of children of same-sex parents and children of heterosexual parents. The literature review examined several key areas related to development, including psychological adjustment, cognitive development, sexual preference, and attachment. The study assessed psychological adjustment using the Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL), self-reports of peer relations among children through semi-structured interviews, the Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence, the Trait Anxiety and Beck Depression inventories, and the Social Acceptance for Young Children. The study analyzed cognitive development using Wechsler Intelligence Scales (WPPSI, WISC). The study assessed sexual preference or gender identity using Preschool Activity Inventory, Block's Toy preference test, the Draw-A-Person test, and

structured interviews. The study examined parent-child attachment using the Family Relations test, the Parenting Stress index, and the Dyadic Adjustment scale. The research participant population included 564 same-sex parent families and 641 heterosexual parent families. The results concluded that children of same-sex parents had no significant differences in psychological adjustment, cognitive development, sexual preference, or attachment than children raised by heterosexual parents.

Welsh (2011) conducted a study examining the experiences of growing up in a same-sex family. Fourteen participants were included in the study, ranging from 13 to 18 years of age. The results of the study concluded that children raised in families with same-sex parents believed that dominant cultural images and media reinforce heterosexual family norms. The participants in the study reaffirm that their definition of family extends beyond traditional heteronormativity and encompasses bonds of love, support, connection, and tolerance. The results of this study show that although there may be social differences among some children of families with same-sex parents and children of heterosexual families, the children raised in families with same-sex parents are not any more developmentally disadvantaged.

Tasker and Golombok (1995) conducted a study with 25 adults raised in families with same-sex parents and 21 adults raised in heterosexual families. The study examined outcomes in family relationships, psychological well-being, sexual orientation, and peer relationships. The results of the study found that the adults raised in families with same-sex parents had no differences in development than that of children in heterosexual families. Data from the study concluded that children raised in families with same-sex parents are not any more likely to experience mental health concerns because of their parent's sexual orientation, such as anxiety and depression, than those in heterosexual households. The study also found that children of

families with same-sex parents are not any more likely to experience peer stigma during adolescence than children raised in heterosexual households. In fact, children raised in families with same-sex parents reported being able to integrate friendships into their family life without social consequences.

### **Peer Acceptance**

Past research supports the importance of quality peer relationships among adolescents, often linking its importance to positive outcomes (Ollendick, Weist, Borden, & Greene 1992). Researchers have found that adolescents strive for belongingness and status among their peers (Dijkstra, Lindenberg, & Veenstra, 2008). Researchers also found that peer rejection can have detrimental effects on the mental and social development of adolescents, even putting them at risk for later social and mental maladjustment (Dijkstra et al., 2008). Research has shown that poor peer relations during childhood has been linked to later academic struggles, truancy, or dropping out of school (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). It is widely believed that children of families with same-sex parents suffer from lower peer acceptance and may be at a social disadvantage based on their parent's sexual orientation (McCann & Delmonte, 2005); however, these beliefs are not supported by the research.

Wainright and Patterson (2008) conducted a study examining associations among families with same-sex parents and heterosexual-led families. The study examined the associations among family and relationship variables, adolescent gender, family types, and the peer relationships of adolescents. The study utilized 88 participants, 44 of the participants were adolescents who were raised by same-sex parents and 44 of the participants were adolescents raised in heterosexual-led families. The results of the study revealed no notable differences in adolescent peer relations because of family type. The study also revealed that family relationship

variables, such as the quality of the parent-adolescent relationships were more closely associated with adolescent peer relations. In other words, regardless of family type or parental sexual orientation, the adolescents whose parents reported closer parent-child relationships were more likely to describe higher quality peer relations and more friends, and were rated as more central in their friendship networks.

Rubin and Sloman (1984) found that peer relations among adolescents are largely impacted by their relationships with parents and their parenting styles, rather than sexual orientation. Ladd and Le Sieur (1995) conducted a comprehensive literature review on parent-child relationships and peer relations. The results found that parenting styles were significantly linked to a child's social competence with peers. Gershon, Tschann, and Jemerin (1999) conducted a study examining the perceived stigma, coping, disclosure, and self-esteem of adolescents with lesbian mothers. The results found that adolescents who disclosed more about their family structure had higher self-esteem than those who did not disclose of their parent's sexual orientation. Thus, proving that peer relations among children of families with same-sex parents are not necessarily negatively impacted based on their family structure.

Though research literature is limited on peer acceptance among children from families with same-sex parents, adolescents of lesbian or gay parents have reported fears of disclosure and stigma by their peers (Gershon et al., 1999; Herbstrith, 2014). Gianino, Goldberg, and Lewis, (2009) conducted a study exploring how youth negotiate disclosures of their family structures in schools and friendship networks. The study utilized 14 adolescents, ranging in age from 13 years to 20 years of age. The results found that participants became more comfortable with their family structure and disclosure with age or in later adolescence. These results are consistent with other research findings that support the belief that early adolescence is harder on

children of families with same-sex parents to disclose of their familial structure (Herbstrith, 2014). Furthermore, research has shown that older adolescents of families with same-sex parents are more comfortable with communicating their familial structure to their peers. Research also indicates that older adolescents are better at screening the trustworthiness of a person before disclosure and older adolescents may feel more comfortable ending friendships with peers who may not be accepting of their familial structure (Herbstrith, 2014). Although children from families with same-sex parents have been previously labeled as socially disadvantaged based on their family structure (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). The literature does not support claims that children of same-sex parents are socially disadvantaged or lack peer acceptance due to the absence of a certain gendered parent or because of their parent's sexual orientation. More research will need to be done in this area to quantify specific occurrences of peer acceptance and peer rejection. In the past, critics have used the lack of social opportunities as a reason to challenge the legitimacy of same-sex parenting. Future research will need to qualitatively and quantitatively address the reality of friendships and peer relations among children from families with same-sex parents.

### **School-related Stressors**

Children of families with same-sex parents are confronted with the decision to disclose of their family structure to others, particularly in school settings. Disclosure can lead to bullying by peers and mistreatment by school personnel (Ray & Gregory, 2001). Butler (1995) found that, a large percentage of pre-service teachers held negative stereotypes about gay men and lesbians, lacked knowledge about them, and were unwilling to address or be supportive of gay and lesbian issues in schools. In an additional study, Vogt and McKenna (1998) found that educators held more significant beliefs of intolerance or negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians than the general public.

Bliss and Harris (1999) conducted a study on gay and lesbian parents and teachers in schools. The study concluded that teachers were limited in their overall exposure to issues of sexual orientation and were largely unprepared to work with gay or lesbian parents. The study also found that most of the schools that the teachers worked in did not have clear policies for working with or supporting families with same-sex parents. This lapse in preparation can leave room for school-related stress for families with same-sex parents.

Previous research has shown that bullying based on sexual orientation is prevalent in schools (Poteat, DiGiovanni, & Scheer, 2013). It is estimated that up to half of students with same-sex parents have been bullied based on their parent's sexual orientation (Kosciw et al., 2012). Even with these alarming statistics, Kozik-Rosabal (2000) found that school personnel oftentimes ignored bullying behaviors among children of families with same-sex parents. Because of this treatment, children of families with same-sex parents may be less likely to report bullying incidents in the future (Kosciw et al., 2012). As Kozik-Rosabal (2000) found, many bullying incidents among children of families with same-sex parents may go unnoticed because the occurrences never reach the level of physical violence. School officials oftentimes dismiss claims of bullying among children of families with same-sex parents based on the belief that "they'll just get over it." With this information, it is imperative to be proactive in addressing misconceptions to ensure safe and fair learning environments for all students.

### **Legal Issues and Discrimination related to Same-Sex Parenting**

Discrimination is defined as "treating people differently from others based primarily on membership in a social group (Sue, 2003), or "the unequal treatment of individuals or groups based on personal characteristics, such as race, age, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation (Kassam, Williams, & Patten, 2012)." Specifically, sexual orientation discrimination or sexual

prejudice towards gay men or lesbian women is defined as “negative attitudes toward people who are not heterosexual” (Herek, 2007). Research literature shows that sexual orientation discrimination is not necessarily addressed in anti-discrimination legislation, leaving room for potential discrimination against same-sex parents (Herek, 2015). In addition, discrimination in schools is prevalent and may be inadvertently supported. Scholars and researchers contend that schools reinforce heterosexual norms and further reinforce invisibility among lesbian women and gay men (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009).

### **Legal Protection**

In 1963, President John F. Kennedy introduced the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and was passed in July 1964 under President Lyndon Johnson. The Civil Rights Act of 1964:

*An act to enforce the constitutional right to vote, to confer jurisdiction upon the district courts of the United States, to provide injunctive relief against discrimination in public accommodations, to authorize the Attorney General to institute suits to protect constitutional rights in public facilities and public education, to extend the Commission on Civil Rights, to prevent discrimination in federally assisted programs, to establish a Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity, and for other purposes (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2016).*

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed discrimination in public facilities, employment settings, and most importantly in public education settings. The law was historical because it set the stage for latter legal legislation and grassroots movements, such as the women’s movement (Bent-Goodley, 2014). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is important for the purposes of this dissertation, in that, it clearly states that discrimination in public education is illegal. Therefore, schools or school personnel who do not adhere to this law are placing themselves at risk for

potential legal action. This is especially true for potential discrimination against children of same-sex parents in schools. Although current anti-discrimination legislation does not properly address discrimination against same-sex parents in schools, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 provides a foundation for future anti-discrimination policies and practices within schools.

A large body of the literature on discrimination in schools is related to racial discrimination occurrences. However, research has shown that all forms of discrimination in schools is certainly not a rare phenomenon. Kam, Cleveland, and Hecht (2010) contend that perceived discrimination or unfair, differential treatment is a common experience that takes place in schools. It is harder to quantifiably state specific occurrences of discrimination, especially discriminatory practices or occurrences against same-sex parents.

Although the public opinion of same-sex marriage has shifted significantly. Lewis and Hatalsky (2012) conducted a study examining national data from 2004 to 2011, with more than 128,000 respondents. The results found that overall support of marriage equality increased by 16 percent during that period and over 75% of respondents stated that their change in beliefs occurred because of individual experiences. Despite the societal gains, discriminatory treatment of members of the LGBTQ community is still highly prevalent (Herek, 2015). Ferfolja (2013) contended that socially there is “tension between increasing social acceptance and on-going homophobia.”

Same-sex marriage is now legal; however, current legislation does not clearly outlaw sexual orientation discrimination towards same-sex parents; the law prohibits discrimination against individuals of a certain gender and parents but not specifically same-sex parents, who may experience more adverse responses based on their sexual orientation (Herek, 2015).

## **Discrimination in Schools**

Despite societal shifts, schools are considered to be among the most homophobic institutions in America (Ginsberg, 1998; Depalma & Atkinson, 2010). Scholars and advocates have argued that schools reinforce heterosexual norms and further reinforce invisibility among lesbian women and gay men (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009). Schools have been labeled as “micro-public” areas of intercultural dialogue and engagement (Amin, 2002), and they have been labeled as the site of everyday interactions of local micro-politics (Vertovec, 2007, p.1046). In other words, scholars have argued that schools can largely mirror the outside, larger communities that they exist in, with potentially little protection for same-sex parents or their children. Ferfolja (2013) concluded that schools do not incorporate sexual diversity, thus making it easier for families with same-sex parents to remain invisible or potentially overlooked in schools. As Marshall (2010) argues:

Education policy-makers would be well served by developing policies and programs that are more focused on emphasizing sexual and gender diversity ... rather than simply having gay and lesbian references in policies ... schools should also acknowledge the diverse ways in which young people engage with sexuality and gender. (p. 23)

In 1999, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) launched the first National School Climate survey to further examine the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students in schools. Before the launch of this study, data on LGBT adolescents was limited and did not quantifiably address questions regarding the school experiences of LGBT with discrimination. The GLSEN 2011 National School Climate survey defined hostile school environments as “school settings where students hear biased and homophobic remarks, when students feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation, gender

expression, or race/ethnicity, when students are harassed or assaulted, and when students miss hours or days of school because they do not feel protected (p. 15). The 2011 National School Climate survey results showed that 71% of LGBT students felt unsafe at school in the past year because of sexual orientation, gender expression, and actual or perceived sexual orientation.

Kosciw and Diaz (2008) found that secondary school students from families with same-sex parents often hear negative remarks about the LGBT community in schools. Additionally, children from families with same-sex parents sometimes experienced mistreatment from peers and adult members of the school community (i.e., parents of other students) because of their family structure. The study also found that LGBT parents reported feeling neglected, excluded or even mistreated by other members of their school communities, especially by other parents. Additionally, the study asked students to qualitatively address their experiences with discrimination in schools. A 10<sup>th</sup> grade student indicated that he frequently heard derogatory remarks about his family in the school hallways. An 8<sup>th</sup> grade student indicated that she was the victim of verbal harassment, stating that “people saying that I was a lesbian just because my moms were.” Another eighth grader indicated that another student intentionally spread untrue stories about her mother at school, stating that “a girl at school told a lie that my mom was making out with another woman behind the bleacher at a school event.” Finally, one 12<sup>th</sup> grade student indicated that his athletic abilities were questioned because of his two moms, stating “I play basketball and softball and when my mom’s come to see me some of my peers insist on making fun of me and ask how I got into sports with no dad in the house.”

Whitley and Kite (2009) contend that this level of discrimination would be considered institutional discrimination. The authors go on to say that this level of discrimination is often subtle and may go unaddressed due to the environment surrounding the incidents. DePalma and

Atkinson (2010) examined heteronormativity in schools and found that current policies do not fully address institutional discrimination. The authors contended that individual incidents of discrimination may go unnoticed due to a “heteronormative” culture within schools. In other words, Depalma and Atkinson (2010) argued that schools fail to address crucial areas of inequality because the overarching culture of heterosexism in schools creates a sense of normalcy or maintains historical practices with little external disruption.

### **School Inclusion**

School inclusion is defined as “a place where everyone belongs, is accepted, supports, and is supported by his or her peers and other members of the school community in the course of having his or her educational needs met” (Stainback & Stainback, 1990, p. 3). School inclusion is designed to benefit students with varying characteristics, as well as teachers and other school personnel (Giangreco, M., Cloninger, C., Dennis, R., & Edelman, S., 1994). Zollers, Ramanathan, and Yu (1999) found that school inclusion is directly linked to school culture. The literature maintains that in order to create an environment of inclusion, the school culture must be conducive to change. Zollers et al., (1999) found that school administration had a large impact on the culture within schools; indicating that any shifts or changes within schools must occur through a top-down approach.

Furthermore, school inclusion is seemingly viewed as an ethical issue, as well as an issue of social justice (McMaster, 2015). This notion is especially true when seeking to understand students who may face exclusion from full participation in the culture of the school. Ferfolja (2013) argues that schools are a key space to discredit myths and provide education on the range of sexual diversity among families, and also teach respect for sexual diversity.

In order to make schools more inclusive for families with same-sex parents, the research shows that shifts in attitudes of school personnel must be made (McMaster, 2015), which has been shown to be one of the biggest barriers. Furthermore, creating inclusive schools would require the identification and removal of negative attitudes within schools. Allan (2005) concluded that it is in this way that inclusion is often viewed as an ethical project, stating:

The success of the ethical project of inclusion will depend on how far all of the people involved allow themselves to hope, accept their responsibilities, and are prepared to do the necessary work, which starts, of course, with oneself.” (p. 293).

In order for schools to create more inclusive environments for families with same-sex parents, school administration and school personnel must be willing to take ownership in the process. Creating an inclusive school environment is complex and cannot simply be done through policy changes. School administration must be on board to engage in continual progress monitoring and ongoing communication between families and school personnel to ensure its fidelity.

### **Summary**

Based on a comprehensive review of research and other literature, several significant findings were made to support the current study. First, more and more same-sex couples are deciding to become parents through adoption (Gates et al., 2007), surrogacy (McCann & Delmonte, 2005), donor insemination, foster care, and heterosexual intercourse (Parks, 1998). Second, one of the major misconceptions or justifications for discrimination against same-sex parents across the board that should be erased or dismissed is that children of families with same-sex parents are disadvantaged based on their parent’s sexual orientation. The literature shows that children of families with same-sex parents do not experience any negative developmental

outcomes based on their parent's sexual orientation (McCann & Delmonte, 2005; Patterson, 2006). The literature does support claims that the quality of parent-child relationships is a better indicator of developmental outcomes (Wainright & Patterson, 2006).

In addition, research has identified that children from families with same-sex parents are less likely to report bullying incidents in schools (Kosciw et al., 2012). Research has also shown that school administration is less likely to intervene on bullying incidents before it reaches the level of physical violence (Kozik-Rosabal, 2000). In addition, the literature shows that schools are largely heteronormative (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010), and research supports the notion that the culture within schools is more accepting of heterosexual norms (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; Kozik-Rosabal, 2000). The literature shows that schools fail to address crucial areas of inequality due to the overarching culture of heterosexism within schools, often schools choose to maintain a sense of "normalcy" due to fear of parent complaints or parental disruption (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2011). These findings show that schools are more inclusive of heterosexual families, and are inadvertently or potentially creating an environment susceptible or prone to discrimination or exclusion toward families with same-sex parents. Although exact statistical figures cannot be displayed, it is clear that schools must implement more policies to prevent discrimination and homophobia against children of families with same-sex parents and same-sex parents (Rivers, Poteat, & Noret, 2008).

In addition, research shows that same-sex parents often feel that schools fail to acknowledge or incorporate families with same-sex parents into school culture, whether through social events or curriculum and instruction (Kozik-Rosabal, 2000). Research also shows that same-sex parents have reported feeling neglected, excluded or even mistreated by other members of their school communities, especially other parents (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008); further reinforcing

negative school-based experiences for families with same-sex parents. Same-sex parents have also reported that schools reinforce heterosexual norms (Depalma & Atkinson, 2010). School inclusion should expand to actively support and include families with same-sex parents in all aspects of the school environment (Depalma & Atkinson, 2010). For schools to be more inclusive, school administrators must be actively involved in overseeing changes and shifts in schools. The literature supports positive outcomes for inclusive school environments, specifically school environments that are open, welcoming of diversity (Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004).

Furthermore, same-sex parents have reported feeling that school personnel are unprepared to work with them (Kozik-Rosabal, 2000; Bliss & Harris, 1999). The literature supports these claims and clearly shows that school personnel have reported feeling unprepared to work with families with same-sex parents. Research has shown that teachers have reported feeling unprepared to work with families with same-sex parents in schools (Bliss & Harris, 1999; Butler, 1995). In order for schools to be more inclusive and accepting of families with same-sex parents, school administration must be proactive in providing professional development and training for teachers and other school staff. Trainings can include curriculum and instruction planning that incorporates families with same-sex parents into the classroom (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2011), correct language to use when working with families with same-sex parents (Kozik-Rosabal, 2000), and best practices for addressing incidents of discrimination (Depalma & Atkinson, 2010).

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

The current dissertation research study utilized a phenomenological approach to qualitatively address the lived experiences of same-sex parents with discrimination and inclusion. The current dissertation study included five families with same-sex parents (N=5) and two families with opposite-sex parents (N=2). Participants ranged in age, race, gender, and socioeconomic status. The researcher required participants to have at least one school-age child enrolled in the same middle school setting. At least one parent was present for all three rounds of interviews, either by telephone or in-person at a local library conference room.

#### **Research Questions**

1. Same-Sex Parents within School Culture: *How do same-sex parents engage in the school culture?*
2. Same-Sex Parents Experiences with Discrimination: *How do same-sex parents describe their experiences with discrimination in schools?*
3. Same-Sex Parents Experiences with Inclusion: *How inclusive are schools for families with same-sex parents?*
4. School-Based Policies to Support Same-Sex Parents: *What policies, that same-sex parents are aware of, are in place in schools to support same-sex parents?*

#### **Overview of Phenomenological Qualitative Research**

According to Merriam (1998), qualitative research seeks to “understand the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they

have in the world” (p. 6). Holloway (1997) suggested that qualitative research is a “form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live in” (p. 2). According to Creswell (2007), a qualitative research methodology is utilized when researchers seek to “empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study” (p. 40). A qualitative approach is warranted when the nature of research questions requires exploration (Stake, 1995). Qualitative research questions often begin with how or what, so that the researcher can gain an in-depth understanding of what is going on relative to the topic (Patton, 2002; Seidman, 1998).

To fully examine the lived experiences of same-sex parents, a phenomenology qualitative research approach was utilized in the present study. Phenomenology seeks to investigate the human experience at a fundamental level and provides an accurate understanding of lived experiences of several individuals (Polkinghorne, 1989). Within schools, same-sex parents have a unique voice and phenomenology research provided the most accurate depiction of their experiences.

As described by Savin-Baden and Major (2013), a phenomenological research study seeks to “not only uncover an individual’s experience but also how they experience the phenomenon” (p. 215). The definition of a phenomenon can be defined as a concept, such as inclusion in schools. The phenomenon can also be assessed in its outward form or based on actions, such as discrimination. A phenomenological approach still captures the essence of an individual’s experience, including thoughts and feelings. Phenomenology was pioneered by Edmund Husserl (Moustakas, 1994), who is regarded as a trailblazer of phenomenology in the twentieth century (Groenewald, 2004). Husserl believed that researchers only acknowledged the

external, physical stimuli and neglected to understand internal variables that contribute to an individual's response to a situation (Lavery, 2003). In addition, Husserl believed that people are reliable sources of information about how things appear in their lives and how things are evident in their consciousness (Groenewald, 2004).

Phenomenology attempts to understand meanings of lived experiences and asks participants to answer the "what" question related to the experience (Lavery, 2003).

Polkinghorne (1983) identified phenomenology as the world as it is experienced pre-reflectively or experiences that may be overlooked in everyday life. Phenomenology seeks to understand an individual's experiences from a natural, uninhibited perspective. Phenomenology also requires that qualitative researchers engage in active self-reflection to understand any potential biases and how they may impact the study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

### **Explanation of Research Steps**

Holloway (1997) contended that qualitative researchers that engage in phenomenological research often neglect to utilize specific techniques or steps; stating that steps often take away from the authenticity of phenomenological research. Hycner (1999) argued that researchers should be reluctant to endorse steps when engaging in phenomenological research, stating that imposing steps could be an injustice to the integrity of that phenomenon. The researcher of the current study chose to employ research steps to ensure reliability and validity. For the purposes of this dissertation study, the researcher used established steps for conducting phenomenological research provided by Moustakas, 1994. Moustakas (1994) comprised four steps for conducting phenomenology: 1) the *epoche*, 2) *phenomenological reduction*, 3) *imaginative variation*, and 4) *synthesis*.

**Epoche.** In the first step, the *epoche*, the researcher was forced to abstain or set aside prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about the research topic. During this process, researchers eliminate any previous knowledge or preconceived notions regarding the research topic. The epoche process does not deny the use of everyday knowledge and researcher preparation on a given topic, however, this process doubts the scientific “facts” or the knowledge of outcomes in advance. In other words, researchers allow a phenomenon or experience to be just what it is and allow it to take its own form as it presents itself.

In the current dissertation study, the researcher examined experiences of same-sex parents with inclusion and discrimination in its authentic state, without forcing these phenomena to take any shape or form. In the first step or *epoche* step, the researcher does not maintain a position and places equal value on all statements (Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas (1994), during the *epoche* process, the researcher acknowledges and writes down any prejudgments; this process is repeatedly practiced to ensure the reduction of preconceived thoughts, judgments, and biases. For the current dissertation study, the researcher wrote out thoughts, judgements, and biases continually and during each phase of data collection. The researcher kept a reflexive journal of any perceived or possible biases (Watt, 2007). This summarized information is published in Appendix A of the current study.

**Phenomenological reduction.** The second step, *phenomenological reduction*, is meant to bring meaning or description to a phenomenon (Giorgi, 1997). Phenomenological reduction is the process of describing a phenomena or the language used to describe a phenomena in its truest form, and not altering or changing descriptive attributes or words in any way (Moustakas, 1994). In other words, phenomenological reduction acknowledges that the qualities of the experience become the focus (Moustakas, 1994). The object itself is not the only factor that is acknowledged

or described. Rather, the contextual factors that researchers often fail to examine are also consciously combined to describe a phenomena. Oftentimes, a researcher may perceive things straightforwardly and focus solely on the object itself, and may fail to acknowledge the contributions of the experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological reduction encompasses a variety of processes that are not exclusive to every qualitative research study, and can include “graded pre-reflection, reflection, and reduction, with concentrated work aimed at explicating the essential nature of the phenomenon (Husserl, 1931, p. 114).”

Moustakas (1994) outlines the sub-steps of phenomenological reduction. First, the researcher must engage in *bracketing*, or place the focus of the research in brackets. The second step is for the researcher to engage in *horizontalizing*, this process requires the researcher to place equal value on all statements. The process of horizontalizing involves comprehensively re-reading statements and any information that are irrelevant to the topic and research questions or any repetitive or overlapping information is removed, leaving only the horizons or themes. This process eventually leads to themes throughout the data (Moustakas, 1994).

For the current dissertation study, the researcher engaged in phenomenological reduction during data analysis by utilizing the following steps: 1) *bracketing*, in which the researcher placed participant’s responses within the overall focus areas, inclusion and discrimination, in brackets; and 2) *horizontalizing*, the researcher placed an equal value on all statements made by participants. To successfully complete the sub-step of bracketing, the researcher placed the overall focus areas of the study, inclusion and discrimination on a white board for analysis. After the focus areas were placed on a white board, the researcher comprehensively re-read statements and in vivo codes related to different functions of discrimination and inclusion. In other words, the researcher placed the focus areas on a white board for analysis. After the focus areas were put

on the white board, the researcher reviewed all in vivo codes and statements related to the two focus areas.

