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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

An Examination of School Harassment for Middle School
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, & Questioning Students

by

Kimberly Indelicato

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,
Loyola Marymount University,
in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Education

An Examination of School Harassment for Middle School

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, & Questioning Students

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by

Kimberly Indelicato

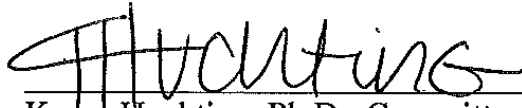
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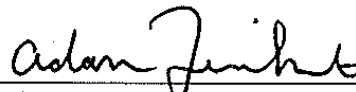
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04 18 2013

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the many LGBQ students who continue to endure harassment at school and to the LGB students and staff members and their straight allies who continue to try to make their schools a safer and more inclusive environment.

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ABSTRACT

Most schools are not safe environments for lesbian, gay, and bisexual students or for individuals who are questioning their sexual orientation. Harassment and victimization of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and questioning (LGBQ) students is pervasive. The harassment and victimization result in these students having higher rates of absenteeism and lower academic achievements than their peers. To date, most research has focused on primarily high school lesbian, gay, and bisexual students. Very few studies have included students questioning their sexual orientation. This quantitative descriptive study utilized an anonymous survey to gather information about middle school LGBQ students' experiences with harassment. The study included 208 middle school students. The results were compiled into three groups (lesbian/gay/bisexual, questioning, and straight) and compared. Findings indicated that LGBQ students experience significantly more harassment than straight students and questioning students are more likely to experience victimization than lesbian, gay, bisexual, and straight students. The findings support the need for middle school administrators and staff members to take steps to create more inclusive school climates for LGBQ students.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In 1993, Unks reviewed the literature regarding lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) students, their experiences in schools, and the support systems available to them and concluded that high schools were “the most homophobic of all institutions” (Unks, 1993, p. 2). Twenty years later, data still support the conclusion that many schools and classrooms continue to be homophobic institutions. For example, in 2011, the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) surveyed over 8,500 gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) students and found that 82% of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) students experience verbal harassment including being called “fag,” “dyke,” and “homo” (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012). Even worse, 57% of LGB students reported hearing homophobic remarks from school staff members (Kosciw et al., 2012). This verbal harassment is often surrounded by an official silence, which includes the lack of response by school staff to homophobic language (Mayo, 2009).

Examples of the harassment endured by LGB students and the lack of response by school officials are well illustrated in recent court cases such as *Henkle v. Gregory (2001)*, *Loomis v. Visalia Unified School District (2001)*, and *Doe v. Anoka-Hennepin School District No. 11(2011)*. In these cases, the plaintiffs (LGB students) reported experiencing verbal harassment by students and school staff. They also reported physical harassment by students, such as being shoved into lockers, beaten, and lassoed around the neck with threats of being dragged behind a truck. In each of the cases, the student plaintiffs reported the incidents to school officials—counselors, assistant principals, principals, or superintendents. However, school officials took no

action, blamed the victim, or did nothing more than telling students to stop. In fact, school officials' responses to the LGB students included: "stop acting like a fag" (*Henkle v. Gregory*, 2001, p. 5) and because you are openly gay a traditional high school would "not be appropriate" (*Henkle v. Gregory*, 2001, p. 6). Specifically, in *Loomis v. Visalia Unified School District*, a teacher stated to the class: "there are only two types of guys who wear earrings—pirates and faggots—and there isn't any water around here" (Wanger, 2001, p. 8).

Although our LGB students are not the only students experiencing harassment, our LGB students are especially at risk of negative outcomes from the harassment due to the unique characteristics of their sub-group. First, in many areas of our country, harassment of LGB individuals, including derogatory comments, is socially acceptable. This social acceptability can be evidenced throughout our society in remarks made regarding banning gay marriage, teacher comments such as those documented in the afore mentioned court cases, and the high percentage of LGBT youth reporting school staff making homophobic remarks alongside the low rates of school staff intervening when witnessing LGB harassment, as reported in the 2011 GLSEN Survey results. Second, when confronted with teasing and harassment, many LGB students lack the traditional support structures that their peers may utilize, such as teachers, parents, and religious figures (Munoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002; Varjas et al., 2007) because they have not yet told those individuals they are LGB. Finally, another unique factor of LGB youth is their lack of connection to the broader LGB community. For example, many youth of ethnic or religious minorities have family members or friends consisting of individuals of the same ethnicity or religion in which they have been raised. Therefore, they have often grown up hearing stories of struggle and triumph and are likely to have a support system available to them.

Further, they may be aware of adults who have had similar experiences who they can rely on for support and guidance during times of struggle. However, many LGB youth may not be embedded in the larger LGB community and therefore they may lack support and guidance from LGB adults who could share their experiences and stories to provide LGB youth with guidance, understanding, and hope.

As a result of harassment, victimization, and lack of support structures, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Questioning (LGBQ) students are at risk of experiencing negative outcomes including depression and academic difficulties (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009; Fisher et al., 2008; Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2009). LGB students who are targets of harassment are more likely to have a lower GPA (Kosciw, 2004), are more likely to be truant (Birkett et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2009), and are three times more likely to drop out of school than their straight peers (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). Students questioning their sexual orientation are at an even greater risk of victimization than their LGB peers (Birkett et al., 2009). However, it is important to remember that LGBQ youth are not at risk of these negative outcomes because of their sexual orientation, but because of others' hostile responses to their sexual orientation (Hansen, 2007; Lee, 2002; Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002). In other words, the words, actions, and school climate created by straight peers and by the school staff are one of the factors putting LGBQ students at risk.

While the majority of these findings are based on high school students' experiences, general verbal harassment and bullying peak during the middle school years (Kaufman et al., 1999; Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001). The sense of belonging and the importance of belonging to the "in-crowd" are especially important to middle school

students (Bishop et al., 2004). During the middle school years, students have a heightened awareness about peer approval and “fitting in” (Eccles & Midgley, 1989, as cited in Graham, Bellmore, Nishina, & Juvonen, 2009). Students who are outside of the norms established by their peers, such as LGB students, are more likely to be targets of harassment (Graham et al., 2009).

Middle school is also the time period in which most students enter puberty (Orvin, 1995; Slavin, 2006). During puberty, individuals experience hormonal changes, which result in increased sexual feelings (Santrock, 2009). While straight students begin to date or “go-with” individuals they are attracted to, many LGB students become aware of their attraction to individuals of the same sex and begin to question their sexual identity (Birkett et al., 2009; Williams, Connolly, & Pepler, 2005).

Given the findings that show a majority of LGB high school students endure harassment (Kosciw et al., 2012), the negative impact the harassment has on their emotional well-being and on their educational outcomes, that verbal harassment and bullying peaks during middle school (Kaufman et al., 1999; Nansel et al., 2001), that questioning students are at greater risk of being a target of victimization (Birkett et al., 2009), and that middle school is the time period in which some LGB students begin to question their sexual identity (Birkett et al., 2009), one can speculate that even more middle school LGBQ students are negatively impacted by the school environment than high school LGBQ students. However, little research has documented the experience of LGBQ middle school students. This study seeks to provide data to fill that gap.

Statement of Problem

The federal government and the California state government assert that every student has the right to learn in a safe environment. The No Child Left Behind Act (2001), federal education

legislation, requires that school campuses are safe, including being free from violence due to intolerance, and mandates that all students will learn and meet minimum proficiencies.

California State Board of Education Policy # 01-02 (2001) mandates schools to protect all students. Despite these mandates and policies, the vast majority of high school LGBQ students continue to experience verbal and physical harassment (Kosciw et al., 2012). Further, the harassment has been shown to result in a negative impact on their academic performance (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). The harassment experienced by LGBQ students creates a hostile school environment. A hostile environment is not a safe environment and the hostile environment is impacting LGB students' learning (Kosciw, 2004). Further, given the negative impact the school environment has on LGBQ students' learning and the idea that LGB students are at risk due to others' perceptions of their sexual orientation (Hansen, 2007; Lee, 2002; Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002), LGBQ students are not able to learn to their full capacity, creating a social injustice.

Birkett et al. (2009) identified middle school as the time in which an individual's sexual identity is forming. Additionally, according to Troiden's (1989) stage model of sexual identity development, questioning one's sexuality occurs prior to identification as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or straight. Therefore, taking into account both Birkett's finding and Troiden's model of sexual identity formation, one can reason that some youth who will later identify as LGB will be questioning their sexuality during the middle school years while others may already identify as LGB. Given the finding that bullying and victimization peak during the middle school years, the data describing the impact of harassment on LGB youth in the high school environment and LGB students' learning, alongside the finding that questioning students experience greater

victimization than LGB students (Birkett et al., 2009), one can speculate that more middle school LGBQ students are negatively impacted by the environment than high school LGBQ students. However, little research has documented the experiences of LGBQ middle school students, specifically their experiences with harassment.

The lack of knowledge about LGBQ middle school student experiences occurs for a number of reasons: LGB demographic data is not collected by schools; a majority of studies on LGB students have focused on high school LGB students; and identifying students who are questioning their sexuality is methodologically difficult. When schools report data such as school safety information, state testing, suspension statistics, graduation rates, and attendance data, they compile the data using student demographics. However, students are typically not asked to state their sexual orientation and therefore LGBQ students are not viewed as a subgroup in most school data sets. One argument for not collecting the demographic information is the fear that the information could stigmatize a student or have negative implications for the student at a future time. Additionally, a student's demographic information is available to his/her parent/guardians and if a student is not "out" to his/her parents and identified him/herself as LGB to the school, the parents could easily obtain the information and the student could experience negative repercussions at home.

Another reason for the lack of data on LGBQ student experiences is due to methodological difficulties. Research that is focused on adolescents almost always requires parent permission for student participation. Therefore, student participation requires students to have self-identified as LGB and obtaining parent permission requires students to be "out" to their parents. As a result, the LGB high school students whose voices are heard in the published

research are nearing the end of the identity formation process. Further, students who have self-identified are likely to have more support options available to them (Birkett et al., 2009; Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008) biasing the findings. Finally, questioning students have not typically shared that they are questioning their sexuality with others making it difficult for researchers to identify those students. For those reasons, most studies have focused on high schools and high school students, have included middle school students in very small proportions, or have been retrospective studies of LGB individuals reflecting back on their middle school experience. Very few studies have focused on the experiences of students questioning their sexual identity.

Due to the aforementioned circumstances, LGB students who are not “out” to their parents and students who are questioning their sexual identity lack a voice and are silenced. The silence and lack of data allow school officials to ignore the struggles that LGBTQ students face regarding school safety, which impacts LGBTQ students’ attendance, sense of well-being, and ultimately their academic performance. This study will utilize an anonymous survey to be given to all 7th and 8th graders at a school site, with parental permission, attempting to give voice to questioning students and LGB students who are not “out” to their parents. Additionally, the data gathered from students who complete the survey will provide information about how harassment experienced by LGB students, questioning students, and straight students may differ. Additionally, data will be collected from straight students about their perception of LGB individuals.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this quantitative study is to describe the experiences of LGBTQ middle school students' experiences with harassment. Studies have shown that the high school environment can be a hostile environment for LGBTQ students (Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008; Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002; Sherbloom and Bahr, 2008), high school LGBTQ students' education and emotional well-being are impacted by the hostile environment (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Kosciw, 2004), questioning students experience more harassment than LGB students (Birkett et al., 2009), and students who identify as LGB in high school are likely to have questioned their sexual orientation in middle school (Birkett et al., 2009). Due to schools' structures for obtaining demographic data, research requirements for parent permission, and the process of sexual identity formation, middle school LGBTQ students are often invisible, silent, and struggling. According to federal and state legislation, educators have a responsibility to provide a safe environment and to ensure that all students learn. This study seeks to provide LGBTQ students a voice about their middle school experiences related to harassment. The findings may prompt school administrators and teachers to create a safer environment for LGBTQ middle school students.

Significance of Study

The federal and state governments have acknowledged that students must feel safe to be able to learn and therefore have included school safety in legislation such as No Child Left Behind and California Education Policy. No Child Left Behind also requires educational leaders to ensure that all students are learning and meeting minimal proficiency standards. For this to happen, administrators must focus on changing traditional practices and structures to ensure that

marginalized groups, including LGBTQ students, succeed. The focus on changing structures and practices to ensure success of traditionally marginalized groups is often described as social justice (Tillman, 2002, as cited in Dantley & Tillman, 2010). Bell (1997), as cited in Brown (2004), describes social justice to “include a vision of society in which...all members are physically and psychologically safe” (p. 3).

High school LGBTQ students experience a school environment that is made hostile through harassment. The majority of high school LGB students report experiencing verbal harassment (Kosciw et al., 2012) and questioning students experience even greater victimization than LGB students (Birkett et al., 2009). Kosciw (2004) found that verbal harassment leads to a hostile environment. Hostile environments are obviously not safe environments; therefore, it is reasonable to infer that LGBTQ students’ learning is negatively impacted by the hostile school environment, thus creating an injustice for LGBTQ students. It is also reasonable to infer that LGBTQ students in middle school are experiencing frequent harassment and a hostile environment, negatively impacting their learning, especially given the finding that bullying in general occurs frequently in middle school. Yet there is little data documenting middle school LGBTQ students’ experiences.

This study is significant because it will provide the perspective of LGBTQ middle school students through the use of an anonymous survey about school safety related to harassment. All seventh and eighth grade students who attend the middle school and have parental permission will be invited to participate in the survey. The survey will include an item in which the student will be able to state if he/she identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, straight, or is questioning his/her sexual orientation during the current school year. This information will be used to provide data

about LGBTQ students' experiences at the middle school level, thus giving this invisible group a voice. This study is also significant because it seeks to provide data regarding middle school students' perceptions of LGBTQ individuals.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework grounding this study is based upon two key ideas: school safety and adolescent development. These concepts provide context for examining LGBTQ middle school students' experiences. First, all students, including LGBTQ students, have the right to learn in a safe environment. This mandate provides the standard to measure experiences of our students and if our students are not safe, educators must work to change their school culture. Second, most middle school students are in the adolescent stage of development where they experience puberty and are forming their sexual identity. This developmental time provides insight to what middle school students are experiencing and can inform educators working with LGBTQ students. As such, these concepts are simultaneously occurring and may help to contextualize harassment experiences of middle school LGBTQ students.

Safety

This quantitative study is based on the perspective that all students have the right to learn in a safe environment, free from harassment and harm. In Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, safety is considered a basic need, which must be met prior to other needs and before self-actualization. Maslow's hierarchy of needs has been applied to the school context and research has emphasized the importance of creating safe school environments for all students. Specifically, as applied to understanding LGBTQ students, research suggests that high school LGBTQ students are less safe, both physically and psychologically, than their heterosexual

counterparts due to their heterosexual counterparts' and heterosexual school staff members' often hostile responses to LGB students' sexual orientation (Lee, 2002; Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002). Additionally, federal and state legislation further stipulate that schools must provide a safe environment for all students. Taken together, this study is grounded in these perspectives on school safety as a primary need for all students.

Adolescence

Adolescence refers to the social and psychological changes that begin to occur during most students' middle school years and puberty describes the physical changes that begin to occur during adolescence (Orvin, 1995). Some of the social changes that occur include the increasing importance the role peers play in students' lives and the importance of "fitting in" (Cillessen, Schwartz, & Mayeux, 2011; Santrock, 2009; Slavin, 2006). One of the physical changes that occurs during puberty is the hormonal changes which result in growth spurts, increased body hair, and increased sexual feelings (Santrock, 2009). In fact, during puberty students begin to form a sexual identity. While straight students begin to date or "go-with" individuals they are attracted to, many LGB students begin to question their sexual identity (Birkett et al., 2009; Williams et al., 2005). Models of sexual identity formation suggest that students who eventually identify as LGB progress through a questioning stage prior to this identification (Troiden, 1989) and this questioning phase likely coincides with puberty, which occurs during adolescence, during the middle school years. As such, understanding more about what is occurring to students during adolescence will provide context for understanding the experiences of LGBTQ middle school students.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to provide statistical data about middle school LGBTQ students' experiences, specifically their experiences with harassment. To do so, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- First, what are middle school students' experiences with harassment?
Specifically, how do LGBTQ, questioning, and straight students' experiences with harassment differ?
- Second, what are straight students' perceptions of LGBTQ individuals?

