A STUDY OF TEACHERS’ ATTITUDES TOWARD
GAY, LESBIAN, BI-SEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER ISSUES

by

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ABSTRACT

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It is the Minneapolis Public Schools policy “…to maintain a learning and working 
environment free of harassment based on sex, race/ethnicity, religion or religious 
practices, disability, sexual orientation or affectional preference and other forms of 
harassment and violence”(Minneapolis Public Schools Policy 4002, 1993). Despite this 
policy, according to the Minnesota State Attorney General’s office, forty-nine percent of 
all students consider gay and lesbian peers most at risk for violence against them at their 
schools. Even when laws are put into place to protect these students, students do not feel 
that they are protected from violent acts (Office of the Minnesota Attorney General, 
1997). A primary question explored in this research is on the role teachers play or would
like to play in addressing or not addressing Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) issues.

The purpose of this study was to look at the attitudes of the teachers at one Minneapolis High School on GLBT issues. Is it because the teachers’ don’t know how to deal with GLBT issues or is it that they need more resources to feel comfortable with supporting GLBT students or is this a value conflict for them. This information was gathered in the hopes that it may provide a foundation for improving the school environment for GLBT students and staff at this school.
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Chapter I

Introduction

In the American culture, homosexuality is considered by many to be a negative lifestyle. In addition, homosexuality is considered to be a sin by some religious groups. Finally, the International Classification of Diseases ninth edition (ICD-9) currently considers homosexuality a disease. Today, approximately ten percent of our society is afflicted with this “disease” according to Alfred Kinsey’s research. This negative phenomenon is “…similar to that 30 to 40 years ago for students of color, the poor, women, and students with disabilities, before educators began to create more supportive and inclusive environment for them” (Pohan, 1998, p.52).

However, the fact remains, there are approximately 2.9 million gay and lesbian k-12 and college students in the United States alone (Miller, 1999, p.632). Research also indicates that the number of people impacted by gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) issues, including students, family, and educators, is far greater. Yet most schools offer virtually no information, support, or visible role models, and silence and ignorance are allowed to prevail (Miller, 1999, p. 632).

With this said, several pressing questions are brought to the forefront. First, why is it that gay and lesbian youth live in fear of discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation, when many laws have been established to protect them? Despite the fact that in 1996, in the Nabozny case, the Supreme Court found it to be unconstitutional for educators to allow harassment on the basis of sexual orientation to go on in schools,
everyday a student can hear anti-gay slurs as they walk through the hallways at most schools. According to Lambada, a legal organization that supports and educates people on issues surrounding sexual orientation, only ten states in the United States have laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (Lambada, 1998). Factual evidence indicates that there are significant inconsistencies between what researchers have discovered as far as homosexuality being an acceptable lifestyle rather than the pathological disorder and the state laws that have since been established.

Second, what are the primary effects of homophobic attitudes on the students in our schools? Research shows that as a result of homophobic discrimination against Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) students, GLBT students are more likely to abuse substances, commit and attempt suicide, and participate in risky behaviors. In fact, gay/lesbian youth are two to three times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual counterparts, and are also three times more likely than their heterosexual peers to abuse substances (Pohan, 1998, p.52). Finally, lesbian, gay and bisexual youth are more likely to report missing school because they’re fearful, because they have been threatened by other students, or because they’ve had their property damaged at school (Torres, 1999).

Third, what are the underlying assumptions of teachers regarding homosexuality, and how does that affect their attitudes toward intervening in discrimination that occurs on the basis of sexual orientation? Approximately eighty percent of prospective teachers report negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian people. Roughly one third of prospective teachers can be classified as "high-grade homophobes" (Kirby, 1994, p.339). Finally, fifty-two percent of prospective teachers report that they would feel
uncomfortable working with an openly lesbian or gay colleague (Kantor, L., 1987). Considering these statistics, how do the attitudes of these prospective teachers impact their willingness to incorporate GLBT issues into their curriculum or to intervene when witnessing acts of discrimination?

Finally, considering the underlying attitudes of educators and resources that have traditionally been made available to them, what should the role of educators be in GLBT education and the protection of rights of students in their schools? Conflicting attitudes prevail considering the precise role of schools and educators in these matters. Bob Chase, President of the National Education Association recently stated, "We cannot afford the obscene luxuries or complacency, denial, or selective tolerance. It is our job to educate all children--to educate them all well, to educate them all equally, and to educate them to live harmoniously in a diverse country". However, with a topic this controversial, “…many want educators to steer clear of gay/lesbian issues because they believe that this is a moral issue”(Pohan, 1998, p.52). This illustrates the conflicting attitudes of educators about their role in issues surrounding sexual orientation.

The answers to these four questions, and information uncovered in attempting to answer them, will assist teachers in working with GLBT staff and students. The research conducted will hopefully not only bring awareness to educators but will also provide resources to improve the overall school environment for GLBT staff and students.

Definitions:

**Sexual Orientation**- A person's emotional, physical, and sexual attraction and the expression of that attraction. Although a subject of debate, sexual orientation is probably
one of the many characteristics that people are born with. Most people become aware of their sexual orientation during adolescence.

**Homosexuality**- A sexual orientation in which a person feels physically and emotionally attracted to people of the same gender.

**Heterosexuality**- A sexual orientation in which a person feels physically and emotionally attracted to people of the opposite gender.

**Bisexuality**- A sexual orientation in which a person feels physically and emotionally attracted to people of both genders.

**Transgender Identity**- The experience of having a gender identity that is different from one's biological sex. A transgender person may identify with the opposite biological gender and want to be a person of that gender.

**Sexual Minority**- A person who may identify as homosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, or transvestite. All gay and lesbian youth are members of a sexual minority, but not all sexual minority persons are gay.

