LGBTQ Perceptions of High School Bullying

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Abstract

This qualitative study was conducted to examine LGBTQ former high school students' perceptions related to their experience while attending high school in northeast Kansas. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to understand LGBTQ former high school students' perceptions of experiences with being bullied in high school, district staff's responses to the bullying of LGBTQ students, district policies related to bullying of LGBTQ students, the extent that the policies protected the students, the curriculum and how it was inclusive of the LGBTQ community, and the experiences with LGBTQ students threatening or committing suicide.

The researcher determined that all but one of the participants were either bullied or witnessed bullying due to being LGBTQ. Although eight of the participants reported that teachers and staff were supportive of stopping the bullying of LGBTQ students one student did perceive that the teachers were bullying him. Fifteen of the 17 participants were aware of the school policies that addressed bullying and harassment, but none of the policies were specifically designed to protect the LGBTQ students. None of the participants were aware of any defined consequences for the bullying of LGBTQ students, but there were consequences for bullying of the students. Three participants recalled discussing or learning anything about LGBTQ people in high school, and the discussions were in literature class, not about LGBTQ history. Thirteen of the participants were aware of LGBTQ students harming themselves or trying to commit suicide; the harm included both cutting and suicide.

The implications for action that could improve the lives of LGBTQ students included: educators need training to work appropriately with LGBTQ students, school

districts need to examine their current bullying policies to determine if they protect

LGBTQ students, schools need to include LGBTQ history in the curriculum, and students

need to feel safe and supported at their schools. Recommendations for future research

included: determining whether students from different areas outside of northeast Kansas

had similar experiences, determining the differences in high school staffs' perceptions

regarding LGBTQ students before and after training related to LGBTQ students,

determining the differences between how school districts handle the punishment of the

bullying of LGBTQ students, determining the differences between "straight" and

LGBTQ students perceptions of bullying, and determining whether a curriculum that

includes LGBTQ history might help students feel more included in school and help deter

bullying problems.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my three children, Harley Ann Fernkopf,

Jonathan Paul Fernkopf, and Antonia David Fernkopf. Love, not DNA defines a family,

and I am so proud to call you mine. Because of you three, I strive to be the best person

and dad that I can be for your futures. The day you became Fernkopfs is the best gift I

could ever receive.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Student bullying can be found in almost every school in America (DeVoe &

Murphy, 2011). Students have been daily targets of bullies because of their perceived

sexuality (Swearer, Turner, Givens, & Pollack, 2008). In many cases, the bullying of

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) students has happened

at school. According to the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN),

which surveyed students in 2014, 74% of LGBTQ students have been verbally harassed

in school due to their sexual orientation and 55% because of their gender expression.

Due to the feelings of being unsafe or uncomfortable, 30% percent of these students

missed at least one day of school within the past month (GLSEN, 2014). Bullying too

often results in dire consequences. Sometimes the bullying of LGBTQ students can lead

them to commit suicide. The results of a study conducted by Duong and Bradshaw

(2014) showed that there is a strong association between bullying and suicidal behavior

among LGBTQ youth.

Background

LGBTQ people live throughout the United States. According to the 2013

National Health Interview Survey, "1.6% of adults identified as gay or lesbian and 0.7%

percent identified as bisexual" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014, p. 13).

Reported by the Gallup poll, as of May 2015, 3.8% of the adult populations of the United

States were members of the LGBTQ community (Newport, 2015). As stated on the

Gallup website, the Gallup (2016) daily tracking is composed of two parallel surveys that

sample a large number of people. Over 3,500 people are surveyed after a week and

15,000 after a month, and over 17,500 in a year. This larger survey size allows for extensive demographic breaks and cross-tabulations (Gallup, 2016). Results from the Gallup poll have shown that there are LGBTQ residents across the United States, including northeast Kansas.