To successfully complete the sub-step of horizontalizing, the researcher placed equal value on all statements or re-read all interview transcripts exhaustively. For the current study, the researcher conducted this sub-step across each interview and for each participant. To complete horizontalizing, the researcher comprehensively re-read interview statements and in vivo codes to identify recurring information or sub-themes within the data.

The phenomenological reduction process served two important roles to the current study. First, the in vivo codes and additional data identified from phenomenological reduction were used to construct interview questions for the study. In other words, the researcher completed the phenomenological reduction step after each interview and for each participant. Second, the phenomenological reduction process, specifically the two sub-steps of bracketing and horizontalizing led to overall themes for the study. The phenomenological reduction process was repeated for each round of interviews. The overall themes reported specifically address the research questions of the current study. The overall themes that emerged from phenomenological reduction in the current study are reported in the results chapter.

**Imaginative variation.** The third step is *imaginative variation*, which forces the researcher to seek possible meanings through the utilization of imagination (Moustakas, 1994). In other words, the imaginative variation process seeks possible meanings of a phenomena by examining different perspectives, roles, and functions of the researched topic (Moustakas, 1994). The goal of imaginative variation was to develop descriptions of an experience, and account for any underlying or contributing factors that can attest to what is being experienced (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) describes the imaginative variation as the “how” that describes the

“what” of the experience, or the process of developing a description for the experience. Giorgi (1997) described imaginative variation as “articulation, based on intuition, of a fundamental meaning without which a phenomenon could not present itself as it is” (p. 242). Savin-Baden and Major (2013) described the imaginative variation process as the researcher freely altering some aspect of the studied phenomenon and then evaluating what changes have occurred, all while maintaining integrity and doing so without losing the phenomenon.

For the current dissertation study, the researcher engaged in *imaginative variation* by providing detailed descriptions of various phenomena in the data. To complete this step, the researcher examined and reported different perspectives, roles, and functions of described phenomena by comprehensively examining the overall themes that emerged from phenomenological reduction, specifically data that answers research questions of the current study. In other words, the researcher engaged in the interview text by re-reading statements or data collected across participants in each interview. The researcher identified information in the text that addressed the research questions of the study. The researcher reported imaginative variation descriptions and data that address each research question for the current study, along with the identified themes. In the current study, the researcher reported the participants’ descriptions and data to address research questions and themes in the results chapter. The findings and overall phenomena described during the imaginative variation process are described more in-depth in the results chapter.

**Synthesis.** The final step in the phenomenological research process is the *synthesis process*. Giorgi (1997) described this process as identifying overall themes about the experiences and perspectives of the phenomenon. During this process, the researcher synthesized the meanings and essences of the research. This process allowed the researcher to make conclusions

and identify any research areas that need to be further addressed. To complete this step, the researcher must have previously organized and analyzed the data. In the current study, during the synthesis process, the researcher summarized the data and the research findings. For the current dissertation study, the researcher engaged in the synthesis process by providing the discussion and interpretation of the major emerging findings of the study. The synthesis process specifically addresses each research question for the current study. The synthesis process involved the researcher reporting findings and interpretations of the larger meanings of the research study. The information is synthesized and reported across all participants in the results chapter.

### **Settings and Participants**

The researcher included five families with same-sex parents (N=5) and two families with opposite-sex parents (N=2) in the present study. The current study sought to examine the experiences of same-sex parents with school-age children, specifically looking at their experiences with inclusion and discrimination. The researcher included two families with opposite-sex parents to further examine the general school experiences across all families in schools. The two families with opposite-sex parents served as a negative case analysis for the entire study. Drisko (1997) suggested that negative case analysis is essential to comprehensively and completely explore a phenomenon. Including two families with opposite-sex parents in the current study was important to identify themes or similarities across participants. It also provided general descriptions of experiences across parents within the identified middle school. Although the two families with opposite-sex parents are not to be the focus of the research, the information gained was reported in the appendices sections of the dissertation.

The final sample of research participants were selected on a first-come, first-identified basis. Dissertation committee members requested that each of the participants be parents at the

same middle school. However, no school district permissions were required, as this study was not conducted on school grounds, nor during school hours, nor was any staff member in the school asked to participate in the study. Specific information on the middle school for the current study is explained with more details later in this chapter.

### **Sampling Plan**

The current qualitative dissertation study used a phenomenological approach to collect data. For this dissertation study, the researcher utilized purposeful sampling to recruit participants. Purposeful sampling means that the researcher purposefully selects research participants that can provide intentional information on a subject for a research study (Creswell, 2007). By purposefully selecting participants, the sample population provided a first-hand perspective and a deeper understanding of a chosen research problem or phenomenon. Specifically, for the current study, purposeful sampling was the most appropriate sampling method. The researcher sought to understand the perspectives of research participants first hand. Maxwell (2005) suggested that purposeful sampling is a strategic method used by researchers “in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately to provide information that can’t be gotten from other sources” (p.88). In order to address the research questions of the current study, the researcher was deliberate and intentional in utilizing purposeful sampling to select research participants.

### **Recruitment**

For the current study, the researcher identified a same-sex parent or informant within a school district in a larger metropolitan city in the Southeastern United States. The researcher was connected to the informant through a mutual colleague in psychology. The researcher explained the details of the current study to the colleague and the colleague had prior experiences with

parents within the middle school. The informant and the colleague had a pre-established professional relationship. The colleague connected the researcher and informant through email. The informant identified same-sex parents in the area that would be eligible to participate in the study.

For the current study, the researcher sought to include parents of middle school students. Middle school still requires extensive parental involvement but does acknowledge student independence in learning and within the school environment. Based on dissertation committee member requests', the researcher only included families with same-sex parents and families with opposite-sex parents in the same middle school through purposeful sampling. All participants within the study were required to have at least one child enrolled at the same middle school.

### **Specific Recruitment**

To recruit participants for the current study, the researcher was connected with a same-sex parent or the informant through a mutual colleague in psychology. The colleague sent an email explaining the nature of the researcher's study to the informant. After the informant agreed to release contact information, the researcher sent an email to set up an official meeting with the informant. During the researcher and the informant's initial meeting, the informant agreed to give the researcher the contact information on all 12 potentially eligible same-sex parents in the area. He agreed to alert the potential parents in advance of the information. During his contact with potential participant-parents, the informant explained the nature of the study, as described in the informed consent document, to all potential participants.

After the informant found parents that would be willing to volunteer, the names/information were given to the researcher in person during an additional pre-scheduled meeting between the researcher and informant. After the meeting, the researcher sent potential

participants an email (Appendix B). The email asked participants to respond with contact information and all parties obliged. The researcher then sent a letter via email. The letter introduced the researcher, stated the purpose of the study, outlined participant eligibility, included a description of the research and data collection procedures, explained confidentiality, and risks and benefits.

In addition to receiving an emailed letter, each potential research participant received a phone call to determine eligibility and establish rapport. This telephone call was used to establish rapport, determine participant eligibility, and to answer any questions regarding the research process. The telephone call was also used to establish and confirm an interview time for the researcher and participants, if appropriate. Participants were given the opportunity to choose the interviewing method that was most appropriate for them, whether in-person, telephone, or web-conference.

To schedule the specific time/day of interviews, the researcher ensured that the location was quiet, but the location and time was convenient for participants. In other words, the participants were allowed to choose the specific location and time of the interview. The researcher was flexible and completed interviews whenever the participants indicated was most convenient. Research participants were emailed a brief background questionnaire (Appendix C). The background questionnaire was used to collect demographic information on the participants in the study. Participants were informed of the purposes and relevance of the brief background questionnaire to the current study. The data that was collected from the demographic questionnaire is described in more detail later in this chapter.

The researcher also sent the participants a copy of the informed consent document (Appendix D). This document outlined the nature of the study and ensured research study

information was explained clearly to participants. The University of Alabama Office of Research Compliance required the researcher to distribute the informed consent document prior to any research activities with participants. Additionally, participants received a brief letter confirming participation (Appendix E). The letter was brief but served as a reminder of the scheduled interview time. The document was sent through email to all participants in the study. The researcher re-confirmed participation among participants in the study with a resent confirmation reminder document sent via email (Appendix F). The confirmation reminder was brief but re-confirmed the interview time and the interviewing approach. The researcher sent this document out 3-5 days prior to the scheduled interview time.

### **Selection of Participants**

The informant sent the researcher the names of 12 families with same-sex parents and opposite-sex families from middle schools throughout the district. Specifically, the informant sent the names of 9 families with same-sex parents and 3 families with opposite-sex parents. The first 9 of the families sent in the email were all parents in the same middle school. The other three parents were parents at two different middle schools. The researcher chose to select the parents of the middle school with the highest enrollment of criteria-eligible families.

Specifically, research participants for the current study were selected on a first-come, first-identified basis. In other words, as families were selected and deemed eligible, the researcher determined eligibility and made selections on an individual, first-identified basis. The eligibility process was the same for families with same-sex parents and families with opposite-sex parents.

The researcher allowed participants to choose whether the interview was conducted in-person, by telephone, or a communication platform such as Google Hangout or Skype. No participants chose to conduct interviews via google hangout or skype. All interviews for the

current study were completed by telephone or in-person in local library conference rooms. Specifically, 3 families in the study chose to conduct their three rounds of interviews in a local library conference room, while 4 families chose to conduct their three rounds of interviews by telephone. The researcher used the pre-determined criteria to determine if families were eligible for participation in the study. Specifically, the criteria below were required for selected participants in the study:

- Same-sex parents and opposite sex parents must have at least one school-aged child (middle school);
- At least one same-sex parent or opposite-sex parent must be listed as the primary legal guardian or caregiver;
- Same-sex parents and opposite-sex parents in the study can be legally married or cohabitating full-time (at least one year);
- Same-sex parents and opposite-sex parents in the study must have made the decision to raise at least one school-aged child (K-12) together as parents in the same household;
- Gender Identity: All participants should identify as male or female;
- Sexual Orientation:
  - Same-sex parent participants must be romantically or sexually attracted to individuals of the same gender identity;
  - Opposite-sex parent participants must be romantically or sexually attracted to individuals of the opposite gender identity;
- At least one parent (same-sex parents & opposite-sex parents) must be available for three rounds of interviews (approximately three hours).

The researcher determined the participant's eligibility during the initial call that was scheduled with potential participants. The researcher went over the criteria with participants by phone to ensure that the criteria was met before confirming participation in the study. The researcher kept the criteria for participation uniform for families with same-sex parents and families with opposite-sex parents for comparability purposes. Specific demographic information on the included participants within the current study is located in Appendix G.

### **Descriptions of Participants**

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit and select participants for the study. The final sample for the current study included five families with same-sex parents (n=5) and two families with opposite-sex parents (n=2). Each participant-family had at least one child enrolled at the same middle school. The family education level or the highest degree reported between two parents varied. Four of the participants had at least a bachelor's degree (4 out of 7 or 57%). One of the participants had at least a master's degree (1 out of 7 or 14%). Two of the participants were completing or had completed doctorate degrees (2 out of 7 or 29%). Thus, 7 out of 7 or 100 percent of the combined participants-families in the current study had at least one parent with a college bachelor's degree. The current study included four of five families with same-sex parents that identified as Caucasian. Of this group, three of the families with same-sex parents consisted of marriages between Caucasian women. The study included one family with two same-sex parents that identified as married Caucasian males and one family with two same-sex parents that identified as married African American males. The negative case analysis participants consisted of one family with a married Caucasian mother and Caucasian father. The second negative case analysis consisted of one married family that included an African American

mother and a Caucasian father. Specific demographic information on participants is located in Appendix G.

### **Location**

The study was conducted in a city in the Southern region of the United States. The city is home to over 600,000 residents. The median household income in the city is \$47,621 currently. The middle school that each of the participants had at least one child enrolled in is home to over 700 students and served grades 5-8. The school's demographic makeup is: 80% of students identify as Caucasian, 14% of students identify as African American, 4% of students identify as Asian/Asian Pacific Islander, and 2% of students identify as Hispanic. The percentage of enrolled middle students receiving free or reduced lunch in the school was approximately 11%.

The middle school has a district perception for being more progressive in school policies and behavioral tactics. For instance, the school has integrated mindfulness into classroom curriculum across all students. Mindfulness seeks to provide meditation to help calm and relax students, and it seeks to reduce school-related stress and anxiety (Hobby & Jenkins, 2014). The school also includes a nationally recognized, School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports system or SW-PBIS. Their SW-PBIS system was developed by the district's implementation team and in collaboration with a local university research department.

### **Permissions**

#### **Committee Approval**

For the current dissertation study, the researcher received approval from the University dissertation committee for the prospectus document on March 31, 2016. After the prospectus defense was completed, the researcher scheduled the proposal defense meeting. The researcher received final approval from the University dissertation committee to conduct the research study on May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2016.

## **IRB approval**

After receiving dissertation committee approval, the researcher applied and received institutional approval from the University of Alabama Office of Research Compliance on September 20, 2016. The official approval letter from the University of Alabama Office of Research Compliance is located in Appendix I. In accordance with institutional research procedures, the researcher required participants to thoroughly review the informed consent document. The researcher was also required by University research compliance office to ensure that participants were capable of consenting by using the capacity to consent sheet (Appendix J). The capacity to consent form was recommended by the University IRB office to ensure that participants could understand the questions they were being asked and for what purposes. These questions were reviewed prior to conducting interviews with participants. No other permissions were needed.

## **School District Permission**

No school district permission was needed to conduct this study. The interviews were not conducted in any of the district's schools, nor with any employees of the district, nor on school property or during school hours. The researcher was not required to submit any formal documentation or information related to the current study to the school or the school district. The participants within the current study were identified by the informant. The informant knew the research participant-parents individually and professionally. All research participants in the current study had children enrolled at the same middle school. However, the middle school itself was not involved in the recruitment, research, or any part of the study.

## **Participant Considerations**

Due to the content of the study, there was a small risk of participants becoming distressed from speaking about their personal experiences with discrimination or exclusion in their child's school. All research participants in the current study were made aware of this in the initial recruitment letter and again during informed consent. If research participants became distressed or upset during data collection, the researcher had resources available on counseling services to address any potential trauma or harmful effects from being in the study.

In addition, each participant was made aware that a research code or pseudonym was assigned to them for the purposes of data collection and data analysis to maintain confidentiality. Participants were also informed in the recruitment letter that their participation is voluntary and they are free to withdraw from the study at any time. The participants were informed in the letter that the data will be discarded and destroyed if they choose to withdraw from the study. Additionally, the informed consent document did not require signatures, due to a pre-approved IRB waiver. It was suggested that the signature waiver be put in place to further protect participants, particularly since this could be considered a vulnerable population if any information was discovered by an outside party.

## **Instruments**

In conducting phenomenological research, the primary method of data collection is in-depth interviews (McCracken, 1988; Moustakas, 1994). Interviews allow researchers first-hand knowledge and experience on a phenomenon. The focus of phenomenological interviews is for participants to describe the phenomenon in-depth (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) identified steps to conducting interviews:

- a) Determine interview type

- b) Identify adequate recording procedures
- c) Design and utilize an interview protocol
- d) Identify a place for conducting interviews
- e) Develop informed consent form
- f) Identify research participants
- g) Confidentiality, bias, ethics

Creswell (2007) suggested that the researcher identify an interview type for gathering information on a phenomenon. For the purposes of this dissertation, the researcher utilized a semi-structured interviewing approach to conduct in-depth interviews. Each interview protocol was designed to achieve specific interview goals. Semi-structured interviews provided many benefits to the interviewing process. Per Savin-Baden and Major (2013), semi-structured interviews allow for the “researcher to not only follow preset questions but also include additional questions in response to participant comments and reactions” (p. 359). Barriball and While (1994) contended that semi-structured interviews can facilitate comparability by ensuring that all questions are answered by each respondent. With other forms of interviewing, the researcher does not necessarily follow a preset script, so questions during the data collection process could be different for each participant and may not capture the essence of each experience but rather the interview may take a spontaneous direction. Employing a preset interview protocol with pre-established general questions ensures that all interviews with participants are focused and accomplish research goals. It also ensures that all participants are given the same opportunity to address pre-established questions and explain experiences.

## **Participant Interviews**

For the current study, the researcher utilized a preset interview protocol for conducting interviews across all participants. Initially, the researcher planned to use a preset protocol only for interview one. As the study progressed, the researcher created a preset protocol for interviews two and three as well. In addition to the preset protocol, the researcher constructed data-based individualized questions for all participants during each round of interviews. The pre-set interview protocol for interview one is in Appendix K. The pre-set interview protocol for interview two is in Appendix L. The pre-set interview protocol for interview three is located in Appendix M. Additional relevant details regarding data collection and data analyses sections are discussed in more detail in later sections of the current chapter.

**First interview.** The initial interview protocol was constructed to gain more information on the general experiences of participants in schools. The initial interview protocol questions were constructed to gain foundational or baseline information on each participant, including general information about their children (or child), their tenure in the school district, and enrollment experiences in the school district. Additional interview questions in the initial protocol asked participants to describe their first experiences in the school district and within their child's school. Interview questions in the initial protocol also covered descriptions of school culture and experiences with discrimination. Interview questions for the first interview were constructed to address research questions for the current study.

Although the goal of the first round of interviews was to gain general descriptions of the parents in the middle school, the interview questions provided a focus for the overall research questions to be addressed in later interviews. To gather data, each participant was asked the same questions during the initial interviews. The interview questions for interview protocol one

included questions that address each of the four research questions for the current study. The researcher developed the specific questions based on the literature review completed. The researcher identified areas of the literature that addressed the general experiences of same-sex parents in the school. The researcher developed the research questions for the study and subsequently the interview questions for interview one concurrently.

After the initial interviews with participants, the researcher engaged in the interview data by using in vivo coding and phenomenological reduction to develop themes and horizons based on each participant's interview text. The initial in vivo codes, themes or horizons that emerged across individual participants was used to construct interview protocols for the second and third interviews across participants. The first round or initial semi-structured interview looked for the general descriptions and experiences of same-sex parents and opposite-sex parents in schools. The researcher employed a semi-structured interview protocol for the initial interview to ask about general topics related to their experiences within schools. The goal of the initial or first round of interviews was to gain general information on participants' experiences within their child's school. Interviews were conducted in local library conference rooms or by telephone, depending on the participants' choice in location. Please refer to Appendix N to see specific interviews questions that address research questions for the current study.

**Second Interview.** After conducting the first round of interviews and to facilitate comparability, the researcher constructed a semi-structured protocol for interview two, along with individualized interview questions. The semi-structured protocol for subsequent interviews ensured that topics and identified themes were asked and answered by all respondents. To construct interview questions for the second round of interviews, the researcher re-read each of the initial interview transcripts comprehensively. The researcher went through the first round of

interview texts and labeled an in vivo code to statements of significance. After the in vivo coding process ended, the researcher engaged in phenomenological reduction of the first interview transcripts across and for each of the participants.

After the in vivo coding and phenomenological reduction processes in analysis were complete, the researcher constructed an individualized, semi-structured protocol for interview two. The pre-set questions on the interview two protocol were constructed to confirm preliminary findings from interview one. The individualized interview questions for the second interview were used to achieve interview goals of identifying participants' experiences with discrimination and inclusion. The individualized interview questions for interview two are noted in the Appendix L section.

The goal of the second round of interviews was to exhaustively identify the participants' specific occurrences with inclusion and discrimination in schools. Since none of the participants reported any incidents of discrimination, the questions mainly focused on the descriptions of inclusion among parents and school staff, specifically characteristics and qualities of the positive interactions reported.

**Individualized interview questions.** The individualized interview questions across participants in the second interview were developed based on their responses in initial interviews. The researcher re-read transcripts comprehensively line-by-line and identified in vivo codes. The researcher engaged in phenomenological reduction to develop themes across the data. The initial themes and in vivo codes identified were used to develop interview questions for the second interview. The researcher asked individualized questions and pre-set interview questions to all research participants. The researcher used the following in vivo codes to construct interview questions for the second round: school leadership, current teacher, volunteer, negative

experiences, and planned activities. Specific data supporting these codes is described in the results chapter. Please refer to Appendix N to see specific interviews questions that address research questions for the current study.

**Third Interview.** The goal of the third round of interviews (Appendix M) was to comprehensively identify the participants' specific interactions with teachers and administrators with discrimination and inclusion. After conducting the first round of interviews and to facilitate comparability, the researcher constructed a semi-structured protocol for interview three, along with individualized interview questions. To construct interview questions for the third round of interviews, the researcher re-read each of the interview transcripts comprehensively. Prior, the researcher went through the first round of interview text and labeled an in vivo code to statements of significance. After the in vivo coding process ended, the researcher engaged in phenomenological reduction of the first interview transcripts across all participants. After the in vivo coding and phenomenological reduction processes in analysis were complete, the researcher constructed an individualized protocol and semi-structured protocol for interview three. The researcher used the following in vivo codes to construct interview questions for the third round: current teacher, school leadership, positive experiences, and welcoming.

**Individualized interview questions.** The individualized interview questions across participants in the third interview were developed based on their responses in initial and second interviews. The researcher re-read transcripts comprehensively line-by-line and identified in vivo codes. The researcher engaged in phenomenological reduction to develop themes across the data. The initial themes and in vivo codes identified, along with the second interview data, were used to develop interview questions for the third interview. The researcher asked individualized questions and pre-set interview questions to all research participants. The researcher used the

following in vivo codes to construct interview questions for the second round: school leadership, openness for communication, and welcoming. Specific data supporting these codes is described in the results chapter. Please refer to Appendix N to see specific interviews questions that address research questions for the current study.

The pre-set questions on the interview three protocol were constructed to confirm preliminary findings from interview one. The individualized interview questions for the third interview were used to achieve interview goals of identifying participants' specific interactions with teachers and administrators. The individualized questions for interview three were constructed based on participant responses during the initial and second round of interviews. Please refer to Appendix N to see specific interviews questions that address research questions for the current study.

The semi-structured protocol for subsequent interviews ensured that topics and identified themes were asked and answered by all respondents. The second and third round of interviews utilized a pre-set, semi-structured interview protocol, along with individualized questions. The protocols for the second and third interview was specific to the participant's responses on initial interviews to accomplish interview goals, along with an individualized protocol. The pre-set protocol was constructed to achieve comparability across participants. The individualized protocol was used to confirm individual experiences reported in the first interview. Interview questions for each round of interviews were constructed to address all research questions for the study. The goals of each round of interviews were developed to achieve the goals of each interview.

### **Summary of Specific Interview Steps**

After initial interviews were conducted for all research participants, the researcher hand-transcribed interviews and identified specific themes and descriptions for each participant. After the researcher identified themes and descriptions for each research participant, the researcher developed an interview protocol, along with an individualized set of questions for additional interviews to address specific themes and descriptions across participants. This ensured that all themes and descriptions identified by participants were addressed comprehensively and comparatively. The goal of the initial or first round of interviews was to gain general information on participants' experiences within their child's school. The second round of interviews were constructed to identify specific occurrences with inclusion and characteristics of the school. The third round of interviews was used to identify specific interactions with school administrators and teachers, particularly looking at inclusion and descriptions.

### **Data Collection and Procedures**

The current study sought to examine the experiences of same-sex parents, specifically looking at their experiences with discrimination and inclusion. The purpose of the study was to provide more information and research data to further support same-sex parents of school-age children in schools. This qualitative study included five families with same-sex parents (N=5) and two families with opposite-sex parents (N=2). The current study consisted of a series of three in-depth interviews across participants to gain more in-depth information on participants. Due to the sample population of parents with school-age children and potential time constraints, the researcher only required one parent be present for the three rounds of participant interviews.

The goal of the current study was to obtain the essence of the individual's experiences. Data collection occurred in a quiet, neutral location, such a local library conference room or by

telephone. The goal was that the person would be removed enough from distractions (school, work, etc.) that the true essence of their experiences was captured. All interviews were audio recorded using a digital recorder and a tape recorder as a backup. All audio recordings and transcripts of interviews are stored in password protected documents. In total, most interviews lasted on average forty-five minutes. Data was collected over the course of five months from October 2016-February 2017. Data was secured and locked in a file cabinet in the researchers' apartment.

The researcher collected data by conducting in-depth interviews for all research participants, including five families with same-sex parents (n=5) and two families with opposite-sex parents (n=2). The researcher conducted three rounds of in-depth interviews with research participants. Four of the research participants chose to conduct interviews by telephone, and the other three chose to complete interviews in local library conference rooms. The researcher allowed each interview to take its own shape and form. In other words, the researcher allowed participants to talk within their comfort level and did not force any responses or reactions onto them. Participant interviews were used to explore the experiences of the participants.

### **Overview of Hermeneutic Phenomenology Data Analysis**

Phenomenological research has foundational steps that all phenomenological researchers must engage in. However, phenomenological researchers generally take a position within phenomenology. For the purposes of this dissertation, the researcher utilized a hermeneutic approach to phenomenology. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) describe hermeneutic phenomenology as an approach that focuses on “shedding light on taken for granted experiences that then enable researchers to create meaning and develop understanding” (p. 218). The hermeneutic approach to phenomenology involves the researcher reading or interpreting the data

for the purposes of uncovering the intentions and meanings behind the text, or to hear what the text is saying to us (Moustakas, 1994). Wilson and Hutchinson (1991) describe hermeneutics as the details or seemingly trivial aspects within experiences that may be overlooked, but may contribute to creating a deeper sense of understanding and create a larger meaning within lived experiences.