"**Coming out**"- Also, "Coming out of the Closet" or "Being Out", this term refers to the process in which a person acknowledges, accepts, and in many cases appreciates her or his lesbian, gay or bisexual identity. This often involves the sharing of this information with others. The process of coming out to oneself and to others occurs for different young people (and adults) in a variety of places and ways.

**Homophobia**- The fear, dislike, and hatred of same-sex relationships or those who love and are sexually attracted to those of the same sex. Homophobia includes prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and acts of violence brought on by fear and hatred. It occurs in schools on personal, institutional, and societal levels.
**Internalized Homophobia**- The fear and self-hate of one's own homosexuality or bisexuality that occurs for many gay and lesbian individuals who have learned negative ideas about homosexuality throughout childhood. Once gay and lesbian youth realize that they belong to a group of people that is often despised and rejected in our society, many internalize and incorporate the stigmatization of homosexuality and fear or hate themselves.

**Heterosexism**- The assumption that all people are or should be heterosexual. Heterosexism excludes the needs, concerns, and life experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual people while it gives advantages to heterosexual people. It is often a subtle form of oppression, which reinforces realities of silence and invisibility for gay and lesbian youth.

**Invisibility**- The constant assumption of heterosexuality renders gay and lesbian people, youth in particular, invisible and seemingly non-existent. Gay and lesbian people and youth are usually not seen or portrayed in society, and especially not in schools and classrooms.

**GLBT**- Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender.

*Definitions are from the Parents, Family, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (P-Flag) web page: http://www.pflag.org/store/resource/BEYOU*
The purpose of this study is to investigate the attitudes that teachers at Patrick Henry High School in Minneapolis, Minnesota, have toward gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) issues. There appears to be a discrepancy between the policies protecting gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender staff and students and the amount of harassment that goes on in the schools. Despite the fact that the U.S. Supreme Court has found it unconstitutional to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation, harassment on the basis of sexual orientation continues. Students on a daily basis are subject to verbal as well as physical abuse. The results of this study will not only provide information on the attitudes of teachers toward GLBT issues, it will also provide resources for helping teachers interested in protecting GLBT students and staff as well as alert districts to professional development needs.

Objectives:

1. Find out if teachers are aware of the district’s policy on discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

2. Find out if teachers have the resources to deal with issues surrounding sexual orientation.

3. Find out what teachers’ attitudes are toward preventing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

4. Find out whose role teacher’s believe it is to deal with issues surrounding sexual orientation.
Chapter II

Review of Literature

This literature review focuses on historical perspectives surrounding sexual orientation, the effects of homophobia, the role of educators in supporting issues surrounding sexual orientation, the attitudes of educators towards the harassment of people based on their sexual orientation, as well as legal issues surrounding sexual orientation.

Historical Perspective on Sexual Orientation:

Homosexuality has long been identified throughout history. According to research “homosexuality has existed in ancient Egypt, in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, in ancient China, and in Ancient India” (Sheurer, 2000, p.5). Homosexuality is not specific to the human specie. Homosexuality has been identified in other species and other cultures as well (Sheurer, 2000, p.5). In South America, some indigenous people consider homosexuality to be a normal, healthy, and acceptable lifestyle (Owens, 1998).

Before the High Middle Ages, homosexual acts appear to have been widely tolerated or ignored by the Christian church throughout Europe. Beginning in the latter twelfth century, however, hostility toward homosexuality began to take root, and eventually spread throughout European religious and secular institutions. Religious beliefs had a major impact on the way laws were written. Therefore, as the Christian church began to identify homosexuality as a sin, laws began to support this belief.
Criminal penalties for sodomy were harsh, in fact, in the American colonies male and female homosexual acts were punishable by death (Ellis, 1901).

The field of medicine soon became involved with the diagnosis of homosexuality after people became sanctioned for their sexual orientation. In the nineteenth century, the majority of psychiatrists considered homosexuality to be a pathological disorder. The movement from homosexuality being considered a crime to being considered a disorder was a progressive move for homosexuals because a sick person was less blameful than a sinner or criminal (Chauncey, 1982/1983). Among the medical community there wasn’t a consensus of whether or not homosexuality should be considered a pathological disorder. While psychiatrist, Richard von Kraft-Ebing described homosexuality as a “degenerative sickness” Sigmund Freud and Havelock Ellis were more accepting of homosexuality. In 1889, Ellis defined the sexual orientation of homosexuality as a “…sexual instinct turned by inborn constitutional abnormality toward persons of the same sex” (Robinson, 1976). Sigmund Freud felt that all human beings were innately bisexual, and that they become heterosexual or homosexual as a result of their experiences with parents and others (Robinson, 1976).

Psychiatrist Havelock Ellis, in the early part of the twentieth century, found that “…homosexuality was inborn and therefore not immoral, that it was not a disease, and that many homosexuals made outstanding contributions to society” (Ellis, 1901). In the early part of the twentieth century the results of Ellis’s research did not coincide with the way in which society viewed homosexuality. As a result of Ellis’s study, more studies were conducted to counter the results of Ellis’s research. By the 1950’s, research on whether or not homosexuality is a pathological disorder was continued by a psychologist
by the name of Evelyn Hooker. Her findings were similar to Ellis’s in that she found that, “Homosexuality in and of itself is unrelated to psychological disturbance or maladjustment. Homosexuals as a group are not more psychologically disturbed on account of their homosexuality” (Hooker, 1957). Despite the results of research that states that homosexuality is not a psychological disorder and it is inborn, today many homosexuals are treated as though they have a disease and that they have the power to change their sexual orientation.