For the purpose of this study, the following counties were defined as northeast Kansas: Marshall, Nemaha, Brown, Doniphan, Pottawatomie, Jackson, Atchison, Leavenworth, Wyandotte, Jefferson, Wabaunsee, Shawnee, Douglas, Johnson, and Osage. Due to the population differences in these counties, the local school districts were different sizes and included rural areas, suburban areas, and urban areas. For example, in Jackson County, there were small rural districts, such as North Jackson. According to the Kansas Report Card, North Jackson's enrollment was comprised of 377 students during 2015-2016 (Kansas State Department of Education [KSDE], 2015). Then, there were large urban districts like Blue Valley in Johnson County, which enrolled 22,546 students during 2015-2016 (KSDE, 2015).

Included in Table 1 are the Northeast Kansas counties ranked in order from largest to smallest population along with the percentages of individuals under the age of 18. These percentages provide an estimate of students who were attending schools in northeast Kansas.

Table 1

Counties, Population, and Percentage of People under the Age of 18

County	Population	Percentage of people under the age of 18
Johnson	580,159	25.3
Wyandotte	163,369	28.3
Douglas	118,053	19.0
Leavenworth	79,315	24.3
Shawnee	78,725	24.3
Pottawatomie	23,298	29.3
Jefferson	18,930	23.5
Atchison	16,398	23.4
Osage	15,847	23.8
Jackson	13,338	25.8
Nemaha	10,227	25.5
Marshall	9,936	23.1
Brown	9,776	25.4
Doniphan	7,767	21.8
Wabaunsee	6,951	25.0

Note. Adapted from *QuickFacts* by the U.S Census Bureau, 2015. Retrieved from

http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/AGE275210/20091

The third column of Table 2 shows the estimated average number of LGBTQ youth per county when taking the population of individuals under the age of 18 and multiplying it by the national average of LGBTQ residents, which according to the Gallup (2015) poll was 3.8%. For example, Marshall County had an estimated 2,295

people under the age of 18, 2295.22 multiplied by 3.8% equals 87.22, which is an estimated 87 youth who identify as part of the LGBTQ community.

Table 2

Average Number of LGBTQ Youth per County

County	People under the age of 18[a]	Estimated number of LGBTQ youth
Johnson	146,780	5,578
Wyandotte	46,233	1,757
Shawnee	43,430	1,650
Douglas	22,430	852
Leavenworth	19,274	732
Pottawatomie	6,826	259
Jefferson	4,449	169
Atchison	3,837	146
Osage	3,772	143
Jackson	3,441	131
Nemaha	2,608	99
Brown	2,483	94
Marshall	2,295	87
Wabaunsee	1,738	66
Doniphan	1,693	64

Note. Adapted from *QuickFacts* by the U.S Census Bureau, 2015. Retrieved from

http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/20091.

Statement of the Problem

The incidences of LGBTQ teen suicides and suicide attempts have come to the

public's notice through increased media attention. According to family and friends of the

LGBTQ suicide victims, bullying was cited as the main problem with which most of the victims were dealing (Heck, Flentje, & Cochran, 2011). With LGBTQ students being the target of bullies (Kearns, Mitton-Kukner, & Tompkins, 2014) and with the increasing risk of LGBTQ student suicides (Kitts, 2005), bullying prevention policies might need to be reviewed by school districts.

The GLSEN developed the National School Climate Survey (NSCS) to identify national data on the experiences of LGBT youth (GLSEN, 2014). The data from the NSCS shows that there have been policies in school districts intended to prevent bullying, but LGBTQ students have not received as much protection as needed (GLSEN, 2014). According to the StopBullying.gov website (2014), "No federal laws exist that directly address bullying, but sometimes bullying overlaps with discrimination harassment that is covered under federal laws" (para. 1). In 2007, the Kansas legislature passed Statute 72-8256, under the Kansas Anti-Bullying, Cyberbullying & Character Development, which defined bullying, required boards of education to adopt a policy prohibiting bully, and required districts to develop a plan to address bullying (KSDE, 2012).