Research Design and Methodology

This is a descriptive quantitative study that intends to describe middle school LGBTQ students' experiences, specifically their experiences with harassment. Based upon the finding that high school LGBTQ students experience harassment and the finding that harassment peaks during middle school (Kaufman et al., 1999; Nansel et al., 2001), it is anticipated that LGBTQ and questioning students will experience more harassment than their straight peers and questioning students will be experiencing the most harassment. The study was completed through anonymous student surveys distributed to seventh and eighth grade students at an urban middle school. The survey asked students about their middle school experiences, specifically with harassment.

The surveys included closed ended questions from the California Healthy Kids Survey (WestEd, 2011), closed ended questions from the GSA School Climate Survey (GSA Network, 2011), and a section for students to document demographic information including sexual orientation. Questions were chosen from the California Healthy Kids Survey and the GSA School Climate Survey because both are well established and reputable surveys.

It was important for the surveys to be anonymous because identity formation often takes place during adolescence, which begins during the middle school years (Williams et al., 2005). Therefore, LGB students were at various stages of the sexual identity and specifically, the “coming out” process, which would impact issues of disclosure through the process of parental consent. As such, it was important for students to feel confident their answers were anonymous so they would answer truthfully, without being in a position where they were forced to “come out” to anyone if not yet ready.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Additional Biases

As with all studies, this study has both limitations and delimitations. First, the results of this study are based upon the self-reporting of students’ sexual orientation, their experience related to harassment and bullying, and their perceptions of LGB individuals. As with all studies which utilize self-reporting, this is a limitation. By making the survey anonymous, the researcher attempted to ensure participants felt comfortable and reported accurately. However, due to the stigma of identifying as LGB, and the stigma of being a target of harassment, students may not have reported accurately.

Delimitations of this study include the limited number of school sites (one middle school) and the limited geographical area (the west side of Los Angeles). Additionally, disproportionately more females than males chose to participate in the survey and an alternate attractive option resulted in a small number of seventh grade participants. Finally, a lot of research about bullying had been recently conducted at the site, including one which offered students money for completing the survey. This was unknown to me until the fourth day of

presentations when a student asked how much they would be paid for completing the survey and the teacher explained another researcher had paid the students for completing that survey.

I have several biases related to this study. First and foremost, I am a lesbian and I strongly feel that LGBTQ students should be treated with respect and should be safe and supported at school. I was also an administrator at the high school in the same school district as the middle school and I am currently an administrator at an elementary school in the same district as the middle school. To minimize this bias, I approached this study quantitatively and did not know any of the students (except one) who participated in the survey. With the anonymous approach, I was unable to link responses to any individual student.

Organization of Study

This study describes LGBTQ students' experiences, specifically their experiences with harassment, in an urban middle school. Chapter one includes the background of the problem, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, the conceptual framework, the research questions, the research methodology, the limitations, the delimitations, the biases, the definitions of key terms, and the organization of the study. Chapter two is a review of the literature on LGBTQ students, including their experiences with harassment and the negative outcomes of the harassment, and an overview of the middle school years including adolescent development, sexual identity formation, and harassment. Chapter three describes the methodology used in this study to answer the research questions. Chapter four analyzes and discusses the findings of this quantitative study. Chapter five concludes the study with recommendations for current practice and for future studies.

Definitions of Key Terms

Bisexual: A person who is attracted to members of both sexes.

Bullying: A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself. This definition includes three important components: 1) bullying is aggressive behavior that involves unwanted, negative actions, 2) bullying involves a pattern of behavior repeated over time, 3) bullying involves an imbalance of power or strength (Olweus, 2012).

Coming Out: The process through which an individual discloses his/her homosexuality.

Commitment: The time when individuals “adopt homosexuality as a way of life” and disclose their sexual orientation to heterosexual individuals (Troiden, 1989).

Gay: A common term for homosexual males.

Gay Straight Alliance (GSA): Clubs or organizations on school campuses that support lesbian, gay, bisexual, and questioning students. The club is comprised of lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, and straight students.

Harassment: Mistreatment and victimization by another individual “through repeated negative acts like insulting remarks and ridicule, verbal abuse, offensive teasing, isolation, and social exclusion, or the constant degrading of one's work and efforts” (Einarsen, Raknes, & Matthiesen, 1994, p. 381).

Heteronormativity: The assumption that all individuals within an institution are heterosexual. The institution’s policies and norms are based upon this assumption. (Filex, 2006).

Heterosexual: A person who is only attracted to members of the other sex.

Homosexuality: Individuals who experience an “enduring, emotional, romantic, sexual, or affectional attraction to another person” of the same sex (American Psychological Association, 2005, p. 1).

Identity Assumption: Often occurs during mid- to late adolescence or adulthood, when individuals begin to self-identify and disclose their sexual orientation (“come out”) to other LGB people (Troiden, 1989).

Identity Confusion: The time when youth become aware that they may be homosexual (Troiden, 1989).

Lesbian: Common term for homosexual females.

Questioning: Individuals who are questioning their sexual orientation.

Sensitization: The time period when a child perceives him or herself as being different (Troiden, 1989).

Sexual Orientation: Sexual orientation refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or both sexes. Sexual orientation has three commonly used categories: heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual.

Straight: Common term for individuals who are heterosexual; are attracted to only members of the other sex.

Target: The individual who the harassment or bullying is aimed at; also known as the victim.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the United States, from September to June, most children, ages 5 to 18 years, are required to attend school 5 days a week for approximately 6 hours per day (Silva, 2007). Throughout the day, children interact with one another in classrooms, in hallways, on the playground, in the cafeteria, and in the locker room. Unfortunately, not all of these interactions are positive. One group of students, who are often targets of negative peer interactions, are sexual minority youth, or students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or are questioning their sexual orientation (Birkett et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2012; Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002; Varjas et al., 2007). For example, research suggests that the vast majority (82%) of students who identify as a sexual minority experience verbal harassment at school (Kosciw et al., 2012) and research suggests that students questioning their sexuality may be at greater risk of victimization, including verbal harassment, than all other students (Birkett et al., 2009). While the experiences of sexual minority students have been examined via research, most studies have included primarily high school students. Further, some studies have included only LGB students, while others have also included transgender students, and still others have included questioning students. Across these studies, the conclusion remains the same: sexual minority students experience harassment in our schools (e.g. Birkett et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2012; Lee, 2002; Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002). However, little research has documented the experience of LGBQ middle school students. This study seeks to provide data to fill that gap.

Throughout this chapter, research that has examined the school experiences of sexual minority youth will be reviewed. This chapter will provide an overview of LGBQ students in the

school context and then discuss high school LGBQ students in the school setting, their experiences with harassment, and the negative outcomes they experience as a result of the harassment. Then, the chapter will provide a brief overview of adolescence, puberty, sexual identity development, and harassment in middle schools. Finally, the chapter will review the limited literature regarding middle school LGBQ students. There are only a few studies, including Birkett et al. (2009), specifically focusing on middle school LGBQ students. As such, much of the literature reviewed in this chapter involves either high school LGB students or is related to general middle school safety. Until more research is available on the experience of middle school LGBQ students, we are left to draw inferences given the literature on high school LGBQ students' experiences.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Questioning Students

Background

Homosexuality is defined by the American Psychological Association as a sexual orientation in which individuals experience an “enduring emotional, romantic, sexual or affectional attraction to another person” of the same sex (American Psychological Association, 2005, p. 1). Homosexual males are commonly referred to as gay and homosexual females are commonly referred to as lesbian. Bisexuals are individuals who experience attraction to individuals of the same sex and to individuals of the opposite sex. Due to the age range of the students participating in this study and for consistency with survey language, which was borrowed from a national study, the term “straight” will be used throughout this study to refer to heterosexual individuals or individuals attracted to the opposite sex. The term “questioning” is reserved for individuals who are questioning their sexuality; individuals who are undecided if

they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or straight. The term “coming out” is most commonly used to describe the process through which an LGB individual discloses his/her sexual identity. The coming out process occurs at different times for each individual (Troiden, 1989), although many individuals who identify as LGB become aware of their attraction to members of the same sex between the middle school ages of 10 and 12 years (Birkett et al., 2009). Questioning one’s sexuality is often an early part of the coming out process (Hansen, 2007; Mosher, 2001; Troiden, 1989), although not all individuals who question their sexuality are lesbian, gay, or bisexual. LGB students may struggle both internally and externally throughout the coming out process (Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002). Internal struggles include experiencing feelings of isolation and confusion at the same time as experiencing external struggles such as negative messages about LGB individuals and harassment.

LGBQ Students and School Safety

Research suggests that the vast majority (82%) of students who identify as LGB experience verbal harassment at school (Kosciw et al., 2012). In 1999, the National Education Association evaluated 42 of the largest districts in the United States on a grading scale from A to F for their ability to keep LGB students safe at school and the average grade earned was a D- (Talbert, 2004). However, during the past decade, society’s concern over and attention to verbal harassment (often falling under the more popular term of bullying) has increased. This is evidenced in the large number of television news stories about bullying, President Obama’s White House Conference on Bullying, and social media campaigns such as “It Gets Better.” Additionally, many states have passed anti-bullying measures aimed at reducing bullying in schools including adding policies mandating disciplinary consequences such as California

Education Code 48900(r) which makes bullying a suspendable offense. Nationally, the No Child Left Behind (2001) policy mandates teachers and administrators to provide a safe school climate for all students.

The underlying belief for these school policies is that students must be safe to be able to learn. This belief is supported by Maslow's (1943) theoretical model of the hierarchy of needs. Maslow (1943) cites the following five types of needs as basic needs: physiological, safety, love (including belonging), esteem, and self-actualization (to be all one can be). He has set these needs in a hierarchical order with physiological needs being the highest of the basic needs and self-actualization being the last of the basic needs. Maslow posits that the hindering of a basic need results in a psychological threat. In other words, safety must be met prior to students being able to develop self-esteem and to self-actualize.

Applying Maslow's theory of needs to LGBQ students' experiences in schools, we find LGBQ students' psychological well-being may be threatened due to their lack of safety and sense of belonging (love) at school. Studies by Lee (2002) and Munoz-Plaza et al. (2002) illustrate this application of Maslow's conceptual framework to LGBQ students' experiences. In 2002, Lee studied seven LGB students at a high school in Utah and Munoz-Plaza et al interviewed twelve adults, age 18-24, about their high school experiences. Both studies were qualitative studies examining LGB individuals' high school experiences and both studies concluded that LGB students are less safe, both physically and psychologically, than their heterosexual counterparts due to hostile responses made by heterosexual students and staff about LGB students' sexual orientation (Lee, 2002; Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002). Additionally, both of

these studies, consisted of only a small number of participants, all participants in Lee's study were out to their parents, and both samples were primarily white.

Despite society's concern over and attention to verbal harassment during the past decade, two more recent studies, with larger sample sizes and including questioning students as an identified group, were conducted by Birkett et al. (2009) and Espelage et al. (2008). Both studies found LGBQ students continued to not feel safe at school. Birkett et al. (2009) surveyed 7,376 lesbian, gay, bisexual, straight, and questioning middle school students in the northeastern United States about their concerns, opinions, attitudes, behaviors, and experiences. Espelage et al. (2008) surveyed 13,921 lesbian, gay, bisexual, straight, and questioning students from the Midwestern United States about their opinions, attitudes, behaviors, and needs. Both studies support the argument that LGB students' basic needs for safety are not being met in the school environment, and that LGBQ students often feel isolated (lack of belonging/love), resulting in LGBQ students suffering psychologically. Similar to Lee (2002) and Munoz-Plaza et al.'s (2002) work, participants in these studies were primarily white. All of these studies provide evidence for two issues: (a) the school environment is hostile for sexual minority youth; (b) it is still unclear how students of diverse backgrounds who are questioning their sexual identity feel about their middle school environment and it is possible that they too have negative experiences.

LGBQ Students and Harassment

In schools, students who identify as LGB often fall in a low-status group and experience victimization, including harassment, at school because of their identity as a sexual minority (Turner, Finkelhor, Hamby, Shattuck, & Ormrod, 2011). Harassment is defined as the mistreatment and victimization by another individual "through repeated negative acts like

insulting remarks and ridicule, verbal abuse, offensive teasing, isolation, and social exclusion, or the constant degrading of one's work and efforts” (Einarsen et al., 1994, p. 381). In 1993, Unks collected a series of articles regarding gay youth and their experiences for *The High School Journal* and concluded that “high schools may be the most homophobic of all institutions” (p. 2). Continuing the research efforts started by Unks and the other contributors to that edition of *The High School Journal*, various agencies have collected data in efforts to measure and to understand LGBQ students’ experiences.

Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) is one organization that has engaged in collecting information about LGBQ students’ school experiences. GLSEN is a national organization of educators who “strives to assure that each member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression” and who “seeks to develop school climates where difference is valued for the positive contribution it makes in creating a more vibrant and diverse community” (GLSEN, 2013, <http://www.glsen.org/values>). Since 1999, GLSEN has administered the school climate survey to LGB students biennially to collect information about their school experience for the purpose of providing the information to educators (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiwicz, 2010). Participants were recruited through organizations serving LGB youth and the survey was available on the Internet. In 2003, approximately 800 youth completed the anonymous survey. Participants ranged in age from 13-20 years of age and represented youth in all fifty states and the District of Columbia. Most participants identified themselves as gay or lesbian; about half were female, three-quarters of the participants identified as white, and over half reported being in the 11th or 12th grade (Kosciw, 2004). Survey results showed 86% of LGB students reported

experiencing verbal harassment at school (Kosciw, 2004). Further, the survey reported that 70% of LGB frequently hear homophobic remarks, 20% of those students reported the remarks were from school staff. Homophobic remarks include derogatory uses of the word gay, such as “that’s so gay,” and epithets such as “fag.” In 2005 the National Mental Health Association report supported GLSEN’s finding that LGB youth are often the targets of intense bullying (Sherblom & Bahr, 2008).

In 2011, GLSEN again conducted the survey. Participants self-selected to participate and were contacted through community based organizations serving LGB youth and through targeted advertisements on the Internet (Kosciw et al., 2012). Survey participants included 8,584 youth in grades 6-12 from across the United States who self-identified as LGBT. GLSEN’s 2011 survey results report that 82% of LGBT students experience verbal harassment, only a 4% decrease from 2003. In 2009, 85% of survey participants reported often or frequently hearing derogatory uses of the word “gay,” an increase from the 2003 survey results, and 71% of participants reported hearing homophobic remarks often or frequently at school (Kosciw et al., 2012). Of the 8,584 participants 32% identified as an individual of color and 61% identified as gay or lesbian (Kosciw et al., 2012). While self-selection is a limitation of the study, these findings are still incredibly valuable and should be taken seriously by educators because the students who did participate are experiencing verbal harassment at school and educators are mandated to make school safe for all students.

Negative Outcomes. Harassment leads to fear and violence becoming a part of the school environment (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004), affecting all students’ sense of well-being (Mayo, 2009). LGB students who are targets of harassment and bullying are more likely to have a lower

GPA, 2.9 vs. 3.2 (Kosciw et al., 2012); are more likely to be truant (Birkett et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2012); are three times more likely to miss school in the past month (Kosciw et al., 2012); and are three times more likely to drop out of school than their straight peers (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). Thus harassment hinders the academic achievement of LGB students (Blackburn & McCready, 2009; Kosciw, 2004).

A recent study by Birkett et al. (2009) found that compared to other sexual minority youth, questioning students were at the greatest risk of victimization. Birkett and colleagues surveyed 7,376 seventh and eighth grade students to examine how school factors such as homophobia and school climate impact LGBQ middle school students. Birkett et al. found that in a positive school environment free from homophobic teasing LGB students report similar rates of victimization, depression, alcohol and/or marijuana abuse, and truancy rates as their straight counterparts. However, in the same environment, questioning youth reported experiencing significantly higher rates of victimization as well as the negative outcomes (depression, substance abuse, and truancy) than both their straight and LGB peers. Although Birkett and colleagues utilized a large sample size, they acknowledge the need for additional studies about questioning youth's experience at school. In addition to experiencing victimization, many LGBQ youth experience isolation (Hansen, 2007; Lee 2002; Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002; Pace, 2009; Talburt, 2004).