Despite the fact that the psychiatric diagnosis of homosexuality as a disorder has a considerable effect on the way the general public viewed homosexuality, there has been little empirical research on homosexuality. Up until Alfred Kinsey’s research on homosexuality, the research that was done on homosexuals was done on homosexuals already under psychiatric care (Rosenthal, 1976). Obviously, it is hard to generalize the entire homosexual community on a small sample of homosexuals seeking psychiatric care. In 1948, Alfred Kinsey, a zoologist and taxonomist, researched the sexual behavior of American adults with a more tolerant stance toward homosexuality. Kinsey’s research revealed that many more American adults than previously suspected had engaged in homosexual behavior or had experienced same-sex fantasies. Kinsey’s research indicated that sixty percent of all men had some type of homosexual relationship before age sixteen (Kinsey, 1948). As a result of Kinsey not categorizing his research participants by sexual orientation but rather by sexual behavior and fantasy his numbers are a lot higher. One wonders if homosexual behavior and fantasy are so prevalent why is it that homophobia even exists when the majority of people have displayed some form of homosexual behavior or fantasy.
Sexual Orientation:

The way in which we define sexual orientation has changed over the years as homosexuality has moved away from an unacceptable lifestyle to a more acceptable lifestyle. For the purpose of this literature review the focus on the term sexual orientation will come from the two most widely accepted sources in the psychology field, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) and the International Classification of Diseases (ICD).

In 1974, as a result of pressures from the gay community, the American Psychiatric Association removed the term homosexuality as a disease from the DSM and created a new term, Ego dystonic homosexuality (American Psychiatric Association, 1987). Ego dystonic homosexuality was defined by the DSM to be a persistent lack of heterosexual arousal, which the patient experienced as interfering with the initiation or maintenance of wanted heterosexual relationships, and persistent distress from a sustained pattern of unwanted homosexual arousal (American Psychiatric Association, 1987). It was believed that the new term for homosexuality, ego dystonic homosexuality, was a result of a compromise to remove the term homosexuality for a new term so that some form of homosexuality would be seen as a pathological disorder. As a result of the new term for homosexuality, widespread prejudice against homosexuality continued in the United States. The new term meant that all homosexuals go through a stage of ego dystonic before they become homosexual (American Psychiatric Association, 1987).

By 1986, the term of homosexuality was completely removed from the DSM. The only area in the DSM that homosexuality fell under was in the DSM-III, where
homosexuality was put under an area called “Sexual Disorders Not Otherwise Specified, which included persistent and marked distress about one’s sexual orientation”. It has been fourteen years since homosexuality has been removed in the DSM as a disease yet everyday as GLBT students walk through the halls they are treated as if they are inflicted with a “disease” as they endure both verbal and physical abuse.

The way in which the DSM has redefined homosexuality is not equivalent to the ways in which the ICD has defined homosexuality. The ICD manual to the present day still includes homosexuality as a disease. However, in 1987, the American Psychiatric Association voted to “urge its members not to use the ‘302.0 homosexuality’ diagnosis in the current ICD” (American Psychiatric Association, 1987).

Despite the way in which homosexuality has been defined and redefined by the DSM and the ICD, everyday homosexual students are treated as if they have a disease. On a daily basis as GLBT students walk down the hall they can expect to be both verbally and physically harassed as a result of their sexual orientation. According to the DSM, GLBT students, based on their sexual orientation, do no have a pathological disorder; however, as a result from the effects of harassment, homosexual teens may have an increased risk of suffering from depression. It is important to understand that homosexuality does not cause depression; it is the effect of homophobia that causes depression for homosexual students.

Effects of Homophobia:

Research indicates that every day homosexual teens face an increased risk of verbal harassment, physical abuse at home as well as at school, and feelings of isolation.
It is important to note that the adversity that homosexuals face is not a result of being homosexual but rather as a result of society’s negative reaction toward homosexuality. As a result of a lack of support for gay and lesbian teens, and conflicted societal messages, teens are at a higher risk for depression, suicide, substance abuse, increased difficulty in school performance, and sexually transmitted diseases.

The effects of homophobia not only have an impact on homosexual teens but on all students. At an early age we teach students that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is acceptable by allowing it to go on in our schools. According to Cathy Pohan, who wrote an article titled, “Including Gays in Multiculturalism”, as early as elementary school students learn that one of the worst insults is to call someone “queer” or a “sissy.” By middle school and high school, gay/lesbian name-calling becomes a powerful weapon. It keeps all students from expressing emotions or actions deviating from accepted gender-role expectations. According to Pohan, students may become sexually active earlier to prove their heterosexuality or they may choose classes, activities, and career goals not expressing what they really want to be doing out of fear of being labeled a “queer” or “sissy.” Students may also engage in anti-gay harassment or limit their development with same-sex peers to prove their heterosexuality. From Pohan’s article, the effects of homophobia are not limited to homosexual students but to all students. By allowing this sort of discrimination in our schools we are not only limiting the potential of gay and lesbian students but of all students (Pohan, 1998).

Of all the minorities in American school populations, young gays and lesbians are among the most frequently ridiculed, victimized and shunned (Lipkin, 1992). This discrimination comes in the form of physical attacks as well as verbal assaults. In 1994,
it was reported that gays and lesbians are the most frequent victims of hate violence, particularly of brutal crimes (Pohan, 1998). In a survey of 286 gay high school teens, twenty-two percent reported that they had been physically attacked because of their sexual orientation. A typical high school student hears anti-gay slurs 25.5 times a day (Sears, 1992). Despite advances in the struggle against homophobia in our schools there is still a long, long way to go (Johnston, p. 1) In a 1988 survey of 500 adolescents who applied for services at The Hetrick-Martin Institute (A Lesbian & Gay Youth Social Service Agency in New York City), forty-six percent had suffered violence from family, friends and/or strangers (Hunter, 1990).