Some school districts have policies that discriminate against LGBTQ students. For example, some school districts do not let students bring same-sex dates to a prom or school dances (Darden, 2014). School districts have had legal action brought against them in Missouri, Indiana, and Mississippi for trying to prevent same sex couples attending their high school prom (Darden, 2014). In 2016, the U.S. Justice Department published a Federal guidance over transgender students and restrooms in response to states barring transgender students from using restrooms consistent with their gender identity (Walsh, 2016). Over twelve states filed lawsuits against the federal guidelines,

not wanting the transgender students to have a choice on which restroom to use. The general guidelines did not add requirements to the law but provided information and examples of how the Departments of Justice and Education evaluated whether school districts were complying with their legal obligations (Walsh, 2016).

It is not known if the school districts are doing enough to protect the LGBTQ students. School districts need to know what to do for LGBTQ students, so they feel safe and included. School districts need to be aware of the changing laws so that they can do more to protect LGBTQ students from bullying.

Purpose of the Study

Lunenburg and Irby (2008) suggested that the purpose of a study is to help solve the stated problem. The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of former LGBTQ high school students related to their experience while attending high school in northeast Kansas. Specifically, the purpose was to understand LGBTQ former high school students' perceptions of and experiences with being bullied in high school, district staff's responses to the bullying of LGBTQ students, district policies related to bullying of LGBTQ students, the extent that the policies protected the students, the extent that the curriculum was inclusive of the LGBTQ community, and LGBTQ students threatening to commit suicide or committing suicide.

Significance of the Study

This study was pursued to examine whether current LGBTQ students are protected by the bullying policies in local districts. Suicide has been found to be the third leading cause of death of youth in the U.S. (Baams, Grossman, & Russell, 2015). LGBTQ students are two and a half times more likely to commit suicide, especially when

bullied at school (Baams et al. 2015). From the results of this study, it may be concluded that LGBTQ students have felt protected from bullying in school. However, it may be determined that local districts need to change their anti-bullying policies to be more inclusive of LGBTQ students, which may lead to fewer teens at-risk for suicide. By understanding the perspectives of former high school students who are members of the LGBTQ community, the effectiveness of policies could be evaluated in protecting LGBTQ students. A study of policies could also contribute to understanding what currently is working and what has not worked in the past. The findings from this study could be important for educators to understand how LGBTQ students felt while attending high school. From the results of the study, it might be concluded that educators need to start using curriculum that is inclusive of the LGBTQ community. By understanding the struggles of LGBTQ students, educators can change the way they are teaching to include help the LGBTQ students feel included. Once the LGBTQ students feel included, they might become better able to adjust to school and be more successful.

Delimitations

Lunenburg and Irby (2008) defined delimitations as "self-imposed boundaries set by the researcher on the purpose and scope of the study" (p. 134). The following delimitations were in place for this study.

1. The study participants were delimited to former students aged 18-22 who attended high school in northeast Kansas.

2. The study was delimited to former students' perceptions and experiences with curriculum inclusive of LGBTQ and their perceptions of policies designed to

prevent bullying, the effectiveness of bullying policies, and the way district

staff responded to bullying.

Assumptions

According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008), "Assumptions are postulates, premises,

and propositions that are accepted as operational for purposes of the research" (p. 135).

This study was based on the following assumptions.

1. The participants understood the interview questions being asked.

2. The responses from the interviewed former students were truthful.

3. The memories of the interviewed former students were accurate.

4. The interviewer was unbiased and did not influence the participants.

Research Questions

Following the advice of Lunenburg and Irby (2008), research questions were used

to organize the study. The research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1. What are former LGBTQ high school students' perceptions of and

experiences with bullying of LGBTQ students while attending high school?

RQ2. What are former LGBTQ high school students' perceptions of and

experiences with district staff responses to the bullying of LGBTQ students?