The hermeneutic analysis process seeks to eliminate any prejudgments that may impact the interpretation or understanding of the text. This hermeneutic analysis process is constantly evolving throughout each stage of analysis, and new prejudgments may be formed and must be addressed during this process. With hermeneutic analysis, the interview text seeks to provide descriptions of lived, conscious experiences. However, during this process, reflective interpretation is needed to achieve a clearer, deeper understanding of the text (Gadamer, 1976). The reflective-interpretative process is all encompassing beyond providing detailed descriptions, but it also incorporates the interpretation of external conditions that may contribute to lived experiences within the text (Gadamer, 1976).

Richards and Morse (2012) suggested that qualitative researchers account for each step during the data analysis process. In other words, researchers should set up processes that log significant decisions during the entire research process and set up a process to account for data interpretation. In doing this, providing justification or a log of each step in the research process allows the researcher to further explain any discoveries or phenomena.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Summary**

For the current dissertation study, the researcher utilized in vivo coding and a portion of Moustakas' (1994) steps to conducting phenomenology research, 1) *phenomenological*

*reduction*, 2) *imaginative variation*, and 3) *synthesis*. By utilizing these steps in data analysis, the entire process can be justified and it also adds more reliability and validity to the study.

### **In Vivo Coding**

For the purposes of dissertation data analysis, the researcher employed in vivo coding to further understand and describe the interview text. In vivo coding has also been labeled “literal coding” or “verbatim coding” (Saldana, 2013, p. 91). In vivo coding is useful in studies that seek to credit and emphasize the research participant’s voice (Saldana, 2013). In vivo coding does not employ a single pattern or strategy when analyzing the data. Rather, it is used when information within the text stands out or needs to be further examined.

In vivo coding provides a “crucial check on whether you have grasped what is significant to the participant” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). In vivo coding helps researchers preserve the participants’ voice and their views (Charmaz, 2006). Researchers employing in vivo coding must reanalyze the codes to generate themes for participants. In the current dissertation study, the codes identified were re-examined across all interview texts and additional interview questions were formulated for subsequent interviews. In other words, the researcher developed in vivo codes for each round of in-depth interviews. For the current study, the researcher coded items with short descriptive words describing the interview text.

For the current dissertation study, in vivo coding was used to understand participant’s experiences in schools. In vivo coding occurred across participants’ interview transcripts individually and for each round of interviews. For the first round of interviews, in vivo coding involved the researcher hand-transcribing the text or data from the initial interview. After the researcher completed the transcription process for interview one, the researcher began applying in vivo codes to significant statements. The researcher generally applied a code for every three-

to-five sentences for each individual transcript based on responses. Statements that received codes were significant and the codes directly address the research questions of the current study.

After the second round of interviews were complete, the researcher hand-transcribed interviews. After the transcription process was complete, the researcher began applying codes to significant statements. The researcher generally applied a code for every three-to-five sentences for each individual research transcript based on responses. The researcher coded data in the second interview that directly address the research questions of the current study. The codes from interview two and from interview one were used to construct individualized and pre-set interview protocols for interview three.

After interview three was complete, the researcher hand-transcribed the data. The researcher re-read statements comprehensively and applied codes to significant statements. The significant statements that received in vivo codes from the third round of interview transcripts directly address the research questions of the current study. The significant codes that were identified across all interviews are reported in Appendix Q.

The in vivo codes for the current study served two roles. First, the in vivo codes generated throughout interviews were reported to address the research questions of the current study. Second, in vivo codes that were generated were also used to develop interview questions that addressed the research questions for the current study. In vivo coding was the first step in the data analysis process. The in vivo codes provided a foundation for other three steps of data analysis.

For each round of interviews, in vivo codes were generally applied for every three to five sentences. Codes were generated and applied based on the responses of participants in each round of interviews. If anything in the interview text proved to be significant, the researcher

applied a code in the interview text. The in vivo codes generated throughout each participants' interview transcripts for each interview were synthesized and analyzed, along with themes from phenomenological reduction, to create an individualized interview protocol for the subsequent interviews.

### **Phenomenological Reduction**

Additionally, after the completion of each round of interviews across all participants, the researcher used a portion of Moustakas' (1994) steps to conducting phenomenology research:

- 1) phenomenological reduction;
- 2) imaginative variation;
- 3) synthesis.

This process was repeated until all three rounds of interviews were completed for all research participants. In phenomenological reduction, the process lead to the emerging of horizons or overall themes from the data. The researcher engaged in the two sub-steps, bracketing and horizontalizing, to develop overall themes for the study.

**Bracketing.** The researcher bracketed major focus areas, inclusion and discrimination, for the study. Bracketing occurred after initial in vivo codes were identified across all interview texts. After each interview, the researcher bracketed major focus areas to identify significant statements in the text. Bracketing involved the researcher removing any known personal beliefs and analyzing the data without biases. The researcher identified specific goals for each round of bracketing based on the goals of each round of participant interviews. In other words, the researcher identified the goals of each round of bracketing based on the goals of each round of interviews. For the current study, bracketing included looking specifically at the interview text and in vivo codes for each round of interviews.

After the initial round of semi-structured interviews, bracketing looked for major general descriptions related to major focus areas identified by each research participant. Specifically, if participants stated or identified major general descriptions related to inclusion and discrimination in the first round then the researcher bracketed this information. The researcher reported bracketed information based on the research questions for the current study. In other words, the data reported for bracketing specifically addresses the research questions for the current study. The bracketed data includes the significant statements that were identified to address the research questions of the current study.

If participants reported specific occurrences with inclusion or discrimination in the second interview, then the researcher bracketed this information. In other words, the researcher aligned the goal of the second round of bracketing with the goals of the second round of interviews. The researcher bracketed any specific occurrences with inclusion and discrimination that the participants identified. The researcher reported the significant statements from the second round of bracketing to address the research questions for the current study.

If participants indicated specific interactions or major experiences with inclusion and discrimination with teachers and administrators during interview three, then the information was bracketed. The major experiences related to inclusion and discrimination noted by participants were bracketed based on the responses of participants in individual interviews. In other words, the researcher identified the third round of bracketed information based on the goals of interview three across participants. The researcher reported the significant statements from the third round of bracketing to address the research questions for the current study.

**Horizontalizing.** After bracketing was complete, the researcher engaged in the sub-process of *horizontalizing* to comprehensively engage in the material. For each round of

interviews, the researcher engaged in horizontalizing to identify sub-themes across participants. For the current study, the researcher wrote out horizons or sub-themes on a white board for further analysis. The researcher utilized a white board for all individual participants. The white board included bracketed information and experiences and horizons or sub-themes for the development of participant descriptions or themes. The first round of horizontalizing looked for general descriptions within the middle school. The second round of horizontalizing examined participant's specific experiences with discrimination and inclusion. The third round of horizontalizing investigated the participant's specific interactions with teachers and administrators.

The overall themes identified were based on the responses of participants within each interview and each round of interviews. The four major themes of this study were identified through phenomenological reduction and in vivo coding. In the results chapter, the researcher will present the emergent major themes for this study more comprehensively.

### **Imaginative Variation**

During the *imaginative variation* process, the researcher developed detailed descriptions for the experiences of participants. During the imaginative variation process, the researcher describes the essence of the phenomena authentically, while still maintaining integrity and not losing the phenomena. For the current study, the researcher engaged in the data by re-reading and developed detailed descriptions for experiences and accounts noted by participants. If data is presented as is, the information may not be understood or the essence of the experience could be missed by second-parties. The imaginative variation process was repeated for each individual interview and for each round of interviews. For the current study, the researcher engaged in the imaginative variation process during each round of interviews and for each participant.

The descriptions developed during imaginative variation were used to address research questions for the study. For the current study, the researcher provided detailed descriptions of individual participants across the three rounds of interviews in the results chapter of the dissertation. The descriptions reported across participants address research questions for the current study.

### **Synthesis**

After the researcher completed in vivo coding, phenomenological reduction, reporting descriptions in imaginative variation, the researcher engaged in the process of *synthesis* to explain larger meanings of the research. During the *synthesis* process, the researcher summarized the data and research findings across all participants, all interviews in detail. The discussion of the synthesis process breaks down findings for research participants. The researcher engaged in synthesis to report findings across all participants and to answer each research question. In other words, the researcher summarized descriptions and themes to address each research question. Each research question is organized based on the data answering each specific question. This is reported for each research question for the current study.

In the current study, synthesis data is presented summarized. The data is reported and organized to address the larger meanings of the data analysis process. The researcher summarized the data and research findings across all participants. The details and results of the synthesis process are reported in the results and discussion section of the final dissertation across all research participants. In other words, the researcher engaged in synthesis for each individual interview across participants and this information is reported in the results and discussion sections of the final dissertation.

## **Ethical and Legal Procedures**

There were many ethical considerations when conducting the present dissertation study. Before any research activities were conducted, the researcher obtained consent on September 20, 2016 to conduct the study through the University of Alabama Institutional Review Board (IRB) office. The IRB proposal included an informed consent document that was given to participants prior to their participation in the study. The informed consent document fully explained the nature of the research, how the research will be distributed, and the exact nature of confidentiality, realms of voluntary research participation, the potential risks and benefits, and the possible use of the research data (Corti, Day, & Backhouse, 2000). For the purposes of this dissertation study, informed consent outlined the background of the research and the researcher, parameters of participation including selection of specific research participants, purpose of the research, commitment of time, benefits of participation, any potential risks to study participation, voluntary participation, confidentiality, debriefing and questions, and contact information.

The researcher respected the rights of research participants by ensuring that each participant fully understood the nature of informed consent. Before officially beginning the research process, the researcher reviewed the informed consent document again. This ensured that research participants were fully informed and understood the nature of the research study. Additionally, the researcher respected the rights of participants by allowing them to choose to disclose of their personal, legal name to the researcher or giving them the option to use a nickname or their initials. The researcher established rapport with participants initially by conducting a telephone call to answer any questions regarding the research process. The researcher treated participants with respect by maintaining a professional distance and answering any questions that participants may have. By maintaining a professional distance, this allowed

the researcher to eliminate biases in the entire research process and it ensured that all data reported by participants was done so without researcher expectations or biases. If research participants became distressed or upset during the research process, the researcher offered to provide resources on counseling services to address any potential trauma or harmful effects from being in the study.

All in-depth interviews conducted were audio recorded to capture verbatim language, emotional responses, and changes in voice pitch. The researcher hand transcribed all interviews to ensure quality. In addition, each interview protocol included a line for the participants' research code along or their pseudo name to maintain confidentiality. Each participant was asked if they wanted to receive a mailed or emailed copy of the transcribed interview to ensure accuracy and quality. In the current study, only one of the participants chose to have a copy of the interview transcript mailed to her. After interviews were complete, all participants received a thank you note in the mail or via email. Additionally, to respect the rights of participants all data collected is stored and locked in a filing cabinet in the researchers' apartment. All audio recordings and transcripts of interviews are stored in password protected documents. To protect confidentiality and privacy, only the primary researcher has access to these documents and passwords.

## **Quality Assurance**

### **Reliability**

To establish reliability in qualitative research, dependability is crucial (Golafshani, 2003). Reliability in qualitative research is a concept that is used to evaluate research quality, specifically for the purposes of generating understanding (Golafshani, 2003). In the current dissertation study, the researcher engaged in ethical self-reflection throughout the entire research

process, specifically identifying any potential bias that may impact the results or the explanation of research findings. The researcher kept a journal of any perceived or possible biases (Watt, 2007).

In establishing reliability, it is important to generate “authentic” understanding of the participant’s experiences and reporting it from their perspective. In the current dissertation study, the researcher hand-transcribed all in-depth interviews. Each interview and the statements made in individual interviews were only used to develop overall themes for descriptions. The researcher did not change any of the data or meanings from the interviews. In addition, participants were given the option to receive a copy of their individually transcribed interviews.

## **Validity**

Validity is often avoided in qualitative research studies because it is often seen as an indicator of attitudes toward research analysis (Richards & Morse, 2012). However, it is important to utilize validity when designing qualitative research studies. Richards and Morse (2012) contend that validity in qualitative research means that the research should be fully justifiable and assert that it is “well founded and applicable; sound and to the point; against which no objection can fairly be brought” (p. 95). In addition, Richards and Morse (2012) offer two general rules for establishing validity in qualitative research studies, the first is to pay attention to the fit of the question, the data, and to also pay attention to the method. In the current dissertation study, the research questions were developed based on the research literature.

The current study utilized a phenomenological research approach to gather data from participants. Phenomenological research seeks to capture the essence of an individual’s experience, including thoughts and feelings; and this was done by utilizing in-depth interviews across all participants. Each research participant was given the same set of interview questions

for each round of interviews, along with individualized questions. Additionally, the process of data analysis was consistent across all participants during each round of interviews. In addition, the researcher hand transcribed all interviews to ensure quality and accuracy across all participants.

### **Summary**

The current dissertation study sought to examine the experiences of same-sex parents, specifically looking at their individual experiences with discrimination and inclusion in schools. The researcher utilized a qualitative approach to properly understand and disseminate participants' true, honest voices. Specifically, the researcher utilized a phenomenological research approach for data collection. Phenomenology sought to investigate the human experience at a fundamental level and provide an accurate understanding of lived experiences of several individuals (Polkinghorne, 1989). By utilizing a phenomenological approach to research, the researcher allowed the individuals within the study to openly share their stories without any changes or modifications being made. In other words, the phenomenological approach provided participants with the opportunity to express their true, natural opinions and thoughts without any researcher intervention or modification.

The current dissertation study utilized multiple in-depth, open-ended interviews as the primary method of data collection. With phenomenological research, the primary method for data collection is in-depth interviews (McCracken, 1988; Moustakas, 1994). The researcher utilized in-vivo coding to create codes for the data. In-vivo coding has been labeled "literal coding" or "verbatim coding" (Saldana, 2013, p. 91). After each round of interviews was conducted, the researcher used in vivo coding to develop initial codes and the researcher engaged in phenomenological reduction to develop themes. The initial codes and themes were used to

develop subsequent interview questions across research participants. Across interviews, the researcher engaged in Moustakas' (1994) steps to conducting phenomenology research, 1) *phenomenological reduction*, 2) *imaginative variation*, and 3) *synthesis* for each research participant to address each research question for the current study. Information is summarized and developed for explanation and interpretation of the research findings.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

The purpose of the current dissertation study was to examine the self-reported experiences of same-sex parents of school-age children, specifically, investigating experiences with discrimination and inclusion in their children's schools. The participants for the study included five families with same-sex parents (N=5) and two families with opposite-sex parents (N=2). The researcher only recruited participants from the same school district, which is home to over 24,000 middle-school age students. The participants each had at least one child enrolled at a single middle school in the district. At least one parent from each family was present for all three rounds of interviews, whether in person or by telephone.

The first portion of this chapter will focus on data analysis and findings. First, the researcher breaks down in vivo coding across each round of interviews among the families with same-sex parents. The results of in vivo coding are broken down across each round of interviews and codes are reported accordingly. The results of in vivo coding provided a foundation for phenomenological reduction to occur.

Second, the researcher breaks down each round of phenomenological reduction across interviews. Within the phenomenological reduction process, the researcher reports the data that emerged from each round of bracketing. The researcher included statements that were bracketed across each round of interviews. The researcher also reported the horizons that emerged from each round of horizontalizing. Each of the themes that emerged from phenomenological reduction directly address the research questions for the current study.

For imaginative variation, the researcher reports the descriptions of experiences among participants. To properly address imaginative variation, the researcher breaks down the themes that emerged and how they address the research questions for the current study. The researcher provides descriptions of the described experiences of research participants. Finally, the researcher presents the synthesis of findings across participants. The researcher explains the larger meanings of the research findings. The synthesis of findings is broken down by each research question for the current study. Each section addresses each research question for the current study individually.

The later portion of this chapter will specifically address research questions. Research question findings are broken down into four sections based on the research questions of the current study: 1) Same-sex parents within school culture: How do same-sex parents engage in the school culture?, 2) Same-sex parents' experiences with discrimination: How do same-sex parents describe their experiences with discrimination in schools?, 3) Same-sex parents' experiences with inclusion: How inclusive are schools for families with same-sex parents?, and 4) School-based policies to support same-sex parents: What policies, that same-sex parents are aware of, are in place in schools to support same-sex parents?

## **Data Analysis and Findings**

### **In Vivo Coding**

For the purposes of dissertation data analysis, the researcher employed in vivo coding to further understand and describe the interview text. In vivo coding has also been labeled “literal coding” or “verbatim coding” (Saldana, 2013, p. 91). In vivo coding does not employ a single pattern or strategy when analyzing the data. Rather, it is used when information within the text stands out or needs to be further examined.

For the current dissertation study, in vivo coding was used to understand participant’s experiences in schools. In vivo coding occurred across participants’ interview transcripts individually and for each round of interviews. For each round of interviews, in vivo codes were generally applied for every three to five sentences (Saldana, 2015). Codes were generated and applied based on the responses of participants in each round of interviews. If anything in the interview text proved to be significant, the researcher applied a code in the interview text.

**Significant codes for first interviews.** After the first round of interviews were complete, the researcher hand transcribed each of the participant interview transcripts. The goal of the first round of interviews was to gain the major general descriptions related to inclusion and discrimination among participants. The researcher re-read statements comprehensively to identify codes. The researcher generally identified in vivo codes every three to five sentences. The researcher placed in vivo codes on significant statements.

In other words, statements that directly addressed inclusion and discrimination were coded, specifically statements that addressed the overall research questions for the current study. The in vivo codes from the first interview ranged in subject area based on participants’ responses. The in vivo codes are listed as they were authentically coded in the interview text. In other words, the significant statements that received codes are listed as the true in vivo code. Specific in vivo codes identified in the first round of interviews are located in table 4.1. Codes are listed in order of interview questions from interview one.

Table 4.1.

*Significant In Vivo Codes that emerged from Interview One across Participants*

Significant In Vivo Codes	Interview Responses
<b>Enrollment</b>	“We have two boys. My oldest is in the 9 <sup>th</sup> grade and my youngest in the 7 <sup>th</sup> grade.”

“Together, me and my husband have one son. He is a mess child. But he is in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade.”

“Oh we have two boys. The one at this school is in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade.”

“We have two teenage girls! Our lives are so much fun every single day. My daughter is in the 7<sup>th</sup>

“My daughter is in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. She’s very mature and cultured.”

### **Current Teacher**

“She is just..just caring. I mean just right down to it. You can tell that she takes her job very seriously. She is no pushover by any means but she makes her students and the achievement her priority.”

“Well I have to say that I think my son’s teacher is great. He just has a way of connecting with people. Like...scary good manners and social skills. He’s very educated himself and I think he just gets it.”

“Oh my son’s teacher is literally so chill. She has never given us any problems with him. She is very respectful and she is always that way. She is ultra-liberal and progressive.”

“She is a warm-hearted person. Like really, if I send an email in the morning about something...I usually have an answer by the afternoon. She’s on top of things and is really careful about her approach with parents.”

“Her teacher is great. She graduated from a prestigious institution close by. She’s very professional and organized. We’ve always felt that she approached us with respect first and as my daughter’s parents second.”

## **Positive Experiences**

“Oh yeah...we’ve had positive experiences in the school..I mean the school is very focused on learning and achievement.”

“You know we never had issues in the school. We have not experienced anything but positive, supportive people in the school. They’ve been great.”

“We’ve always had good experiences in this district...everyone has been really about the kids...”

“Everybody is so nice here....they really are very accepting of us...We are both involved a lot in the school and it’s never been anything.”

“We were handled so politely...never had any trouble with anyone in the school...they focus the energy on the kids and learning.”

## **Welcoming**

“The school is inviting to parents really...Like they really encourage the parents to participate. They have something for all of the parents to do..”

“They really do include families into just about everything in the school. I know I was a traffic person for them. Everybody is nice and they always speak when they see us. We’re known as my son’s dads.”

## Volunteer

“...you know I volunteer in the school and It’s never been weird or anything. The teachers treat us just like they would any other parent. Very hospitable environment.”

“People don’t blink at us. The school staff members just seem to be glad they have involved parents... everyone in the school has been great to our family.”

“I’m not enrolled in PTO but I am involved in like a volunteer organization for the parents and teachers. We do monthly things at the school. A lot of it turns into us venting about our kids or work (laughs).”

“I think the culture over here is different in that way. I volunteer in an organization here to help out the teachers. So I’m in the school often and it’s never weird. The teachers and staff treat me like any other parent in the school.”

“We both volunteer at the school. We pretty much know everybody and they know us. If we’re in an after school event and somebody needs something, they’ll holler at one of us just like they would any of the other parents. We honestly get treated no different. Ann, my wife, taught Yoga classes out there last year and we’ve had no issues at all.”

“We all chip in and volunteer throughout the school. Like making copies, baking desserts, field trips...you name it. We are all expected to model the good

behaviors for the kids and I think it works the way they do things here.”

“We both go on field trips and we’ll volunteer for the bigger stuff. Most of the parents in the school are involved in some capacity. It’s just the nature of the school..”

## **Planned Activities**

“The school does a lot of different things to include the parents. They do a workshop every year on including parents. It (parental involvement) is a priority out there.

“The school honestly does too much sometimes. I mean we’re busy already and they probably have something every week. Sometimes it can be a bit much. But it is about the kids, so we go. Me and my husband rotate on who goes. They really include parents in everything and they are always doing stuff with us (parents).”

“They start with us early in the year. They usually do the workshop for parents and they tell everyone then...hey y’all we need your help to keep this ship floating.”

“We all make it work together. There are some parents that are obviously more involved than others you know. But the school has something for every parent to do.”

“We were on the social committee at the school at one time and it was a lot of work. I mean we were probably up there several times a week. Now, we just go and it’s still great. It’s probably even better now that we

## Negative Experiences

don't have to plan anything (laughs). Seriously though, they do just about everything to include families."

"We've had no trouble at all with anyone in the school. Not the principal or any of the teachers but.. you know because we're in the PTO and Carol will volunteer from time to time in the school with other parents. And we got the sideways glances or looks from some of them. Like what? Oh they must be together? But that hasn't stopped anyone in the school from inviting us to do stuff."

"Truthfully, I can't say that I've ever had an experience with discrimination in that school. Never. Other parents may look but even they don't say anything or treat us badly. I think of the place as a "come as you are" but within obvious boundaries."

"I mean the worst places for discrimination for us have been church. I mean from the minute I walk in..it's you're going hell for your lifestyle. Lord, the thought of even bringing my family in there scares me honestly."

"We have found some people looking at us...but really what we found is some people care but most don't. Of course, we get more tension or resistance in places like church...(laughs) but that I...uh...guess is really to be expected? You know...I mean we are in the bible belt and we knew that population wouldn't necessary welcome us with open arms."

“Of course, we worried about what other kids would say to our daughter. We were worried about how other parents would treat us...you know...would they let their kids come over? What would they think of me? You know...since I’m divorced from another woman? But you know...what we have found is that no really cares because they see us. They see how committed we are as a parents and they see that we both love each other like any other couple or any other mom and dad...the teachers and administrators don’t even blink. They never have anything negative to say. They are accepting.”

### **School Leadership**

“She (principal) wouldn’t allow any of that stuff out there. She’s very professional and she expects the same of her staff. They are all dressed in that way too.”

“The administration in that school is tip top. I mean you know the saying. You get the bang for your buck. She is the bang in the buck. She’s like a matriarch in the school.”

“The principal is instrumental in protecting the same-sex parents in the school. I mean I don’t think she’d be okay with stuff like that going on in the school..you know?”

“I think the education level of the people at the school really matters honestly. They really just understand the role of the parents and what we have to bring. Most of the parents in the school have lots of money. They just wouldn’t go for anything.”

## Outlines Expectations

“They make it known early on that the school is culturally-open. They do this thing for the parents at the workshop. It’s like a group exercise to get to know other parents and we all share tips, strategies to help. They make everything about the kids.”

“The school does this workshop about this stuff, you know like feeling included, at the beginning of the year too. They cover a lot of information about the culture in the school for the kids and the parents. The principal makes an effort to really make sure it spreads throughout the school...like the positivity part for everyone.”

“They do a workshop with the parents early in the school year. They really focus on creating a good environment for the kids. It really couldn’t be any better for us...we feel very included in everything.”

“They use a positive behavior model in the schools. They do a workshop every year in the beginning, around August. It basically gets all of the parents involved within the school. They tell us that anyone can join and be active.”

“The school does a really good job making sure parents are aware of how things in the school work...you know? Like in the workshop they talk about the school wide system that they use. We get information on how we can contribute.”

**Significant codes for second interviews.** After the second round of interviews were complete, the researcher re-read all statements comprehensively and applied in vivo codes to the responses within the interview text. The second round of in vivo codes were developed after the researcher comprehensively re-read the second interview transcript for each individual research participant. The goal of the second round of interviews was to identify specific occurrences with discrimination and inclusion. Participants did not report specific experiences with discrimination so most of the second interview focused on the qualities that make the middle school inclusive and free of discrimination. The researcher re-read statements comprehensively to identify codes. The researcher generally identified in vivo codes every three to five sentences. The researcher placed in vivo codes on significant statements within the interview texts. Specific in vivo codes identified in the second round of interviews are located in figure 4.2.