The effect of homophobic behaviors causes an increased use of substance abuse, suicide, risky sexual activity, and an increased difficulty in school performance among homosexual teens. Of those students who experienced violence on the basis of sexual orientation, forty-four percent reported suicidal ideation (seriously contemplating suicide) and forty-one percent of the females and thirty-four percent of the males had actually made suicide attempts (Hunter, 1990). Substance abuse and suicide are three times higher among gay and lesbian youth than among the general population (Miller, 1999).

Besides substance abuse and suicide there is also an increase in the amount of risky sexual activity that gay and lesbian youth engage in. Gay and Lesbian youth may engage in risky homosexual sex as a result of a desperate need to be with others who are like them and who will show them affection instead of rejection. Gay and Lesbian youth may also engage in unprotected heterosexual sex and use pregnancy as a way to prove to everyone that they couldn’t possibly be gay or lesbian in an effort to protect themselves from anti-gay harassment (Miller, 1999).
One of the paramount effects of harassment among gay and lesbian students is an increased difficulty in school performance. Lesbian, gay and bisexual youth are more likely to report missing school because they’re fearful, because other students have threatened them, or because they’ve had their property damaged at school (Torres, 1999). As indicated before, the effects of homophobia not only impacts gay and lesbian youth but all youth. Therefore, it is important not just for the gay population but for all students to feel comfortable to express themselves without fear of being ostracized. The question becomes, “Whose job is it to deal with these issues surrounding sexual orientation?”

Role of Educators in supporting issues surrounding Sexual Orientation

According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), when acts of anti-gay harassment, particularly physical violence, occur in the schools, administrators should respond promptly to take action against the perpetrators and to support the students who have been harassed. Providing a safe, welcoming school environment for all students is one of the core responsibilities of public school officials (ACLU, 1995, p.6). More specifically the ACLU wrote that it is up to:

Public education to prepare all young people for their futures as independent actors in our heterogeneous society. To accomplish that task, comprehensive, accurate, and age-appropriate sexuality education is essential, and should receive strong support. Equally essential is a concerted effort, at the school district, state and federal levels, to end all forms of discrimination against gay and lesbian youth in the public schools (ACLU, 1995, p.6).
According to Pohan’s article, “Inclusion of Homosexuality into Multicultural Education,” school and classrooms are the place where teachers should provide “places of hope, where students and teachers gain glimpses of the kind of society we could live in and where students learn the academic and critical skills needed to make it a reality” (p.61). By not creating a safe environment or by allowing harassment on the basis of sexual orientation we are following what society tells us to do and we are not teaching our students rather we are allowing society to teach our students acceptable forms of discrimination.

Attitudes of Educators Toward Issues Surrounding Sexual Orientation

The needs of GLBT teens are largely unmet in the public schools. Despite the fact that in most schools they are the largest minority, in most schools they are usually ignored by staff and harassed by students. The question becomes, “Why is it that these students are ignored?” Maybe if we understand the attitudes of teachers toward homosexuality we would be able to understand why some students needs go unmet.

From a more global perspective we can look at where attitudes of teachers come from by looking at the society we live in. Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is one of the last socially acceptable forms of discrimination. Laws and institutional regulations preclude homosexuals from full participation in society—for example, marriage, tax exemptions, health benefits for domestic partners, same-sex couple attendance at school proms and more subtle forms of culturally sanctioned discrimination are often officially condoned by governmental, religious and other social institutions (Fontaine,J., 1998, p.7). Schools tend to be a representation of the world we
live in and if the world we live in finds it acceptable to have negative attitudes toward homosexuality, then it is no wonder that teachers for the most part have negative attitudes toward homosexuality.

Teachers’ negative attitudes toward homosexuality are shown through their comments towards homosexuality as well as the way in which they deal with harassment on the basis of sexual orientation. According to research, 53% of students report hearing homophobic comments made by school staff (CAPS, 1995). When any student hears a homophobic comment it tells that student that it is acceptable to be homophobic and to the GLBT youth it reaffirms what society has already taught them, that homosexuality is an unacceptable lifestyle. How common is homophobia among teachers? According to research, 80% of prospective teachers report negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian people (Kirby, 1994). Naturally one wonders how homophobia affects the classroom. According to Kantor’s research, 52% of prospective teachers report that they would feel uncomfortable working with an openly lesbian or gay colleague (Kantor, L., 1993). 77% of prospective teachers would not encourage a class discussion on homosexuality; 85% oppose integrating gay/lesbian themes into their existing curricula (Harlow, R. & Dennis, D. 1986). As you can see, negative attitudes toward homosexuality have a major impact on the way in which teachers teach. Despite what the law says and because of the attitudes of teachers toward homosexuality, it makes it hard for teachers to ensure every student’s right to an education that isn’t biased as a result of their views.

It isn’t teachers, however, that are the only ones with biased views toward homosexuality; according to research, school counselors have also been shown to have negative attitudes toward homosexuality. School counselors’ negative attitudes toward
homosexuality, because their role, requires them to be more sensitive to students and they are in the schools to help students whatever their needs or issues are. Research indicates that less than 20% of guidance counselors have received any training on serving gay and lesbian students (Remafedi, G., 1987) and only 25% of guidance counselors consider themselves "highly competent" in serving gay and lesbian youth (Dryfoos, J.G., 1988). As GLBT youth become more visible it is going to become increasingly important for counselors to receive some kind of sensitivity training on working with GLBT youth.

Teachers’ attitudes not only affects what they teach in their classroom and what they choose to ignore, but it also affects the safety of students in the school. If teachers have a negative attitude toward homosexuality they will more than likely allow harassment on the basis of sexual orientation to go on in their classrooms. Research indicates that teachers fail to intervene in 97% of incidents involving anti-gay slurs at school (Kirby, D., 1991); 78% of school administrators say they know of no lesbian, gay, or bisexual students in their schools, yet 94% of them claim they feel their schools are safe places for these young people (Curtis V. School Committee of Falmouth, 1995). How safe can our schools be for the students we are protecting when we don’t even know the people we are protecting exist? It is hard to identify GLBT students because they don’t feel safe to be visibly gay. Once schools are made safe, the ability for school administrators, teachers and counselors to identify gay and lesbian teens will be much easier.