RQ3. What are former LGBTQ high school students' perceptions of and

experiences with district policies related to the bullying of LGBTQ students?

RQ4. What are former LGBTQ high school students' perceptions of and

experiences with district policies related to the protection of LGBTQ students who are

bullied?

RQ5. What are former LGBTQ high school students' perceptions of and experiences with a curriculum that was inclusive of LGBTQ students?

RQ6. What are former LGBTQ high school students' perceptions of and experiences with LGBTQ students threatening or committing suicide?

Definition of Terms

Per Lunenburg & Irby 2008, the terms central to the study should be defined, and the definitions should come from a "professional reference source" (p. 119). The terms are words that may not be commonly known. The following terms were used throughout this study.

Bisexual. "The word bisexual is used to describe a person who experiences sexual attraction toward both men and women" (Olive, 2015, p. 143).

Bullying. "Bullying is defined as an aggressive behavior by a more powerful individual or group that targets a less powerful person, is deliberately harmful, and is repeated over time" (Boulton, 2014, p. 25).

Gay. "Gay is the word used to describe a man who is sexually attracted to other men" (Olive, 2015, p. 143).

Gender identity. "Gender identity is the knowledge of oneself as being male or female" (Frankowski et al., 2004, p. 1827).

Gender role. "Gender role is the outward expression of maleness or femaleness" (Frankowski et al., 2004, p. 1827).

Heteronormativity. "Heteronormativity refers to everything being referred to as normal when heterosexual, and everything that is not heterosexual is referred to as the other" (Vega, Crawford, & Van Pelt, 2012, p. 254).

Homophobia. "Homophobia is the irrational fear, hatred, and intolerance of being in close quarters with homosexual men and women" (Nagoshi et al., 2008, p. 521).

Homosexual. "Homosexual are Individuals who are attracted to persons of the same sex (Frankowski et al., 2004, p. 1827).

Lesbian. "Lesbian is a word used to describe a woman is sexually attracted to other women" (Olive, 2015, p. 143).

LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQIA. These acronyms refer to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersexed and Asexual. Many times, all of the different identities within "LGBT" are often lumped together (Michigan, 2016).

Questioning/queer. "Questioning/queer is someone who eschews any type of gender or sexuality label" (Olive, 2015, p. 142).

Sexual harassment. "Sexual harassment is unwelcome conduct sexual in nature" (Hanley, 2015, p. 1).

Sexual orientation. "Sexual orientation refers to an individual's pattern of physical and emotional arousal toward other persons" (Frankowski et al., 2004, p. 1872).

Transgender. "Transgenders are people living in a gender identity different from traditional heteronormative definitions; they are individuals who violate norms of gender roles and gender identity and/or go across the boundaries of one gender to another gender" (Nagoshi et al., 2008, p. 522).

Organization of the Study

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter one included an introduction, the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, the delimitations, the assumptions, the research questions, the

definitions of terms, and the organization of the study. Chapter two consists of a review

of the literature, which includes current movements for LGBTQ people, bullying

addressed in schools, LGBTQ students and the struggles of being bullied, how bullying is

addressed in schools, policies being enacted in schools, LGBTQ in the curriculum, and

LGBTQ student suicides. Provided in chapter three are a description of the research

design, the selection of participants, the measurement, data collection procedures,

methods of analysis, synthesis of data, researcher role, and the limitations of the study.

Included in chapter four are the findings of the study. Chapter five completes the study

with a study summary, the findings related to the literature, and the conclusions.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this study was to understand LGBTQ former high school students'

perceptions of and experiences with being bullied in high school, and district staff's

responses to the bullying of LGBTQ students. The purpose was also to see how district

policies related to bullying of LGBTQ students, the extent that the policies protected the

students, the curriculum and how it was inclusive of the LGBTQ community, and the

experiences with LGBTQ students threatening or committing suicide. The review of

literature includes current movements for LGBTQ people, bullying addressed in schools,

LGBTQ students and the struggles of being bullied, how bullying is addressed in schools,

policies being enacted in schools, LGBTQ in the curriculum, and LGBTQ student

suicides.