Table 4.2.

*Significant In Vivo Codes that emerged from Interview Two across Participants*

Significant In Vivo Codes	Interview Responses
<b>School Leadership</b>	<p>“The principal has ties to members of the gay community. Her view is very progressive and open. She wants to connect with the parents and teachers.... The culture in the school happens because of her and no one would argue with that.”</p> <p>“The principal here has personal connections and she is connected to someone or a person that is pretty well known and she just so happens to be a same-sex parent herself. I think the culture over here is different in that way...she tends to have more of a diplomatic way about her.”</p>

“Uh...I think we got lucky for real. Like I really believe I got really fortunate in that I was able to connect with the folks here at the school. The principal is the main one in charge of that. She has no tolerance for hate or anyone messing with those kids. She keeps everybody in line, including the parents.”

“I know the principal does a behavioral system that involves parents. They usually do it at the beginning of the year and she did it this year. I think she really keeps everything in line and keeps everybody on the same goal. She’s created an environment of professionalism and acceptance.”

“The principal and everybody is so inviting. They really do establish relationships with the parents. Like early on...the principal is very down to earth but firm...hard to explain it but she’s just able to reach people.”

## **Other Parents**

“The other parents in the school have been fabulous to work with. I mean we have several of our close friends with kids in this school too. Everyone is pretty open-minded. At the end of the day, we all work together to help the school and the kids.”

“Hmm..I’ve had good experiences working with other parents. We all work together to support the teachers and our children. I mean I’m not best friends with every parent in the school but we have friends with kids in the school. Overall, I’d say the other parents in the school are cool to work with.”

## Unnecessary Policy

“They’ve been fine. I haven’t had any issues with anyone. I mean I see and talk to some more than others. But on field trips and school functions everybody is on their best behavior. We want to be good examples for our children.”

“I mean we’ve gotten dirty looks from other parents but honestly it’s really not a big deal. I mean they look and they also speak. I don’t want to make it a big deal because the other parents really are great in the school.”

“Working with the other parents? Well it’s been fine. I suppose. I mean we pretty much sit and vent about life when we’re all together (laughs) volunteering. Seriously though, it’s been fine. They know that we are committed parents and we want the best for our family.”

“(Laughs) My husband calls it the little Hogwarts school but I don’t know. Everybody is just so nice and we’ve never had a bad experience. I don’t think they would need a policy like that there. Maybe other schools in the district need that but not us. Everyone is really focused on the kids.”

“You know I’m not sure if they have one or not. But honestly I don’t think a formal policy is necessary out there. If the trend keeps going the way it has been, then I don’t think they would need a policy of that nature.”

“I know they really try here, like purposely try to make sure this is a

place free from discrimination. They have so many ways for parents to connect with the teachers here. I mean the PTO is able to fund positions within the school. So they really value the presence of parents here. Sorry I can talk all day (laughs)...I don't know of any specific rules in the school for same-sex parents. But honestly, I'm not sure I would want that or if that would really change anything here. The principal here is really good and she's very accessible via email or even in person. I feel like if any problems were to arise, she'd be the first one to address it head on. She's created that type of culture there.

"I don't believe they have anything like that... I think she really keeps everything in line and keeps everybody on the same goal...otherwise, I don't see it being needed if they do have it."

### **Openness for Communication**

"Well they really encourage the parents and teachers to communicate frequently. They have set it up so that we can access information whenever we need it. It's still a work in progress but it's a really headed in the right direction. They also really encourage that communication partnership early on in the school year between parents and teachers."

"It (the workshop) each year is always so popular because it is so open. I mean across the board. Everyone in the school is all hands on. We are doing team work, asking questions, laughing..uh..it's more like we're talking and learning from

experts and they're talking and learning from us about our son."

"The content. Hands down. They do it in a way that is engaging and fun. I don't know how they do it with all of us stuffy adults but...they do. We all talk and share ideas. I mean I think we all leave feeling more excited about the school."

"Oh..well I'd have to say the speakers. Every year they have the best speakers. I mean like really really good and funny. We get into groups and talk a lot too. It's a few hours long but it really never has been boring."

"The workshop..um..I would say it's the format. They make it really easy to communicate with the teachers and other parents. The food is always good too. It runs smooth. You really get a chance to talk with the other parents and teachers."

### **Applicable Information**

"What sort of information do they discuss during the workshop? Gosh..so much..they discuss cultural excursions, opportunities for the parents to volunteer, other parent opportunities, group exercises..I mean a lot of information but the main point of everything in the workshop is to help bridge gaps between the parents and teachers."

"They talk about a lot of things that may arise in the school. Like volunteer opportunities, stuff with the PTO, they talk about the communication portal for parents and teachers. The information all

goes back to the grades, the scores, and the well being of the kids”

“Well they really cover a number of things. They talk about the structure of the school, the practices within the school, like relationships and being an example for the students. They talk about the teaching methods, the scoring system, testing ...really a lot of information to keep us informed.

“Um..well they cover information on different topics. Some of the topics are geared toward the teachers and some are geared toward the parents. It really all goes back to the achievement of the kids.”

“Well honestly they talk about so much. I mean they discuss the school volunteer opportunities, the PTO, the teachers do a little spill...It really helps the parents understand the culture of the school. Most of the families in this school have been intentional about their kids coming here and the workshop almost sets the tone for why...”

**Significant codes for third interviews.** After the third round of interviews were complete, the researcher re-read all statements comprehensively and applied in vivo codes to the responses within the interview text. The third round of in vivo codes were developed after the researcher comprehensively re-read the third interview transcript for each individual research participant. The goal of the third round of interviews was to identify major interactions with teachers and administrators. The researcher re-read statements comprehensively to identify codes. The researcher generally identified in vivo codes every three to five sentences.

The researcher identified in vivo codes from the third interviews after re-reading the text and identifying significant responses. The researcher reports the significant in vivo codes developed and applied during the third round of interviews in Figure 4.3.

Table 4.3.

*Significant In Vivo Codes that emerged from Interview Three across Participants*

Significant In Vivo Codes	Interview Responses
<b>Morning Greeting</b>	<p>“The principal is outside every morning speaking to all of the students and parents as we drop our kids off. She stands at the front door during dismissal to ensure everything is running right.”</p> <p>“I probably interact with her a few times a week. She usually does the morning greeting for the car line. She is pretty friendly and animated at times. The kids like her.”</p> <p>“I usually see her in the mornings and if my son has a meeting or something at the school...I see her around. She always talks to us and says hello.”</p> <p>“I probably see her every morning in the car line or just about every morning. We probably talk or socially engage about 2-3 times a month. Usually when I’m down there to volunteer or something. She’s cool. I mean she’s firm but easy going. I think she realizes that she works with middle-schoolers but she can hold her own with these educated parents out here.”</p> <p>“I see her a few times a month. I definitely see her when I drop off my daughter some mornings. My</p>

## **Academic Achievement**

daughter has also told me that she hangs out in the school in different places. We've never had a bad interaction with her."

"You know the school really focuses a lot of energy on student achievement. That is the priority there. The kids and the test scores really drive everything in the school. For years, they've been a higher performing school in the district."

"The school is so successful because they place so much energy on academic achievement. I mean everything in that school is devoted to the learning of the kids. The yoga classes, the workshops...it is all about the kids and their future."

"I would say the focus on learning in the school makes it successful. I mean the parents, teachers, and everybody do this every day for the future of our children. I think the population here really take it seriously too."

"I think they use almost a business model to approach education. They have teams designated to working with my daughter in the classroom. Like they have coaches to help with academic subjects and people working all ends to make sure the kids are able to learn."

"Well this school is known throughout the district because of the teachers honestly. The teachers are committed to teaching and doing a good job. They've had a few teachers win teacher of the year for the district. Learning is the top priority for the teachers and staff members."

## **Testimonial**

“I would say to any parent that first be prepared for the admissions process! Then, I’d say be prepared to experience a school environment like no other. Be prepared to be a real part of your child’s learning and growth.”

“Uh..probably just talk with them about the emphasis on academics and learning. I’d also share my good experiences with my son’s teacher and the administrators. All parents in the district want their kid to come to this middle school for a reason.”

“I would tell them to be prepared to learn more than ever. You’ll be learning along with your child. Each step of the way and the journey. The staff and teachers are awesome to work with. I can’t ever imagine a parent having a difficult time in this school.”

“Come on! This school is an open door school. No one will care about your sexual orientation or your family. They are open minded, progressive. It is really liberal.”

“I’d encourage them to enroll their child here. I mean the school is one of the higher performing ones in the district. The teachers and everyone is committed to education. There really is nowhere better for a child to be. My daughter has had a great experience”

## **Phenomenological Reduction**

In the phenomenological reduction process, the researcher engaged in the two sub-steps, bracketing and horizontalizing, to develop overall themes for the study. The phenomenological reduction process lead to the emerging of horizons or overall themes from the data. The overall

themes identified were based on the responses of participants within each interview and each round of interviews. The four major themes of this study were identified through phenomenological reduction. Each theme addresses specific research questions. Later sections within this chapter will discuss themes and research questions.

**Bracketing**

The researcher bracketed major focus areas, inclusion and discrimination, for the study. Specifically, the researcher bracketed major focus areas and their functions across settings. Bracketing occurred after initial in vivo codes were identified across all interview texts. After each interview, the researcher bracketed major focus areas to identify significant statements in the text.

**First round.** The first round of bracketing looked at in vivo codes comprehensively. The researcher re-read statements and codes several times. The first round of bracketing occurred after the first round of interviews were complete. The first round of bracketing looked for major general descriptions related to the experiences of same-sex parents, specifically as it relates to inclusion and discrimination. Table 4.4. outlines the bracketed data from the first round.

Table 4.4.

*First round of Bracketing: Major General Descriptions of Inclusion and Discrimination*

Bracketed Data	Supporting Responses
<b>Positive Experiences</b>	<p>“Oh yeah...we’ve had positive experiences in the school..I mean the school is very focused on learning and achievement.”</p> <p>“You know we never had issues in the school. We have not experienced anything but positive, supportive people in the school. They’ve been great.”</p>

## Welcoming

“We’ve always had good experiences in this district...everyone has been really about the kids...”

“Everybody is so nice here....they really are very accepting of us...We are both involved a lot in the school and it’s never been anything.”

“We were handled so politely...never had any trouble with anyone in the school...they focus the energy on the kids and learning.”

“The school is inviting to parents really...Like they really encourage the parents to participate. They have something for all of the parents to do..”

“They really do include families into just about everything in the school. I know I was a traffic person for them. Everybody is nice and they always speak when they see us. We’re known as my son’s dads.”

“...you know I volunteer in the school and It’s never been weird or anything. The teachers treat us just like they would any other parent. Very hospitable environment.”

“People don’t blink at us. The school staff members just seem to be glad they have involved parents... everyone in the school has been great to our family.”

**Second round.** The second round of bracketing looked at in vivo codes comprehensively. The researcher re-read statements and codes several times. The second round of bracketing

occurred after the second round of interviews were complete. The second round of bracketing looked for specific occurrences with inclusion and discrimination across research participants.

Table 4.5. outlines bracketed data from the second round.

Table 4.5.

*Second round of Bracketing: Specific Occurrences with Inclusion and Discrimination*

Bracketed Data	Supporting Responses
<b>School Leadership</b>	<p>“The principal has ties to members of the gay community. Her view is very progressive and open. She wants to connect with the parents and teachers.... The culture in the school happens because of her and no one would argue with that.”</p> <p>“An administrator here has a family member that is pretty well known and she just so happens to be a same-sex parent herself. I think the culture over here is different in that way...she tends to have more of a diplomatic way about her.”</p> <p>“Uh...I think we got lucky for real. Like I really believe I got really fortunate in that I was able to connect with the folks here at the school. The principal is the main one in charge of that. She has no tolerance for hate or anyone messing with those kids. She keeps everybody in line, including the parents.”</p> <p>“I know the principal does a behavioral system that involves parents. They usually do it at the beginning of the year and she did it</p>

## Unnecessary Policy

this year. I think she really keeps everything in line and keeps everybody on the same goal. She's created an environment of professionalism and acceptance."

"The principal and everybody is so inviting. They really do establish relationships with the parents. Like early on...the principal is very down to earth but firm...hard to explain it but she's just able to reach people."

"(Laughs) My husband calls it the little Hogwarts school but I don't know. Everybody is just so nice and we've never had a bad experience. I don't think they would need a policy like that there. Maybe other schools in the district need that but not us. Everyone is really focused on the kids."

"You know I'm not sure if they have one or not. But honestly I don't think a formal policy is necessary out there. If the trend keeps going the way it has been, then I don't think they would need a policy of that nature."

"I know they really try here, like purposely try to make sure this is a place free from discrimination. They have so many ways for parents to connect with the teachers here. I mean the PTO is able to fund positions within the school. So they really value the presence of parents here. Sorry I can talk all day (laughs)...I don't know of any specific rules in the school for same-sex parents. But honestly, I'm not sure I would want that or if that

would really change anything here. The principal here is really good and she's very accessible via email or even in person. I feel like if any problems were to arise, she'd be the first one to address it head on. She's created that type of culture there.

"I don't believe they have anything like that... I think she really keeps everything in line and keeps everybody on the same goal...otherwise, I don't see it being needed if they do have it."

**Third round.** The third round of bracketing looked at in vivo codes comprehensively.

The researcher re-read statements and codes several times. The third round of bracketing occurred after the third round of interviews were complete. The third round of bracketing looked for major experiences and specific interactions with teachers and administrators. Table 4.6 outlines bracketed data from the third round.

Table 4.6.

*Third round of Bracketing: Major Experiences and Specific Interactions with Teachers and Administrators with Inclusion and Discrimination*

Bracketed Data	Supporting Responses
<b>Morning Greeting</b>	<p>"The principal is outside every morning speaking to all of the students and parents as we drop our kids off. She stands at the front door during dismissal to ensure everything is running right."</p> <p>"I probably interact with her a few times a week. She usually does the morning greeting for the car line. She is pretty friendly and animated at times. The kids like her."</p> <p>"I usually see her in the mornings and if my son has a meeting or something at the school...I see her</p>

around. She always talks to us and says hello.”

“I probably see her every morning in the car line or just about every morning. We probably talk or socially engage about 2-3 times a month. Usually when I’m down there to volunteer or something. She’s cool. I mean she’s firm but easy going. I think she realizes that she works with middle-schoolers but she can hold her own with these educated parents out here.”

“I see her a few times a month. I definitely see her when I drop off my daughter some mornings. My daughter has also told me that she hangs out in the school in different places. We’ve never had a bad interaction with her.”

## **Horizontalizing**

After bracketing was completed across three rounds, the researcher engaged in the sub-process of *horizontalizing* to comprehensively engage in the material. *Horizontalizing* sought to identify emerging sub-themes across interview texts. For each round of interviews, the researcher engaged in *horizontalizing* to identify sub-themes across participants. For the current study, the researcher wrote out horizons or sub-themes on a white board for further analysis. The researcher utilized a white board for all individual participants. The white board included bracketed information and experiences and horizons or sub-themes for the development of participant descriptions or themes. The horizons reported directly relate to the research questions of the current study.

**First round of horizontalizing.** The first round of horizontalizing was completed after the first round of interviews concluded. The researcher re-read bracketed information and in vivo

codes from the first round of interviews to identify sub-themes or horizons. The researcher examined the horizons or sub-themes, specifically for the purposes of addressing research questions and goals of the study. Table 4.12. includes horizons that emerged after the first round of interviews.

Table 4.7.

*Emerged Horizons from Interview One*

Emerged Horizons	Interview Responses
<b>Current Teacher</b>	<p>“She is just..just caring. I mean just right down to it. You can tell that she takes her job very seriously. She is no pushover by any means but she makes her students and their achievement her priority.”</p> <p>“Well I have to say that I think my son’s teacher is great. He just has a way of connecting with people. Like...scary good manners and social skills. He’s very educated himself and I think he just gets it.”</p> <p>“Oh my son’s teacher is literally so chill. She has never given us any problems with him. She is very respectful and she is always that way. She is ultra-liberal and progressive.”</p> <p>“She is a warm-hearted person. Like really, if I send an email in the morning about something...I usually have an answer by the afternoon. She’s on top of things and is really careful about her approach with parents.”</p> <p>“Her teacher is great. She graduated from a prestigious institution close by. She’s very professional and</p>

organized. We've always felt that she approached us with respect first and as my daughter's parents second."

**Second round of horizontalizing.** The second round of horizontalizing was completed after the second round of interviews concluded. The researcher re-read bracketed information and in vivo codes from the second round of interviews to identify sub-themes or horizons. The researcher examined the horizons or sub-themes, specifically for the purposes of addressing research questions and goals of the overall study. Table 4.13. includes horizons that emerged after the second round of interviews.

Table 4.8.

*EmergEd Horizons from Interview Two*

EmergEd Horizons	Interview Responses
<b>Other Parents</b>	<p>“The other parents in the school have been fabulous to work with. I mean we have several of our close friends with kids in this school too. Everyone is pretty open-minded. At the end of the day, we all work together to help the school and the kids.”</p> <p>“Hmm..I’ve had good experiences working with other parents. We all work together to support the teachers and our children. I mean I’m not best friends with every parent in the school but we have friends with kids in the school. Overall, I’d say the other parents in the school are cool to work with.”</p> <p>“They’ve been fine. I haven’t had any issues with anyone. I mean I see and talk to some more than others. But on field trips and school</p>

functions everybody is on their best behavior. We want to be good examples for our children.”

“I mean we’ve gotten dirty looks from other parents but honestly it’s really not a big deal. I mean they look and they also speak. I don’t want to make it a big deal because the other parents really are great in the school.”

“Working with the other parents? Well it’s been fine. I suppose. I mean we pretty much sit and vent about life when we’re all together (laughs) volunteering. Seriously though, it’s been fine. They know that we are committed parents and we want the best for our family.”

**Third round of horizontalizing.** The third round of horizontalizing was completed after the third round of interviews concluded. The researcher re-read bracketed information and in vivo codes from the third round of interviews to identify sub-themes or horizons. The researcher examined the horizons or sub-themes, specifically for the purposes of addressing research questions and goals of the overall study. Table 4.14. includes horizons that emerged after the third round of interviews.

Table 4.9.

*Emerged Horizons from Interview Three*

Emerged Horizons	Interview Responses
<b>Academic Achievement</b>	“You know the school really focuses a lot of energy on student achievement. That is the priority there. The kids and the test scores really drive everything in the school. For years, they’ve been a higher performing school in the district.”

“The school is so successful because they place so much energy on academic achievement. I mean everything in that school is devoted to the learning of the kids. The yoga classes, the workshops...it is all about the kids and their future.”

“I would say the focus on learning in the school makes it successful. I mean the parents, teachers, and everybody do this every day for the future of our children. I think the population here really take it seriously too.”

“I think they use almost a business model to approach education. They have teams designated to working with my daughter in the classroom. Like they have coaches to help with academic subjects and people working all ends to make sure the kids are able to learn.”

“Well this school is known throughout the district because of the teachers honestly. The teachers are committed to teaching and doing a good job. They’ve had a few teachers win teacher of the year for the district. Learning is the top priority for the teachers and staff members.”

### **Themes that Emerged from Phenomenological Reduction**

**Theme One.** The first theme that emerged from the study was the Principal. In other words, the principal was cited as being an influential role in facilitating the school culture of inclusiveness, as it relates to the social acceptance of families with same-sex parents. In total, 5 out of 5 same-sex parents of the current middle school stated that the lead principal is responsible

for the positive, inviting school climate within the school. Parents within the school cited her style of leadership and other interpersonal skills as being influential. The content reported for theme one address research question four for the current study.

**Theme Two.** The second theme that emerged from the study was the Enrichment Workshop. All 5 out of 5 of the same-sex parent-participants cited the enrichment workshop as a tool in creating inclusion in the school. Participants indicated that the workshop does a good job outlining expectations for the parents and establishing parent-teacher communication. The content reported for theme two address research question three for the current study.

**Theme Three.** The third theme that emerged from the study was the Positive School Culture. In other words, the positive school culture emerged as an influential tool in creating an environment free of discrimination against same-sex parents. The research participants identified the culture within the school as positive. All 5 out of 5 same-sex parent-participants cited positive experiences, welcoming environment, and the focus on academic achievement as means for creating the positive school culture within the school. The content reported for theme three address research question one for the current study.

**Theme Four.** The fourth theme that emerged from the study was Discrimination. In other words, discrimination emerged as theme within the overall study. All 5 out of 5 of the same-sex parent-participants cited discrimination as a nonexistent problem within the current middle school. Other factors, such as the principal, the enrichment workshop, and the positive school culture contributed to the participants citing nonexistent experiences with discrimination. The content reported for theme four address research question two for the current study.

## **Imaginative Variation**

After the phenomenological reduction process was complete, the researcher engaged in imaginative variation to provide detailed descriptions for the experiences of participants. The researcher engaged in the data by re-reading and developed detailed descriptions for experiences and accounts noted by participants. The imaginative variation process was repeated for each individual interview and for each round of interviews. If data is presented as is, the information may not be understood or the essence of the experience could be missed by second-parties. In other words, the researcher engaged in the imaginative variation process during each round of interviews and for each participant. The descriptions developed during imaginative variation were used to address the four research questions for the study.

## **Positive School Culture**

### ***Research Question 1: How do same-sex parents engage in the school culture?***

Theme three that emerged from the current study was positive school culture. This theme addresses research question one for the current study. In the current study, participants cited positive experiences and the welcoming environment as contributors to the positive school culture. To address research question one for the current study, all 5 out of 5 cited the current middle school as having a positive school culture for same-sex parents. Participants cited the positive experiences they previously had with teachers and administration, along with the welcoming environment as contributors of the positive school culture. Specifically, participants stated:

“We were handled so politely...never had any trouble with anyone in the school...they focus the energy on the kids and learning.”

“The school is inviting to parents really...Like they really encourage the parents to participate. They have something for all of the parents to do..”

“They really do include families into just about everything in the school. I know I was a traffic person for them. Everybody is nice and they always speak when they see us. We’re known as my son’s dads.”

“You know we never had issues in the school. We have not experienced anything but positive, supportive people in the school. They’ve been great.”

“We’ve always had good experiences in this district...everyone has been really about the kids...”

“Everybody is so nice here....they really are very accepting of us...We are both involved a lot in the school and it’s never been anything.”

With all of the research participants highlighting the school’s positive culture, it addresses research question one of the current study. The families with same-sex parents within the current study reported positive social engagement into the school culture. Participant responses cited several factors, such as interactions, opportunities for involvement, and programming as a means for creating a positive school culture for same-sex parents.

## **Discrimination**

### ***Research Question 2: How do same-sex parents describe their experiences with discrimination in schools?***

Theme four that emerged from the current study was discrimination. This theme addresses research question two for the current study. In the current study, participants cited several factors for the absence of discrimination in the school. To address research question two for the current study, all 5 out of 5 of the same-sex parent-participants cited discrimination as a nonexistent problem within the current middle school. Other factors, such as the principal, the enrichment workshop, and the positive school culture contributed to the participants citing nonexistent experiences with discrimination within the middle school site. Specifically, the participants indicated that their experiences with discrimination are non-existent in the school.

“I know they really try here, like purposely try to make sure this is a place free from discrimination. They have so many ways for parents to connect with the teachers here. I mean the PTO is able to fund positions within the school. So they really value the presence of parents here.”

“Truthfully, I can’t say that I’ve ever had an experience with discrimination in that school. Never. Other parents may look but even they don’t say anything or treat us badly. I think of the place as a “come as you are” but within obvious boundaries.”

“I like this school a lot. Everyone is nice and committed to these kids. I’ve been upfront about our family structure and we’ve always had good teachers. They’re always helpful.”

Participants within the current study cited several factors for the lack of discrimination in the current middle school. The school culture, programming, and the school’s leadership were frequently mentioned as reasons for the non-discriminatory school environment.

### **Enrichment Workshop and Inclusion for Families with Same-Sex Parents**

#### ***Research Question 3: How inclusive are schools for families with same-sex parents?***

Theme two that emerged from the current study was enrichment workshop. This theme addresses research question three for the current study. In the current study, participants cited the enrichment workshop as a tool in creating inclusion in the school. To address research question three for the current study, all 5 out of 5 of the same-sex parent-participants cited the enrichment workshop as a tool in creating inclusion in the school. In other words, the same-sex parent-participants in the study thought the current middle school was progressive about creating inclusion for same-sex parents. All 5 of the same-sex parent-participants in the study indicated that the current middle school is inclusive for families with same-sex parents. Specifically, the participants stated:

“The school holds a workshop on keeping the parents involved at the beginning of the year and she makes her position known then. I mean with respect too. I’ve never felt excluded by anyone in the school.”

“They do a workshop every year in the beginning, around August. It basically gets all of the parents involved within the school. They tell us that anyone can join and be active.”

“They talk about parental involvement and including us in all parts of the school. They make it known that this is a culturally-open school. Plus, they do this thing for the parents at the workshop. It’s like a group exercise to get to know other parents and we all share tips, strategies to help.”

All 5 out of 5 of the same-sex parent-participants cited the enrichment workshop as a tool in creating inclusion in the school. The workshop appears to be carefully planned out to incorporate many of the goals of the school. Participants describe the workshop as an enriching experience and all of same-sex parents in the study reported positive responses.