One of the reasons that teachers give for not discussing homosexuality in their classroom is “because it is too controversial.” According to Donavan Walling (1993), author of the article “Gay Teens at Risk”, teachers are afraid of discussion surrounding
homosexuality because it is controversial and it is culturally taboo. Cathy Pohan in her article counters this argument by asking, “Which issue surrounding human rights isn’t controversial?” of course it’s controversial, we are comparing the values of some with the rights of others.

Legal Issues Surrounding Sexual Orientation:

As a result of the amount of discrimination and harassment on the basis of sexual orientation that occurs in the schools, laws have been enacted and policies have been put in place to protect students. The Minneapolis School District’s policy on harassment on the basis of sexual orientation states that:

It is the policy of Minneapolis Special School District No. 1 (the "School District") to maintain a learning and working environment free of harassment based on sex, race/ethnicity, religion or religious practices, disability, sexual orientation or affectional preference and other forms of harassment and violence. The School District prohibits any form of sexual, ethnic, religious, disability, sexual orientation or affectional preference or other improper harassment and violence (Minneapolis School Policy 4002, 1993).

As a result of two national organizations, The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and Lambada, a legal defense and education fund for Gays and Lesbians, more legislation has been created to protect GLBT students. The ACLU and the Lambada legal defense fund were both involved in the Nabozny case in Wisconsin and the Wagner case from Arkansas, which have set precedents for school districts to create policies that protect students on the basis of sexual discrimination.
In the Nabozny case the seventh district court became the first court in the country to hold that school officials can be held liable for failing to stop the harassment of gay students. Nabozny claimed that the abuse from other students ranged from name-calling to being shoved, beaten, spat upon, and even having his head pushed in a urinal and being urinated upon. Despite the fact that the school district had a policy against discrimination that included sexual orientation, the school officials did nothing. As a result of the school officials’ lack of action to protect Nabozny, the Ashland school district was required to pay 900,000 dollars in punitive damages. The Nabozny case is just one example of why it is so important as educators to make sure to protect all of our students not just for ethical reasons but for legal reasons as well.

The Wagner case was the first of its kind. The Wagner case deals with a title IX complaint with the Office of Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education. Wagner was a student that had suffered for two years from extremely violent anti-gay harassment. Wagner had received a broken nose and a bruised kidney as a result of “gay-bashing.”

In the Nabozny v. Podlesny case, where a student was a victim of harassment on the basis of sexual orientation, the Supreme Court interpreted the Constitution to protect students against harassment on the basis of sexual orientation. If your school is public, federal law prohibits discrimination and harassment based on prejudice against lesbian, gay, and bisexual students or teachers (ACLU, 1995, p.3). If you receive federal money, under the Equal Protection Clause, the law forbids discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (ACLU, 1995, p.3). While the Equal Protection Clause protects all students in all public schools, some cities and states have also have created stricter laws and policies that protect their students from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.
According to the U.S. Constitution, the First Amendment freedoms includes the protection of academic freedom, of students’ right to receive information, and of the right to be free from content- and viewpoint –based government censorship (ACLU, 1995, p.1). In addition, there is the Equal Protection Clause and its guarantee of equal government treatment, particularly on behalf of a group—such as lesbians and gay men—that have historically been and continue to be subject to invidious discrimination (ACLU, 1995, p.1). It becomes difficult for a student being both verbally and physically harassed at school to be able to receive information. Also, the information that most students receive in public high schools is dependent on what that school’s viewpoints and what the geographical area of that school is. It isn’t just the urban schools that have GLBT students in their schools, it is all schools. According to Kinsey’s research, ten percent of our country is homosexual and therefore ten percent of our classrooms are homosexual. It is important, not just from a legal standpoint, that we protect that ten percent of our classes while educating the other ninety percent.
Chapter III
Methodology

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of teachers toward Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) issues in one Minneapolis Public High School. The objectives of this study are to determine, from a teachers perspective, the amount of harassment on the basis of sexual orientation that goes on in schools, the amount of resources available to teacher on homosexuality, the understanding of policies protecting students and staff from harassment on the basis of sexual orientation, and how much they are involved or care to be involved with working on GLBT issues.

Instrumentation

A structured survey was developed by the researcher in order to investigate the attitudes of teachers on GLBT issues. The survey was eighteen questions in length and was written on a Likert scale. The survey was designed to assess the attitudes teachers had on GLBT issues. From the perception of the teacher, the researcher wanted to look at resources that are available on GLBT issues, knowledge of policies on sexual orientation, the amount of harassment that goes on in the schools, and how often teachers become involved with protecting students and staff from harassment on the basis of sexual orientation.
Participants

The researcher administered the survey to a high school teaching staff in the Minneapolis School District. The survey was administered at the practicum site of the researcher. The survey was administered at a staff meeting at the high school in November of 2000. All participants were teachers at the high school. There were a total of eighty-nine teachers at the high school. Sixty-two of the eighty-nine members of the teaching staff answered the survey.

Research Procedures

The researcher, with the consent of the high school principal, administered the survey at a staff meeting in November during a staff in-service day. Before the survey was administered, the researcher provided an explanation of the survey and assured the participants of their anonymity with a voluntary consent form at the beginning of the survey. The survey was then handed out. The researcher allotted time for the participants to complete the survey and then collected the surveys. Some of the participants needed extra time and extra time was allotted. At the end of the survey teachers were allowed to write any thoughts, questions or comments they had regarding GLBT issues at their school.