Isolation. Emotional and cognitive isolation can also negatively impact many LGB students (Hansen, 2007; Lee 2002; Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002; Pace, 2009; Talburt, 2004).

Emotional isolation is described as “feelings of being alone, of being the only one who feels this way, of having no one to share feelings with” (Martin & Hetrick, 1988, as cited in Pace, 2009, p.

109). Cognitive isolation includes the absence of information and the lack of accurate information (Pace, 2009). The absence of information is especially notable in curriculum and representation of LGB individuals in the curriculum. Unks, one of the first individuals to collect and review a large number of articles focused on LGB youth and their school experiences for a single publication, in 2003 made the following statement about school curriculum and classroom instruction:

Homosexuals do not exist. They are “nonpersons”...They have fought no battles, held no offices, explored nowhere, written no literature...The lesson to the heterosexual student is clear: homosexuals do nothing of consequence. To the homosexual student, the message has even greater power: no one who has ever felt as you do has done anything worth mentioning. (Unks, 2003, cited in Pace 2009, p. 98)

These silences in the school curriculum and instruction as described by Unks, add to LGBTQ students' feelings of isolation and despair (Vare & Norton, 2004).

In response to the concern regarding lack of LGB in school curriculum, in 2011, California passed Senate Bill 48 amending California Education Code (§51204.5). The bill focused on pupil instruction, specifically prohibiting discriminatory content in social sciences. Previously, the California Education Code (§51204.5) required instruction in social sciences to include contributions made by demographic groups such as women, African Americans, Native Americans, and Mexican Americans. California Senate Bill 48, the Fair Education Act (2011), added gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals (as well as transgendered individuals, Pacific Islanders, and persons with disabilities) to the list of groups to be recognized for the roles and contributions to California and U.S. history. Further, Senate Bill 48 (2011) states that any new

textbook that is adopted must include contributions made by lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals in the development of California and the United States. Although the contributions of LGB individuals may never be fully known due to the stigma of coming out that was prevalent in U.S. history and that still continues today, the addition of even a few contributions of LGB individuals has the potential to break the silence and begin to fill the informational void about the contributions made by lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals in current school curriculum and classroom instruction. However, it remains too soon to determine if the intentions of the bill will reach classrooms.

LGBQ Students and Invisibility

Compounding the issues of harassment and isolation, LGB youth are an invisible minority (Hansen, 2007; Lee, 2002), meaning that school staff members are often unaware they may be in need of support. Two factors contributing to their invisibility are the lack of documentation of LGB students and the necessity of coming out to both peers and school personnel to be recognized as LGB (Kosciw et al., 2009).

One practice which contributes to LGB students' invisibility is in the collecting of school demographic information. Schools do not document a student's sexual orientation as they document a student's race, parent's education level, and home language. While the reason for not formally documenting this private information is the concern for the negative implications sexual orientation information could have on a student's current home life or their future, the lack of documentation makes it easy for school administrators to overlook LGBQ students' suffering. LGB youth are also considered invisible because there is no way for an individual to know if another individual is LGB simply by looking at them. Finally, questioning students are

an invisible group because they have typically not shared with anyone that they are questioning their sexuality (Carrion & Lock, 1997; Troiden 1989). An example of how this invisibility negatively impacts LGBQ students can be seen in school staff members' response to harassment. Even if adults see an individual being a target of harassment, the adult may not know that the individual is LGBQ and therefore not recognize the reason for the harassment and not be able to address the cause of the harassment. Knowing the negative effects of invisibility, schools could begin to explore other ways of collecting data about LGB students without officially documenting the students' sexual orientation. For example, schools could ask students who are out to identify themselves to a specific school staff member so their test data can be compiled as a sub-category without officially documenting the student's sexual orientation and schools could include sexual orientation when conducting anonymous surveys.

LGBQ Students Labeled “At-Risk”

Due to many of the negative outcomes LGBQ students experience, much literature has defined LGB youth as at-risk (Fisher et al., 2008; Hansen, 2007; Kosciw et al., 2009; Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002). According to Patton (1996) and Lesko (2000), adults often assume all teenagers are “at-risk” because it is a time of change and transition (as cited in Talburt, 2004). In Patton's (1996) “stress and storm” theory, he considers straight teenagers “normally abnormal” (as cited in Talburt, 2004, p. 43). Patton (1996) identifies LGB youth as “at risk” because they are a subculture whose transition to adulthood is more difficult due to troubled relationships with straight peers and to the lack of relationships with LGB adults (Talburt, 2004). Uribe and Harbeck (1994) identified that adults can assist LGB youth during their difficult transition to

adulthood “by providing them adequate, honest information about themselves or others who are like them” (p. 13).

In 2007, Hansen reviewed school-based interventions for LGB students. In her review of risks related to school experiences, Hansen (2007) argues that LGB youth are not “at-risk” due to their sexual orientation, but because of others’ responses to their sexual orientation. Munoz-Plaza et al. (2002) found that negative messages about homosexuality and the lack of information about homosexuality in the school environment contribute to LGB students’ internal conflict. Lee (2002) also found that LGB students’ felt self-defeated and had negative self-images due not to their identity as LGB, but due to the hostile responses from others. Munoz-Plaza et al. and Lee’s findings support Hansen’s argument that LGB youth are “at-risk” due to the school environment, not due to their sexual identity. As Talbert (2004) states in her article about dominant images of LGB students as “at-risk” and the importance of LGB youth adopting a secure gay identity, “To point out that gay people are not inherently at-risk offers a needed image of queer youth” (p. 118). In other words, it is important for school staff to remember that LGB students do not have to be “at risk.” School staff members have the power to create an accepting environment which includes positive images and information about LGB individuals and an environment where harassment of LGB students is not tolerated.

Much of the literature cited thus far has focused on, or primarily involved, high school LGB students. This is due to the small number of studies about middle school LGBQ students. However, Birkett et al. (2009) found that students often begin to question their identity during their middle school years. Therefore, it is important to examine what is occurring during the middle school years and in middle schools.

Middle School

The verbal harassment LGB youth experience at school could be due to a number of reasons. One reason LGB students are often targets of verbal and physical harassment is because other students perceive LGB youth as “different” (Bontempo & D’Augelli, 2002; Crothers, 2007; Williams et al., 2005). “Fitting in” is especially important to individuals during adolescent development (Cillessen et al., 2011).

Adolescence

Adolescence refers to the social and psychological changes that take place between childhood and adulthood (Orvin, 1995). Adolescence is a time marked by the importance of peer relationships, puberty, and sexual identity development. Adolescence typically begins during middle school.

General Development. There are several perspectives and theories about this time of life, including the psychological perspective offered by Freud who refers to this period of one’s life as the genital stage (Miller, 2002), and Erikson, who referred to it as identity and repudiation versus identity diffusion (Erikson, 1959). Both Freud and Erikson discussed the strong sexual desires that occur during this stage of life (Miller, 2002). Erikson built on Freud’s idea by acknowledging the social/cultural impact on an individual’s identity development. Erikson noted that during this stage, youth seek to find their identity through peer groups, clubs, and other organizations. Orvin (1995) stated that “adolescents see themselves in the eyes of their peers” (p.96). The peer group dictates which clothes, music, hair-dos, and ways of speaking are acceptable (Cillessen et al., 2011; Orvin, 1995).

During adolescence, peer groups become extremely important as youth begin to spend more time with their peers and less time with their families (Cillessen et al., 2011; Santrock, 2009; Slavin, 2006). Within peer groups, crowds and cliques form. According to Cillessen et al. (2011), at most middle schools, the crowds are arranged in a social hierarchy with groups such as the athletes or student council members being near the top of the hierarchy and band members or nerds being near the bottom. To remain near the top of the hierarchy, compliance to fashionable or normative looks, clothes, and social behavior is expected (Cillessen et al., 2011) and those who are at the top of the social hierarchy will often engage in verbal harassment, physical harassment, and/or exclusion of those who do not comply with the expected social norms (Wiseman, 2002).

Bishop et al. (2004) surveyed over 35,000 students attending 134 secondary schools in the northeastern United States and interviewed tenth graders at eight of those schools, and found that many students reported that by the end of the first month of middle school, they were already aware of which crowd they had been assigned to by their peers. In other words, status played a role and students were aware that popular kids were in the “in-crowd” while kids who appeared different from the norm were not. Many students also reported they were unhappy with their crowd assignment and spent the remainder of their middle school years attempting to change crowds (Bishop et al., 2004). Additionally, the study found that students not accepted by their peers, which are often students in the low-status crowds, including sexual minorities, were targets for harassment (Bishop et al., 2004).

Applying the knowledge that LGBQ students are often considered a low status crowd and are viewed as “different,” not complying with social norms, it would be logical to assume they

would be targets of verbal harassment, physical harassment, and/or exclusion by their peers at the top of the social hierarchy. Further, some students questioning their sexual identity will be in the crowds at the top of the hierarchy, such as athletes or student council members. Knowing the importance of being in the “in crowd,” it is reasonable to wonder if the decision to come out could be especially difficult for students currently a member of the “in-crowd,” thus adding to their internal struggles.

Physical Development. During adolescence, individuals go through puberty. Puberty is a period of time in which an individual goes through physiological changes that result in the individual being able to reproduce (Slavin, 2006). Puberty occurs at different ages for different individuals with the average age of onset being 11 years for girls and 13 years for boys, typically during middle school (Orvin, 1995; Slavin, 2006). During puberty, girls and boys both experience growth spurts, growth of body hair, and hormonal changes (Orvin, 1995). One result of the hormonal changes is an “increased interested in sexual matters” (Santrock, 2009, p. 93), including romantic relationships (Cillessen et al., 2011).

Sexual Identity Formation

While students are struggling to fit in socially, sexual identity, defined by Moshman (2011) as “one’s theory of oneself as a sexual person” (p. 223), is also developing during adolescence (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006; Orvin, 1995). Sexual identity is comprised of an individual’s sexual desires and one’s cultural dispositions and attitudes towards sexuality (Moshman, 2011). For youth, sexual identity development can include: discovering their body’s sexual reaction to something (i.e. increased heart rate when being touched by someone they are attracted to, a first kiss); determining what sex and love will mean to them and how they will or

will not engage with those they date; realizing their preferences or attractions to others. These experiences occur for heterosexual and lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth.

Many LGB individuals become aware of their attraction to members of the same sex between the ages of 10 and 12 years (Birkett et al., 2009). There are many models of sexual identity formation. One of the most cited sexual identity formation models, and one of the few models supported by empirical research, is Troiden's identity formation model (Mosher, 2001). In 1979, Troiden studied 150 gay males, age 20 to 40, from three geographic regions (New York, suburban/semirural New York, and Minneapolis). His study consisted of interviews which focused on the acquisition of the participants' gay identity. A decade later, Troiden (1989) identified four stages of lesbian/gay identity development:

1. *Sensitization* is the time when a child perceives him- or herself as being "different."
2. *Identity confusion* is the time in which youth become aware that they may be homosexual.
3. *Identity assumption* often occurs during mid- to late adolescence or adulthood, when individuals begin to self-identify and disclose their orientation ("come out") to other LGB people.
4. *Commitment* is the time when individuals "adopt homosexuality as a way of life" (p. 63) and disclose their sexual orientation to heterosexual individuals.

Sensitization, which typically occurs before puberty, involves LGB individuals feeling marginalized and different from their same-sex peers (Troiden, 1989). During identity confusion, LGB individuals begin to consider that their feelings and/or behaviors could be

considered homosexual. This stage typically begins during adolescence and can be a time of considerable inner turmoil (Troiden, 1989). Cass (1984) describes the beginning of identity formation as a time of confusion about the sort of person one is and the life one will lead. “Altered perceptions of self” (p.53), experiences of arousal and behavior, the stigma of being homosexual, and misconceptions surrounding homosexuals and homosexuality all contribute to this confusion. In the later phases of identity confusion, this confusion lessens as LGB individuals begin to feel they probably are a homosexual (Cass, 1984).

The identity assumption stage often occurs during late adolescence and is the stage in which LGB individuals often begin to come out to other LGB individuals (Troiden, 1989). During this stage LGB individuals develop a self-definition as a homosexual and move from tolerating their homosexual identity to accepting it (Troiden, 1989). Lesbian and gay individuals’ self-definition is largely based upon their first interactions with other homosexuals (Cass, 1979) and therefore it is extremely important that those first contacts are positive. During this stage, LGB individuals learn and develop strategies for managing the stigma of being a homosexual and learn the cultural norms of the LGB community (Troiden, 1989).

Commitment is the final stage of identity formation. Commitment is defined as the stage when an individual is out to both heterosexual and homosexual individuals, has accepted their homosexuality as a “way of life” (Troiden, 1989), and results in increased happiness (Troiden, 1989). In Troiden’s (1979) study of 150 gay males, 91% of males reported feeling “more happy” after coming out and self-accepting their homosexual identity. Although Troiden only studied homosexual males, and society has changed since the study was completed, Troiden’s work was foundational to the study of sexual identity development and is still referenced today.

Harassment in Middle School

School harassment is clearly an issue during the middle school years. As previously stated, during middle school, students who are at the top of the social hierarchy will often engage in verbal harassment, physical harassment, and/or exclusion of those who do not comply with the expected social norms (Wiseman, 2002). Research by Turner et al. (2011) provides a detailed description of what such harassment looks like in schools. Turner et al.'s research included students from elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools. They sampled 2,999 students ages 6-17 from across the United States about the location and type of peer harassment, if any, participants had experienced. Participants in this study completed the 2008 National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence, which measured six types of peer harassment: physical assault, physical intimidation, emotional victimization, sexual victimization, property crime, and internet harassment (Turner et al., 2011). Turner et al. (2011) found that the majority of physical attacks (59%), physical intimidation (53%), emotional victimization (83%), and property victimization (58%) occurred at school. Further Turner et al. identifies victimization via bias attacks (attacks due to an individual's race, religion, nationality, physical disability or sexual orientation) as highly likely to occur at school. For example, 78% of the individuals who reported being physically attacked due to their race, religion, nationality, physical disability or sexual orientation reported the attack occurred at school. Applying the framework of basic needs posited by Maslow (1943), it is clear that personal safety is threatened for students who are not in the majority. Further applying Maslow's framework of basic needs, if students' safety needs are not being met, they will not be able to achieve self-actualization or be the most they can be, thereby impacting their learning.

Specific to middle school students, Zhang, Truman, Snyder, Robers, & American Institutes for Research (2012) found that 8% of sixth graders, 10% of seventh graders, and 11% of eighth graders reported being targets of hate related words. Further, 28% of sixth and seventh graders and 31% of eighth graders report seeing hate related graffiti on their school campus. This survey was conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice and designed by the National Center for Education Statistics and Bureau of Justice Statistics. Survey participants included over 5,000 students from across the United States, in grades 6-12, of various ethnicities, household income levels.

While students are perceived as “different” for many reasons, the studies mentioned thus far support the argument that LGBQ students’ basic needs for safety are not being met in unsupportive school climates, that Questioning students’ basic needs for safety are not being met in positive or unsupportive school climates, and that LGBQ middle school students often feel isolated (lack of belonging/love), resulting in LGBQ students suffering negative outcomes.

Conclusion

LGB students face many challenges in the school setting: harassment, violence, and isolation. These challenges have been shown to result in negative outcomes including depression/suicidality, victimization, and truancy. It is important to remember that these results are not due to LGB students’ sexual identity, but due to others’ responses to LGB students’ sexual identity.