### **Principal and School-Based Policies to Support Same-Sex Parents**

***Research Question 4: What policies, that same-sex parents are aware of, are in place in schools to support same-sex parents?***

Theme one that emerged from the current study was Principal. This theme addresses research question four for the current study. In the current study, participants reported that the principal plays a huge role in facilitating the school culture and inclusiveness, as it relates to the social acceptance of families with same-sex parents. In the current study, 5 out of 5 parents of the current middle school stated that the lead principal is responsible for the positive, inviting school culture within the school. To address research question four for the current study, 4 out of 5 participants thought a policy to support same-sex parents would be unnecessary in the current middle school. In other words, a majority of participants in the current study believed that a policy protecting families with same-sex parents was unnecessary in the middle school site.

Specifically, participants indicated:

“(Laughs) My husband calls it the little Hogwarts school but I don’t know. Everybody is just so nice and we’ve never had a bad experience. I don’t think they would need a policy like that there. Maybe other schools in the district need that but not us. Everyone is really focused on the kids.”

“You know I’m not sure if they have one or not. But honestly I don’t think a formal policy is necessary out there. If the trend keeps going the way it has been, then I don’t think they would need a policy of that nature.”

A majority or 4 out of 5 participants thought a policy to support same-sex parents would be unnecessary in the current middle school. The same-sex parents in the current study indicated that other factors within the school, such as the school leaders, opportunities for parental social inclusion, and school social demographics created an environment supportive of inclusion and intolerance of any exclusionary practices among students or families.

### **Synthesis of Findings**

For the synthesis of findings, the researcher sought to explain larger meanings of the research. In this section, the researcher presents summarized data and research findings across participants. The information and data is reported around the research questions for the current study. To complete synthesis, the researcher was first required to apply in vivo codes to significant statements across interviews. The in vivo codes that were identified across the three rounds of interviews were organized to address the research questions of the current study.

After in vivo codes were identified, the researcher engaged in phenomenological reduction to construct themes to address the research questions of the current study. The themes that emerged from the identified in vivo codes and phenomenological reduction were constructed to provide descriptions in imaginative variation. The descriptions reported within imaginative variation address the emerged themes and the research questions of the current study. Finally, the synthesis section explains the larger meanings of the data. The data includes data collected across interviews and it is reported to address each research question for the current study. All names and identifying information have been changed.

## **Same-Sex Parents within School Culture**

*Research Question 1: How do same-sex parents engage in the school culture?*

Sally, or research participant one, indicated that she believed the school culture was positive for same-sex parents. She credits the principal for creating full inclusion and openness among staff members with families. Anthony, or research participant two, echoed Sally's sentiments and contended that school staff members are more focused on instruction rather than the sexual orientation of parents. He even went on to add that the teacher's go above and beyond to ensure that the students get the educational support they need. Kaleb, or research participant three, added that he and his husband do not feel any different in the school. He added that the principal and other staff members make them feel included and stated that they are treated no different because of their sexual orientation. Ginger, or research participant four, reported that she and her wife volunteer frequently in the school and that they both consider the school culture positive. She stated that a lot of people in the school know them well and they also attend field trips. She went on to add that their experiences with school culture have only been positive. Celine, or research participant five, reinforced the positive school experiences; stating that the school emphasizes student learning and achievement. She went on to say that her family has not experienced negative experiences involving school staff or the administration. Overall, 5 out of 5 participants agreed that the school culture is accepting of families with same-sex parents.

### **Larger Meaning**

The larger meaning of this finding relates to the functions within the school supporting the positive school culture. The current middle school proved to be intentional about placing different roles of supports within the school to create a positive school culture for families with same-sex parents. The research participants in the current study reported engaged, positive

experiences in the school. Not one of the research participants reported a negative, exclusionary experience involving school staff members. Due to the positive experiences reported in the current study, other schools may wish to adapt more research-based strategies for supporting effective home-school collaboration as a means for further supporting families with same-sex parents.

### **Same-Sex Parents' Experiences with Discrimination**

*Research Question 2: How do same-sex parents describe their experiences with discrimination in schools?*

Sally reported that none of her family members have experienced any discrimination in the school. She believed the cultural mixture of the families in the school and affluence played a role in creating an environment free of discrimination. Anthony echoed Sally's sentiments, stating that he believed the progressive population of school staff members and the principal are motivating forces for creating a culture free of discrimination. Kaleb believed that the dedication and determination to the children among school staff plays a key role in creating an environment free of discrimination. Ginger added that she credits the school staff members for the discrimination-free environment. Specifically, she spoke highly of her child's teacher's this year and how she has really embraced them. Celine restated what previous participants had reported. She mentioned that her family had never experienced any discrimination in the school and she reported positive interactions with school staff members. Overall, 5 out of 5 participants did not report any experiences with discrimination based on their familial structure.

### **Larger Meaning**

The larger meaning of this finding is that schools can be free of discrimination for families with same-sex parents. Research participants cited the other factors such as the

principal, the enrichment workshop, and the positive school culture as contributors of the nonexistent experiences with discrimination within the middle school site. This finding reiterates the need for schools to be intentional about creating effective home-school collaboration, other in-school supports for diverse families.

### **Same-Sex Parents' Experiences with Inclusion**

*Research Question 3: How inclusive are schools for families with same-sex parents?*

Sally added that the school does a good job including all families. She and her wife both go on field trips and volunteer at school functions. She went on to credit the principal and the younger teachers in the school for creating a culture of inclusion in the school. Anthony contends that the teachers and the principal are responsible for the culture of inclusion. He mentioned that several of his son's teachers have been over-accommodating to ensure that him and his husband felt welcomed in the school. Kaleb thought that the school was more committed to establishing effective home-school collaboration with parents. He went on to say that he believed their focus and efforts in working with parents is generally centered around establishing effective home-school collaboration. Ginger and her wife moved from a smaller county to ensure their daughters have access to an education free of discrimination. Her family report positive, inclusive experiences in the school. Celine mentioned the opportunities for interactions with people within the school help to create a culture of inclusion. She also mentioned the principal as a key role player in creating inclusiveness in the school. Overall, 5 out of 5 participants reported positive experiences with school inclusion.

### **Larger Meaning**

The larger meaning of this finding is that several roles within the school impact school inclusion. Participants cited the school as a whole but specifically school staff members as the

primary role in creating inclusion. This finding relates to the need for professional development in schools to ensure that school staff members are properly trained to work with same-sex parents.

### **School-Based Policies to Support Same-Sex Parents**

*Research Question 4: What policies, that same-sex parents are aware of, are in place in schools to support same-sex parents?*

Sally believed that the positive behavior supports system was an effective school-based framework for addressing exclusionary behaviors. She mentioned a workshop that the principal conducts each year and the workshop seeks to create a positive school climate. The behavioral model places an emphasis on parental involvement and teacher-parent communication. Anthony did not believe that his son's middle school needed an explicit discrimination policy due to the culture of inclusion that's already been established. He believed the current administration and teachers have created an inclusive environment for same-sex parents. Kaleb believed that a formal discrimination policy for same-sex parents would be unnecessary in the current middle school. He believed that the principal would be the best point of contact if an incident were to occur. Kaleb also appeared to be unsure if he would support such as a policy for same-sex parents, due to a fear of possibly bringing attention to a non-existent problem. Ginger also echoed Kaleb's sentiments, reporting that she didn't believe a specific policy would be necessary in the school. Celine did not mention the need for a school-based policy protecting same-sex parents. She credits the level of education among parents as grounds for better treatment. She also went on to say that the school staff knew that if laws were broken or rights were violated against her family that she would take legal action. The opinions were strong on the importance

of an explicit policy protecting same-sex parents. All 5 out of 5 of the same-sex parent-participants cited discrimination as a nonexistent problem within the current middle school.

### **Larger Meaning**

The larger meaning of this finding is that same-sex parents did not endorse the need for a formal policy protecting them within the school. Other factors, such as the principal, the enrichment workshop, and the positive school culture contributed to the participants citing nonexistent experiences with discrimination within the middle school site. Only one of the research participants in the current study reported knowledge of a formal policy against discrimination. However, 5 out of 5 of the same-sex parent-participants cited discrimination as a nonexistent problem within the current middle school. The parents in the study were hesitant to endorse the need for a formal anti-discrimination policy specifically for families with same-sex parents.

### **Negative Case Analysis**

The researcher included families with opposite-sex parents to compare the experiences of the families with same-sex parents. The negative case analysis of the current study sought to ensure validity and reliability in the current study. The first negative case family reported that the level of education among parents, the school administration, the focus on learning, and professionalism as positive factors in their experiences. The second negative case family noted that the school staff members, the school structure on inclusion, and the focus on achievement as influences on their experiences within the middle school. The families in the negative case analysis generally reported positive experiences in the current middle school. Both families reported similar experiences to that of the families with opposite-sex parents. Specific details

related to the research participants' in the negative case analysis are located in Appendix R. The information is organized based on identified themes within interviews.

### **Summary**

Chapter four covered key findings obtained from in-depth interviews across seven research participants. The researcher conducted a total of 21 interviews, either by telephone or in local library conference rooms. The researcher utilized in vivo codes, and the themes and descriptions identified during phenomenological reduction to develop interview questions. The researcher utilized a white board for analysis across all individual participants. The researcher engaged in imaginative variation to develop detailed descriptions for the experiences of participants. The researcher explained the larger meanings of the research in the synthesis section. The researcher presented findings and research questions for the study. In chapter 5, the researcher will summarize and discuss these findings and their implications for school psychology.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on previous research, same-sex couples nationwide are choosing to become parents. At some point, their children will be enrolled in school and need to navigate their way within a school setting. Same-sex parents must interact and collaborate with school personnel within their child's school at some point. Therefore, it is important to ensure that school environments are inclusive and free of discrimination for same-sex parents. Research suggests that many same-sex parents and their children utilize "secrecy" to navigate school environments. However, legitimate home-school collaboration requires comfortable, nondiscriminatory communication between parents and school personnel (Goldberg & Smith, 2014).

Same-sex parents, like all parents, serve as vital information sources for school personnel when working with children of families with same-sex parents. Therefore, it is important that communication between parties is respectful and the school environment is inclusive for same-sex parents. To identify barriers for school inclusion and to eliminate school-based discrimination, it is important to understand specific experiences of same-sex parents within schools.

The current dissertation study was designed to examine the experiences of same-sex parents, specifically their experiences with discrimination and inclusion within schools. The current dissertation study sought out to examine the experiences of same-sex parents from a first-hand perspective or a qualitative research approach, specifically a phenomenological method of

data collection. Current research literature has revealed the negative school experiences of children of families with same-sex parents, however, research on same-sex parents in schools is limited (Jeltova & Fish, 2005; Goldberg & Smith, 2014). Therefore, the current dissertation study sought to contribute to the current research base on same-sex parents in schools.

### **Dissertation Purpose**

The purpose of the current dissertation study was to examine the self-reported experiences of same-sex parents of school-age children, specifically, investigating experiences with discrimination and inclusion in their children's schools. Previous research has identified some of the negative school experiences that same-sex parents and their children face within schools. Research literature has also exposed the culture of heteronormativity that currently exists within many schools (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010), thus creating an environment of exclusion for some families with same-sex parents.

This dissertation study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design to examine specific experiences with discrimination and inclusion within schools for same-sex parents. According to Savin-Baden and Major (2013), the phenomenological research design is designed to “not only uncover an individual's experience but also how they experience the phenomenon” (p. 215). Data was collected in three rounds of in-depth interviews, and across five families with same-sex parents and two families with opposite-sex parents, all of whom have a child of middle school age. Interviews were conducted to address the research questions of the current study. The goals of each round of interviews were established to provide structure for the data. In other words, the interview goals were constructed to organize and analyze the data to address research questions for the current study. Interviews were conducted in local library

conference rooms and/or by telephone. Data collection spanned over the course of five months from October 2016-February 2017 with three rounds of interviews across participants.

For the current dissertation study, the researcher chose one middle school in an urban area. The middle school is home to over 700 students and serves grades 5-8. In the middle school, the final sample of research participants were selected on a first-come, first-identified basis. As participants were selected and deemed eligible through telephone call, the researcher determined eligibility and made selections on an individual, first-identified basis. The researcher included five families with same-sex parents (N=5) and two families with opposite-sex parents (N=2) in the present study. The current study sought to examine the experiences of same-sex parents with school-age children, specifically looking at their experiences with inclusion and discrimination. The researcher included two families with opposite-sex parents to further examine the general school experiences across all families in schools. The two families with opposite-sex parents served as a negative case analysis for the entire study.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the researcher utilized a semi-structured interviewing approach to conduct in-depth interviews. The researcher interviewed five families with same-sex parents and two families with opposite-sex parents over the course of three rounds of interviews for a total of 21 interviews. All interviews were audio recorded using a digital recorder and a tape recorder as a backup. All audio recordings and transcripts of interviews are stored in password protected documents. The researcher utilized a white board for data analysis and a word document for typing interview questions for all individual participants. The white board included bracketed information and experiences and horizons or sub-themes for the development of subsequent interview questions. Subsequent follow-up interview questions were

developed based on the responses of individuals in interviews through in vivo codes and phenomenological reduction.

For the current dissertation study, the researcher received institutional approval from the University of Alabama Office of Research Compliance on September 20, 2016. No other permissions were needed. The final chapter of this study will be presented as (a) research questions, (b) summary of findings for each research question, (c) summary of themes, (d) discussion of results, (e) limitations of the study, (f) implications of the study for research, and (g) implications of the study for applied practice in schools.

### **Research Questions**

*How do same-sex parents engage in the school culture?*

*How do same-sex parents describe their experiences with discrimination in schools?*

*How inclusive are schools for families with same-sex parents?*

*What policies, that same-sex parents are aware of, are in place in schools to support same-sex parents?*

### **Summary of Findings**

#### **Same-Sex Parents within School Culture**

##### **Research Question 1: How do same-sex parents engage in the school culture?**

The first research question for the current study was constructed to examine the culture in schools among same-sex parents. The findings of the current dissertation study challenge previous research literature on schools being largely heteronormative (Depalma & Atkinson, 2010), and same-sex parents reporting feeling excluded, neglected, and even mistreated by other members of their school communities, especially by other parents (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). Several of the parents in the current study did cite that other parents have made them

uncomfortable with certain looks and glances that they may have received. However, none of the participants in the current study reported any incidents of exclusion, negative treatment, or any issues with negative school culture. All 5 same-sex parent research participants agreed that the school culture is accepting, engaging for all families in the school. To support the school culture described in participant interviews, the researcher included codes that participants in the current study reported. The following in vivo codes were reported among participants related to the school culture: outlines expectations, positive experiences, welcoming, and openness.

### **Same-Sex Parents' Experiences with Discrimination**

#### **Research Question 2: How do same-sex parents describe their experiences with discrimination?**

The second research question for the current study sought to address the previous research findings on same-sex parents and their experiences with discrimination. Depalma and Atkinson (2010) found that schools fail to address crucial areas of inequality and discrimination because the overarching culture of heterosexism in schools creates a sense normalcy or maintains historical practices with little external disruption. Oftentimes, discrimination in schools goes unnoticed because schools inadvertently reinforce heterosexual norms and further reinforce invisibility among lesbian women and gay men (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009). None (5 out of 5) of the same-sex parents in the current study reported any experiences with discrimination in the middle school site. To specifically examine the data supporting the experiences of same-sex parents with discrimination, the researcher examined in vivo codes from participant interviews. The following in vivo codes were grouped together to support the lack of discrimination described by the research participants: supportive of parental involvement, other parents, church, 2016 presidential election, wealth, level of education, and positivity. The parents in the study

cited both internal and external influences as contributing factors for their limited experiences with discrimination.

### **Same-Sex Parents' Experiences with Inclusion**

#### **Research Question 3: How inclusive are schools for families with same-sex parents?**

The third research question examined previous research literature on negative school experiences among same-sex parents. Kosciw and Diaz (2008) found that same-sex parents reported feeling excluded from school communities. Additionally, Ray and Gregory (2001) found that over 62 percent of same-sex parents were concerned that school curriculum would not include or acknowledge families with same-sex parents. All (5 out of 5) same-sex parent research participants from the current study reported positive experiences with school inclusion in their child's middle school. In fact, every participant believed the school was doing a great job at including parents in a variety of settings and roles in the school. All 5 out of 5 of the same-sex parent research participants in the current study reported that they had either volunteered at least once at school, attended at least one function held outside of school hours, or attended at least one field trip this school year. Each research participant reported inclusive experiences across all settings and among different populations of parents and staff members in the school. The following codes specifically identify the experiences of research participants: family friendly, welcoming, supportive of parental involvement, and outlines expectations. The parents in the study reported varying levels of involvement within the middle school. Their social involvement could have influenced their views or perceptions of experiences and possibly made them appear more positive.

## **School-Based Policies to Support Same-Sex Parents**

### **Research Question 4: What policies, that same-sex parents are aware of, are in place in schools to support same-sex parents?**

The fourth research question sought to examine previous research findings on the lack of clear policies protecting same-sex parents in schools. Bliss and Harris (1999) found that teachers reported that their respective schools did not have clear policies for working with or supporting families with same-sex parents. In addition, DePalma and Atkinson (2010) found that current school policies do not fully address institutional discrimination. Rivers et al. (2008) found that schools must implement more policies to prevent discrimination and homophobia against children of families with same-sex parents and same-sex parents. In the current dissertation study, none of the participants indicated an exact knowledge of a school-based policy that protects same-sex parents. However, several of the participants (4 out of 5 of the same-sex parent-participants) indicated that they didn't believe a policy specifically for same-sex parents would be necessary. The only same-sex parent participant that did not indicate any feelings toward the policy reported that she was happy with the systems and supports that are already in place in the school. The following in vivo codes were identified to address research question four: unnecessary policy and testimonial. Data supporting the existence of policies to support same-sex parents is limited, even in the current study. However, several of the same-sex parents in the current study indicated that a specific policy was unnecessary.

### **Summary of Themes**

The current dissertation study examined the self-reported experiences of same-sex parents of school-age children, specifically, investigating experiences with discrimination and inclusion in their child's school. In conducting data analysis, four major themes emerged from

the phenomenological reduction data across all participants. The first major theme that emerged was the School Principal. All (5 out of 5) of the parents in the current study cited the principal as a major role in creating positive culture in the middle school. Parents cited the following characteristics or sub-themes that emerged about the principal: school leadership, responsive in communication, openness, progressive views, demeanor, friendliness, professionalism, knowledge of education structure/laws, rapport with teachers and parents, and her dedication to student achievement.

The second major theme that emerged from the data was the Enrichment Workshop that the school conducts at the beginning of each academic year. All 5 out of 5 the same-sex parent-participants cited the workshop as a tool in creating inclusion in the school. Based on participant reports, the workshop occurs at the beginning of each academic year across grade levels. The workshop involves team building activities, information on SWPBIS, teacher introductions, and the parents break off into group activities. It serves as a bridge to support home-school collaboration and the school brings in leaders across the district to discuss a variety of topics. The parents in the study report that the workshop is mandatory after the admissions acceptance process is complete. Parents cited the following characteristics or in vivo codes that make the workshop effective: openness for communication, supportive of parental involvement, positive interactions, outlines expectations, modeling good behaviors, and applicable information.

The third major theme that emerged from the data was Positive School Culture. All 5 out of 5 same-sex parent-participants cited the current middle school as having a positive school culture for same-sex parents. Participants cited the positive experiences they previously had with teachers and administration, along with the welcoming environment as contributors of the

positive school culture. Parents cited the following codes related to school culture: positive, welcoming, current teacher, and family friendly.

The fourth major theme that emerged from the data was discrimination. All 5 out of 5 of the same-sex parent-participants cited discrimination as a nonexistent problem within the current middle school. Other factors, such as the principal, the enrichment workshop, and the positive school culture contributed to the participants citing nonexistent experiences with discrimination within the middle school site. Parents cited the following codes: respectful, 2016 presidential election, education, and church.

### **Discussion of Results**

The major purpose of the current dissertation study was to investigate previous research findings that indicate clear mistreatment or discrimination against families with same-sex parents (Depalma & Atkinson, 2010; Kozik-Rosabal, 2000; Chesir-Teran and Hughes, 2009). This study sought to investigate any discriminatory or exclusionary practices that may impact same-sex parents in schools. The study examined the experiences of families with opposite-sex parents for a negative case analysis. The findings in this current middle school did not yield expected negative results or experiences among parents. All participants in the study reported positive experiences overall and they also did not report any negative experiences involving their children. Additionally, the families in the negative case analysis generally reported positive experiences in the current middle school. Both families reported similar experiences to that of the families with opposite-sex parents.

### **Role of Principal**

In the current study, participants reported that the principal plays a huge role in facilitating the school culture of inclusiveness, as it relates to the social acceptance of families

with same-sex parents. 5 out of 5 parents of the current middle school stated that the lead principal is responsible for the positive, inviting school culture within the school. This finding supports current research literature on the effective role of the principal. McKinney, Labat, and Labat (2015) found that an effective principal will set the tone and create a culture for which teaching, learning, and inclusion occurs in schools. Their study examined key attributes of principals across award winning schools. They found that successful principals maintained good relationships with teachers, aimed to keep morale high, and maintained positive rapport throughout the school. The participants in the current dissertation study indicated similar characteristics in the principal of the middle school site. A conclusion that can be assumed is that an effective principal can be influential in contributing to a positive school culture with social inclusion for school staff and families.

### **Role of Enrichment Workshop**

All 5 out of 5 of the same-sex parent-participants cited the Enrichment Workshop as a tool in creating inclusion in the school. The workshop is led by the administrators of the school and it involves leaders throughout the district for assistance with certain areas (ex. trauma specialists provide information on trauma response and/or crisis management). The parents that reported the workshop as significant in creating inclusion also provided several characteristics in proving its effectiveness, such as openness for communication, supportive of parental involvement, personalized, positive interactions, outlines expectations of parents and teachers, modeling good behaviors for the children, and information is applicable to them. Portwood and Schoeneberger (2015) examined the effectiveness of a parent university program in creating parental engagement among 862 surveyed parents. Their results found that providing formal parent-teacher collaboration in the form of course offerings, workshops or symposia are effective

at gaining parent engagement, particularly among those who may have been under-served previously. The findings of the current study support the belief that schools should be intentional about creating environments for parents and teachers to collaborate and communicate, and it is influential in creating an environment of inclusion for parents.

A conclusion to be assumed from this finding is that schools that intentionally forge parent-teacher collaboration and communication may nurture more parental engagement across all family structures, including families with same-sex parents. Georgis, Gokiert, Ford, & Ali (2014) found that schools can create more inclusive environments through collaboration with parents or parental engagement. It is important to note that their study mostly examined refugee families (Georgis et al., 2014), however the results are applicable across all types of diverse families. In other words, previous research supports the positive relationship between school inclusion and parental engagement.

### **Limitations of the Study**

In chapter one, the researcher outlined limitations to conducting the current dissertation study. It is important to interpret the results of this dissertation in the context of the study's limitations. The sample size for the current dissertation study included five families with same-sex parents and two families with opposite-sex parents. When we examine the smaller sample size of this study, the results of the current study cannot be generalized to all families with same-sex parents in schools, nor can the results be generalized to all families with opposite-sex parents. The research participants within the study can only report their specific experiences, and their experiences within schools may be exclusive to those individuals. Thus, future research will need to be done to address issues faced by families with same-sex parents nationwide on a larger scale.

The results of the current study cannot be generalized across school settings due to external factors that could have an impact on results, such as socioeconomic status, access to resources and information, and the educational background across participants. In the current study, the neighborhood surrounding the middle school is known for median home prices being over 500 thousand dollars. Several of the participants in the study mentioned the vast amount of wealth in the area. This income disparity could yield different results if this study were done in an environment with a lower median home average and could also yield to different experiences among participants.

Future research could employ a longitudinal approach to follow the experiences of families with same-sex parents throughout each grade level and possibly until their child or children graduate from the traditional K-12 school setting. This information could provide more accurate information on the experiences of families with same-sex parents during each phase of their child's school experiences. A longitudinal study should include diverse families, along with more traditionally structured families for comparison.

The chosen sampling method presents limitations to the current study. Initial contacts made to identify research participants could be considered a limitation in that the identified informant may only have identified personal acquaintances. Thus, research participants may have similar views or beliefs and experiences, which could also impact the perception of experiences. In other words, selecting participants that are connected to the same person may give you similar reported experiences and not much variation in responses. Future research should examine experiences of same-sex parents in different middle school settings and maybe even different school systems or districts. Additionally, the research was limited to only one middle school. The researcher chose to conduct all research activities among parents with

enrolled students at a middle school for comparability purposes. However, research participants could only speak to the experiences within one middle school.

Another limitation of this study is the current body of literature of the school experiences of same-sex parents. The majority of current research literature related to same-sex parenting specifically addresses the experiences of children of families with same-sex parents, not the parents themselves. Future research needs to examine the experiences of families with same-sex parents in schools. With the legalization of same-sex marriage nationwide, future research will need to document the experiences of families with same-sex parents based on specific geographic locations as well.

There is a gap in the literature on same-sex parents in schools. Thus, most current literature on same-sex parents is old. For the current study, the researcher included older literature to make the case for same-sex parenting in schools because of this limitation. However, more research will need to be done on same-sex parents in the future to provide a more accurate depiction of their current experiences in schools. Future research should examine specific factors or stressors related to same-sex parenting in schools.