Data Analysis

The information that was analyzed was examined to determine the attitudes of teachers’ on GLBT issues. The data was analyzed for information on the amount of resources that are made available to teachers on issues surrounding sexual orientation.
The data also provided information on the attitude of teachers toward discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, teachers’ knowledge of policies preventing harassment on the basis of sexual orientation, and teachers’ perceptions of their role in working with issues surrounding sexual orientation.
Chapter IV

Results

There were eighteen questions in the survey presented to the teaching staff at Patrick Henry High School. The questions focused on five specific areas that as a whole would express what the attitudes of teachers are toward Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) issues. The five areas the survey focused on were teachers attitudes toward school policies on sexual orientation, the inclusion of sexual orientation into curriculum, schools safety, teachers active roles in confronting harassment, roles of teachers in dealing with issues surrounding harassment, and support service available to GLBT youth. The total number of teachers asked to respond to the survey was eighty-nine and sixty-five responded.

School Policies:

As discussed in the literature review, school policies and laws have been put into place to protect students from all kinds of harassment but harassment on the basis of sexual orientation in particular. The consequences of ignoring school policies have proved to be costly as it was in the Nabozny case, where the Ashland Wisconsin School District was required to pay $900,000 in damages for not enforcing the school policies and laws that protected students from harassment on the basis of sexual orientation. As shown with the Ashland public school officials, even when the harshest penalties are put into place, public school officials do not always enforce policies.
Item one and Item two both focused on the school district’s policy. Item one asked teachers, using a Likert scale, how aware they were of the school district’s policy on discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Of the sixty-four teachers who responded to the question, sixty-two of the teachers reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that they were aware of the school district’s policy on sexual orientation. Only two of the teachers responded that they were unaware of the school district’s policy on discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Item two looked at the teachers’ attitudes toward the school district’s policy. The survey showed that forty-nine of the sixty-five teachers strongly disagreed that they were uncomfortable with the school district’s policy. Fifty-five of the teachers felt comfortable with the school district’s policy and only three of the teachers felt uncomfortable with this policy while an additional six teachers were unsure how they felt toward this policy.

Inclusion of Sexual Orientation into Classroom Curriculum:

Items three and four looked at whether or not Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) issues should be discussed in the classroom. Item three looked specifically at teachers’ attitudes toward GLBT issues being discussed in the classroom. Thirty-five of the sixty-one teachers agreed and strongly agreed that sexual orientation should be discussed in the classroom, while nine of the sixty-one teachers said that GLBT issues should not be discussed in the classroom, and seventeen were unsure if sexual orientation should be discussed in the classroom. Item four asked if teachers felt that GLBT issues should be integrated into the classroom, of the sixty-four that responded, thirty-two or fifty percent agreed or strongly agreed that GLBT issues should be
integrated into the classroom. Sixteen of the teachers that responded disagreed or strongly disagreed that GLBT issues should not be integrated into the classroom. Sixteen of the teachers were neutral on whether or not GLBT issues should be integrated in the classroom.

According to the literature review seventy-seven percent of prospective teachers would not encourage a class discussion on homosexuality; eighty-five percent oppose integrating gay/lesbian themes into their existing curricula (Harlow, R. & Dennis, D., 1986). The teachers at Patrick Henry appeared to be more liberal in supporting the discussion of sexual orientation in the classroom as well as the integration of GLBT issues in the classroom compared to the teachers surveyed in Harlow and Dennis study in 1986.

Safe Environment:

Items five, six, and seven, look at teachers attitudes toward Patrick Henry being a safe school for students and whether or not teachers are ensuring the safety of all students. Item five asks teachers whether or not they consider themselves to be a safe person for students to talk to about GLBT issues. Fifty-one of the sixty-four who responded felt that they were a safe person for students to discuss issues surrounding sexual orientation with. Item six states, “I believe our school provides a safe environment for GLBT students” of the sixty-four teachers who responded twenty-six, or less than half of the teachers felt that Patrick Henry provides a safe environment for GLBT students. Item seven similar to item six states, “I believe our school provides a safe environment for GLBT staff;” of the sixty-two teachers that responded to the survey,
thirty eight, or more than half of the teachers felt that the schools provided a safe environment for the GLBT staff. More teachers felt that Patrick Henry High School provided a safe environment for staff than for students. Fifteen of the teachers responded were unsure if Patrick was a safe school for GLBT youth and staff members.

For the most part the teachers at Patrick Henry High School (PHHS) fall between unsure if PHHS is safe for staff and students to strongly agreeing that PHHS is a safe school. According to the literature review GLBT youth strongly feel that schools are not a safe place for them. According to Kristina Torres’s article on GLBT youth “Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth are more likely to report missing school because they’re fearful, because other students have threatened them or because they’ve had property damage” (Torres, 1998).

**Teachers’ Active Roles in Confronting Harassment:**

As stated in the literature review, students frequently hear anti-gay slurs in school; a typical high school student hears anti-gay slurs 25.5 times a day (Sears, 1992). Item eight addresses this issue of name-calling at Patrick Henry and asks teachers to rate if “Name-calling or harassment on the basis of sexual orientation is an issue at this [Patrick Henry High] school” (appendix). Forty of the sixty-two teachers responded by saying that name-calling on the basis of sexual orientation was an issue at the school. The response from the teachers was fairly consistent with the literature review; both the literature review and the majority of teachers recognized that name-calling on the basis of sexual orientation is an issue.
Item nine asked for teacher’s attitudes on confronting a harassing student. Forty-five of the sixty-two teachers who responded said they strongly agreed or agreed that they would feel comfortable confronting a harassing student. It is important to note that six of the respondents, nearly ten percent of the respondents said that they would feel uncomfortable confronting a student for harassing another student. The teachers’ attitudes toward confronting a harassing a student differ from the literature review. From the literature review, previous “Research indicates that teachers fail to intervene in ninety-seven percent of incidents involving anti-gay slurs at school” (Kirby, D., 1991). It appears from the attitudes teachers have toward confronting harassing students at PHHS, they tend to intervene more often than the teachers from Kirby’s 1991 study.