Much of the research about LGBQ students’ experiences has focused on the experience of high school aged LGB students. Additionally, most have not included students who are questioning their sexual orientation because one cannot identify a student who has not yet

disclosed or even self-identified their homosexuality. Given Birkett et al.'s (2009) finding that students questioning their sexual orientation experience significantly more victimization than their straight or LGB peers, it is important for researchers to include this group in studies. One possible way to include questioning students is through anonymous surveys (Birkett et al., 2009).

Additionally, education and educational funding are currently being driven by school and government generated data. Yet, due to the ways in which schools collect data, there is a lack of data regarding LGB students' daily attendance rates, standardized test scores, drop-out rates, grade point averages, and college admittance rates. These statistics are often quoted when school personnel discuss minority groups' achievement gaps and injustices. The lack of data easily leaves LGB students out of the conversation and continues to drive their "invisibility" as a minority group. The negative outcomes experienced by LGBQ students can then go unnoticed in the school district and at the individual school site. Despite the challenges of data collecting for LGB students, it is important in our current educational environment to begin to do so we can address the needs of our LGBQ students and ensure they are receiving equitable educational experiences and achieving equitable educational outcomes.

Finally, given that sexual identity formation often begins during the middle school years (Birkett et al., 2009) and that harassment peaks during middle school (Kaufman et al., 1999; Nansel et al., 2001) examining LGBQ students' middle school experiences is warranted for future studies. The current study seeks to provide data to fill this gap. The methodology will be described next in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

It has been well documented that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and questioning (LGBQ) high school students experience victimization including verbal and physical harassment on a regular basis (Birkett et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2009). Birkett et al. (2009) found questioning students to be at the greatest risk of victimization. Much of the research about lesbian, gay, and bisexual students' school experiences has focused on high school students. The purpose of this quantitative study is to provide descriptive data about lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, and straight middle school students' experiences, specifically related to harassment. Additionally, this study provides data regarding middle school students' perceptions of LGBQ individuals. The purpose of collecting this information is to provide LGBQ middle school students a voice about their experience. Further, given the negative impact the school environment has on LGBQ students' learning and the idea that LGB students are at risk due to others' perceptions of their sexual orientation (Hansen, 2007; Lee, 2002; Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002), LGBQ students are not able to learn to their full capacity because of others, creating a social injustice.

Research Questions

This research study provides descriptive information to answer the following two questions:

1. What are middle school students' experiences with harassment? Specifically, how do LGB, questioning, and straight students' experiences with harassment differ?
2. What are straight students' perceptions of LGB individuals?

Similar to high school findings, it is anticipated that both LGB and questioning students will experience more harassment than their straight counterparts. Furthermore, it is anticipated that questioning students will experience the most harassment. In addition to describing the experiences of middle school students who identify as LGBQ, this study provides data as to straight students' views of LGB individuals, to further describe the middle school harassment climate.

In this study, the two dependent variables are school safety related to harassment and students' perceptions of LGB individuals. Harassment was defined as physical harassment (e.g., being pushed, slapped, kicked, or hit by someone who was not kidding around), verbal harassment (e.g., sexual jokes, comments or gestures; been made fun of because of your looks or the way you talk, had mean rumors or lies spread about you), and fear of harassment (e.g., afraid of being beat up). Perceptions of LGB individuals were defined by the importance students place on various characteristics when choosing friends.

The study was conducted at an urban middle school in Los Angeles, asking seventh and eighth graders about their experience during the school year. The purpose of asking seventh and eighth graders to complete the survey was intentional in order to contribute to the gap in knowledge about middle school student experiences. The data were obtained through voluntary student survey participation. All surveys were completed anonymously. Participants were informed of their anonymity in an effort for students to feel safe in disclosing their sexual identity (Johnston, O'Malley, & Bachman, 1998 as cited in West Ed., 2010).

Methodology

School Context

The research site was an urban middle school located in a small school district in the West Los Angeles area. The school district is in a relatively liberal community which includes many LGB parents, teachers, and administrators. The community has also elected LGB school board members. The high school in the district has had a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) organization since 1993. The student population at the middle school totals 1,567 students in grades 6-8. The student population is evenly distributed between the three grade levels (524 sixth graders, 515 seventh graders, and 528 eighth graders). The ethnic composition of the school is 42% Hispanic, 24% White, 20% African American or Black, 11% Asian, and 3% other. The school is a Title 1 school with 42% of its students receiving free or reduced price lunch. After school, the school offers intermural and intramural sports, Mock Trial, Theatre Arts/Drama, and class offerings such as knitting and math builders that change every ten weeks. Sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students are elected by peers to serve as members of the Associated Student Body (ASB) which organizes dances and campus activities.

Participants

Recruitment of student participants relied on convenient sampling, such that all seventh and eighth grade students were invited to participate in the survey. Sixth grade students were not included in the study because the school district felt they were too young to participate in the study due to the topic of sexual orientation.

A total of 243 students returned the informed consent and started the survey. Seven of those students reported that they answered some or hardly any of the survey questions honestly

and were eliminated from the sample, leaving 236 participants. Eight students completed less than half of the survey questions and were eliminated from the sample, leaving 228. Twenty of the remaining participants responded to the sexual orientation question (borrowed from Birkett et al.'s study) that they are rarely confused about their sexual orientation. Since it is not possible to determine if those individuals were rarely confused because they were pretty sure they are LGB or if those individuals were rarely confused because they were pretty sure they are straight, those participants were also eliminated from the sample. This left 208 participants (7 LGB, 16 questioning, and 185 straight) in the sample. Table 1 displays the demographic information of the sample by sexual orientation categories (LGB, questioning, and straight).

Table 1

Demographics of Participant by Sexual Orientation

Characteristic	LBG (n=7)	Questioning (n=16)	Straight (n=185)
Ethnicity			
African American or Black	2 (28.6)	1 (6.3)	29(15.8)
Asian	0 (00.0)	1 (6.3)	19 (10.4)
Native American or PacificIslander	0 (00.0)	1 (6.3)	0 (0)
White	2 (28.6)	7 (43.8)	38 (20.8)
Hispanic/Latino	1 (14.3)	1 (06.3)	53 (29.0)
Middle Eastern	0 (00.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.5)
Mixed/Multiple Race	2 (28.6)	4 (25.0)	34 (18.6)
Other	0 (00.0)	1 (06.3)	8 (4.4)
Decline to State	0 (00.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.5)
Age			
12 years	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	18 (9.7)
13 years	3 (42.9)	3 (18.8)	75 (40.5)
14 years	4 (57.1)	13 (81.3)	87 (47.0)
15 years or older	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	5 (2.7)
Grade			
7	0 (0.0)	1 (6.3)	39 (21.2)
8	7 (100)	15 (93.8)	145 (78.8)
Gender			
Male	0 (0.0)	1 (6.7)	50 (27.0)
Female	7 (100)	14 (93.3)	135 (73.0)
Religion			
Atheist	3 (42.9)	5 (31.3)	23 (12.8)
Christian-Catholic	2 (28.6)	3 (18.8)	88 (48.9)
Christian- Protestant	1 (14.3)	2 (12.5)	30 (16.7)
Hindu	0 (0.0)	1 (6.3)	1 (0.6)
Judaism	1 (14.3)	1 (6.3)	7 (3.9)
Islam	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	7 (3.9)
Other	0 (0.0)	4 (25)	17 (9.4)
Decline to State	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	7 (3.9)

Note: Two straight participants did not answer the survey question about Ethnicity. One straight participant did not answer the question about grade. One questioning participant did not answer the question about gender. Five straight participants did not answer the question religion.

As reported in the table above, a few statistics are notable. First, white students are overrepresented in the category of questioning. Secondly, no seventh graders identified as LGB and only one identified as questioning. Third, almost half (43%) of the students who identified as LGB and almost one-third (31.3) of the students who identified as questioning stated their religious affiliation as Atheist compared to barely one-tenth (12.8) of straight students. Most notable was only one male identified as questioning and no males identified as gay or bisexual.

Design and Procedure

With approval from the school district, school site, and Institutional Review Board (IRB), I provided all potential participants a 10 minute presentation one week prior to data collection about the purpose of the study. All of the potential participants were informed that participation would be voluntary, survey responses would be anonymous, participants could stop at any time, and were provided a list of the potential benefits and harm (although minimal) that they might experience. Additionally, potential participants had an opportunity to ask me questions about the study. At the end of the presentation, potential participants were given an informed consent letter (see Appendix A). If the student wished to participate in the study, the letter had to be signed by the student and a parent/guardian, and returned to the assigned teacher on or before the day the survey was administered. The informed consent letter included the same information presented to the students and included an e-mail address which allowed parents the opportunity to contact me and ask questions.

The survey was given on-line during the students' normally scheduled physical education (PE) class. All participants completed the anonymous survey once within a four day span of time. The day the class was scheduled to complete the survey, students met at their assigned

space for attendance. After attendance, the teacher told students who had completed and returned the informed consent to walk with me to the computer lab. After arriving at the computer lab, the students were told they could sit at any computer terminal they would like to sit. The computer terminals are arranged in small circles of five. Dividers 1.5' tall and 2' wide were placed between computers for additional privacy. After all students were seated, I asked each student for their name and confirmed the student had returned a completed informed consent form.

Next, students were given a few reminders and a point of clarification:

1. All surveys are confidential and anonymous. No one will know how you answer each question.
2. Because all surveys are confidential, you must stay in your seat until everyone is finished. If you have a question, raise your hand.
3. If there is a question to which none of the answers apply, skip that question.

Next, students then began to complete the survey. The survey was conducted on-line through Qualtrics and completed during class time. Most students completed the survey in approximately 15 minutes. When everyone was finished, all students were thanked for their participation and one student volunteer was chosen to draw a name out of the box. All participants' names were represented on slips of paper inside of the box. The winner received a \$5 gift card to In-N-Out restaurant. All students then walked back to their physical education class.

Students who did not return the informed consent remained with their physical education teacher. On the days eighth graders completed the survey; the students who did not return the informed consent dressed in their PE cloths and ran the mile. On the days seventh graders

completed the survey; the students who did not participate did not dress out and had free choice time. These activities were the regularly scheduled lesson planned by their teachers. I was also available for debriefing at the end of the study.

Measures

This study is a descriptive research study that utilized a cross-sectional survey research design. The survey was in the form of a questionnaire that consisted of structured items including a few skip pattern items. The skip patterns created an additional 14 items resulting in a maximum of 38 survey items. Otherwise, all students responded to 24 items. The survey consisted of questions including the following: demographic information, harassment, witnessing harassment, harassment by sexual orientation, physical harassment, verbal harassment, fear of harassment, school safety, and perceptions of LGB individuals (see Appendix B).

Reliability and Validity. The validity of an instrument can be threatened by a number of factors including unclear directions, confusing items, and vocabulary that is too complex for the participants (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). To decrease these threats to validity and thus increase the validity of the findings, items were borrowed from well-established instruments that are utilized to measure harassment at schools. As such, the survey items utilized in this study have been vetted already and are commonly used for the age range represented in this sample.

Primarily, the survey was composed of several questions from the California Healthy Kids Survey including, demographic information such as race, gender, grade, and age. The California Healthy Kids Survey is administered to students in California in the 5th grade, 7th grade, 9th grade, and 11th grade. The survey was first administered in 1999 and has been given to students in the same grades every two years since (West Ed., 2010). One purpose of the

California Healthy Kids survey is to assess school climate including measures of school safety pertaining to harassment (West Ed., 2010). Permission was received from the authors (West Ed) to administer several items as part of this study.

Additionally, several items were taken from the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) School Climate Survey. GSAs are school clubs comprised of LGB and straight students. The Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) School Climate Survey was developed for the purpose of individual GSA clubs to assess their school's climate toward individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. Each individual GSA chooses whether or not to administer the survey. If a GSA chooses to administer the survey, the individual club decides how often, who participates, when and where the survey is administered, and even which questions to include and add to the survey. The national GSA encourages GSA Clubs to think about what data they are looking to collect, what problems/concerns they have at their school, to seek permission from the proper school authorities, to publish their results, and to use the results to create a safer environment for LGBTQ at their school (GSA Network, 2009).

Demographic Information. Demographic information regarding age, grade/year in school, gender, and letter grades earned in the current school year were asked in multiple-choice format. Items seeking information about ethnicity and religion were multiple-choice items that included an option for participants to write-in or decline to state their ethnicity or religion.

The item seeking information about the participants' sexual identity was a multiple choice item asked similarly to the item administered in the Birkett et al. (2009) study. The item was in the form of a question, "Do you ever feel confused about whether you are lesbian, gay, or bisexual?" and the response options were as follows: *never confused because I am straight*;

rarely confused; sometimes confused; a lot confused; always confused; and never confused because I am lesbian, gay, or bisexual (Birkett et al., 2009, p. 992).

In order to compare straight, questioning, and LGB students and answer the research questions, categories were created based on participants' responses to this question. For example, participants who responded *never confused because I am straight* were categorized as straight; participants who responded *sometimes confused, a lot confused, or always confused* were defined as questioning; and individuals who responded *never because I am lesbian, gay, or bisexual* were coded as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (Birkett et al., 2009). Individuals who responded *rarely confused* were not placed in any of the groups because it was not possible to distinguish if they were rarely confused because they are straight or if they were rarely confused because they are lesbian, gay, or bisexual (Birkett et al., 2009). Unfortunately this excluded 20 students from the original sample.

Harassment. For purposes of the study, harassment was defined as mistreatment and victimization by another individual “through repeated negative acts like insulting remarks and ridicule, verbal abuse, offensive teasing, isolation, and social exclusion, or the constant degrading of one's work and efforts” (Einarsen et al., 1994, p. 381). Harassment was further considered to include bullying, physical harassment, verbal harassment, and fear of harassment. Bullying was defined as being *repeatedly* shoved, hit, threatened, called mean names, teased in a way you did not like, or had other unpleasant things done to you by someone who is more powerful than you (older, more popular, bigger, or stronger). It is not considered bullying when two students of about the same strength quarrel or fight (West Ed, 2010). Physical harassment included being pushed, slapped, kicked, or hit by someone who was not kidding around (West

Ed, 2010). Verbal harassment included having sexual jokes, comments or gestures made about of towards you; been made fun of because of your looks or the way you talk; and having mean rumors or lies spread about you (West Ed, 2010). Fear of harassment was defined as being afraid of being beat up.

The survey contained twenty items about harassment. The items focused on characteristics such as race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and ability/disability status. One of the survey items about harassment asked, “During this school year, how many times on school property were you *harassed* or *bullied* for any of the following reasons? (You were bullied if *repeatedly* shoved, hit, threatened, called mean names, teased in a way you didn't like, or had other unpleasant things done to you. It is not bullying when two students of about the same strength quarrel or fight.)” This item was borrowed from the California Healthy Kids Survey to assess levels of harassment based on demographic information. Participants were offered answer choices ranging from *0 times* to *4 or more times*. Participants who answered *4 or more times* were given the same question and provided with additional answers ranging from *less than one time a month* to *more than 1 time per day*. Another survey item asked students “During this school year, how many times have you had been pushed, shoved, kicked, or hit by someone who wasn't kidding around?” and offered answer choices ranging from *0 times* to *4 or more times* (West Ed., 2010).

Witnessing Harassment. In addition to being impacted as a target of verbal harassment, students are also negatively impacted from witnessing harassment (Mayo, 2009). Therefore, students were asked about their experiences witnessing verbal harassment. Students were asked questions such as, “During this school year, how many times on school property have you seen

another student harassed or bullied for any of the following reasons? (Someone is bullied if repeatedly shoved, hit, threatened, called mean names, teased in a way you didn't like, or had other unpleasant things done to you. It is not bullying when two students of about the same strength quarrel or fight),” borrowed from the California Healthy Kids Survey (West Ed., 2010) followed by reasons of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and disability. Participants were offered answer choices ranging from *0 times* to *4 or more times*. Participants who answered *4 or more times* were given the same question and provided with additional answers ranging from *less than one time a month* to *more than 1 time per day*.