Several of the research participants were socially involved in different areas within the school, such as parent organizations or volunteering. Therefore, an additional limitation is the potential perspective of their relationships with school staff members. In other words, participants may have reported more positive experiences because of the frequency in interactions with school staff members. The parents may have reported different experiences or interactions if they were not involved in social organizations and did not have the opportunity to establish more personable relationships with school staff members. Additionally, the parents cited positive, engaging relationships with the principal. The nature of the relationships among

participants with the principal could have played a role in the information they reported. In other words, the participants may not have fully disclosed of their true experiences due to their established relationship with the principal.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The current dissertation study used a qualitative research design to identify experiences with discrimination and inclusion among participants. Future research could examine the principal's role in establishing parental engagement among same-sex parents. The study should use a quantitative research design and include a larger sample size so that results are more generalizable and transferable. Future research could even examine characteristics in teachers or school administrators that make families feel more included, such as personality characteristics, communication strategies, and/or professional traits. This study could be qualitative or quantitative in design. It would also be interesting to examine the prior training of teachers in working with diverse families. The research could look at the professional development trainings that teachers receive prior to entering the classroom and even in the classroom. This study could use a qualitative or quantitative design to conduct research. The study could include teachers across various settings and years of experience.

Future research should aim to investigate the social experiences of parents in schools. Specifically, the level of implicit acceptance among parents could be examined more closely. The parents could describe how authentic their relationships are with school staff or how accepted they feel within schools. Several of the parents cited positive, engaging relationships with the principal. The nature of the relationships among participants could have influenced the information reported. Future research could examine the nature of parent-administrator relationships and how they influence overall experiences. Additional future research could be a

comparative analysis of parent and student social perceptions and experiences in schools. In other words, a comparative study could be done to research the differences in social experiences reported by parents and students. In the future, researchers should also seek to conduct interviews in person instead of including the phone interview option. The current study found that interviews conducted in-person versus by phone presented with differences in responses. To eliminate any potential biases and for comparability purposes, additional research should seek to employ in-person interviewing as the primary method of data collection among all participants. Previous research supports the use of face-to-face interviews as a means of reducing distractions and managing social cues (Novick, 2008).

Future research should seek to replicate the current study to examine the impact of causal factors. Specifically, future research could employ similar sampling methods but use different research participants to examine differences in experiences. The research participants should range in age, race, socioeconomic status, school involvement level, and familial structure. Additionally, the researcher chose to employ a post-positivist approach, using tables and figures, in phenomenological research instead of the traditional method of narrating stories. Future research could employ a narrative approach to organizing and reporting information among participants. The data could be reported in a narrative form and tell a story about specific experiences among research participants.

### **Implications for School Psychology**

The current dissertation study provides several practice-based and research implications for the field of school psychology. First, providing information on the experiences of same-sex parents to school professionals provides a foundation for further supporting home-school collaboration among families with same-sex parents. Two of the major emerging themes from

this study, Principal and Enrichment Workshop, provide school based implications for school psychologists. All forms of school psychological services seek to collaborate with families to provide environmental, social, and cultural components that may impact or contribute to a child's education. By bridging any gaps in experiences with families with same-sex parents, school professionals are better able to serve and support children within schools.

The information gained from the current dissertation study can be used by school psychologists to educate school staff members on best practices when working with families with same-sex parents. The information gained from the current dissertation study could also be used by school psychologists to develop a curriculum or a practice model for supporting families with same-sex parents in schools, specifically addressing instances of school inclusion for all families. Research has shown that many schools do not have policies that specifically address institutional discrimination (Depalma & Atkinson, 2010). The current study found that the middle school site did not have a clear policy on addressing institutional discrimination. The current dissertation findings could provide support and a foundation for school psychologists to develop such implicit policies supporting families with same-sex parents within schools. In addition, the current body of literature on the experiences of families with same-sex parents in schools is very limited, thus, making it harder for school psychologists to potentially address any specific issues. By bringing awareness to the experiences of families with same-sex parents in schools, the current dissertation study is creating a platform to further address barriers proactively.

### **Implications for School Practices**

The literature supports several strategies for inclusivity and anti-discrimination in schools. Herbstrith (2014) identified the following practices for creating inclusive schools:

- Start a gay-straight alliance in middle and high schools;
- Educate teachers, staff, and students on the offensive use of language such as “That’s so gay,” which are often perceived as socially acceptable;
- Make meetings, such as individualized educational program meetings, inclusive for diverse families (e.g., substitute language such as “parent” to “mother” or “father”);
- Use an inclusive definition of “family” to represent diverse families in school handbooks;
- School psychologists can provide training to teachers and administrators on working with families with same-sex parents;
- Plan activities and events that are inclusive of diverse families, and that seek to help school staff understand the array of diverse families;
- Display posters and pictures throughout the schools that incorporate diverse families (p. 210).

### **Roles of School Psychologists**

Although instances of discrimination within schools should be handled at the administrative level, school psychologists can play active role in providing school-based services to children of families with same-sex parents and same-sex parents. School psychologists receive extensive training in consultation and collaboration, thus, they are qualified to facilitate systems-level changes or modifications. In addition, school psychologists can collaborate with administrators or school personnel to develop a more inclusive school curriculum that incorporates families with same-sex parents and their family structures into instruction. School psychologists can facilitate community based discussions on issues related to social justice, school inclusion, equality and discrimination. Most importantly, school psychologists can lead in-service trainings for teachers and school staff members. Continual in-service trainings and

professional development can open lines of communication for teachers who may feel unprepared to work with families with same-sex parents (Bliss & Harris, 1999).

School psychologists are also trained in counseling and can provide counseling services to children and families with same-sex parents. Should issues arise in schools that cause trauma or harm to families with same-sex parents or children, school psychologists can provide comprehensive counseling services and offer resources on community-based counseling services for families. School psychologists are also trained in dealing with issues related to diversity and supporting diversity in schools. If any problems with diversity or acceptance arise, school psychologists are trained to address problems comprehensively.

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## **Appendix A Reflexive Journal**

The researcher used the reflexive journal to document any perceived or possible biases (Watt, 2007). The researcher was forced to reflect on personal experiences with school inclusion. Although the researcher is not a parent, the journal forced her to view these experiences from the eyes of parents. Themes that may not have seemed relevant going into the study proved themselves to be significant for the participants after the study. The researcher gained essential knowledge that will be useful as an educational practitioner in an urban school setting.

## **Appendix B**

### **Email to Participants**

Dear Participant:

My name is Kia Boyd and I am a doctoral student in the school psychology program at The University of Alabama. I am currently writing my dissertation and my chosen topic is to examine the experiences of same-sex parents of school-age children. My dissertation study will specifically examine the experiences of same-sex parents and opposite-sex parents with discrimination and inclusion in schools.

I will be contacting you by telephone or email, whatever method you prefer, within a week to determine if you accept my request to participate in the current research study. If you choose to participate, the interviews will be confidential and your participation in this study is voluntary. It is your free choice. You can refuse not to be in it at all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. There will be no effect on your relations with the University of Alabama

Each interview will last about an hour, for a total of three hours. The primary risk of participating in this research study is that you may get upset by thinking or talking about your experiences with your child's school. If or should this occur, the primary researcher can remove you from the study and recommend counseling services in your area. The interviews can occur at a time that is convenient for you and may occur in-person, by telephone, or a communication platform such as Google Hangout or Skype. The following criteria is required for participation within the study:

- Same-sex parents and opposite sex parents must have at least one school-aged child (K-12);
- At least one same-sex parent or opposite-sex parent must be listed as the primary legal guardian or caregiver;
- Same-sex parents and opposite-sex parents in the study can be legally married or cohabitating full-time (at least one year);
- Same-sex parents and opposite-sex parents in the study must have made the decision to raise at least one school-aged child (K-12) together as parents in the same household;
- Gender Identity: All participants should identify as male or female;
- Sexual Orientation: Same-sex parent participants must be romantically or sexually attracted to individuals of the same gender identity;
- Sexual Orientation: Opposite-sex parent participants must be romantically or sexually attracted to individuals of the opposite gender identity;
- At least one parent (same-sex parents & opposite-sex parents) must be available for three rounds of interviews (approximately three hours).

The interviews will follow pre-set, IRB-approved interview questions. The interview questions will all be related to your experiences in schools as a same-sex parent. In addition, I may also request the names of any other same-sex parents or opposite-sex parents within a possible network of families that may be able to provide information and contribute to the current study. Your name or identity will not be revealed to anyone other than the primary researcher. For the purposes of research, you will be assigned a research code to protect your identity.

If you agree to participate, I will send you a mailed or emailed copy of a biographical questionnaire, a copy of the informed consent document, and my personal contact information. After the data collection process subsides, you will receive a copy of your interview transcript in the mail or via email. This seeks to ensure research quality. Also, if you wish, I will personally send a mailed or emailed copy of the research findings for the entire dissertation study.

Thank you for your willingness to contribute to the knowledge base on same-sex parents and opposite-sex parents in schools.

Please respond to [ksboyd@crimson.ua.edu](mailto:ksboyd@crimson.ua.edu) with a preferred contact phone number or email address for our initial discussion.

Sincerely,  
Kia Boyd  
(P): 706-244-5900  
Email: [ksboyd@crimson.ua.edu](mailto:ksboyd@crimson.ua.edu)

**Appendix C**  
**Background Questionnaire**  
**(Demographics)**

Gender identity: \_\_\_\_\_

Ages: \_\_\_\_\_

Race: \_\_\_\_\_

Ages of school-age child(ren): \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

Grades of school-age child(ren): \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

Number of school-age children living in your home: \_\_\_\_\_

Highest degree earned: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Spouses' Occupations: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of school your child attends: Rural                      Urban                      Suburban

## **Appendix D**

### **Informed Consent: Same-sex Parents**

#### **Informed Consent for a Non-Medical Study**

**Study Title:** Same-Sex Parents of School-Age Children: Self-Reports of Experience and Perceptions with Inclusion and Discrimination in Schools

**Investigator's Name:** Kia Boyd

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You are being asked to take part in a research study.

This study is called Same-Sex Parents of School-Age Children: Self-Reports of Experience and Perceptions with Inclusion and Discrimination. The study is being done by Kia Boyd, who is a graduate student at the University of Alabama. Ms. Boyd is being supervised by Professor Patti Harrison at the University of Alabama.

#### **What is this study about? What is the investigator trying to learn?**

The current dissertation study is being done to find out and examine the experiences of same-sex parents of school-age children, specifically examining their experiences with 1) discrimination and 2) inclusion in schools. The research study will employ 2 families with opposite-sex parents as a comparison group.

#### **Why is this study important or useful?**

This knowledge is useful because it A) it will examine specific self-reported experiences with discrimination in schools among same-sex parents, B) it will examine specific self-reported experiences with inclusion in schools among same-sex parents. As mentioned earlier, the current research study will employ 2 families with opposite-sex parents as a comparison group.

The study is important because the knowledge gained will provide school administrators, teachers, and other school staff with A) further methods on supporting families with same-sex parents in schools, B) raise awareness on specific discrimination experiences that families with same-sex parents may encounter in schools, C) contribute to a limited research base on same-sex parenting in schools, and, D) provide more knowledge on ways that schools can be more inclusive for families with same-sex parents.

#### **Why have I been asked to be in this study?**

You have been asked to be in this study because you are a same-sex or opposite-sex parent with at least one school-age child that is currently enrolled in a middle school setting.

**How many people will be in this study?**

About 7 families, specifically 5 families with same-sex parents and 2 families with opposite-sex parents, will be in this study. The research study will employ 2 families with opposite-sex parents as a comparison group.

**What will I be asked to do in this study?**

If you meet the criteria and agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do these things: A) participate in a series of three interviews, each lasting about an hour, on your experiences as a parent in schools, B) be willing to have the interviews digitally and audio recorded by the interviewer, Kia Boyd, and C) be willing to meet at a central, quiet location or using technological resources such as Skype or Google Hangout or by telephone. The researcher can drive to you and meet you at a convenient location. The researcher can also schedule a time to speak by telephone or web conference (Skype, Google Hangout). The interviews will be conducted by Kia Boyd, who will serve as the principal investigator of this study.

**How much time will I spend being in this study?**

Each interview should last about 1 hour or 60 minutes. The entire study of three separate interviews will require about 3 hours or 180 minutes of your time. The researcher is planning to conduct interviews during the months of October 2016-December 2016, at a time and location of the participants choosing.

**Will being in this study cost me anything?**

The only cost to you from this study is your time and your mileage to a chosen location. The interviews can be conducted around your schedule and can be done at night or on weekends to avoid any work interruptions.

**Will I be compensated for being in this study?**

You will not be compensated for being in this study.

**Can the investigator take me out of this study?**

The investigator may take you out of the study if she feels that the study is upsetting you or causing any undue stress.

**What are the risks (dangers or harms) to me if I am in this study?**

The chief risk is that you may get upset by thinking about your experiences with your child's school. If or should this occur, the primary investigator or primary researcher will remove you from the study and provide a list of counseling service providers.

Otherwise, no other risks are foreseen.

**What are the benefits (good things) that may happen if I am in this study?**

There are no direct benefits to you.

**What are the benefits to science or society?**

The study will inform school administrators, school teachers, school psychologists, school social workers, school counselors, and other school staff on best practices for working with families with same-sex parents in schools. The study will help school professionals understand any barriers in supporting and providing inclusion for families with same-sex parents in schools.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

Interviews will be conducted in a quiet, central location of your choosing. This location can be at a local library conference room or using technological resources such as Skype or Google Hangout or by telephone. The researcher will schedule the interview time at a time of your choosing. By consenting to this study, you are agreeing that you are willing to have your interview be recorded for transcribing purposes only.

During the interview, you will be asked to discuss your experiences as a same-sex parent in school, specifically experiences with discrimination and inclusion. You may choose to not answer certain questions. The primary investigator must report signs of spouse, child, or elder abuse if she observes them. This would force the participant to be in contact with police or other protective services.

**How will my confidentiality be protected?**

Confidentiality refers to data and how it will be safeguarded. The following actions will be taken to protect confidentiality: A) separating signed consents from datasheets, B) using ID numbers for records, C) storing any information obtained in a locked filing cabinet in the researchers apartment, D) encrypting data bases, E) only the primary investigator will access to any data obtained, and F) destroying raw data or identifiers after data have been entered.

**What are the alternatives to being in this study? Do I have other choices?**

The alternative to being in this study is not to participate.

**What are my rights as a participant in this study?**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. It is your free choice. You can refuse not to be in it at all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. There will be no effect on your relations with the University of Alabama.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board (“the IRB”) is the committee that protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

**Who do I call if I have questions or problems?**

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study right now, please ask them. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study later on, please call the investigator Kia Boyd at 706-244-5900.

If you have questions about your rights as a person in a research study, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach website at [http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO\\_Welcome.html](http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html) or email the Research Compliance office at [participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu](mailto:participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu).

After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online at the outreach website or you may ask the investigator for a copy of it and mail it to the University Office for Research Compliance, Box 870127, 358 Rose Administration Building, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127.

I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions. I agree to take part in it.

I will receive a copy of this consent form to keep.  
I agree to have my interview digitally and audio recorded.

**No Signature Required.**

Electronic link to the document:

[https://docs.google.com/a/crimson.ua.edu/document/d/1xCQB\\_NydK-qMBIHzQPTOR\\_Wam-R27pMR0-N0NEcFe9Y/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/a/crimson.ua.edu/document/d/1xCQB_NydK-qMBIHzQPTOR_Wam-R27pMR0-N0NEcFe9Y/edit?usp=sharing)

**Appendix E**  
**Confirmation Letter**

Dear Participant:

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a research participant in the current dissertation study. This letter serves to confirm your interview on DATE at LOCATION or TELEPHONE. If you have any issues with finding the location or need additional directions, please contact Kia Boyd at 706-244-5900. Should you have technical issues or problems with internet, please contact Kia Boyd at 706-244-5900.

If you have any additional questions or concerns related to the study or your participation, please contact Kia Boyd at 706-244-5900 or [ksboyd@crimson.ua.edu](mailto:ksboyd@crimson.ua.edu).

Thank you for your willingness to contribute to the knowledge base on same-sex parents in schools.

Sincerely,

Kia Boyd

(P): 706-244-5900

Email: [ksboyd@crimson.ua.edu](mailto:ksboyd@crimson.ua.edu)

**Appendix F**  
**Reminder Email**

Dear Participant:

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a research participant in the current dissertation study. This letter serves a reminder of your interview on DATE at LOCATION or TELEPHONE. If you have any issues with finding the location or need additional directions, please contact Kia Boyd at 706-244-5900. Should you have technical issues or problems with internet, please contact Kia Boyd at 706-244-5900.

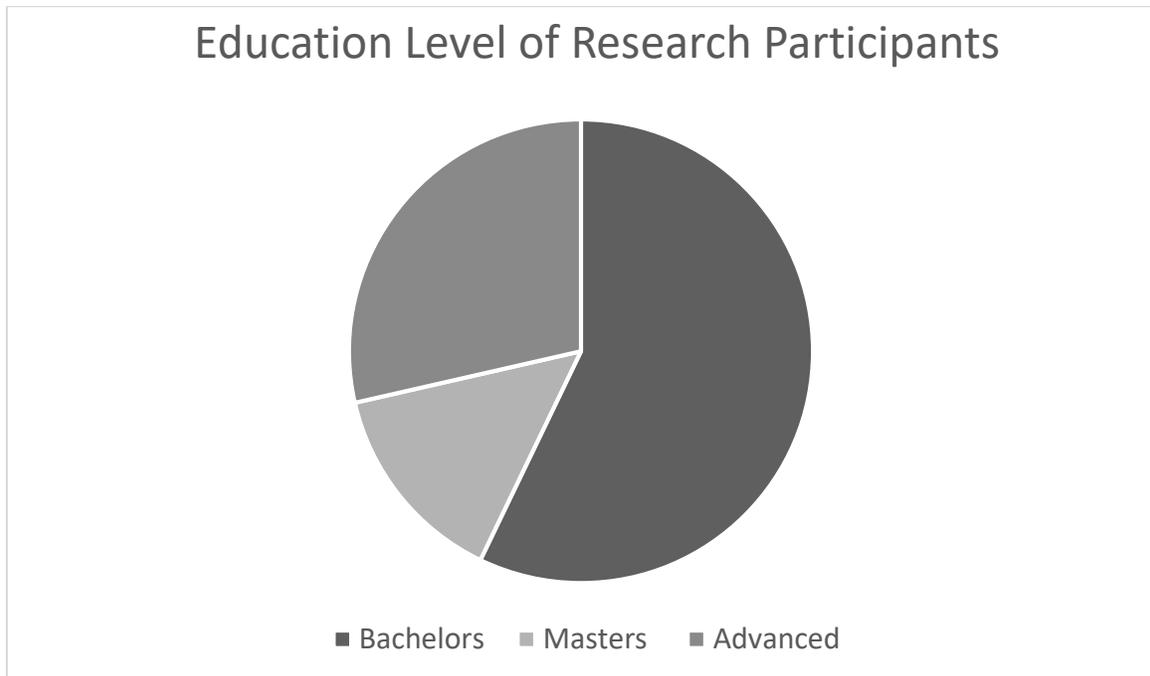
If you have any additional questions or concerns related to the study or your participation, please contact Kia Boyd at 706-244-5900 or [ksboyd@crimson.ua.edu](mailto:ksboyd@crimson.ua.edu).

Thank you for your willingness to contribute to the knowledge base on same-sex parents in schools.

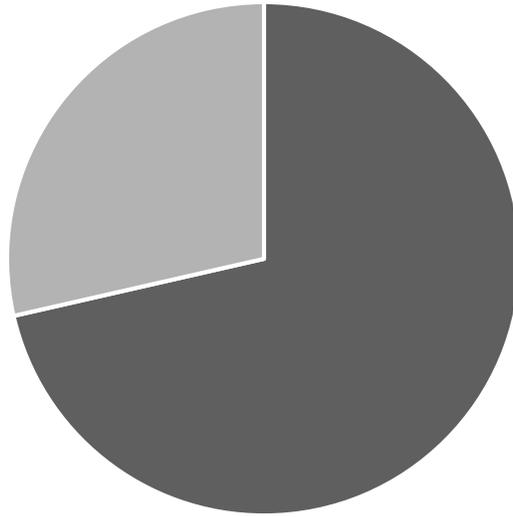
Sincerely,

Kia Boyd

**Appendix G**  
**Demographic Information on Participant's**



## Racial Demographics



■ Caucasian ■ Black or African American

## Appendix I IRB Approval Letter

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA® | Office of the Vice President for  
Research & Economic Development  
Office for Research Compliance

September 20, 2016

Kia Boyd  
Dept. of Psychology  
College of Arts & Sciences  
Box 870348

Re: IRB#: 16-OR-316 "Same-Sex Parents of School-Age Children: Self-Reports of Experience and Perceptions with Inclusion and Discrimination"

Dear Ms. Boyd:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. You have also been granted the requested waiver of written documentation of informed consent. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies

Your application will expire on September 19, 2017. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Request for Study Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped consent/assent forms to obtain consent from your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

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**Appendix J**  
**Assessing Capacity to Consent**  
**IRB Application number: 8097**  
**Same-Sex Parents of School-Age Children: Self-Reports of Experience and Perceptions**  
**with Inclusion and Discrimination**

Potential research participants must pass the following competency checklist to be considered eligible for the study:

- Participants must be able to identify what year and what month it is;
- Participants must be able to answer questions to determine eligibility criteria (see Appendix C) for the research study;
- Participants must be able to communicate a yes or no decision;
- Participant must be able to tell the PI what the research procedures involve and what the consent information includes.

**Appendix K**  
**Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Interview One**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time Interview Started: \_\_\_\_\_  
Place: \_\_\_\_\_ Time Interview Concluded: \_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewer's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender Identity: \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Pseudo Name and Code: \_\_\_\_\_

---

**Interview Procedure**

You are being asked to participate in a research study examining the experiences of same-sex parents of school-age children. The current research study will examine the experiences of same-sex parents in discrimination and inclusion. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of same-sex parents with discrimination and inclusion within schools. During this interview, you will be asked to respond to several open-ended questions. You may choose not to answer any or all of the questions. The procedure will involve taping the interview, and the tape will be transcribed verbatim. Your results or responses will be confidential, and you will not be identified individually.

**Informed Consent**

Please see the attached informed consent document.

1. Tell me the age and sex of your child.
2. How long has your child or children been enrolled in XYZ School District?
3. How would you describe your first experiences with XYZ school district? Such as enrolling your child into the district.
4. Describe your experiences with your child's current teacher in XYZ school district.
5. How would you describe the "culture" within your child's school? (Define school culture)
6. Tell me how you would describe your child's school in including families into school culture?
7. Describe your level of involvement in your child's school. (PTA, Field Trips, etc.)
8. Describe any negative experiences or experiences with discrimination that you've had in XYZ school. What about your child?

**Appendix L**  
**Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Interview Two**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time Interview Started: \_\_\_\_\_  
Place: \_\_\_\_\_ Time Interview Concluded: \_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewer's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender Identity: \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Pseudo Name and Code: \_\_\_\_\_

---

**Interview Procedure**

You are being asked to participate in a research study examining the experiences of same-sex parents of school-age children. The current research study will examine the experiences of same-sex parents with discrimination and inclusion. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of same-sex parents with discrimination and inclusion within schools. Additionally, this research study will employ two families with opposite-sex parents as a comparison group.

The comparison group adds to the validity and reliability of this study and its results. During this interview, you will be asked to respond to several open-ended questions. You may choose not to answer any or all of the questions. The procedure will involve taping the interview, and the tape will be transcribed verbatim. Your results or responses will be confidential, and you will not be identified individually.

**Informed Consent**

Please see the attached informed consent document.

1. Now you previously mentioned that you've had great experiences with the principal and/or other staff person at the middle school, what about those experiences are great? What does he/she do differently than other principals and/or staff people in other schools?
2. Describe your experiences with working with other parents in the school? (ex. Drop off, family nights, and/or school plays)
3. What does the school currently have in terms of specific anti-discrimination laws or clauses that you know of? How was the information given to parents? Do you feel that the policy is effective?
4. You previously mentioned that the principal does a workshop at the beginning of the school year and everyone across grade levels attend. What about that workshop is significant?  
(ONLY FOR SAME-SEX PARENTS)
  - a) **Probe:** Do you believe that workshop is responsible for the inclusive culture within the school? (**If appropriate**)

**Appendix M**  
**Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Interview Three**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time Interview Started: \_\_\_\_\_  
Place: \_\_\_\_\_ Time Interview Concluded: \_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewer's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender Identity: \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Pseudo Name and Code: \_\_\_\_\_

---

**Interview Procedure**

You are being asked to participate in a research study examining the experiences of same-sex parents of school-age children. The current research study will examine the experiences of same-sex parents with discrimination and inclusion. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of same-sex parents with discrimination and inclusion within schools. Additionally, this research study will employ two families with opposite-sex parents as a comparison group. The comparison group adds to the validity and reliability of this study and its results.

During this interview, you will be asked to respond to several open-ended questions. You may choose not to answer any or all of the questions. The procedure will involve taping the interview, and the tape will be transcribed verbatim. Your results or responses will be confidential, and you will not be identified individually.

**Informed Consent**

Please see the attached informed consent document.