Item ten asks teachers if they are comfortable with confronting a harassing staff member. Forty-four of the sixty-one teachers that responded said they strongly agree or agreed that they would feel comfortable confronting a staff member for harassing another staff member on the basis of sexual orientation. Seven of the teachers who responded said that they were not sure if they would feel comfortable confronting another staff member. Ten of the teachers responded by saying that they would not feel comfortable confronting another staff member, they either disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were comfortable confronting another staff member on the basis of sexual orientation.

Roles of Teachers in Dealing with Issues Surrounding Sexual Harassment:

Items eleven, twelve, thirteen look specifically at the attitude teachers have toward their role in working on GLBT issues. Item eleven looks at if GLBT staff members are important role models for GLBT students. Item twelve asks the teachers if a
staff member or student has ever consulted them about their sexual identity. Item thirteen looks at if counselors should be the ones to deal with issues on sexual orientation.

For item eleven, out of sixty-three teachers, forty-six responded that openly GLBT teachers are important role models to the school, while only six of the teachers strongly disagreed or disagreed that GLBT teachers are important role models to the school.

Thirteen teachers responded that a student or staff member consulted them about their sexual orientation, for item twelve. Thirteen teachers were neutral on whether or not a student or staff member consulted them about their sexual orientation, while forty-six of the teachers said that they were not consulted by a student or staff member about their sexual orientation consulted them.

Item thirteen asked teachers if they felt that counselors should be the ones to deal with issues around sexual orientation. Ten of the teachers strongly agreed or agreed that counselors should be the ones to deal with issues around sexual orientation. Twenty-three were unsure if counselors should be the only ones that deal with sexual orientation while thirty of the teachers felt that counselors shouldn’t be the only ones that deal with sexual orientation. Similar to the literature review, where the ACLU states that “…it is a concerted effort, at the school district…to end all forms of discrimination against gay and lesbian youth in public schools (ACLU, 1995, p.6), teachers at PHHS feel that it is not just the counselor’s job to deal with issues surrounding sexual orientation.
Support Services:

Items fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen look at the attitudes of teachers toward support services and referral resources that would be beneficial for teachers. Item fourteen asks teachers whether or not referral resources would be beneficial for helping support GLBT youth and staff. Item fifteen asks what teachers’ attitudes toward support groups are and if the teachers feel support groups would be beneficial to school staff as well students. Item sixteen asks the perception of teachers on in-services that have been made available on GLBT issues. Item seventeen looks at how familiar teachers are with local GLBT organizations by stating, “I am familiar with local GLBT organizations such as Out 4 Good, Gay Lesbian Straight Educational Network (GLSEN), and The Gay and Lesbian Community Council.” Item eighteen similar to item seventeen states “I am familiar with national organizations such as P-Flag, (Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays).”

Of the sixty-three teachers that responded to item fourteen, thirty-nine agreed to strongly agree that referral resources would be beneficial to them. Eighteen of the teachers were not sure if referral resources would be beneficial, while six of the teachers did not feel that referral resources would be beneficial to them.

Fifty of the sixty-three teachers agreed to strongly agree that a support group would benefit GLBT staff and students. Nine of the teachers were not sure if a support group would benefit students and staff and four teachers disagreed to strongly disagreed that a support group would benefit students and staff.

For item sixteen, forty-four out of sixty-two teachers responded that they agreed to strongly agree that in-services had been provided to teachers on GLBT issues. Twelve
of the teachers were not sure if in-services had been provided while six teachers felt that in-services had not been provided to them. It seems that the overall majority of teachers at PHHS have felt that opportunities have been provided to them to learn more about GLBT issues.

Item seventeen and eighteen were similar in that the question revolved around the awareness staff had of GLBT local and national support groups. Thirty of the sixty-three teachers who responded to item seventeen said that they were familiar with local organizations such as Out 4 Good. Ten of the teachers were not sure if they had heard of the local organizations while nineteen of the teachers were not familiar with local organizations. Twenty-nine of the sixty-one teachers who responded to item eighteen said they were not familiar with GLBT national organizations such as Parents, Family and Friends, of Lesbians and Gays (P-Flag). Ten of the teachers were not sure if they were familiar with GLBT national organizations and twenty-two said that they were familiar with national organizations. Nearly one-third of the teachers were aware of national organizations. According to the literature review, in Walling’s article, “Gay Teens at Risk,” he writes “teachers are afraid of the discussion surrounding homosexuality because it is controversial and it is culturally taboo.” One of the reasons that teachers may have responded the way in which they did to item seventeen and eighteen may be a result of their fear of learning more about homosexuality.
Chapter V

Conclusions and Recommendations

As the literature review stated, everyday as students walk down the halls at school, they can hear anti-gay slurs. Homophobia is apparent not only to gay and lesbian students and staff but to all students and staff. As teachers it becomes our legal obligation to make all students feel safe and free from harassment despite our personal belief system. However, it is also important that teachers are given resources to help them provide protection and support to students and staff who endure discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

There was some consistency between the literature review and the results of the study but there were also some difference. As expected from the literature review there was some indication of homophobic attitudes among the staff at Patrick Henry high school. Attitudes about homosexuality usually stem from a variety of places, views of homosexuality as a negative lifestyle may come from a person’s upbringing, or their religious beliefs, or just plainly because of their misconception of homosexuality. One teacher in the survey who commented on their view of homosexuality wrote, “I believe that no students’ rights should be violated. All men are created equal, and if a student does not want to embrace this without being seen as a gay basher. For some of us, this type of behavior opposes our religious beliefs. However, we are expected to love the sinner and not the sin.” Another teacher wrote, “I do not completely support GLBT issues to be addressed at the school environment. It is better to discourage GLBT.” It is obvious in the comments by the teachers that there is a belief among teachers that
homosexuality is in fact a negative lifestyle, which is consistent with the literature review.