Students were also asked two items from the GSA School Climate survey (GSA Network, 2009). One of the borrowed items was, “During this school year, did you know of any vandalism or graffiti being directed against students at your middle school because people think they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT)?” with possible responses of *yes*, *no*, or *I don't know*. Another item asked, “During this school year, how often did you hear the following slurs directed at specific students, teachers, or staff?” followed by the categories race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, and disability. Possible responses ranged from *never* to *several times a day*.

Harassment by Sexual Orientation. One item asked students specifically about experiencing harassment based upon their actual or perceived sexual orientation. This item was borrowed from the California Healthy Kids Survey (West Ed., 2010). It asked participants, “During this school year, how many times on school property were you *harassed* or *bullied* for any of the following reasons?” Sexual orientation was one of the five reasons listed. Possible response choices ranged from *0* to *4 or more times*. Again, students who answered 4 or more

times were given the same question and provided with additional answers ranging from *less than one time a month* to *more than 1 time per day*.

Physical Harassment. Two items borrowed from the California Healthy Kids Survey specifically asked students about physical harassment (West Ed., 2010). One item asked participants, “During this school year, how many times on school property have you been pushed, slapped, kicked, or hit by someone who wasn’t kidding around?” The second item asked students, “During this school year, how many times on school property have you had your property stolen or deliberately damaged such as your clothes, bag, or books?” Possible responses to both questions were answer choices ranging from *0 times* to *4 or more times*.

Verbal Harassment. One specific type of verbal harassment students were asked about was their experiences being made fun of due to their looks or the way they talk. This item was borrowed from the California Healthy Kids Survey and asked, “During this school year, how many times on school campus have you been made fun of because of the way you look or talk?” (WestEd., 2010). Participants’ response choices ranged from *0 times* to *4 or more times*.

Verbal harassment can also be sexual harassment. Another item borrowed from the California Healthy Kids Survey assessed the frequency participants experienced sexual harassment (West ed., 2010). Specifically, participants were asked, “During this school year, how many times on school campus have you had sexual jokes, comments, or gestures made to you?” Participants’ response choices ranged from *0 times* to *4 or more times*.

In addition to sexual comments and being made fun of for the way one looks or talks, another common type of verbal harassment is the spreading of rumors or lies. Therefore, students were asked about their experience as targets of mean rumors or lies. As the popularity of internet

sites such as Facebook™, MySpace™, and Formspring have increased, so has on-line harassment. The harassment that occurs on-line is often viewed by many of the target's school peers. Therefore, in addition to asking students about the verbal harassment they experienced on school property this year, the researcher asked students about the number of times the student has experienced harassment on-line during this school year. This question was also borrowed from the California Healthy Kid's Survey; "During this school year, how many times did other students spread mean rumors or lies about you on the Internet (i.e. Facebook™, MySpace™, email, instant message)?" with answer choices including *0 times*, *1 time*, *2-3 times*, and *4 or more times* (WestEd., 2010).

Verbal harassment intervention. In addition to asking students about verbal harassment, the survey asked students about school staff members' responses to verbal harassment. Participants were asked, "During this school year, if you heard anti-LGB slurs (example: fag, dyke, no homo, that's so gay) of any kind, teachers or staff step in: *always*, *often*, *sometimes*, *never*?" This question was borrowed from the GSA School Climate Survey (GSA Network, 2009).

Fear of Physical Harassment. To assess fear of harassment, participants were asked the following item to gauge fear of physical harassment: "During this school year, how many times on school property have you been afraid of being beat up?" Possible responses were 0 times to 4 or more times. This item was borrowed from the California Healthy Kids Survey (WestEd., 2010).

Overall School Safety. Near the end of the survey, participants were asked "During this school year, how safe did you feel at your middle school?" with possible responses of: *very safe*;

safe; neither safe nor unsafe; unsafe; or very unsafe. This item was modeled after an item from the California Healthy Kids Survey (WestEd., 2010).

Perception of LGB individuals. The survey contained one item I generated regarding participants' perception of individuals based upon race, religious, and sexual orientation characteristics. The item stated, "During this school year, when choosing who to hang out with, to what extent does the following characteristic matter: race, religion, sexual orientation." In response to each characteristic, students were able to select: *not at all; a little; somewhat; or a lot.* Participants who chose *somewhat* or *a lot* were asked additional questions to provide more detail as to which groups the individual liked or did not like to hang out with. The data for each characteristic was utilized to gauge students' perceptions of LGB individuals. Responses to the sexual orientation characteristic of *not at all* were coded as favorable perceptions of LGB individuals and responses of *a lot* corresponded with negative perceptions of LGB individuals.

Analytical Plan/ Method of Analysis

The survey was administered through Qualtrics and analyzed using SPSS software. To answer the first research question, the data were analyzed for the whole sample and then by sexual orientation (LGB, questioning, straight). The responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics. For items that contained demographic information, the frequency of each response was computed and the results were converted to a percentage. For all remaining items, responses were calculated to find the frequency of each response to an item. To answer the second research question, students identifying as straight were selected and then descriptive statistics were applied to examine their perception of LGB individuals.

Limitations

As with all studies, this study has both limitations and delimitations. First, the results from this study are based upon students self-reporting their sexual orientation, their experience related to harassment and bullying, and their perceptions of LGB individuals. As with all studies which utilize self-reporting, this is a limitation (Gay et al., 2009). By making the survey anonymous, the researcher attempted to ensure participants felt comfortable and reported accurately (Johnston et al., 1998, as cited in West Ed., 2010). However, due to the stigma of identifying as LGB, and the stigma of being a target of harassment, students may not have reported accurately. Additionally, relying on survey items already established in the field was done intentionally to increase the reliability and validity of the findings. However, by borrowing the item regarding sexual orientation, 20 students were excluded from the study because of their response *rarely confused about my sexual orientation* which could not be re-coded into the categories used for this study.

Delimitations

Delimitations of this study include the limited number of school sites (one middle school) and the limited geographical area (the west side of Los Angeles). Additionally, disproportionately more females than males chose to participate in the survey and an alternate attractive option resulted in a small number of seventh grade participants. As such, findings may not be generalizable beyond the population of students who completed this survey. Finally, the school site where the research was conducted had recent research studies, programs, and prevention efforts about bullying, including one which offered students money for completing the survey. This was unknown to the researcher until the fourth day of presentations when a

student asked how much they would be paid for completing the survey and the teacher explained another researcher had paid the students for completing their survey. As such, students may have chosen to not participate because they were not being paid. Likewise, the state of harassment captured by their responses on the survey may be due to the intervention efforts that were recently present at the school site and as such, findings may not be generalizable to other school sites without such prevention efforts. Future research is necessary at the middle school level to continue to gain a sense of the experiences of middle school students.

Biases

I have several biases related to this study. First and foremost, I am a lesbian and strongly feel that LGBTQ students should be treated with respect and should be safe and supported at school. I was also an administrator at the high school in the same school district as the middle school and I am currently an administrator at an elementary school in the same district as the middle school. To minimize my personal bias, I approached this study quantitatively and did not know any of the students (except one) who participated in the survey. The survey was also anonymous so I am unable to determine student-specific responses. The anonymous survey approach was intentional to mitigate any personal bias—the data simply describe the self-reported responses by the middle school students.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

In 2002, as part of the No Child Left Behind legislation, the United States Federal Government recognized the importance of school safety and mandated all teachers and administrators provide safe school climates for all students. Yet bullying and harassment continue to dominate news headlines. A 2010 study analyzed 2,999 students' (ages 6-17) experiences with victimization at school. Of those 2,999 students, 13% reported experiencing a physical assault and 17% reported experiencing emotional victimization (teasing, name calling) at school during the past year (Turner et al., 2011).

In addition to the research suggesting our students still must contend with harassment, research has found that LGB high school students experience physical and emotional victimization based on their sexual orientation (Kosciw et al, 2012; Lee, 2002; Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002; Sharblom & Bahr, 2008). Research suggests that students who are questioning their sexual orientation undergo more harassment than their LGB and straight peers (Birkett et al., 2009). Furthermore, general harassment has been found to occur more frequently in middle school than in high school (Kaufman et al., 1999; Nansel et al., 2001). Yet little research to date has examined LGBQ middle school students experience with harassment. From a developmental perspective, many LGB individuals first become aware of their attraction to the same sex between the ages of 10 and 12 years (Birkett et al., 2009), and most 11 and 12 year olds are in middle school. Developmental models of sexual identity formation (see Carrion & Lock, 1997; Troiden, 1988) also posit that that individuals question their identity before “coming out” to

others. As such, to understand questioning students' experiences, the middle school time frame is appropriate.

Based on the literature suggesting that LGBTQ high school students experience harassment based on their sexual orientation and that harassment is more frequent in middle school than high school, this study will document middle school students' experiences with harassment. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to describe harassment for students who identify as LGB, questioning, and straight.

This study took place at a middle school located in the West Los Angeles area. The student population totals 1,567 students evenly distributed between grades 6, 7, and 8. The ethnic composition of the school is 42% Hispanic, 24% White, 20% African American or Black, 11% Asian, and 3% other. The school is a Title I school with 42% of the students receiving free or reduced priced lunch.

All students in the seventh and eighth grade were invited to participate in the study. The study was conducted during the last month of the school year. Students who wanted to participate were required to return the informed consent letter with a parent signature signifying parental consent. Students who returned the consent form completed the survey during their physical education class.

The resulting sample consisted of a total of 208 students comprised of the following demographics: 40 seventh graders and 167 eighth graders (one student did not answer); 51 males and 156 females (one student did not answer); 32 African American or Black students, 20 Asian students, 1 Native American or Pacific Islander student, 47 White students, 55 Hispanic students, 1 Middle Eastern student, 40 students of mixed/multiple races, 9 students who identified as

other, and 1 student who declined to state (2 students did not answer); and 7 LGB students, 16 questioning students, and 185 straight students (see Table 1 in Chapter 3). The difference in the number of seventh and eighth graders who chose to participate is likely because the eighth graders who completed the survey were excused from running the mile the day they completed the survey and the seventh graders who completed the survey did so during their free time (in PE).

The following two questions guided this line of inquiry:

1. What are middle school students' experiences with harassment? Specifically, how do LGB, questioning, and straight students' experiences with harassment differ?
2. What are straight students' perceptions of LGB individuals?

Similar to high school LGB students (Kosciw et al., 2010; Lee, 2002; Munoz-Plaza et. al., 2002; Sharblom & Bahr, 2008), it was anticipated that middle school LGB students experience harassment based on their sexual orientation. It was also anticipated that both LGB and questioning middle school students experience more harassment than their straight counterparts with questioning students experiencing the most harassment.

In this study, harassment was defined as physical harassment (e.g., being pushed, slapped, kicked, or hit by someone who was not kidding around); verbal harassment (e.g., sexual jokes, comments or gestures; being made fun of because of your looks or the way you talk, had mean rumors or lies spread about you), and fear of harassment (e.g., being afraid of being beat up). Students' experiences with harassment included both witnessing harassment and being the target of harassment. Perceptions of overall school safety were also documented.

Research Question 1: Findings

Harassment

Harassment and school climate are closely tied together. A school with low levels of harassment is likely to be described as having a positive school climate. Likewise, a school with a positive school climate is less likely to have a large amount of harassment. Therefore, to understand middle school students' experiences, participants were asked to answer a number of questions about their experiences with harassment on campus in the past school year. Based on the finding that harassment peaks in middle school (Kaufman et al., 1999; Nansel et al., 2001), I first wanted to understand the climate of harassment among the sample based on a variety of demographic characteristics including race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, or disability. These characteristics were chosen based upon Bishop et al.'s (2004) finding that students are often targeted for harassment for being different. By analyzing harassment across demographic characteristics, a better sense of the climate at the school for these middle school students is provided to then discuss how harassment based on sexual orientation fits into the larger school climate.

To understand the school climate of harassment, each student was asked: "During this school year, how many times on school property were you harassed or bullied for any of the following reasons?" This item was borrowed from California Healthy Kids Survey. The following demographic characteristics were listed on the survey: race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, and disability. These characteristics were chosen based on Bishop et al.'s (2009) finding that students are often targeted because they are different. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Frequency of Being the Target of Harassment Based on Demographic Characteristic

	Demographic Characteristics				
	Sexual Orientation	Religion	Race	Gender	Disability
0 Times	192 (92.3)	194 (93.3)	182 (87.5)	201 (96.6)	202 (97.1)
1 Time	9 (4.3)	8 (3.8)	19 (9.1)	6 (2.9)	2 (1.0)
2-3 Times	5 (2.4)	1 (.5)	2 (1.0)	0 (.0)	2(1.0)
4 or more Times	2 (1.0)	5 (2.4)	5 (2.4)	1 (.5)	2 (1.0)

Note: Sexual orientation was defined as actual or perceived for this question on the survey. Percentage of students given in parenthesis.

As seen in Table 2, there is a low level of harassment across all demographic categories, with the majority of students reporting never experiencing harassment based on any of the demographic characteristics listed. Only 15% of students reported harassment based on any one of the demographic characteristics surveyed. Taken together, this sample of middle school students reported that the school climate of harassment based on these demographic characteristics is minimal.

Witnessing Harassment

To further understand the climate of harassment at the middle school level, participants were also asked about the frequency of witnessing harassment of other students based on the same demographic characteristics. The frequency of witnessing harassment is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Witnessed Harassment based on Demographic Characteristic

Frequency	Demographic Characteristics				
	Sexual Orientation	Religion	Race	Gender	Disability
0 Times	104 (50.0)	146 (70.2)	112 (53.8)	153 (73.6)	104 (50.0)
1 Time	45 (21.6)	34 (16.3)	38 (18.3)	32 (15.4)	37 (17.8)
2-3 Times	29 (13.9)	16 (7.7)	35 (16.8)	14 (6.7)	40 (19.2)
4 or more Times	30 (14.4)	12 (5.8)	23 (11.1)	9 (4.3)	26 (12.5)

Note: One participant did not answer this question about disability. Sexual orientation was defined as actual or perceived. Percentage of students given in parenthesis.

Of these five demographic characteristics, students witnessed harassment based upon sexual orientation and harassment based on disability the most frequently. Half of the students (50.0%) reported witnessing harassment based on sexual orientation or disability, just less than one half (46.2%) witnessed harassment based on race, and approximately one-third (29.8%, 26.4%) of the students witnessed harassment based upon religion and gender.

Harassment by Sexual Orientation

To specifically understand harassment of LGB, questioning, and straight middle school students, the frequency of harassment based on sexual orientation was calculated for each of the subgroups: LGB (n=7), questioning (n=16), and straight (n=185). The frequency and percentage of students in each category are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Target of Harassment Based on Sexual Orientation (Actual or Perceived)

Frequency	Sexual Orientation		
	LGB (n=7)	Questioning (n=16)	Straight (n=185)
0 Times	5 (71.4)	12 (75.0)	175 (94.6)
1 Time	2 (28.6)	2 (12.5)	5 (2.7)
2-3 Times	0 (0.0)	1 (6.3)	4 (2.2)
4 or more Times	0 (0.0)	1 (6.3)	1 (0.5)

Note: Percentage of students given in parenthesis.

Across the categories, the highest percentage of students consistently indicated not being harassed (0 times), regardless of sexual orientation. Yet, there were a greater percentage of LGB (28.6%) and questioning (25.0%) students indicating harassment compared to straight students (5.4%). Consistent with my hypothesis, this finding is significantly different ($\chi^2 = 20.32; p < .01$) indicating that being the target of harassment due to sexual orientation was more likely among students who identify as LGB or are questioning their sexual orientation than among students who identify as straight.

LGB students had the greatest proportion of individuals reporting being the target of harassment based on their sexual orientation one time during the school year (28.6%), with questioning students following (12.5%). In terms of being harassed multiple times, however, a greater percentage of questioning students (12.6%) than LGB or straight students reported being harassed, suggesting that questioning students experience repeated or ongoing harassment.

Due to the significant difference between LGB and straight students' experiences as targets of harassment based on sexual orientation and the higher frequency of students witnessing harassment of students based on sexual orientation, the following data regarding

physical harassment, verbal harassment, and fear of harassment have been disaggregated by sexual orientation (LGB, questioning, and straight).