1. In the first interview, you mentioned \_\_\_\_\_ teacher or staff person. What do you believe is unique about his/her personality or approach to the job? What is it about that teacher or staff person that makes you feel included?
  - a) **Probe:** Describe the characteristics that make you feel connected to your child's learning and growth in the classroom.
2. On average, how often do you engage with the principal? What for? How would you describe those interactions?
3. What do you believe makes this school so unique and successful throughout the district?
  - a) **Probe:** Specific characteristics of the teachers, principal, and other members of the school staff.
4. If a person was seeking to enroll their child in this middle school, how would you describe the teachers and administrators to them?

**Appendix N**  
**Interview Questions and Research Questions**

<b>RQ1: How do same-sex parents engage in the school culture?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you describe the “culture” within your child’s school?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me how you would describe your child’s school in including families into school culture?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you believe makes this school so unique and successful throughout the district?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Probe: Specific characteristics of the teachers, principal, and other members of the school staff.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If a person was seeking to enroll their child in this middle school, how would you describe the teachers and administrators to them?</li> </ul>

<b>RQ2: How do same-sex parents describe their experiences with discrimination in schools?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you describe the “culture” within your child’s school?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you describe your child’s school in including families into school culture?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Now you previously mentioned that you’ve had great experiences with the <u>principal and/or other staff person</u> at the middle school, what about those experiences are great? What does he/she do differently than other principals and/or staff people in other schools?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe your experiences with working with other parents in the school? (ex. Drop off, family nights, and/or school plays)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe any negative experiences or experiences with discrimination that you’ve had in XYZ school. What about your child?</li> </ul>

<b>RQ3: How inclusive are schools for families with same-sex parents?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you describe the “culture” within your child’s school?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you describe your child’s school in including same-sex families into school culture?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You previously mentioned that the principal does a workshop at the beginning of the school year and everyone across grade levels attend. What about that workshop is significant? (ONLY FOR SAME-SEX PARENTS) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Probe: Do you believe that workshop is responsible for the inclusive culture within the school? (If appropriate)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<b>RQ4: What policies, that same-sex parents are aware of, are in place in schools to support same-sex parents?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you describe the “culture” within your child’s school?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you describe your child’s school in including same-sex families into school culture?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe any negative experiences or experiences with discrimination that you’ve had in XYZ school. What about your child?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does the school currently have in terms of specific anti-discrimination laws or clauses that you know of? How was the information given to parents? Do you feel that the policy is effective?</li> </ul>

**Appendix O**  
**Individualized Follow-up Interview Questions for Interview Two**  
**All identifying information has been changed**

**Family One: Sally and Karen (Married)**

Interview Two Individualized Questions: You previously mentioned some of the dirty looks your family has gotten from other families. Describe those interactions to me.

Would you say the school has been proactive in addressing such behaviors among parents? Explain.

**Family Two: Anthony and Danny (Married)**

Interview Two Individualized Questions: In the last interview, you mentioned that your son has an IEP. Do you feel that the school is supportive of your families needs? In other words, how would you describe the academic support provided to families with specific needs?

**Family Three: Kaleb and Ryan (Married)**

Interview Two Individualized Questions: Now you previously mentioned experiences within the PTO, specifically, the organization funds full time positions within the school. Do you believe that the role of parents is shaped largely by the PTO organization within the school? Please explain.

You told me in the previous interview that you had an incident with a stranger at Chick Fil A. You were on a field trip with your son right? Describe that incident in more detail please.

**Family Four: Ginger and Ann (Married)**

Interview Two Individualized Questions: You mentioned that your sons have school friends over to your house each weekend. Describe the interactions you've had with the other parents.

Did you feel compelled to mention your familial structure to other parents prior to the school friends being invited over? Please explain.

**Family Five: Celine and Carol (Married)**

Interview Two Individualized Questions: You previously described the positive interactions between parents in the school. What would you describe as the single most memorable experience you've had within the PTO?

You mentioned that you believe the education level of many of the parents plays a role in the school treatment. Why do you say that? Please describe what you meant.

**Appendix P**  
**Individualized Follow-up Interview Questions for Interview Three**  
**All identifying information has been changed**

**Family One: Sally and Karen (Married)**

Interview Three Individualized Questions: Several of the participants mentioned the principal, however, you mentioned that you believe she is the most open person you've met in town. Expand on this more for me. (Specific characteristics)

**Family Two: Anthony and Danny (Married)**

Interview Three Individualized Questions: After the 2016 presidential election, you indicated that several of your son's teachers came up to you in the school for support. Describe those interactions.

**Family Three: Kaleb and Ryan (Married)**

Interview Three Individualized Questions: You mentioned an incident with one of the staff members in the office. Describe that incident in more detail for me.

**Family Four: Ginger and Ann (Married)**

Interview Three Individualized Questions: Can you describe some of the specific characteristics of the enrichment workshop that the principal hosts at the beginning of the school year?

A. What information did you feel was most relevant for the families with same-sex parents?

**Family Five: Celine and Carol (Married)**

Interview Three Individualized Questions: Wealth has been a sub-theme in both of your previous interviews. How would you describe the role of wealth in creating the school culture. (Explain if needed)

**Appendix Q**  
**Significant In Vivo Codes from Three Rounds of Participant Interviews with Same-Sex Parents**

<b>Significant In vivo Codes</b>	<b>Interview Responses</b>
<b>Positive Experiences</b>	“Oh yeah...we’ve had positive experiences in the school..I mean the school is very focused on learning and achievement.”
<b>Positive Experiences</b>	“You know we never had issues in the school. We have not experienced anything but positive, supportive people in the school. They’ve been great.”
<b>Positive Experiences</b>	“We’ve always had good experiences in this district...everyone has been really about the kids...”
<b>Positive Experiences</b>	“Everybody is so nice here....they really are very accepting of us...We are both involved a lot in the school and it’s never been anything.”
<b>Positive Experiences</b>	“We were handled so politely...never had any trouble with anyone in the school... they focus the energy on the kids and learning.”
<b>Welcoming</b>	“The school is inviting to parents really... Like they really encourage the parents to Participate. They have something for all of the parents to do..”
<b>Welcoming</b>	“They really do include families into just

about everything in the school. I know I was a traffic person for them... everybody is nice and they always speak when they see us. We're known as my son's dads."

**Welcoming**

"...you know I volunteer in the school and It's never been weird or anything. The teachers treat us just like they would any other parent.

**Welcoming**

"We pretty much know everybody and they know us. If we're in an after school event and somebody needs something, they'll holler at one of us just like they would any of the other parents."

**Welcoming**

"People don't blink at us. The school staff members just seem to be glad they have involved parents.

**Morning Greeting**

"The principal is outside every morning speaking to all of the students and parents as we drop our kids off. She stands at the front door during dismissal to ensure everything is running right."

**Morning Greeting**

"I probably interact with her a few times a week. She usually does the morning greeting for the car line. She is pretty friendly and animated at times. The kids like her."

**Morning Greeting**

"I usually see her in the mornings and if my son has a meeting or something at the school...I see her around. She always talks to us and says hello."

**Current Teacher**

"She is just..just caring. I mean just right down to it. You can tell that she takes her job very seriously. She is no pushover by any means but she makes her students and their achievement her priority."

**Current Teacher**

“Well I have to say that I think my son’s Teacher is great. He just has a way of connecting with people. Like...scary good manners and social skills. He’s very educated himself and I think he just gets it.”

**Current Teacher**

“Oh my son’s teacher is literally so chill. She has never given us any problems with him. She is very respectful and she is always that way. She is ultra-liberal and progressive.”

**Current Teacher**

“She is a warm-hearted person. Like really, if I send an email in the morning about something...I usually have an answer by the afternoon. She’s on top of things and is really careful about her approach with parents.”

**Current Teacher**

“Her teacher is great. She graduated from a prestigious institution close by. She’s very professional and organized. We’ve always felt that she approached us with respect first and as my daughter’s parents second.”

**Academic Achievement**

“You know the school really focuses a lot of energy on student achievement. That is the priority there. The kids and the test scores really drive everything in the school. For years, they’ve been a higher performing school in the district.”

**Academic Achievement**

“The school is so successful because they place so much energy on academic achievement. I mean everything in that school is devoted to the learning of the kids. The yoga classes, the workshops...it is all about the kids and their future.”

**Academic Achievement**

“I would say the focus on learning in the school makes it successful. I mean the parents, teachers, and everybody do this everyday for the future of our children. I

think the population here really take it seriously too.”

**Academic Achievement**

“I think they use almost a business model to approach education. They have teams designated to working with my daughter in the classroom. Like they have coaches to help with academic subjects and people working all ends to make sure the kids are able to learn.”

**Academic Achievement**

“Well this school is known throughout the district because of the teachers honestly. The teachers are committed to teaching and doing a good job. They’ve had a few teachers win teacher of the year for the district. Learning is the top priority for the teachers and staff members.”

**Other Parents**

“The other parents in the school have been fabulous to work with. I mean we have several of our close friends with kids in this school too. Everyone is pretty open-minded. At the end of the day, we all work together to help the school and the kids.”

**Other Parents**

“Hmm..I’ve had good experiences working with other parents. We all work together to support the teachers and our children. I mean I’m not best friends with every parent in the school but we have friends with kids in the school. Overall, I’d say the other parents in the school are cool to work with.”

**Other Parents**

“They’ve been fine. I haven’t had any issues with anyone. I mean I see and talk to some more than others. But on field trips and school functions everybody is on their best behavior. We want to be good examples for our children.”

**Other Parents**

“I mean we’ve gotten dirty looks from other parents but honestly it’s really not a big deal. I mean they look and they also speak. I don’t want to make it a big deal because the other parents really are great in the school.”

**Other Parents**

“Working with the other parents? Well it’s been fine. I suppose. I mean we pretty much sit and vent about life when we’re all together (laughs) volunteering. Seriously though, it’s been. They know that we are committed parents and we want the best for our family.”

**Family Friendly**

“The school is always having something. Just about every week, they’re having something with the parents. Last week, we did a spaghetti dinner and it was kind of a Friday night thing with the family. They do stuff for the entire family probably about 3-4 times each semester.”

**Family Friendly**

“I think they do a good job including families into stuff at the school. I mean there’s a really educated population here and they’re more of the demographic that gets it. You know...they understand about being professional and they know what to say.”

**Family Friendly**

“Good. Other parents may look but even they don’t say anything or treat us badly. I think of the place as a “come as you are” but within obvious boundaries. But they really just focus on the kids and teaching the children.”

**Family Friendly**

“I would say the school is very open and including of families. They do stuff a lot out here. Almost every other week. They are about to start up an annual fundraiser for the grade-level field trip to a major American city. Each grade level chooses to take their

students on a field trip. The parents usually help out with that I know. Uh..I mean they just have events for everyone to get involved in.”

**Family Friendly**

“The school has been wonderful. We had no trouble at all from the teachers or the administration. More of kinda the looks and stuff would always come from the other parents. It’s more of a hipster, cool place and everyone is on board and open.”

**Openness for Communication**

“Well they really encourage the parents and teachers to communicate frequently. They have set it up so that we can access information whenever we need. It’s still a work in progress but it’s a really headed in the right direction. They also really encourage that communication partnership early on in the school year between parents and teachers.”

**Openness for Communication**

“It (the workshop) each year is always so popular because it is so open. I mean across the board. Everyone in the school is all hands on. We are doing team work, asking questions, laughing..uh..it’s more like we’re talking and learning from experts and they’re talking and learning from us about our son.”

**Openness for Communication**

“The content. Hands down. They do it in a way that is engaging and fun. I don’t know how they do it with all of us stuffy adults but...they do. We all talk and share ideas. I mean I think we all leave feeling more excited about the school.”

**Openness for Communication**

“Oh..well I’d have to say the speakers. Every year they have the best speakers. I mean like really really good and funny. We get into groups and talk a lot too. It’s a few

hours long but it really never has been boring.”

**Openness for Communication**

“The workshop..um..I would say it’s the format. They make it really easy to communicate with the teachers and other parents. The food is always good too. It runs smooth. You really get a chance to talk with the other parents and teachers.”

**Supportive of Parental Involvement**

“The school holds a workshop on keeping the parents involved at the beginning of the year and she makes her position known then. I mean with respect too. I’ve never felt excluded by anyone in the school.”

**Supportive of Parental Involvement**

“They do a workshop every year in the beginning, around August. It basically gets all of the parents involved within the school. They tell us that anyone can join and be active.”

**Supportive of Parental Involvement**

“They talk about parental involvement and including us in all parts of the school. They make it known that this is a culturally-open school. Plus, they do this thing for the parents at the workshop. It’s like a group exercise to get to know other parents and we all share tips, strategies to help”

**Supportive of Parental Involvement**

“I know they really try here, like purposely try to make sure this is a place free from discrimination. They have so many ways for parents to connect with the teachers here. I mean the PTO is able to fund positions within the school. So they really value the presence of parents here.”

**Supportive of Parental Involvement**

“You know...the teachers and administrators don’t even blink. They never have anything negative to say and they are accepting. They just seem to really be glad that they have involved parents.”

**Personalized**

“During his first IEP meeting they put us in contact with a tutoring service to help him more. Because I was honest with them about not really knowing how to help him with his school problems. No one cared that we were his parents.”

**Personalized**

“She has given us so much information to help us with homework at night. I mean... um...I didn't learn it the way they do a lot of stuff now and her teacher understands that. She's always in communication with us about her progress, whether through letters home or an email, you name it.”

**Personalized**

“They have been just been very responsive and very communicative and they say...you know...this is what is really working and this is what she could improve on and okay we say how can we help more on our end?”

**Personalized**

“The principal is really amazing. She is hands on with all of the kids. She knows a lot of the parents and she is always quick with emails.”

**Personalized**

“They really take the time to get to know the families in the school. Like on a friendly, supportive level. The teachers especially, I don't think they forget anything. It is very Human..uh and warm.”

**Positive Interactions**

“I am involved in like a volunteer organization for the parents and teachers. We do monthly things at the school. A lot of it turns into us venting about our kids or work (laughs). I feel accepted and I feel like the other kids in the school gravitate towards me, it's fun.”

**Positive Interactions**

“No one cared that we were his parents. They wanted to help him and the teachers are really dedicated like that. Even though

he's the problem child and we know it (laughs). They still will help him and treat him like every other kid there."

**Positive Interactions**

"Well last year, my father got really sick with leukemia. So we were traveling a lot back and forth to Indiana. The teacher and even the principal had stopped me in the hall to ask me how he was doing. They offered to give us resources on bereavement for our family if we needed it."

**Positive Interactions**

"I think we are really lucky. Like I really believe I got really fortunate in that I was able to connect with the folks here at the school. The principal here is...they are just so open minded and friendly."

**Positive Interactions**

"You know we were worried on her first day of middle school because we all remember how fun middle school is right (laughs)? But we were handled so politely. We've had no trouble at all with anyone in the school. Not the principal or any of the teachers."

**Outlines Expectations**

"They make it known early on that the school is culturally-open. They do this thing for the parents at the workshop. It's like a group exercise to get to know other parents and we all share tips, strategies to help. They make everything about the kids."

**Outlines Expectations**

"The school does this workshop about this stuff at the beginning of the year too. They cover a lot of information about the culture in the school for the kids and the parents. The principal makes an effort to really make sure it spreads throughout the school...like the positivity part for everyone."

**Outlines Expectations**

“They do a workshop with the parents early in the school year. They really focusing on creating a good environment for the kids. It really couldn’t be any better for us...we feel very included in everything.”

**Outlines Expectations**

“They use a positive behavior model in the schools. They do a workshop every year in the beginning, around August. It basically gets all of the parents involved within the school. They tell us that anyone can join and be active.”

**Outlines Expectations**

“The school does a really good job making sure parents are aware of how things in the school work...you know? Like in the workshop they talk about the school wide system that they use. We get information on how we can contribute.”

**Modeling Good Behaviors**

“We all chip in and volunteer throughout the school. Like making copies, baking desserts, field trips...you name it. We are all expected to model the good behaviors for the kids and I think it works the way they do things here.”

**Modeling Good Behaviors**

“They really try to be examples to the students. I mean I don’t think I have ever seen his teacher not push him in some way. I mean in all academics. She’s on top of him about his motivation.”

**Modeling Good Behaviors**

“The principal lives by the belief that we are the most powerful influencers on the lives of the students. She believes that the students will do as we do.. If we are nasty to each other, then the kids will do the same. If we talk bad about one another, the kids will do it too.”

**Information**

“Whenever the boys have a field trip a sports thing. Me and Karen rotate on who goes..who takes off work,

you know. We are sent the information like all the other parents and it is never a problem. We just sign up and that’s done.

**Applicable Information**

“What sort of information do they discuss during the workshop? Gosh..so much.. they discuss cultural excursions, opportunities for the parents to volunteer, other parent opportunities, group exercises..I mean a lot of information but the main point of everything in the workshop is to help bridge gaps between the parents and teachers.”

**Applicable Information**

“They talk about a lot of things that may arise in the school. Like volunteer opportunities, stuff with the PTO, they talk about the communication portal for parents and teachers. The information all goes back to the grades, the scores, and the well being of the kids”

**Applicable Information**

“Well they really cover a number of things. They talk about the structure of the school, the practices within the school, like relationships and being an example for the students. They talk about the teaching methods, the scoring system, testing...really a lot of information to keep us informed.

**Applicable Information**

“Um..well they cover information on different topics. Some of the topics are geared toward the teachers and some are geared toward the parents. It really all goes back to the achievement of the kids.”

## **Applicable Information**

“Well honestly they talk about so much. I mean they discuss the school volunteer opportunities, the PTO, the teachers do a little spill...It really helps the parents understand the culture of the school. Most of the families in this school have been intentional about their kids coming here and the workshop almost sets the tone for why...”

## **Other Parents**

“Other people look. Well excuse me, other parents look at him and at us as two gay black men with this child. I guess it’s confusing for them. They just look. No one would ever say anything for real..not here. So I really can’t say if they’re looking at us two for being gay men or at our son for being bad (laughs).

## **Other Parents**

“Like I had told you before, the people that actually work in the school are fabulous. Some of the other parents can be distant when they see us together at events. It is more so just a look and maybe some stares (laughs) but we have people who love us and there's people who we don't know that are going to love us and accept us for who we are, so it's okay if you don't.”

## **Other Parents**

“We’ve had no trouble at all with anyone in the school. Not the principal or any of the teachers but as I mentioned to you before we have gotten more of the looks from other parents. You know because we’re in the PTO and Carol will volunteer from time to time in the school with other parents. And we got the sideways glances or looks

from some of them. Like what? Oh they must be together? But that hasn't stopped anyone in the school from inviting us to do stuff."

### **Other Parents**

"Like I said to you before...we are very active in the school and can I say that we've never received any dirty looks? No. Any long glares? No. We've experienced stares and dirty looks but it's not anything alarming...you know...one of her friends once introduced us as her two mom's. The child's mother looked confused but she didn't say anything ugly or inappropriate."

### **Other Parents**

"Truthfully, I can't say that I've ever had an experience with discrimination in that school. Never. Other parents may look but even they don't say anything or treat us badly. I think of the place as a "come as you are" but within obvious boundaries."

### **Church**

"We have found some people looking at us...but really what we found is some people care but most don't. Of course, we get more tension or resistance in places like church...(laughs) but that I...uh...guess is really to be expected? You know...I mean we are in the bible belt and we knew that population wouldn't necessary welcome us with open arms."

"I mean the worst places for discrimination for us have been church. I mean from the minute I walk in..it's you're going hell for your lifestyle. Lord, the thought of

even bringing my family in there scares me honestly.”

**Church**

“You know we’ve found a nice little community feeling in this area. I mean the parks are sustainable, we have the farmers market, we have a nice little church group..the local restaurants host kids nights. I mean the community and the school are very connected.”

**2016 Presidential Election**

“After Trump won, I think at least 6-7 teachers from that school came up to me and was like “I can’t believe we did this to you guys!” (laughs) So many of them were so disturbed and concerned for us. I mean it was almost unreal (laughs). I love all of his teachers. I’m friends with a lot of them on Facebook. I see their anti-hate posts. They really are some very liberal White women who just aren’t here for any hate or discrimination.”

**2016 Presidential Election**

“After the presidential election was over, I think a lot of same-sex parents were worried...you know...we’re concerned about our rights being taken away. You know you think about those type of things.”

**2016 Presidential Election**

“I’m not really worried about the election results. I actually voted for him. I feel that this country needs a solid president and he is the man to do it. Others in the school may disagree with me but that’s my opinion. I support Trump.”

**Positivity**

“Her teacher has a really positive approach to teaching the material. She keeps the students engaged in the process. My daughter knows how she’s doing all the time and she can see her grades. She keeps

track of those too. She takes it seriously like us.”

**Positivity**

“I like this school a lot. Everyone is nice and committed to these kids. I’ve been upfront about our family structure and we’ve always had good teachers. They’re always helpful

**Respectful**

“The principal too. She’s amazing with the parents and the kids. I see her out front every morning greeting parents and the kids. My child is no different. Everyone is always respectful.”

**Respectful**

“The principal makes her position known early on. I mean with respect too. I’ve never felt excluded by anyone in the school. She is just going to tolerate any form of discrimination in her school. Especially not anything outlandish or over the top.”

**Respectful**

“Oh his teacher is a sweetheart! I mean she can be firm but she is a really caring teacher. She’s younger and she is full of ideas. My son has already grown in many areas. Just this semester.”

**Unnecessary Policy**

“(Laughs) My husband calls it the little Hogwarts school but I don’t know. Everybody is just so nice and we’ve never had a bad experience. I don’t think they would need a policy like that there. Maybe other schools in the district need that but not us. Everyone is really focused on the kids.”

**Unnecessary Policy**

“You know I’m not sure if they have one or not. But honestly I don’t think a formal policy is necessary

out there. If the trend keeps going the way it has been, then I don't think they would need a policy of that nature."

**Unnecessary Policy**

"I know they really try here, like purposely try to make sure this is a place free from discrimination. They have so many ways for parents to connect with the teachers here. I mean the PTO is able to fund positions within the school. So they really value the presence of parents here. Sorry I can talk all day (laughs)...I don't know of any specific rules in the school for same-sex parents. But honestly, I'm not sure I would want that or if that would really change anything here. The principal here is really good and she's very accessible via email or even in person. I feel like if any problems were to arise, she'd be the first one to address it head on. She's created that type of culture there.

**Ex-Spouse**

"It's so interesting because we weren't quite sure how the school system would receive all of us. You know. It is now me and my wife and my ex-husband and his wife. We didn't know how the people at the school would take us. But they know if something is wrong, they can call any of us and we'll be there."

**Ex-Spouse**

"We're best friends first and we communicate about everything related to our daughter. Well my daughter has been in the school district all of her life. Since she was young...we were a little worried at first because I was previously married to another woman and I

thought oh gosh people can be so judgmental you know; and we've always lived on this side of town, so some people probably know. But we had no trouble at all from um teachers or the administration."

**Wealth**

"I think it's a mix in the school with conservatives and liberals. It's in a very high income area. There's a lot of money here. The kids that come into the school, the families are very very wealthy. It doesn't seem like many of the folks in this population care too much about my sexual orientation.

**Wealth**

"And we would also consider ourselves wealthy by American standards. I mean I make enough money doing what I do that Ryan doesn't have to work an outside job because we can still live very well with my income. But I'm not going to lie and say that I didn't worry about what others would think of my kids. Especially other parents, but the majority of people, especially in this school are very supportive."

**Wealth**

"But they really just focus on the kids and teaching the children. It is a higher performing school and there is a lot of money in this area, so I just don't think this is that kinda place. You know?"

**Level of Education**

"You know we happen to live in an affluent area...I mean I wouldn't say everyone is rich or anything. You know...but there's a really educated population here and they're more of the demographic that gets it. You

know...they understand about being professional and they know what to say.”

**Level of Education**

“You know we both are educated...not in the text book sense but in the business sense and that is how we approach school. We kinda approach it...dealing with the school and the community like we would a job. You know...we take it very seriously and it’s her future we’re talking about.”

**School Staff**

“Now in this school, the principal and the staff are supportive and we get treated no different from other parents. We get the same letters and information sent home every day just like other parents in the school.”

**School Staff**

“I volunteer in an organization here to help out the teachers. So I’m in the school often and it’s never weird. The teachers and staff treat me like any other parent in the school. We go on field trips and come to meetings like everybody else.”

**School Staff**

“Like I mentioned before..we had that one incident when she (school secretary) asked what we’d like to be called. That was early on meeting us. But she really helps to run that school. She knows all of the parents, the teachers, and everything about the school.”

**School Leadership**

“The principal also has ties to members of the gay community. Her view is very progressive and open. She wants to connect with the parents and

teachers. The culture in the school happens because of her and no one would argue with that.”

**School Leadership**

“Uh...I think we got lucky for real. Like I really believe I got really fortunate in that I was able to connect with the folks here at the school. The principal is the main one in charge of that. She has no tolerance for hate or anyone messing with those kids. She keeps everybody in line, including the parents.”

**School Leadership**

“An administrator here has a family member that is pretty well known and she just so happens to be a same-sex parent herself. I think the culture over here is different in that way...she tends to have more of a diplomatic way about her.”

**School Leadership**

“I know the principal does a behavioral system that involves parents. They usually do it at the beginning of the year and she did it this year. I think she really keeps everything in line and keeps everybody on the same goal. But otherwise, I don’t see it being needed if they do have it.”