The results of this study indicate that the teachers are aware of anti-discriminatory policies at Patrick Henry High School and are also aware of the ramifications of allowing harassment on the basis of sexual orientation, yet nearly twenty percent of the teachers, who filled out the survey could not say that they felt comfortable confronting a harassing staff member for harassing somebody on the basis of sexual orientation. It is important to note here that teachers felt more comfortable with confronting a student than a staff member. Only ten percent of the teachers felt uncomfortable with confronting a student. When faced with the lawsuit that the Ashland, Wisconsin school district was faced with, as discussed in the literature review, teachers’ attitudes toward whether or not they should confront harassing students or teachers can quickly change, it becomes an immediate reaction to confront homosexuality. No school wants to face the lawsuit that the Ashland School District faced; unfortunately, it will probably take similar cases before teachers feel the immediacy to confront harassment on the basis of sexual orientation.

It seemed that overall the teachers at Patrick Henry High School felt that the resources would be beneficial to them. Only six of sixty-three teachers that responded to the survey didn’t feel that resources would be beneficial to them. As a result of the ramifications of not addressing homosexuality and preventing anti-gay slurs it would be valuable for the administration to ensure that teachers are provided with the resources they need so they can abide by the law and protect students from harassment. The majority of teachers not only felt the need for resources but were also unaware of local and national organizations that supported GLBT issues. In order to protect all students
from anti-gay slurs we must first gain knowledge on the resources that are available to protect the students as well as ourselves from issues relating to discrimination on the basis of homosexuality.

Besides providing resources and knowledge of local and national organizations for students and staff on GLBT issues, it would all be beneficial to provide in-services to staff. While forty-four of the sixty-two teachers that answered the survey said that there had been in-services on GLBT issues, in-services are another way to ensure that teachers are being educated regularly on GLBT issues. Only half of the teachers felt that it was their job as well as counselors job to deal with issues surrounding sexual orientation. By providing in-services and educating teachers on GLBT issues, more teachers hopefully will feel comfortable working with issues on sexual orientation and will not leave it up to the counselor to deal with.

It is important to note that there are limitations to this survey. This survey examined only one urban high school in Minnesota. This survey based on it's limited sample cannot and should not generalized to all schools. However, it does serve as one study that may give some idea as to where we are at as far as discussing homosexuality in the schools.

It would be interesting to compare, geographically, the attitudes of teachers toward homosexuality. In Owens (1998) research, mid-westerns tend to have more homophobic attitudes than people from the east and west coast. It would also be interesting to compare secondary school teachers attitudes with primary school teachers attitudes.
The purpose of this study was to look specifically at the attitudes of teachers, it would be interesting to expand this study to see what the attitudes of administration, parents, legislators and students, all of whom have an invested interest in our educational system are. Teachers were chosen for this specific study because they are seen as the ones that have the most impact on the attitudes of the students and other teachers.
A Study of Teachers’ Attitudes toward Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, and Transgender Issues (GLBT)

Consent

I understand that by returning this survey/questionnaire, I am giving my informed consent as a participating volunteer in this study. I understand the basic nature of the study, teachers’ attitudes toward GLBT issues, and agree that any potential risks are exceedingly small. I also understand that while there are no personal benefits to me from participating in this study there may be the potential benefits, intervention and prevention strategies for working with GLBT issues, which might be realized from the successful completion of this study. I am aware that the
information is being sought by an anonymous survey so that no identifiers are needed and so that confidentiality is guaranteed. I realize that I have the right to refuse to participate and that my right to withdraw from participation at any time during the study will be respected with no coercion or prejudice.

Questions or concerns about participation in the research or subsequent complaints should be addressed first to Jessica Hebl, the researcher, at 612-298-6170, and then to Ted Knous, Chair, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 11 HH, UW-Stout, Menomonie, WI, 54571, 715-232-1126.

Strongly Disagree (1) Disagree (2) Neutral (3) Agree (4) Strongly Agree (5)

1. I am aware that the policy of this school district prohibits any form of discrimination on the basis of sexual, ethnic, religious, disability, sexual orientation or affectional preference or other improper harassment and violence.

2. My personal values make me uncomfortable with this policy.

3. GLBT issues should be discussed in the classroom.

4. GLBT issues should be integrated into the curriculum.

5. I consider myself to be a safe person for students to talk with about GLBT issues.

6. I believe our school provides a safe environment for GLBT students.

7. I believe our school provides a safe environment for GLBT staff members.

Strongly Disagree (1) Disagree (2) Neutral (3) Agree (4) Strongly Agree (5)

8. Name-calling or harassment on the basis of sexual orientation is an issue at this school.

9. I am comfortable confronting a student who harasses another person because of their sexual orientation.

10. I am comfortable confronting a member of the faculty who harasses another person because of their sexual orientation.
11. Openly gay/lesbian teachers are important as role models in our school.

12. I have been personally consulted by a student or staff member about their sexual identity.

13. Counselors should be the ones to deal with issues around sexual orientation.

14. Referral resources would be helpful to me for supporting GLBT students and staff at this school.

15. Support groups that include teachers would be beneficial for GLBT students and Staff.

16. There have been in-services on GLBT to help in supporting GLBT staff and students at this school.

17. I am familiar with local GLBT organizations such as Out 4 good, Gay Lesbian Straight Educational Network (GLSEN), and The Gay and Lesbian Community Council.

18. I am familiar with national organizations such as P-Flag (Parents, Family, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays).

Please feel free to add any comments, questions, or thoughts regarding GLBT issues that you feel might be addressed by your school.