Physical Harassment

Participants were asked two questions about their experience this school year as a target of physical harassment on school property. Physical harassment was defined as being pushed, slapped, kicked, or hit by someone who was not kidding around. This question focused on physical contact between the target and the aggressor. Additionally, students were asked to report the frequency of deliberate damage or theft of personal property. The frequencies of each category of sexual orientation (LGB, questioning, straight) were examined for each of these physical harassment items. Table 5 and Table 6 display the frequencies of physical harassment involving physical contact between the aggressor and the target and damage to property, respectively.

Table 5

Physical Harassment

Frequency	Sexual Orientation		
	LGB (n=7)	Questioning (n=16)	Straight (n=185)
0 Times	4 (57.1)	8 (50.0)	134 (72.4)
1 Time	0 (0.0)	6 (37.5)	32 (17.3)
2-3 Times	2 (28.6)	1 (6.3)	11 (5.9)
4 or more Times	1 (14.3)	1 (6.3)	8 (4.3)

Note: Percentage of students given in parenthesis.

Of the three categories of sexual orientation, students who are questioning their sexual identity report experiencing the most physical harassment (50.1%). Repeated physical harassment (e.g., 2 or more times) occurred most often for students who identified as LGB

(42.9%) with one student (14.3%) reporting experiencing physical harassment due to sexual orientation 4 or more times in the past school year. Of the students who identify as straight, 51 reported being physically harassed in the past school year (27.5%).

Table 6

Harassment via Stolen or Damaged Property

Frequency	Sexual Orientation		
	LGB (n=7)	Questioning (n=16)	Straight (n=185)
0 Times	4 (57.1)	9 (56.3)	142 (76.8)
1 Time	3 (42.9)	4 (25.0)	36 (19.5)
2-3 Times	0 (0.0)	3 (18.8)	5 (2.7)
4 or more Times	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (1.1)

Note: Percentage of students given in parenthesis.

Again, the sexual orientation category in which the greatest percentage of individuals (44%) reported having personal property damaged or stolen on school property this year is the questioning category. Forty-two percent of students who identify as LGB and 23.3% of students who identify as straight also reported having property stolen or damaged deliberately. The difference between the experiences of students who identify as LGB, questioning, and straight is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 13.46; p < .05$).

Verbal Harassment

In addition to being asked about physical harassment, participants were asked to answer four questions about their experience being a target of verbal harassment and one question about witnessing verbal harassment. For instance, students were asked to report how often they experienced verbal harassment via jokes or gestures, based on looks or how they talk, and through rumors or lies in person and on the Internet. These items were borrowed from the California Healthy Kids Survey (WestEd., 2010). Students were also asked if they witnessed

anti-LGB slurs, which was borrowed from the GSA School Climate Survey. Again, the frequencies for each category of sexual orientation are presented in Tables 7 through 11.

Table 7

Sexual Harassment via Jokes, Comments, Gestures

Frequency	Sexual Orientation		
	LGB (n=7)	Questioning (n=16)	Straight (n=185)
0 Times	3 (42.9)	3 (18.8)	119 (64.3)
1 Time	2 (28.6)	3 (18.8)	28 (15.1)
2-3 Times	1 (14.3)	4 (25.0)	23 (12.4)
4 or more Times	1 (14.3)	6 (37.5)	15 (8.1)

Note: Percentage of students given in parenthesis.

Over 75% of students who identified as questioning reported experiencing verbal harassment through sexual jokes, comments, or gestures, whereas almost 65% of straight students reported never having been verbally harassed through sexual jokes comments or gestures. Notably, 37% of students questioning their sexual orientation experienced this form of verbal harassment 4 or more times. There is a significant difference ($\chi^2= 20.16; p < .01$) in the verbal harassment via sexual jokes, comments, or gestures experienced by LGB, questioning, and straight students.

The results to the question about being made fun of for the way you look or talk are displayed by sexual orientation categories in Table 8. The results to the item about harassment via rumors or lies are displayed in Table 9. Finally, the results to the item about on-line harassment are shown in Table 10.

Table 8

Harassment based on Looks or Talk

Frequency	Sexual Orientation		
	LGB (n=7)	Questioning (n=16)	Straight (n=185)
0 Times	4 (57.1)	4 (25.0)	113 (61.1)
1 Time	3 (42.9)	4 (25.0)	42 (22.7)
2-3 Times	0 (0.0)	5 (31.3)	16 (8.6)
4 or more Times	0 (0.0)	3 (18.8)	14 (7.6)

Note: Percentage of students given in parenthesis.

As in the previous question, a greater percentage of questioning students (75%) than LGB students (43%) or straight students (39%) reported experiencing verbal harassment due to the way they look or talk. Again, the difference between the experiences of these three groups of students is significant ($\chi^2 = 15.50; p < .05$).

Table 9

Harassment via Rumors or Lies

Frequency	Sexual Orientation		
	LGB (n=7)	Questioning (n=16)	Straight (n=185)
0 Times	2 (28.6)	7 (43.8)	129 (69.7)
1 Time	1 (14.3)	4 (25.0)	29 (15.7)
2-3 Times	4 (57.1)	2 (12.5)	16 (8.6)
4 or more Times	0 (0.0)	3 (18.8)	11 (5.9)

Note: Percentage of students given in parenthesis.

Students in the category of LGB had the greatest proportion (71.4%) of individuals reporting having a mean rumor or lie spread about them at least once during the school year. The sexual orientation category with the highest percentage of students (19%) reporting this form of verbal harassment occurring four or more times during the school year were students who are questioning their sexual orientation. Consistent with the findings for the first two types

of verbal harassment, the results show a significant difference ($\chi^2 = 22.99$; $p = .001$) in the frequency at which LGB, questioning, and straight students experience being the targets of mean rumors and lies on campus.

Table 10

Harassment via Rumors or Lies On-line

Frequency	Sexual Orientation		
	LGB (n=7)	Questioning (n=16)	Straight (n=185)
0 Times	6 (85.7)	10 (62.5)	160 (86.5)
1 Time	1 (14.3)	2 (12.5)	16 (8.6)
2-3 Times	0 (0.0)	3 (18.8)	7 (3.8)
4 or more Times	0 (0.0)	1 (6.3)	2 (1.1)

Note: Percentage of students given in parenthesis.

Among the three categories for sexual orientation, students who are questioning their sexual identity report the greatest frequency of being the targets of on-line rumors. Of the students questioning their sexual identity, 38% reported that other students spread a mean rumor or lie about them on the internet one or more times compared to 14% of LGB students and 14% of straight students. Compared to the previous three types of verbal harassment, on-line verbal harassment is the least common form of verbal harassment experienced by students in all three sexual orientation categories.

When comparing the three categories of sexual orientation, students who identify as straight reported experiencing the least amount of verbal harassment across all four types of verbal harassment. With the exception of having mean rumors or lies spread, questioning students had the greatest percentage of students experiencing verbal harassment.

The results to the item about witnessing anti-LGB slurs directed at a student or staff member are disaggregated by sexual orientation categories and shown in Table 11.

Table 11

Anti-LGB Slurs Directed at Students or Staff

Frequency	Identified Sexual Orientation		
	LGB (n=7)	Questioning (n=16)	Straight (n=185)
Never	2 (28.6)	3 (18.8)	86 (46.5)
Once a month or less	1 (14.3)	4 (25.0)	53 (28.6)
2-3 Times per month	1 (14.3)	3 (18.8)	17 (9.2)
Once a week	2 (28.6)	2 (12.5)	9 (4.9)
2-3 Times per week	1 (14.3)	2 (12.5)	5 (2.7)
Daily	0 (0.0)	1 (6.3)	9 (4.9)
Several Times a Day	0 (0.0)	1 (6.3)	6 (3.2)

Note: Percentage of students given in parenthesis.

Similar to the findings for being the target of verbal harassment, students in the questioning category had the greatest proportion of students who reported hearing anti-LGB slurs directed at students or staff at least one time this school year (81%) and had the greatest proportion of students who reported hearing anti-LGB slurs daily (13%).

Verbal harassment intervention. To further investigate the experience of verbal harassment at school, the frequency at which students or staff members intervene when witnessing anti-LGB slurs was measured. Participants reported how often they or another student “stepped in” when hearing anti-LGB slurs. Of the participants who reported hearing anti-LGB slurs (n=117), 30.8% of students reported they or another student never (n=36) intervene and 44.4% reported sometimes (n=52) intervening. A smaller number of students (24.8%) reported intervening often (n=17) or always (n=12). When asked how often school staff members intervene when hearing anti-LGB remarks, the same group of participants responded as follows: never (n=40, 34.2%), sometimes (n=44, 37.6%), often (n=21; 17.9%), and always (n=10; 8.5%).

The majority of participants reported that students and staff step in at least sometimes when witnessing harassment.

Next, only the responses from students who identify as LGB or questioning who reported hearing anti-LGB slurs were selected (n=18). Of those participants, only 6% of students (n=1) reported neither they nor another student ever intervened when hearing anti-LGB slurs. Thirty eight percent reported that they or another student intervened sometimes (n=7) and 56% reported intervening often (n=4) or always (n=6). When asked about school staff members intervening, approximately one-third (33.3%) of these same 18 students reported witnessing faculty or staff intervene often (n=4) or always (n=2), one-third (n=6, 33.3%) report faculty or staff intervenes sometimes and one-third (n=6, 33.3%) report the faculty or staff never intervenes.

Taken together, the majority of students who identify as LGB and who hear anti-LGB slurs, also witness a student intervening often or always. It is notable that when LGBQ students witness LGB harassment, the students are more likely to see a student step-in than a staff member step-in. This finding suggests consistent intervention by students and may be one possible indication of feeling safe on campus.

Fear of Physical Harassment

Just as being the target of and/or witnessing physical and/or verbal harassment affects students' well-being, fear of physical and/or verbal harassment also affects one's well-being (Mayo, 2009). Given such, students were asked one question about their fear of physical harassment; specifically "being beat up" (see Table 12) which was borrowed from the California Healthy Kids Survey.

Table 12

Fear of Physical Attack

Frequency	Sexual Orientation		
	LGB (n=7)	Questioning (n=16)	Straight (n=185)
0 Times	5 (71.4)	11 (68.8)	160 (86.5)
1 Time	2 (28.6)	1 (6.3)	17 (9.2)
2-3 Times	0 (0.0)	3 (18.8)	6 (3.2)
4 or more Times	0 (0.0)	1 (6.3)	2 (1.1)

Note: Percentage of students given in parenthesis.

Again, students in the questioning category reported the greatest percentage of students (31%) who had been fearful of being beat up on school property during the school year, a slightly greater percentage than the percentage of students in the category of LGB (29%) who reported being afraid of being beat up. Comparatively, 14% of students in the straight category reported being fearful of being beat up, a significant difference exists across the three groups ($\chi^2 = 14.87; p < .05$).

Overall School Safety

Physical and verbal harassment, the direct experience or witnessing harassment, and the frequency of student and staff intervention, are all indications of the climate of the school setting or school safety in general. To conclude, students were also asked one item about how safe they feel at school. The results are displayed in Table 13.

Table 13

Feelings of Safety by Sexual Orientation

How Safe	Sexual Orientation		
	LGB (n=7)	Questioning (n=16)	Straight (n=185)
Very Safe	1 (14.3)	2 (12.5)	51 (27.6)
Safe	2 (28.6)	8 (50)	81 (43.8)
Neither Safe nor Unsafe	4 (57.1)	5 (31.3)	46 (24.9)
Unsafe	0 (0.0)	1 (6.3)	6 (3.2)
Very Unsafe	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (.5)

Note: Percentage of students given in parenthesis.

Only 4% of all students report feeling unsafe or very unsafe on campus. The majority of questioning (72.5%) and straight (71.4%) students report feeling safe or very safe on campus.

Only 6.3% of questioning students and 3.7% of straight students reported feeling unsafe.

In summary, the first research question asked about middle school students experiences with harassment and whether those experiences differed by sexual orientation. Overall, students who are questioning their sexual orientation report experiencing being the target of and witnessing harassment, both physical and verbal, more often than students who identify as LGB or straight. Based upon the large percentage of students who reported that someone intervened when they heard anti-LGB statements and evidenced by the very small percentage of students who reported not feeling safe on campus, it appears that this sample of middle school students perceive their school to be relatively safe.

Question 2- Findings

To answer the second research question regarding straight students' perceptions of LGB individuals, participants were also asked about the extent to which the following characteristics influenced their choice in friends: race, religion, and sexual orientation. While the research

question is mainly interested in choosing friends based on sexual orientation, descriptive data for race and religion are also presented below as a means of comparison. Responses by students who identified as being straight (n =185) are presented in Table 14.

Table 14

Extent Demographic Characteristics Matter in Friend Selection

Characteristic	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	A lot	Mean	SD
Race	157 (84.9)	19 (10.3)	8 (4.3)	1 (0.5)	1.21	.533
Religion	176 (95.1)	7 (3.8)	2 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	1.06	.279
Sexual Orientation	141 (76.2)	24 (13.0)	11 (5.9)	9 (4.9)	1.39	.808

Note: To compute the mean, responses were assigned the following numerical value: not at all-1, a little-2, somewhat-3, and a lot-4. Percentages of students given in parentheses.

In response to race, religion, and sexual orientation, the majority of participants stated it does not matter at all (race-84.9%; religion 95.1%, sexual orientation 76.2%) and the fewest participants stated it matters a lot (race-0.5%; religion 0.0%; sexual orientation 4.9%). Comparing the mean scores across the characteristics, religion mattered least (mean=1.06) and sexual orientation mattered most (mean=1.39) to the participants when deciding who to hang out with. As such, findings suggest that the majority (74.1%) of straight students' perceptions of LGB individuals appear to be favorable. However, it is also important to note that more students stated that sexual orientation mattered when choosing friends compared to race and religion.

Conclusion

Findings suggest significant differences in the harassment experiences of LGB, questioning, and straight middle school students. For almost every harassment variable, students who are questioning their sexual orientation are experiencing the most harassment. This finding is consistent with the experiences of high school LGBQ students (Kosciw et al., 2012; Lee, 2002;

Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002; Sharblom & Bahr, 2008) and with a previous study by Birkett et al. (2009) which showed questioning students experience more victimization than their straight and LGB peers. Furthermore, of the three demographic characteristics included in the survey, sexual orientation was the most likely to matter when students choose friends. Explanations for these findings, within a discussion of the literature will be presented in Chapter 5, along with implications for research and practice.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Studies have shown that the high school environment is a hostile environment for LGBQ students (Kosciw et al., 2008; Munoz-Plaza et al, 2002; Sherbloom and Bahr, 2008); high school LGBQ students' education and emotional well-being are impacted by the hostile environment (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Kosciw, 2004); questioning students experience more harassment than LGB students (Birkett et al., 2009); and students who identify as LGB in high school are likely to have questioned their sexual orientation in middle school (Birkett et al., 2009). However, little research has examined middle school LGBQ student's school experiences likely due to research requirements for parent permission and the process of sexual identity formation leaving many middle school LGBQ students invisible, silent, and struggling. The purpose of this quantitative study was to provide middle school LGBQ students a voice about their middle school experience related to harassment. The research questions were as follows:

1. What are middle school students' experiences with harassment? Specifically, how do LGB, questioning, and straight students' experiences with harassment differ?
2. What are straight students' perceptions of LGB individuals?

To answer the research questions, 208 participants (current seventh and eighth grade students) completed an anonymous survey about their experiences at middle school. Many of the survey items were focused on physical or verbal harassment. The survey also contained items to document participants' demographic information including an item about the student's sexual orientation. Based upon students' answers to that item, students were divided into three categories: LGB, questioning, and straight. The data were analyzed based on those three

categories. Specifically the dependent variable of harassment was defined as physical harassment (e.g., being pushed, slapped, kicked, or hit by someone who was not kidding around), verbal harassment (e.g., sexual jokes, comments or gestures; being made fun of because of your looks or the way you talk, had mean rumors or lies spread about you), and fear of harassment (e.g., being afraid of being beat up).