Current Movements for LGBTQ People

Since 2012, many movements have helped the LGBTQ community with equality

and justice. Some of these movements are directed towards LGBTQ youth, while other

movements are for everyone that is a part of the LGBTQ communities. The organized

movements encompass a wide range of activities including social media, lobbying, and

student organizations.

It Gets Better Project. Some movements have taken place in the past few years

to help LGBTQ students know that things do get better. Savage started a project that is

referred to as It Gets Better (Savage & Miller, 2011). Savage was concerned with

LGBTQ youth and their suicides. The idea was very simple; LGBTQ adults who have

made it the through the years of being a teenager and being gay recorded short videos for

current LGBTQ youth with a message that being gay gets better (Savage & Miller, 2011).

The project was a success, with over 200 videos the first week and over 30,000 as of

October 2013 (Savage & Miller, 2011). The whole idea helped challenge the logic that

being a member of an LGBTQ group meant a life of punishment and misery (Savage &

Miller, 2011). The It Gets Better Project helps members of the LGBTQ youth

community know that they are not alone (Savage & Miller, 2011).

Hurley (2014) conducted a qualitative study to develop a deeper understanding of

the experiences and motivations of the It Gets Better project. Hurley had over 400

individuals participate in her survey and interviewed 35 participants. The findings

revealed that most people made the video as a reflection and a way to take action. The

results of Hurley's research showed that the construction of the It Gets Better Project

allowed the participants to engage in a process that could reach out and help both youth

and adults.

Gay-Straight Alliances. One way that some school districts in the United States

have helped LGBTQIA students feel accepted is the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). GSAs

are organizations for students designed to provide a safe environment for LGBTQIA

students and their straight allies (Lassiter & Sifford, 2015). Some of the GSA clubs

sponsor social events, and others work to educate the school community about sexual

orientation (Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006). The GSA groups also work

toward getting schools to adopt policies that are more LGBTQIA friendly. The results of

research conducted by the California Safe Schools Coalition found that schools that have

a GSA have decreased verbal and physical harassment incidents (Murphy, 2012). The

GSAs also become a support for school staff, and many students have a feeling of

belonging when a GSA is in place at schools (Goodenow et al., 2006). GSAs are endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Association of School Administrators, American Counseling Association, American Federation of Teachers, American School Counselor Association, American School Health Association, Interfaith Alliance Foundation, National Association of Secondary School Principals, National Association of School Nurses, National Association of Social Workers, National Education Association, National School Boards Association, and School Social Work Association of America (Murphy, 2012).

In 2011, Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, sent a letter to school districts warning them that they could not ban the formation of GSAs. In the letter, Duncan reminded school districts that the Equal Access Act required the public schools to provide equal access to extracurricular clubs. Duncan (2011) went on to remind the school districts that the Equal Access Act requires public schools to treat all student-initiated groups equally, regardless of the subject matters discussed in the meetings. Duncan also wrote that he encouraged every school district to make sure that all educators, students, and community member are aware of these student rights (Duncan, 2011). Several school districts had been actively blocking or preventing GSAs from forming (Shah, 2011). In all the cases, school district eventually let the GSAs form, although the American Civil Liberties Union did have to sue on behalf of the students in many of the cases (Shah, 2011).

Bradley (2015) completed a qualitative study to examine the personal experiences of LGBTQ individuals regarding the perceived levels of safety while in school. The research questions from Bradley's (2015) study dealt with the impact of GSAs on the

safety of students while at school, whether GSAs contributed to a safe school environment, and if there were any personal benefits to attending a school with GSAs for LGBTQ students. Bradley (2015) found that more teacher involvement with GSAs helped the students feel safer and when the no bullying message was supported that bullying and verbal harassment decreased. She also found the GSAs promoted acceptance and helped provide a safe place to go to the school. Bradley (2015) also found that there is a need to incorporate GSA clubs and refine the anti-bullying policies to protect LGBTQ students. Based on the findings, Bradley (2015) recommended the need for more GSAs in schools, along with better professional development about the issue of LGBTQ students.