**School Leadership**

“The principal and everybody is so inviting. They really do establish relationships with the parents. The principal is very down to earth...hard to explain it but she’s just able to reach people.”

**Responsive in Communication**

“They have been just been very responsive and very communicative and they say...you know...this is what is really working and this is

what she could improve on and okay we say how can we help more on our end? We really try to engage them and choose the areas that she has strengths and weaknesses in.”

**Responsive in Communication**

“We keep the lines of communication open on all sides. It has always been that way with all of her teachers in this district. Now her last school district was a different story. Not anything bad really but it was just a smaller area and the people there knew I was previously married to a man.”

**Responsive in Communication**

“The principal is really amazing. She is hands on with all of the kids. She knows all of the parents and she is always quick with emails. I mean it’s just really liberal. The culture there is just different. Everybody in town wants their kids to go to this middle school because of its reputation.”

**Responsive in Communication**

“The principal here is really good and she’s very accessible via email or even in person. I feel like if any problems were to arise, she’d be the first one to address it head on. She’s created that type of culture there.”

**Openness**

“The principal here is...they are just so open minded and friendly. I never even thought about hiding it from them for real. Our son has an IEP too and we communicate with everyone in the school a lot and no one has ever made us feel weird about being two married Black men. If anything really, they can be over-accommodating to us, which is a nice change.”

**Openness**

“We are both out and we’ve always been an out couple. We purposely chose to live in this area and for our kids to attend the schools in this area because of the culture over here.”

**Openness**

“Here, everybody is so nice and the principal has the open door policy for all parents in the school. They are...they are very accepting of us. We both volunteer at the school. We pretty much know everybody and they know us.”

**Openness**

“The principal keeps an open door for anyone or any of the parents... She has really created a culture of acceptance and the area is like “gay pride” everywhere. I just don’t think this is the place for that. The teachers here are younger too. That could have something to do with it. There are only a few “old” teachers here and they probably all went to Woodstock (laughs). Just not the place.”

**Progressive Views**

“She has a very...well she has two teachers this year. Both of them are very young, progressive, you know...a couple of years experienced. Very open and she really loves the kids. At that first parent-teacher conference, she told us where her current scores were and she told us where she’d like her to be by the end of the year.”

**Progressive Views**

“The principal also has close ties to members of the gay community. Her view is very progressive and open.”

**Progressive Views**

“From the principal to other teachers, I can say that we’ve ever been excluded from doing something because of our sexual orientation. They have found a way to make it normal there. I can’t put my finger on just one thing either...something is in the water out there.”

**Demeanor**

“I probably see her every morning in the car line or just about every morning. We probably talk or socially engage about 2-3 times a month. Usually when I’m down there to volunteer or something. She’s I mean she’s firm but easy going. I think she realizes that she works with middle-schoolers but she can hold her own with these educated parents out here.”

**Demeanor**

“She is very supportive. She encourages the parents and teachers to collaborate and talk about the progress of the children frequently. I think she comes from a different approach in her style of communication. In the few meetings I had with her, she was very diplomatic. She wants to ensure that the parents are happy and the teachers.”

**Demeanor**

“It’s her personality. She has a really down to earth personality with everybody. The parents are treated like equals. I’ve never heard her be rude or dismissive to anyone.”

**Demeanor**

“She’s really connected to the community over here too. Several of the local businesses host stuff with

the school, like they did a fundraiser and an art show..you know like family outings. She usually attends and speaks on behalf of the school. Only she's able to do that so well."

**Demeanor**

"Hmm..She's just an educated professional. She knows her facts and she is sharp. At the same time, she is personable, communicative, and collected. She is even balanced."

**Friendliness**

"The principal here is...they are just so open minded and friendly. I never even thought about hiding it (family structure) from them for real.

**Friendliness**

"The principal too. She's amazing with the parents and the kids. I see her out front every morning greeting parents and the kids...I've also seen her out in the community and she treats us the same way. She always says hello."

**Professionalism**

"She is always very professional with us and the teachers. She knows the correct language to use and she knows how to communicate with us instead of to us."

**Professionalism**

"The principal is very visible in the school. Not just with the teachers and students but with the parents too. She is visible and she is responsive in communication."

**Professionalism**

"Of course, we worried about what other kids would say to our daughter. We were worried about how other parents would treat us...you know...would they let their kids come over? What would they think of me? You know...since I'm

divorced from another woman? But you know...what we have found is that no really cares because they see us. They see how committed we are as a parents and they see that we both love each other like any other couple or any other mom and dad...the teachers and administrators don't even blink. They never have anything negative to say and they are accepting."

**Knowledge of Laws**

"The principal is very knowlegdable about state standards. She explains the exact numbers and stuff at the beginning of the year. She talked about it at the workshop. All of the parents got information on the learning expectations."

**Rapport**

"She has good rapport with her staff and her teachers. You can see it. They interact respectfully. At least, they do when the parents are around. They seem to support others."

**Rapport**

"She is very persistent in her effort to reach parents. She does a newsletter each month, along with the workshops. I think she recognizes the important role that we parents have."

**Dedication to Student Achievement**

"The school itself is one of the higher performing in the district. They really just focus on the kids and teaching the children. It is a higher performing school and there is a lot of money in this area, so I just don't think this is that kinda place..the principal..she gets it."

**Dedication to Student Achievement**

"You know this is the south, so we knew before deciding to "come" out

that we would potentially face some issues...uh...you know...but this school is like the last place we experienced that type of stuff. They focus the energy on these kids and learning. The alumni wall speaks for itself...you know...some names have walked these halls.”

### **Dedication to Student Achievement**

“I think we all understand that it takes involved parents for that (achievement) to happen. I know the principal gets it. She uses her influence for the goals of the school. The big goals, like the test scores, the grades, and the successful students.”

## **Appendix R**

### **Negative Case Analysis**

As a negative case analysis for the current study, the researcher interviewed two families with heterosexual parents. Negative case analysis seeks to ensure validity and reliability of the current research study. The researcher completed the same recruitment and eligibility processes for the participants in the negative case analysis.

#### **Analysis Family One**

Sharon and Lee are in a heterosexual marriage. Together, Sharon and Lee have four kids. The oldest is 12 and she is in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. This marriage is the first for the both and they both agree that the middle school is in an urban area. Sharon completed all three rounds of interviews by telephone.

#### **Parents within School Culture**

Sharon did not mention any concerns related to the culture within the school. She only shared positive experiences and went on to say:

Experiences or issues?...no we've never had any problems with enrolling our children in school. That would be illegal and I'm sure they know me being an attorney...that wouldn't be a smart idea (laughs) so no, we've never had issues with enrolling any of our kids into school. Nor have we had any issues in any of the schools we've been in.

She later added that the school culture is shaped by the teachers and the principals. She expressed gratitude for the school culture that she believes the principal created:

You know...it's crazy how maintained she (the principal) is. I mean she keeps everything straight to the point and very professional. I don't think it's just me either. She's business and she will just fix the problem. You know...uh....think about her this way. She's an older white liberal woman with years of experience doing this job. It is like a perfect marriage between the skills (laughs). I mean

really? She has got everybody in check and she makes everything about the students at the school.

### **Experiences with Discrimination**

Sharon continued her positive sentiments about the middle school. She contended that her family has never experienced any form of discrimination in the school:

Um..I would say that uh..I can't recall of any events like that. Like full fledged discrimination?...I can't say that we have been through that or if this is even the place for that. I mean really? This is a institution for learning and that must be the priority. All of these side beliefs and stuff? That is irrelevant here. I would be so freaking pissed if my daughter came home and told me some stuff about discrimination. Me and the way I am...I would go straight to the board and they know that. I have that demeanor about myself and they know not to ever try that stuff with us. I don't even want it in my presence. I would speak up just seeing it honestly.

She too added that the principal and the school staff members have created an environment free from discrimination due to their treatment of each other.

You go in that school and the teachers really like each other. I don't know how much of it is real or pretend for everybody but I have never sensed any issues among the staff or the parents. I mean at parent nights and stuff they are all laughing and talking among each other and us. The principal joins them too. They show the kids what good, professional behavior looks like and that's what I really appreciate about that school. They show the children the way in actions and in words.

### **Experiences with Inclusion**

When questioned about specific characteristics and experiences with inclusion in the school, Sharon credits the teachers for their relationships with parents. Specifically, she went on to emphasize that the school's primary focus is learning:

You know...like I said to you before...the school staff and everybody in the school is more concerned with the learning. They have state expectations, district expectations, and expectations from the parents to deliver high quality learning. When I need information on my daughter...I can email and get what I need the same day. Me and her father are on the same page with her learning. That goes for all of children too.

## **Policies to Support Parents**

Sharon went on to reiterate her and her husband's approach to learning and how this impacts their interactions with school staff:

Both me and my husband approach education like a business model. We are very fortunate and we have the financial means to pretty much do whatever we want to do. The same for our children. With that, we want our children to enjoy the fruits of our hard work and doing it on their own...uh. Girl, what I'm really saying is that I look at it like I'm raising the next great at something...uh...education, medicine, or even some kinds of sports but we want them to be prepared for the world. I don't give my children the answers to anything. I make them go find it and I tell them that's what adults do if they need answers. I view the school staff as facilitators of learning and I still have loads of work to do at home. I email my child's teacher if I need something...she answers. If I have a question about some of her homework or need some information on something for her, I call and email (laughs). But I always get an answer. The people at the school are just as committed to learning and their test scores are some of the highest in the district.

## **Analysis Family Two**

Mallory and Jeff are in a heterosexual marriage. Together they have two boys. Their oldest son is 11 and is in 5<sup>th</sup> grade and their youngest is in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. Mallory was present for all three rounds of interviews via telephone.

## **Parents within School Culture**

Mallory expressed that her and her family have had positive experiences within the school. Specifically:

I would describe the culture in the school as really really positive. Everybody is so open and welcoming. I don't think I've ever even heard anything bad about the school...uh...I can't even recall off the top of my head...but I'm almost 100 percent positive I've never heard anything bad about the school from any other parents. The teachers and the administrators are all really focused on achievement and learning. I honestly don't think anyone would even feel...you know...well...I would say I just don't think the school is geared for that sort of thing. It's hard to say...but beyond usual concerns for parents. I don't think the school would allow bad behavior from anyone.

She went on to add that the school staff members are generally really friendly and nice to all of the parents:

They're all just...so...um...they're just friendly and nice. Everyone speaks to everyone and you always get a smile. I mean we have had some issues in the past but nothing beyond the ordinary. I recently had some issues with my son's teacher and his behavior. He is a very eccentric child and I think some people may find him weird or odd. But they wanted me to consider medication for his attention issues. But we refused and we all agreed on a resolution. The principal and his teacher were in the meeting. They listened to us and our concerns. Um..I don't know if I mentioned this or not but our son's are not vaccinated and they are on the do not vaccinate at school. We just have a different set of views on that but they were all really respectful. We reached an agreement that everybody liked.

### **Experiences with Discrimination**

Mallory did not report any experiences with discrimination in the school. She only spoke of positive experiences in the school:

Me and my husband are not as active in the school due to our schedules. I'm starting up a business and that takes up so much of my time right now. We do have help and that helps me out. But even them have never mentioned anything to me. So no..I can't say that anyone in the family has experienced any sort of discrimination. Not to my knowledge and I don't believe events of that nature would occur at that school. There is a lot of money in this area and the parent's are pretty well educated out there.

### **Experiences with Inclusion**

Mallory noted that she and her husband attend school events and are present for parent-teacher conferences. She went on to say that each experience has been positive:

We do go to functions and events that they host at the school. We also donate to the PTO...uh...they also do workshops with the parents and I'll usually go to those. Like I said to you earlier...they treat everyone with respect. I've never seen or heard about any of the parents having bad experiences. I think enough of us would complain if that were happening.

She also went on to say that her son has never complained about bullying or any type of intentional harm to the kids:

They have a solid behavioral system in the school. It covers bullying and bad behaviors...stuff related to isolating other students. I think with the principal and her commitment, they are able to make it work at the school really good. I mean my son has never complained about bullying or discrimination.

### **Policies to Support Parents**

Mallory could not recall of any specific policies that protect parents. She did mention the workshop that other participants previously mentioned in the study. She reported that the school provides parents with information on their rights and district policies:

I think the district has stuff of that nature in place already. I don't think the school has anything different or I don't know...uh...they may use the one in the district. They give us information on their policies at the beginning of the year at the workshop for parents. I'm pretty sure they discuss anti-discrimination stuff and they also tell the parents what their rights are. So I don't know if they do anything different but I'm pretty sure the district has protections in place.

**Appendix S**  
**Overall Themes from Phenomenological Reduction and In Vivo Codes**

**Principal:**

School Leadership,  
Responsive in communication,  
Openness,  
Progressive views,  
Demeanor,  
Friendliness,  
Professionalism,  
Knowledge of education structure/laws,  
Rapport with teachers and parents, and  
Dedication to student achievement.

**Enrichment Workshop:**

Openness for communication,  
Supportive of parental involvement,  
Personalized,  
Positive interactions,  
Outlines expectations of parents and teachers,  
Modeling good behaviors, and  
Information is applicable to them.

**School Culture:**

Positive,  
Welcoming,  
Morning greeting,  
Academic Achievement,  
Current Teacher,  
Other Parents, and  
Family-friendly.

**Discrimination:**

Other Parents,  
Church,  
2016 Presidential Election,  
Positivity,  
Respectful,  
Policy is Unnecessary;  
Ex-Spouse,  
Wealth,

Education Level, and  
School Staff.

**Appendix T**  
**Codes and Research Questions**

The researcher created a chart to outline the results of in vivo coding and how they address research questions for the current study. The researcher organized codes and interview responses to specifically address the purpose of the research questions. To reiterate from chapter three, the purpose of in vivo coding was to gain insight into the experiences of same-sex parents in schools.

**Research question one.** The first table includes specific in vivo codes from all rounds of interviews across participants that address research question one. These codes specifically address the experiences of same-sex parents and school culture.

*In Vivo Codes to address Research Question One: How do same-sex parents engage in the school culture?*

In Vivo Codes	Interview Response
<b>Outlines Expectations</b>	“The school does this workshop about this stuff at the beginning of the year too. They cover a lot of information about the culture in the school for the kids and the parents. The principal makes an effort to really make sure it spreads throughout the school...like the positivity part for everyone.”
<b>Positive Experiences</b>	<p>“Oh yeah...we’ve had positive experiences in the school..I mean the school is very focused on learning and achievement.”</p> <p>“You know we never had issues in the school. We have not experienced anything but positive, supportive people in the school. They’ve been great.”</p>

“We’ve always had good experiences in this district...everyone has been really about the kids...”

“Everybody is so nice here....they really are very accepting of us...We are both involved a lot in the school and it’s never been anything.”

“We were handled so politely...never had any trouble with anyone in the school...they focus the energy on the kids and learning.”

## **Welcoming**

“The school is inviting to parents really...Like they really encourage the parents to participate. They have something for all of the parents to do..”

“They really do include families into about everything in the school. I know I was a traffic person for them...everybody is nice and they always speak when they see us. We’re known as my son’s dads.”

“...you know I volunteer in the school and It’s never been weird or anything. The teachers treat just like they would any other parent.

“We pretty much know everybody and they know us. If we’re in an after school event and somebody needs something, they’ll holler at one of us just like they would any of the other parents.”

“People don’t blink at us. The school staff members just seem to be glad they have involved parents.”

## **Openness**

“The principal here is...they are just so open minded and friendly. I never

even thought about hiding it from them for real. Our son has an IEP too and we communicate with everyone in the school a lot and no one has ever made us feel weird about being two married Black men. If anything really, they can be over-accommodating to us, which is a nice change.”

“We are both out and we’ve always been an out couple. We purposely chose to live in this area and for our kids to attend the schools in this area because of the culture over here.”

“Here, everybody is so nice and the principal has the open door policy for all parents in the school. They are...they are very accepting of us. We both volunteer at the school. We pretty much know everybody and they know us.”

“The principal keeps an open door for anyone or any of the parents... She has really created a culture of acceptance and the area is like “gay pride” everywhere. I just don’t think this is the place for that. The teachers here are younger too. That could have something to do with it. There are only a few “old” teachers here and they probably all went to Woodstock (laughs). Just not the place.”

**Research question two.** The second table includes specific in vivo codes from all rounds of interviews across participants that address research question two. These codes specifically outline the experiences of same-sex parents with discrimination in schools. To reiterate from chapter three, the purpose of research question two was to understand individual experiences with discrimination in schools among same-sex parents.

*In Vivo Codes to address Research Question Two: How do same-sex parents describe their experiences with discrimination in schools?*

In Vivo Codes	Interview Response
<b>Supportive of Parental Involvement</b>	“I know they really try here, like purposely try to make sure this is a place free from discrimination. They have so many ways for parents to connect with the teachers here. I mean the PTO is able to fund positions within the school. So they really value the presence of parents here.”
<b>Other Parents</b>	“Truthfully, I can’t say that I’ve ever had an experience with discrimination in that school. Never. Other parents may look but even they don’t say anything or treat us badly. I think of the place as a “come as you are” but within obvious boundaries.”  “Hmm..I’ve had good experiences working with other parents. We all work together to support the teachers and our children. I mean I’m not best friends with every parent in the school but we have friends with kids in the school. Overall, I’d say the other parents in the school are cool to work with.”  “They’ve been fine. I haven’t had any issues with anyone. I mean I see and talk to some more than others. But on field trips and school functions everybody is on their best behavior. We want to be good examples for our children.”  “I mean we’ve gotten dirty looks from other parents but honestly it’s really not a big deal. I mean they look and they also speak. I don’t want to make it a big deal because the other parents really are great in the school.”  “Working with the other parents? Well it’s been fine. I suppose. I mean we pretty much sit and vent about life when we’re all together (laughs) volunteering. Seriously though, it’s been. They know that we are

## Church

committed parents and we want the best for our family.”

“We have found some people looking at us...but really what we found is some people care but most don’t. Of course, we get more tension or resistance in places like church...(laughs) but that I...uh...guess is really to be expected? You know...I mean we are in the bible belt and we knew that population wouldn’t necessary welcome us with open arms.”

“I mean the worst places for discrimination for us have been church. I mean from the minute I walk in..it’s you’re going hell for your lifestyle. Lord, the thought of even bringing my family in there scares me honestly.”

## 2016 Presidential Election

“After Trump won, I think at least 6-7 teachers from that school came up to me and was like “I can’t believe we did this to you guys!” (laughs) So many of them were so disturbed and concerned for us. I mean it was almost unreal (laughs). I love all of his teachers. I’m friends with a lot of them on Facebook. I see their anti-hate posts. They really are some very liberal White women who just aren’t here for any hate or discrimination.”

“After the presidential election was over, I think a lot of same-sex parents were worried...you know...we’re concerned about our rights being taken away. You know you think about those type of things.”  
“I’m not really worried about the election results. I actually voted for him. I feel that this country needs a solid president and he is the man to do it. Others in the school may disagree with me but that’s my opinion. I support Trump.”

## Wealth

“I think it's a mix in the school with conservatives and liberals. It's in a

very high income area. There's a lot of money here. The kids that come into the school, the families are very very wealthy. It doesn't seem like many of the folks in this population care too much about my sexual orientation."

"And we would also consider ourselves wealthy by American standards. I mean I make enough money doing what I do that Ryan doesn't have to work an outside job because we can still live very well with my income. But I'm not going to lie and say that I didn't worry about what others would think of my kids. Especially other parents, but the majority of people, especially in this school are very supportive."

"But they really just focus on the kids and teaching the children. It is a higher performing school and there is a lot of money in this area, so I just don't think this is that kinda place. You know?"

### **Level of Education**

"You know we happen to live in an affluent area...I mean I wouldn't say everyone is rich or anything. You know...but there's a really educated population here and they're more of the demographic that gets it. You know...they understand about being professional and they know what to say."

"You know we both are educated...not in the text book sense but in the business sense and that is how we approach school. We kinda approach it...dealing with the school and the community like we would a job. You know...we take it very

seriously and it's her future we're talking about."

**Positivity**

"Her teacher has a really positive approach to teaching the material. She keeps the students engaged in the process. My daughter knows how she's doing all the time and she can see her grades. She keeps track of those too. She takes it seriously like us."

"I like this school a lot. Everyone is nice and committed to these kids. I've been upfront about our family structure and we've always had good teachers. They're always helpful."

**Research question three.** The third table includes specific in vivo codes from all rounds of interviews across participants that address research question three. These codes specifically outline the experiences of same-sex parents with inclusion in schools. To reiterate from chapter three, research question three sought to understand specific experiences with school inclusion among families with same-sex parents.

*In Vivo Codes to address Research Question Three: How inclusive are schools for families with same-sex parents?*

In Vivo Codes	Interview Responses
<b>Family Friendly</b>	<p>"The school is always having something. Just about every week, they're having something with the parents. Last week, we did a spaghetti dinner and it was kind of a Friday night thing with the family. They do stuff for the entire family probably about 3-4 times each semester."</p>
	<p>"I think they do a good job including families into stuff at the school. I mean there's a really educated population here and they're more of the demographic that gets it. You know...they understand about being professional and they know what to say."</p>

“Good. Other parents may look but even they don’t say anything or treat us badly. I think of the place as a “come as you are” but within obvious boundaries. But they really just focus on the kids and teaching the children.”

“I would say the school is very open and including of families. They do stuff a lot out here. Almost every other week. They are about to start up an annual fundraiser for the grade-level field trip to a major American city. Each grade level chooses to take their students on a field trip. The parents usually help out with that I know. Uh..I mean they just have events for everyone to get involved in.”

“The school has been wonderful. We had no trouble at all from the teachers or the administration. More of kinda the looks and stuff would always come from the other parents. It’s more of a hipster, cool place and everyone is on board and open.”

“The school is inviting to parents really... Like they really encourage the parents to Participate. They have something for all of the parents to do..”

“They really do include families into just about everything in the school. I know I was a traffic person for them... everybody is nice and they always speak when they see us. We’re known as my son’s dads.”

## **Welcoming**

“...you know I volunteer in the school and It’s never been weird or anything. The teachers treat us just like they would any other parent.

“We pretty much know everybody and they Know us. If we’re in an after school event and somebody needs something, they’ll

holler at one of us just like they would any of the other parents.”

### **Supportive of Parental Involvement**

“The school holds a workshop on keeping the parents involved at the beginning of the year and she makes her position known then. I mean with respect too. I’ve never felt excluded by anyone in the school.”

“They do a workshop every year in the beginning, around August. It basically gets all of the parents involved within the school. They tell us that anyone can join and be active.”

“They talk about parental involvement and including us in all parts of the school. They make it known that this is a culturally-open school. Plus, they do this thing for the parents at the workshop. It’s like a group exercise to get to know other parents and we all share tips, strategies to help.”

“I know they really try here, like purposely try to make sure this is a place free from discrimination. They have so many ways for parents to connect with the teachers here. I mean the PTO is able to fund positions within the school. So they really value the presence of parents here.”

“You know...the teachers and administrators don’t even blink. They never have anything negative to say and they are accepting. They just seem to really be glad that they have involved parents.”

### **Outlines Expectations**

“They do a workshop with the parents early in the school year. They really focusing on creating a good environment for the kids. It really couldn’t be any better for us...we feel very included in everything.”

**Research question four.** The fourth table includes specific in vivo codes from all rounds of interviews across participants that address research question four. These codes specifically outline the policies in place to support and protect same-sex parents. To reiterate from chapter three, research question four sought to understand the current policies in place in schools that support same-sex parents.

*In Vivo Codes to address Research Question Four: What policies, that same-sex parents are aware of, are in place in schools to support same-sex parents?*

In Vivo Codes	Interview Responses
<b>Unnecessary Policy</b>	<p>“(Laughs) My husband calls it the little Hogwarts school but I don’t know. Everybody is just so nice and we’ve never had a bad experience. I don’t think they would need a policy like that there. Maybe other schools in the district need that but not us. Everyone is really focused on the kids.”</p> <p>“You know I’m not sure if they have one or not. But honestly I don’t think a formal policy is necessary out there. If the trend keeps going the way it has been, then I don’t think they would need a policy of that nature.”</p> <p>“I know they really try here, like purposely try to make sure this is a place free from discrimination. They have so many ways for parents to connect with the teachers here. I mean the PTO is able to fund positions within the school. So they really value the presence of parents here. Sorry I can talk all day (laughs)...I don’t know of any specific rules in the school for same-sex parents. But honestly, I’m not sure I would want that or if that would really change anything here. The principal here is really good and</p>

## Testimonial

she's very accessible via email or even in person. I feel like if any problems were to arise, she'd be the first one to address it head on. She's created that type of culture there."

"I would say to any parent that first be prepared for the admissions process! Then, I'd say be prepared to experience a school environment like no other. Be prepared to be a real part of your child's learning and growth."

"Uh..probably just talk with them about the emphasis on academics and learning. I'd also share my good experiences with my son's teacher and the administrators. All parents in the district want their kid to come to this middle school for a reason."

"I would tell them to be prepared to learn more than ever. You'll be learning along with your child. Each step of the way and the journey. The staff and teachers are awesome to work with. I can't ever imagine a parent having a difficult time in this school."

"Come on! This school is an open door school. No one will care about your sexual orientation or your family. They are open minded, progressive. It is really liberal."

"I'd encourage them to enroll their child here. I mean the school is one of the higher performing ones in the district. The teachers and everyone is committed to education. There really is nowhere better for a child to be. My daughter has had a great experience"