Participants

When examining the data and discussing the findings, it is important to note the participants, particularly the LGBTQ participants. Of the seven participants who identified as LGB, all were eighth graders and all were female. Two (29%) of the seven identified as white, two (29%) identified as African American or Black, two (29%) identified as multiple/mixed race, and one (14%) identified as Hispanic/Latino. Comparatively, of the 16 participants who identified as questioning, one was a seventh grader and 15 were eighth graders. Fourteen of the participants who identified as questioning were female and only one was male. Seven (44%) participants who were questioning their sexual orientation identified as white, one identified as African American or black, one identified as Asian, one identified as Native American or Pacific Islander, one identified as Hispanic/Latino, and four identified as multiple/mixed race.

Based on the number of males identifying as gay ($n=0$) and questioning ($n=1$), one is left to wonder why the sample was so disproportionate? Although it is impossible to conclude why so few males identified as gay, some possibilities include that it may be less acceptable for males to be gay or bisexual than for females to be lesbian or bisexual and therefore boys do not feel safe identifying even on an anonymous survey. Another possibility could include that girls are coming out at an earlier age than boys. Both of these possibilities are worthy of future research.

Research Question 1

At the middle school in which the study was conducted, very few students reported feeling unsafe or very unsafe at school. In fact, there was a low level (less than 15%) of harassment reported by students based on the demographic characteristics of race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, or disability. However, examining harassment based on sexual orientation suggested that there were significant differences. In other words, students who identify as LGBQ experience more harassment than their straight peers.

Physical Harassment

In this study, physical harassment included physical aggression (i.e. pushing, hitting) and property damage. Students questioning their sexual orientation reported experiencing the most physical harassment, followed by LGB students. Straight students reported experiencing the lowest level of physical harassment. There was a significant difference between the groups regarding their experience as the target of theft or property damage.

Verbal Harassment

Students were asked several items about their experience as being the targets of verbal harassment and one item about their experience witnessing harassment. The results overwhelmingly showed a greater percentage of questioning and LGB students experienced verbal harassment than the percentage of straight students who experienced verbal harassment. Of the three groups of students, questioning students were most likely to have experienced each type of verbal harassment with the exception of verbal harassment via rumors or lies. LGB students were most likely to experience harassment via rumors or lies. The difference between the three groups' experiences for three of the four types of verbal harassment (sexual harassment via

jokes, comments and gestures; harassment based on looks or manner of speech; harassment via rumors or lies) was significant.

The majority of students reported witnessing verbal harassment (anti-LGB slurs) directed at students, teachers, or staff members at least once during the school year. Over a quarter of the students reported hearing anti-LGB slurs directed at students, teachers, or staff members at least once a month. Questioning students reported hearing anti-LGB slurs more often than LGB students or straight students.

The large difference between the number of students reporting being the target of verbal harassment and the number of students reporting witnessing the harassment could be for a number of reasons. First, it is possible that when an individual is being verbally harassed, there are many more students witnessing the harassment. Or, there may be only a few students experiencing harassment (1 questioning students reported 4 or more incidents of harassment), but the one student is constantly harassed so many students have witnessed the same student being harassed. Further, the students who are experiencing the harassment may have chosen not to complete or participate in the survey yet the survey participants have witnessed the nonparticipants being harassed. Another possibility is that targets of harassment are embarrassed to report that they have been the target of harassment. Finally, this specific school has implemented numerous anti-bullying programs in the past couple of years, which may have heightened witnesses' awareness of harassment.

Although the overall harassment levels at this school were low and most students reported feeling safe on campus, there are significant differences between LGB, questioning, and straight students' experiences with harassment. Based on responses to the survey items,

questioning students are enduring the most harassment. The rate at which questioning students hear anti-LGB slurs at school is alarming (19% hearing it 2-3 times per month, 13% hearing it once a week, 13% hearing it 2-3 times per week, 6% hearing it daily, and 6% hearing it several times a day). This continual exposure to anti-LGB slurs seems likely to add to their internal struggle as they are questioning their orientation as it can be difficult to accept something that is routinely spoken of negatively.

In addition to the overall low harassment levels, another accolade for this school is the high percentage of times students witness a teacher or staff member intervene when hearing anti-LGB slurs (sometimes, 38%; often, 18%; and always, 9%) which is far higher than those reported from the GLSEN 2011 study. This intervention may be one of the reasons that although a large percentage reported being afraid of being beat up at school, they also reported feeling safe on campus.

Finally, although this is a quantitative study, it should not be forgotten that each percentage represents one or more students and that student(s) is someone's daughter, son, sister, brother, or friend. Therefore, although the overall level of harassment is low, there were 61 reports, by at least 28 different students, of experiencing some type of harassment based on a demographic characteristic. That is 61 times someone's daughter(s), son(s), brother(s), sister(s), and/or friend(s) were physically or verbally harassed.

Research Question 2

Bishop et al. (2004) concluded that individuals in a low status group, many of whom are students not accepted by their peers, are often harassed. LGB students are amongst those groups

often considered to be low status. Therefore, participants' perception of LGB individuals was measured. To measure participants' perceptions of LGB individuals, participants were asked how much sexual orientation mattered when deciding who to hang out with. Answer choices included not at all, a little, somewhat, and a lot with not at all being used to indicate a positive perception and a lot being used to indicate a negative perception. Only straight students' responses were calculated. Participants were also asked the same question about race and religion.

In response to the question about sexual orientation, the majority of students stated that sexual orientation, race, and religion does not matter at all and only a small portion stated it matters a lot when deciding who to hang out with. Although only 25% of students stated that sexual orientation mattered at all when choosing who to hang out with, thus possibly indicating a less than positive perception of LGB individuals, it was a greater percentage than indicated that race or religion mattered at all and therefore could indicate LGB as a low status group. However, it could be argued that a participant may have responded "a lot" because they want a friend who is LGB. If in fact "a lot" does indicate a negative perception, it could also lead to questioning students feeling fearful of losing friends if the individual questioning concludes he/she is LGB and decides to come out. This fear could prolong the questioning phase, leaving the student more vulnerable to experiencing harassment.

Significance of the Findings

Much of the research focusing on LGB students' school experiences have focused on or included primarily high school LGB. These studies have shown that LGB high school students are targets of physical and verbal harassment (Birkett et. al., 2009; Goodenow, Szalacha, &

Westheimer, 2006; Kosciw et al., 2012; Payne & Smith, 2010; Turner et al., 2011; Varjas et al., 2008; Williams et al., 2005). Further, LGB students who are targets of harassment are more likely to experience a number of negative outcomes including absenteeism (Kosciw et al., 2012), lower GPA (Kosciw et al., 2012), and are more likely to drop out of school (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). High school students who are questioning their sexual orientation have been found to be more likely than their LGB or straight counterparts to experience victimization such as harassment (Birkett et al., 2009), increasing the likelihood of experiencing negative outcomes due to the victimization. To date, little research has focused on middle school LGB or questioning students' experiences.

This study focused on middle school LGB and questioning students' experiences, specifically with verbal and physical harassment. The inclusion of questioning students was very important due to the process of sexual identity formation. Many models of sexual identity formation include a period of time in which one questions their sexual orientation prior to disclosing one is LGB. Studies by Birkett et al. (2009) and Williams et al. (2005) suggested that during the middle school years, many LGB individuals are in the questioning phase.

Even in a school focused on anti-bullying measures, located in West Los Angeles, which includes many out adult parents, teachers, and administrators, this study found middle school LGB and questioning students face harassment at levels significantly different than their straight counterparts which was consistent with findings showing high school LGB face harassment. Also consistent with findings from studies of LGBQ high school students, this study found middle school students who are questioning their sexual orientation are more likely to be targets of harassment than their LGB or straight peers. Given that the No Child Left Behind Act (2001)

mandates that schools must provide a safe learning environment for all students, these findings show educators must take action to provide a safer environment for LGBQ students.

Recommendations for Practice & Future Research

Educators have a moral commitment to provide a safe environment for all students, including LGBQ students. Further, educators have a legal mandate (i.e. NCLB 2001) to provide such environment. This is not to say this will be easy or even easily accepted in some communities. However, LGBQ students exist in all communities and as educators; it is our ethical and legal job to keep all students, including LGBQ students, safe. School climate impacts students' mental health, self-esteem, and academic outcomes (Birkett et al., 2009). In a recent study, seventh through twelfth grade LGB students who reported a positive school climate were less likely to have reported experiencing victimization and negative outcomes (Birkett et al., 2009). A positive school climate is considered a primary prevention (Merrell, Ervin, & Gimpel, 2006, as cited in Fisher et al., 2008) and includes policies that promote the acceptance and safety of all students (Fisher et al., 2008).

Schools have begun to work towards improving LGBQ students' school experiences. Some schools have created policies that prevent discrimination based upon sexual orientation and many high schools have created Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) and similar support groups (Blackburn & McCready, 2009). The Milwaukee School system recently approved a LGB friendly middle school, the first in the U.S. (Blackburn, & McCready, 2009). There are also a few middle schools in California that have created Diversity Clubs. Diversity Clubs often include topics of acceptance for racial, ability/disability, religious, and sexual minority groups and fight harassment based on race, ability/disability, religious, and sexual orientation. The

National Association of School Psychologists (2006) listed the need to understand LGB issues and documented strategies to support LGB students in their blueprint for training and practice (Hansen, 2007). In addition to policies and GSAs, some schools are including LGB individuals and history in the school curriculum and classroom lessons. California recently passed a senate bill requiring inclusion of LGB individuals in social science instruction.

Inclusive School Climate and Policies

Mayo (2009) speaks to the official silence surrounding the harassment of LGB individuals. One way to break the silence is to implement policies that are inclusive of LGB individuals and policies which prohibit the harassment of LGB individuals (Biegel & Kuehl, 2010). Biegel & Kuehl (2010) promote the importance of educators being proactive in creating an inclusive environment for LGB individuals. Proactive measures can include LGB supportive faculty and staff members placing LGB “Safe Space” stickers on the door of their classroom/office, displaying posters that clearly state harassment of LGB individuals will not be tolerated, and keeping language surrounding school events such as dances LGB inclusive.

Another proactive measure schools can take is to specifically include LGB individuals in harassment and bullying policies. Some states include LGB individuals in harassment policies, while others do not. As bullying has become a growing concern, more states have passed anti-bullying legislation. LGB students have been specifically mentioned in some of the anti-bullying legislation. Anti-bullying policies that specifically mention LGB students have a positive impact on school climate (Kosciw et al., 2012). Results of the GLSEN 2011 School Climate Survey showed students who reported their schools had an anti-bullying policy which specifically mentions LGB individuals also reported lower rates of homophobic comments, lower rates of

victimization, and higher rates of staff intervention when hearing homophobic comments (Kosciw et al., 2012). These policies not only give students a clear understanding that harassment of LGB individuals is not acceptable, but also give school staff guidance about how to respond when harassment of LGB individuals occurs (Kosciw et al., 2012).

Gay Straight Alliances

Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) are clubs or organizations on school campuses consisting of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and straight students. According to Griffin, Lee, Waugh, and Beyer (2004) GSAs take on the following roles in schools: counseling and support group not integrated into the school, a “safe space” known by the general student population, the main group raising awareness and educating the general student population about LGB issues, and a group which is part of a larger school effort to make school a safe place for LGB students (as cited in Hackford-Peer, 2010). In all of those roles, GSAs provide LGB students support and a safe place to meet. The GSA Network connects high school GSAs. The GSA Network’s mission states:

The national GSA Network supports young people in starting, strengthening, and sustaining GSAs and builds the capacity of GSAs to create safe environments in schools for students to support each other and learn about homophobia and other oppressions; educate the school community about homophobia, gender identity, and sexual orientation issues; and fight discrimination, harassment, and violence in schools.

(www.gsanetwork.org/about-us, 8/2/2010)

The GSA network strives to benefit students through ending isolation, developing leaders, and making schools safer (www.gsanetwork.org/about-us, 8/2/2010).

GSAAs have been shown to be the “most potent force for school change” (Hansen, 2007, p. 844) that has a positive impact in the lives of LGB students. Goodenow et al. (2006) found that the presence of a GSA on a school campus serves as a visible sign of a school’s support of LGB students. Positive outcomes of GSAs have been an improvement in academic performance (Lee, 2002), improved attendance (Goodenow et al., 2006; Lee, 2002), and the students working harder and taking school more seriously (Lee, 2002).

A second finding of GSAs is the increased safety of LGB students on campus (Goodenow et al., 2006; Kosciw, 2004; Kosciw & Cullen, 2002; Kosciw et al., 2012; Lee, 2002). The students interviewed in Lee’s (2002) research cited the formation of a GSA on campus lead to increased visibility and support, resulting in students feeling safer on campus. Goodenow et al. (2006) analyzed data from the Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2000) and determined that LGB students in schools with a GSA experienced less victimization and rated their schools as less hostile than LGB students in schools without a GSA. This finding was supported by Kosciw et al. (2012) research in which students in schools with a GSA reported hearing fewer homophobic remarks than students in schools without a GSA. Decreased harassment, hostility, and homophobic language all support the finding that GSAs impact not only LGB students, but all students in the school (Goodenow et al., 2006; Hansen, 2007; Kosciw et al., 2012; Lee, 2002; Mayberry, 2006; Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002; Talburt, 2004).

Other positive outcomes of GSAs include social support and reducing isolation (Mayberry, 2006). LGB students expressed feeling that participation in a GSA increased visibility which resulted in their ability to form closer relationships with LGB and straight

students (Lee, 2002). Pace (2009) found students were positively impacted by the social support provided to them through GSAs. Students in schools with a GSA were able to identify a staff member who is supportive (Lee, 2002; Szalacha, 2003).

Based on the positive impact high school GSAs have had on high schools' school climates and high school LGBQ students' experiences, the formation and implementation of GSAs or similar clubs in middle schools could be one possible way of improving middle schools' school climate and the school experience for LGBQ middle school students.

Curricular Inclusion

Curricular silence is another form of silence in schools. The vast majority of LGB students (83%) report that positive representation of LGB individuals, history, or issues is not included in classroom curriculum and lessons. As Unks eloquently stated about school curriculum:

Homosexuals do not exist. They are "nonpersons"...They have fought no battles, held no offices, explored nowhere, written no literature...To the homosexual student, the message has even greater power: no one who has ever felt as you do has done anything worth mentioning. (Unks, 2003, cited in Pace 2009, p. 98)

LGB students who do report LGB individuals, history, or topics were included in their school's curriculum/lessons, also report hearing fewer homophobic comments, report feeling safer at school, and report less absenteeism (Kosciw et al., 2012). Based on the reports of hearing fewer homophobic comments, it is likely that the inclusion of LGB individuals, history, or topics also has a positive impact on straight students' perception of LGB individuals and is recommended.

An inclusive school climate, policies clearly stating that harassment of LGB individuals is not tolerated, GSAs and similar support groups, and positive information about LGB individuals in the school curriculum could likely reduce the fear and isolation many students questioning their sexual identity experience.

Research

To date, much research has focused on LGB high school students. The few studies that have focused on middle school students, including this study, have been in limited geographic areas. A nation-wide study could be beneficial in generalizing the findings. Given Birkett et al. (2009) findings and the findings of this study that questioning students often experience greater harassment than LGB students, I recommend such study include questioning students. Based on my experience with this study, I recommend future researchers utilize recognized surveys that focus on student experiences and embed, rather than highlight, sexual orientation. Having chosen surveys which the school district already utilized (California Healthy Kids Survey and GSA School Climate Survey) and simply adding sexual orientation into the demographic information as well as a category alongside race and religion helped me get approval to conduct the study at the school site.

Identifying questioning students can be difficult. I recommend utilizing Birkett's question "Do you ever feel confused about whether you are lesbian, gay, or bisexual?" modifying the choice of rarely to state rarely because I am pretty sure I am straight" and "rarely because I am pretty sure I am gay". These two options will allow the researcher more data to utilize.