Lindquist (2016) examined whether various school supports, such as GSAs and safe zones, were helpful to students. She discovered that schools that had a GSA were less likely to have students absents due to safety concerns (Lindquist, 2016). Bagley (2016) agreed that GSAs work and there are fewer instances of bullying in highs schools with GSAs. Bagley (2016) interviewed GSA faculty advisors throughout the state of South Carolina. Results indicated that high schools with GSAs reported fewer instances of bullying and had school climates that were more accepting. Spencer (2016) conducted a quantitative study across the United States to determine if LGBTQ graduates of high schools with GSAs have better mental health than LGBTQ students who are attending high schools without GSAs. Spencer interviewed 183 graduates of high school, 80% of whom identified as LGBT. From his research, Spencer found a positive association between GSA presence and high self-esteem and life satisfaction. He also found that

those students who attended schools with GSAs had a significantly higher self-esteem and life satisfaction than the graduates without GSAs.

Day of Silence. Schools around the United States have participated in the Day of Silence to raise awareness of anti-LGBTQ-bullying. The Day of Silence is sponsored by GLSEN and was put in place to empower students to change anti-LGBTQ bias and harassment in schools (GLSEN, 2015). The first-ever Day of Silence was at the University of Virginia in 1996, and following its success, the organizers took their effort national the following year in both high school and colleges.

The GLSEN Day of Silence has reached students in all 50 states. The students participate in the day of by not speaking during the school day. The hope of the Day of Silence is to bring more attention to the silence that is faced by LGBT people daily as they face bullying, name-calling, and harassment (GLSEN, 2015).

Bullying Addressed in Schools

Bullying is defined as an aggressive behavior by a more powerful individual or group that targets a less powerful person, is deliberately harmful, and is repeated over time (Boulton, 2014). Bullying between peers has occurred for decades in schools (Roberge, 2012). According to the United States Justice Department, one of every four children will be bullied sometime during their adolescence (Bullying Statistics, 2016). In 2003, 23% of public schools reported that bullying occurred among students on a daily or weekly basis (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008). Several types of bullying can happen to students in school including direct bullying, verbal bullying, sexual harassment, and cyberbullying (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008). According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities, school personnel only notice or intervene in 1 of 25 incidents of bullying

(Whitson, 2015). The statistics on bullying show how bad bullying can be in the school setting.

One form of bullying that students can be subjected to is direct bullying. Direct bullying includes behaviors such as taunting, teasing, hitting, threatening, assault, stealing, and destruction of one's property (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008). Levine and Tamburrino (2014) found that females reported more direct bullying at school while males reported more direct bullying at home. Lester, Cross, and Shaw (2012) found that if actions are taken early to stop or reduce the direct bullying in schools, the chances of bullying occurring later are significantly reduced.

The second form of bullying is verbal bullying, also referred to as indirect bullying. Victims of verbal bullying can experience taunting, teasing, and name-calling. The students that are on the receiving end of verbal bullying often experience it in unsupervised areas (Varjas et al., 2008).

The third form of bullying is sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature (Hanley, 2015). Sexual harassment can include unwelcome sexual advances and requests for sexual favors. Females and males can both be sexually harassed, but a majority of the time, women are on the receiving end of sexual harassment (Rahimi & Liston, 2011).

The fourth a newer type of bullying is cyberbullying, which is referred to as online bullying. Per Campbell (2011), cyberbullying is the use of technology to purposefully intimidate or harm another person. Cyberbullying has no boundaries, as technology is a part of all aspects of our lives. The results of research conducted by Griezel, Finger, Bodkin-Andrews, Craven, and Yeung (2012) have shown that an equal

number of males and females were cyberbullied. Not as many studies have been

conducted on the effects of cyberbullying on LGBTQ students because of the recency of

cyberbullying (Wimberly, 2015). One research study conducted across the United States

by Cooper and Blumenfeld (2012) explored how often cyberbullying was happen and the

impact it had on the lives of LGBT youth. Cooper and Blumenfeld developed a survey

that was administered to 310 students who were under the age of 18 and who identified as

LGBT or an ally. The result of the survey showed that over 60% of the LGBT and 8% of

the allied participants reported being electronically harassed based on their sexual

identity (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012).

In addition to the different forms of bullying, people who are not involved in

bullying, but are a witness who does not react are called bystanders. Bystanders give

bullies the illusion that they are not doing anything wrong, which then gives the bully

more power over the victim (Brown, 2014). The result of Brown's research has shown

that bystanders are less likely to stop bullying when there are a large number of

bystanders watching. When people sit back and watch it is referred to as the bystander

effect (Obermann, 2011). Sometimes in bullying situations, especially with children,

bystanders interpret the inaction of other bystanders as a sign that the bullying situation is

not that bad (Obermann, 2011). Another reason bullying is often not stopped by

bystanders is the bullies are, at times, perceived as popular and powerful. The bystanders

are afraid of being seen as not popular if they were to step in and stop the popular person

from bullying (Obermann, 2011). Many bystanders do not feel that it is their business

when someone else is being bullied; therefore, they avoid the whole situation (Obermann,

2011).

Ross (2015) conducted a qualitative study to determine whether the overall success of students is related to a positive school climate. Ross based his study on the theory that mitigating school violence would contribute to building peaceful school climates. Ross's (2015) study was conducted in Ontario at three high schools with student populations ranging from 500 to 1,500. The purpose of the study was to investigate patterns of activity in schools that caused violence and what activities helped build a peaceful school climate. Ross (2015) found that reducing competition and exclusion and building social relationship could reduce the risks of physical violence and bullying.

Chatman (2015) examined the effects of bullying of LGBTQ youth who attended a high school in Shelby County of Tennessee. The qualitative research was conducted to determine the perceptions of 53 LGBT youth (Chatman, 2015). The research questions dealt with homophobic bullying, how the bullying affected the LGBT youth, and what bullying was evident in Shelby County, Tennessee. Chatman found that the LGBT youth who were interviewed did experience homophobic bullying. Chatman discovered that 77% of participants stated they were bullied because they were gay or perceived to be gay. She also found that 91% of the gay participants interviewed stated that they were bullied because they were gay (Chatman, 2015). During her research, Chatman (2015) also investigated how acts of homophobic bullying affect the lives of those involved. Chatman (2015) found that 42% or the participants interviewed revealed that homophobic bullying had a negative impact on their lives. Additionally, Chatman also investigated what types of homophobic bullying was evident in the high school her participants attended. She found that over 77% of her participants endured some form of

bullying. This bullying included isolation, physical altercations, and cyberbullying (Chatman, 2015).

LGBTQ Students and the Struggles with Being Bullied

The results of the research have found that students who are thought to be a sexual minority are often targets of bullying (GLSEN, 2014). According to the National School Climate Survey, 80% of the LGBT students who took the survey had experienced some form of verbal harassment because of their orientation (GLSEN, 2014). Over two-thirds of the LGBTQ students who completed the survey felt unsafe because of their sexual orientation. In addition, over half of the LGBTQ students who participated heard homophobic comments from the school staff (Bratsis, 2015).