A national study could also address the questions raised about the lack of gay male participants. Included in the study could be questions about the perceptions of specifically gay males, bisexual males, lesbians, and bisexual females. The results should be analyzed by the perceptions of each gender towards each gender (i.e. straight females towards lesbians, straight females towards gay males, straight males towards lesbians, straight males towards gay males).

Another area for future study is to examine the effectiveness of middle school GSAs and Diversity Clubs. High School GSAs have been found to be an effective strategy for creating safe campuses for LGB students (Goodenow et al., 2006; Kosciw, 2004; Kosciw & Cullen, 2002; Kosciw et al., 2012; Lee, 2002). As the number of middle school GSAs and Diversity Clubs increase, it will be important to examine their effectiveness for creating safe campuses for middle school LGBQ students.

Conclusion

Many studies have shown LGBQ students experience harassment at school. This study shows that even at a school where students report overall low levels of harassment, LGBQ students experience significantly more harassment than their straight counterparts. Results of harassment can include absenteeism, lower GPAs, and even suicide (as seen in the Anoka-Hennepin School District's four LGB student suicides in a nine month period of time). Administrators, teachers, students, and parents are urged to take steps now to create safe school environments for all students, including LGBQ students. The next dropout or suicide could be your favorite student, your son, your daughter, or your best friend.

Appendix A

Informed Consent Letter

LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent Form

Date of Preparation _____

Loyola Marymount University

Middle School Students and Harassment

- 1) I hereby authorize Kim Indelicato to include me (my child/ward) in the following research study: Middle School Students and Harassment.
- 2) I have been asked to participate on a research project which is designed to examine the harassment of various demographic groups including ethnic, religious, gender, ability/disability, and sexual orientation. The survey will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. Each participant will complete the survey on June _____, 2012.
- 3) It has been explained to me that the reason for my son/daughter's inclusion in this project is because he/she is a seventh or eighth grade student at [school name].
- 4) I understand that if my child is a participant in the study, he/she will complete a survey one time, on-line, during his/her physical education class. The survey will ask questions about your child's experience at [school name] pertaining to harassment. I also understand that when completing the survey my child may choose to skip or not answer any question(s) he/she does not want to answer.

The researcher will collect and analyze the data to describe the experiences and perceptions of middle school students.

These procedures have been explained to me and my child by Kim Indelicato.

- 5) I understand that the study described above involves my child recalling past events that may have been stressful for him/her. As such, every question is optional and your child may choose to skip answering any item on the survey or opt out of the survey at any time.
- 6) I also understand that the possible benefits of the study are an increased awareness of students' experiences at [school name]. School personnel will be able to use this information to inform decisions related to school safety.
- 7) I understand that Kim Indelicato, who can be reached at kindelic@lion.lmu.edu or [school phone number] will answer any questions I may have at any time concerning details of the procedures performed as part of this study.

- 8) If the study design or the use of the information is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent reobtained.
- 9) I understand that I have the right to refuse to participate in, or to withdraw from this research at any time without prejudice.
- 10) I understand that circumstances may arise which might cause the investigator to terminate my participation before the completion of the study.
- 11) I understand that this study is anonymous and the information obtained from my child cannot be linked to my child in any way.
- 12) I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question that I may not wish to answer.
- 13) I understand that my child's name will be entered into a drawing for one of six \$5 gift cards to In-N-Out Restaurant for his/her participation in this study; I further understand that if I withdraw before the study is completed her/his name will remain in the drawing.
- 14) I understand that if I have any further questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact David Hardy, Ph.D. Chair, Institutional Review Board, 1 LMU Drive, Suite 3000, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles CA 90045-2659 (310) 258-5465, david.hardy@lmu.edu.
- 15) In signing this consent form, I acknowledge receipt of a copy of the form, and a copy of the "Subject's Bill of Rights".

Subject is a minor (age_____).

Mother/Father/Guardian _____ Date _____

Appendix B

Survey

Middle School Experience Survey

Hello! Thank you for agreeing to participate in the survey. Your parent(s) have given you permission to participate. Below is the participants assent form. Please take one moment to read through it. If you agree to participate, please mark "yes". If you do not agree to participate, mark "no". If you have any questions, raise your hand.

1) I hereby authorize Kim Indelicato to include me in the following research study: Middle School Students and Harassment.

2) I has been asked to participate on a research project which is designed to examine the harassment of various demographic groups including ethnic, religious, gender, ability/disability, and sexual orientation. The survey will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. Each participant will complete the survey in June, 2012.

3) It has been explained to me that the reason for my inclusion in this project is because I am a seventh or eighth grade student at [school name].

4) I understand that if I am a participant in the study, I will complete a survey one time, on-line, during my physical education class. The survey will ask questions about my experience at [school name] pertaining to harassment. I also understand that when completing the survey I may choose to skip or not answer any question(s) I do not want to answer. The researcher will collect and analyze the data to describe the experiences and perceptions of middle school students. These procedures have been explained to me by Kim Indelicato.

5) I understand that the study described above involves me recalling past events that may have been stressful for me. As such, every question is optional and I may choose to skip answering any item on the survey or opt out of the survey at any time. I may also speak to a school counselor should I experience any discomfort when completing the survey.

6) I also understand that the possible benefits of the study are an increased awareness of students' experiences at [school name]. School personnel will be able to use this information to inform decisions related to school safety.

7) I understand that Kim Indelicato, who can be reached at kindelic@lion.lmu.edu or (310)842-4200 x.3301, or her Dissertation Chair: Dr. Karen Huchting, 310-568-16 6227; karen.huchting@lmu.edu, will answer any questions I may have at any time concerning details of the procedures performed as part of this study.

8) If the study design or the use of the information is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent reobtained.

9) I understand that I have the right to refuse to participate in, or to withdraw from this research at any time without prejudice.

10) I understand that circumstances may arise which might cause the investigator to terminate my participation before the completion of the study.

11) I understand that this study is anonymous and the information obtained from me cannot be linked to me in any way.

12) I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question that I may not wish to answer.

13) I understand that my name will be entered into a drawing for one of six \$5 gift cards to In-N-Out Restaurant for my participation in this study; I further understand that if I withdraw before the study is completed my name will remain in the drawing.

14) I understand that if I have any further questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed assent process, I may contact David Hardy, Ph.D. Chair, Institutional Review Board, 1 LMU Drive, Suite 3000, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles CA 90045-2659 (310) 258-5465, david.hardy@lmu.edu.

15) In signing this consent form, I acknowledge receipt of a copy of the form, and a copy of the "Subject's Bill of Rights". I agree to participate in this study.

Yes

No

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

The following questions will ask you about your background, please choose one answer to each question.

Age

- 11 years or younger
- 12 years
- 13 years
- 14 years
- 15 years or older

Grade

- 7th grade
- 8th grade

Gender

- Male
- Female

Ethnicity

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- African American or Black
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White
- Hispanic/Latino
- Middle Eastern
- Mixed/Multiple Race _____
- Other _____
- Decline to state

Religion

- Atheist
- Christian- Catholic
- Christian- Protestant (i.e. Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran)
- Hindu
- Judaism (Jewish)
- Islam (Muslim)
- Other _____
- Decline to state

During this school year,

- I only attended [school name].
- I attended another school(s) before attending [school name].

During this school year, how would you describe the grades you mostly received in school?

- Mostly A's
- A's and B's
- Mostly B's
- B's and C's
- Mostly C's
- C's and D's
- Mostly D's
- D's and F's
- Mostly F's

During this school year, did you ever feel confused about whether you are lesbian, gay, or bisexual? Remember, this survey is anonymous. No one will know how you answer.

- never confused because I am Straight
- rarely confused
- sometimes confused
- a lot confused
- always confused
- never confused because I consider myself to be Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual.

The following questions will ask about your experience this year at [school name], please answer honestly.

During this school year, how many times on school property have you ...

	0 times	1 time	2 to 3 times	4 or more times
Been pushed, shoved, slapped, kicked, or hit by someone who wasn't kidding around?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Been afraid of being beat up?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Had mean rumors or lies spread about you?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Had sexual jokes, comments, or gestures made to you?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Been made fun of because of your looks or the way you talk?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Had your property stolen or deliberately damaged such as your clothes, bag, or books?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Answer If During this school year, how many times on school propert... - 4 or more times Is Selected

We want to let you know that we care about you and want you to be safe at school. Help is available. Please contact an Assistant Principal or a school counselor. The Venice Youth Health Center (located next to the nurse's office) also provides counseling.

During this school year, how many times did other students spread mean rumors or lies about you on the Internet (i.e. Facebook™MySpace™, email, instant message)?

- 0 times (never)
- 1 time
- 2-3 times
- 4 or more times

During this school year, how many times on school property were you harassed or bullied for any of the following reasons? [You were bullied if repeatedly shoved, hit, threatened, called mean names, teased in a way you didn't like, or had other unpleasant things done to you. It is not bullying when two students of about the same strength quarrel or fight.]

	0 times (never)	1 time	2-3 times	4 or more times
Race	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sexual Orientation (actual or perceived)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gender	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Disability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(Answer If During this school year, how many times on school propert... - 4 or more times Is Selected)

We want to let you know that we care about you and want you to be safe at school. Help is available. Please contact an Assistant Principal or a school counselor. The Venice Youth Health Center (located next to the nurse's office) also provides counseling.

(Answer If During this school year, how many times on school proper... Race - 4 or more times Is Selected)

On the previous question, you answered 4 or more times. During this school year, on average how frequently on school property have you been harassed or bullied because of your race?

Choose the most accurate answer from the choices below.

- less than 1 time per month
- 1 time per month
- more than 1 time per month, but less than 1 time per week
- 1 time per week
- more than 1 time per week, but less than 1 time per day
- 1 time per day
- more than 1 time per day

(Answer If During this school year, how many times on school proper... Religion - 4 or more times Is Selected)

On a previous question, you answered 4 or more times. During this school year, on average how frequently on school property have you been harassed or bullied because of your religion?

Choose the most accurate answer from the choices below.

- less than 1 time per month
- 1 time per month
- more than 1 time per month, but less than 1 time per week
- 1 time per week
- more than 1 time per week, but less than 1 time per day
- 1 time per day
- more than 1 time per day

(Answer If During this school year, how many times on school propert... Sexual Orientation (actual or perceived) - 4 or more times Is Selected)

On a previous question, you answered 4 or more times. During this school year, on average how frequently on school property have you been harassed or bullied because of your sexual orientation (actual or perceived)? Choose the most accurate answer from the choices below.

- less than 1 time per month
- 1 time per month
- more than 1 time per month, but less than 1 time per week
- 1 time per week
- more than 1 time per week, but less than 1 time per day
- 1 time per day
- more than 1 time per day

(Answer If During this school year, how many times on school proper... Gender - 4 or more times Is Selected)

On a previous question, you answered 4 or more times. During this school year, on average how frequently on school property have you been harassed or bullied because of your gender? Choose the most accurate answer from the choices below.

- less than 1 time per month
- 1 time per month
- more than 1 time per month, but less than 1 time per week
- 1 time per week
- more than 1 time per week, but less than 1 time per day
- 1 time per day
- more than 1 time per day

(Answer If During this school year, how many times on school proper... Disability - 4 or more times Is Selected)

On a previous question, you answered 4 or more times. During this school year, on average how frequently on school property have you been harassed or bullied because of your disability? Choose the most accurate answer from the choices below.

- less than 1 time per month
- 1 time per month
- more than 1 time per month, but less than 1 time per week
- 1 time per week
- more than 1 time per week, but less than 1 time per day
- 1 time per day
- more than 1 time per day

During this school year, how many times on school property have you seen another student harassed or bullied for any of the following reasons? [Someone is bullied if repeatedly shoved, hit, threatened, called mean names, teased in a way you didn't like, or had other unpleasant things done to you. It is not bullying when two students of about the same strength quarrel or fight.]

	0 times (never)	1 time	2-3 times	4 or more times
Race	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sexual Orientation (actual or perceived)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gender	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Disability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(Answer If During this school year, how many times on school prope... Race - 4 or more times Is Selected)

On the previous question, you answered 4 or more times. During this school year, on average how frequently on school property have you seen another student harassed or bullied because of their race? Choose the most accurate answer from the choices below.

- less than 1 time per month
- 1 time per month
- more than 1 time per month, but less than 1 time per week
- 1 time per week
- more than 1 time per week, but less than 1 time per day
- 1 time per day
- more than 1 time per day

(Answer If During this school year, how many times on school prope... Religion - 4 or more times Is Selected)

On a previous question, you answered 4 or more times. During this school year, on average how frequently on school property have you seen another student harassed or bullied because of their religion? Choose the most accurate answer from the choices below.

- less than 1 time per month
- 1 time per month
- more than 1 time per month, but less than 1 time per week
- 1 time per week
- more than 1 time per week, but less than 1 time per day
- 1 time per day
- more than 1 time per day

(Answer If During this school year, how many times on school prope... Sexual Orientation (actual or perceived) - 4 or more times Is Selected)

On a previous question, you answered 4 or more times. During this school year, on average how frequently on school property have you seen another student harassed or bullied because of their sexual orientation? Choose the most accurate answer from the choices below.

- less than 1 time per month
- 1 time per month
- more than 1 time per month, but less than 1 time per week
- 1 time per week
- more than 1 time per week, but less than 1 time per day
- 1 time per day
- more than 1 time per day

(Answer If During this school year, how many times on school prope... Gender - 4 or more times Is Selected)

On a previous question, you answered 4 or more times. During this school year, on average how frequently on school property have you seen another student harassed or bullied because of their gender? Choose the most accurate answer from the choices below.

- less than 1 time per month
- 1 time per month
- more than 1 time per month, but less than 1 time per week
- 1 time per week
- more than 1 time per week, but less than 1 time per day
- 1 time per day
- more than 1 time per day

(Answer If During this school year, how many times on school prope... Disability - 4 or more times Is Selected)

On a previous question, you answered 4 or more times. During this school year, on average how frequently on school property have you seen another student harassed or bullied because of their disability? Choose the most accurate answer from the choices below.

- less than 1 time per month
- 1 time per month
- more than 1 time per month, but less than 1 time per week
- 1 time per week
- more than 1 time per week, but less than 1 time per day
- 1 time per day
- more than 1 time per day

During this school year, did you know of any vandalism or graffiti being directed against students at your middle school because people think they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT)?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

During this school year, how often did you hear the following slurs directed at specific students, teachers, or staff?

	Never	Once a month or less	2-3 Times a Month	Once a Week	2-3 Times a Week	Daily	Several times a day
Racial	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Anti-Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

During this school year, how often did you hear the following slurs at school not specifically directed at an individual (example: “that’s so gay” to mean something is bad)?

	Never	Once a month or less	2-3 Times a Month	Once a Week	2-3 Times a Week	Daily	Several times a day
Racial	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Anti-Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

During this school year, if you heard racial slurs of any kind, teachers or staff step in:

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

During this school year, if you heard religious slurs of any kind, teachers or staff step in:

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

During this school year, if you heard anti-LGBT slurs (example: Fag, Dyke, No Homo, That's so Gay) of any kind, teachers or staff step in:

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

During this school year, if you heard racial slurs of any kind, you or another student step in:

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

During this school year, if you heard religious slurs of any kind, you or another student step in:

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

During this school year, if you heard anti-LGBT slurs (example: Fag, Dyke, No Homo, That's so Gay) of any kind, you or another student step in:

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

During this school year, how safe did you feel at your middle school?

- Very Safe
- Safe
- Neither Safe nor Unsafe
- Unsafe
- Very Unsafe

During this school year, about how many times did you skip school or cut classes because you felt unsafe or were being physically or verbally harassed or you were being bullied?

- Never
- Less than Once a Month
- Once a Month
- 2-3 Times a Month
- Once a Week
- 2-3 Times a Week
- Daily

During this school year, when choosing who to hang out with, to what extent does the following characteristic matter:

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	A lot
Race	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sexual Orientation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Complete the following statement (select all responses that apply). Most of the time, I like to hang out with friends at school who are the same sexual orientation as me.

- Not at all
- A little
- Somewhat
- A lot

How many questions in this survey did you answer honestly?

- All of them
- Most of them
- Some of them
- Hardly any of them

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