In 2012, the American Psychoanalytic Association (APSAA) published a position statement about the impact of bullying and harassment on gender non-conforming youth and LGBT youth and condemned bullying in schools. The APSAA reported that gender-nonconforming and LGBT youth hear anti-gay slurs on an average of 26 times a day. The APSAA also reported that 78% of gay or perceived gay out youth are teased or bullied in their schools and communities (APSAA, 2012). Additionally, the organization reported that victims of bullying suffer high rates of suicidality, depression, anxiety, lower self-esteem and increased rates of school absenteeism. The APSAA recommended implementing preventive measures to help LGBT youth. These measures include adding sexual orientation antidiscrimination policies, beginning comprehensive school-wide education programs, and providing support for LGBT youth in schools (APSAA, 2012).

When LGBTQ students are bullied, they are at a higher risk of psychological distress. Greene, Britton, and Fitts (2014) felt that distress can include higher rates of

substances abuse, higher-risk sexual behavior, and can include depression and suicide. Greene et al. (2014) indicated that LGBTQ adults have a high rate of posttraumatic stress disorder that has been attributed to prolonged school bullying.

According to Kuhlmann's (2014) research, school districts do have legal responsibilities and liabilities related to providing protection for LGBT students. Kuhlmann (2014), found that many administrators were not completely aware of what legal responsibilities they had in protecting LGBT students. Kuhlmann (2014) determined that administrators would benefit from having a resource guide that could be used for guidance, whenever needed. She recommended that leaders in education must understand the specific impact that bullying has on LGBT students and their education.

Despite campaigns across the nation to decrease bullying, three of every 10 districts do not have policies that protect students from harassment (DeNisco, 2015). To help students from being bullied, it is vital that LGBTQ students have supportive school personnel (Marshall, Yarber, Sherwood-Laughlin, Gray, & Estell, 2015). Much of the bullying of LGBTQ youth might stem from homophobia (Perez, Schanding, & Dao, 2013). Homophobia could include, "belief systems, general attitudes, behaviors, and stereotyping toward those individuals who are not heterosexual or who do not conform to gender norms" (Perez et al., 2013, p. 66). They went on to state that training to recognize bullying especially LGBTQ bullying was lacking for educators.

McFall (2015) completed a qualitative study on lesbians and their experiences during high school. She interviewed participants between the ages of 18 and 24 that had same sex attraction during high school. The purpose of McFall's (2015) research was to address the "gap between the quantitative data's exposition of academic risk for LGBT

students and actual accounts of the lived experience of being LGBT in a high school

classroom setting." (p.6). In her study, McFall clarified the important role of teachers, as

youth are finding their sexual identity. She tried to answer the research question, "What

is the experience of being lesbian in a high school classroom?" (p. 37). The results of

McFall's study depended upon if the students were "in" or "out." She found that it could

be difficult to be a lesbian in high school. Students found it helpful to have teachers who

could understand the journey of students coming out, but more importantly having people

available to listen and encourage them to find the strength to open up about who they are

(McFall, 2015). Additionally, the results of McFall's (2015) study showed the

importance of a safe and inclusive environment to have students be successful in school.

Heteronormativity is another issue that LGBTQ students encounter daily. The

term heteronormativity denotes everything being referred to as normal when

heterosexual, and everything that is not heterosexual is referred to as the "other" (Vega et

al., 2012). According to Khayatt (2006),

> Schools both reinforce and, at the same time, reflect mainstream normative
>
> genders and sexualities. Schools teach intentionally (through the curriculum) and
>
> unintentionally, through values promoted by teachers, administration, boards and
>
> parents, a taken-for-granted normative sexuality and concomitant expectations of
>
> gender behavior. (p. 135)

Hearing about heteronormative references daily can be rather difficult for LGBTQ

students as they do not learn about people like themselves (Vega et al., 2012).

Studies have also been conducted to explore the attitudes and knowledge of

administrators towards LGBTQ-related issues. One such qualitative study by Barragan-

Rebolledo (2013) focused on elementary school principals in Southern California and their knowledge of LGBTQ related issues along with identifying what the principals deem necessary to have a safe learning environment for the LGBTQ students. Barragan-Rebolledo administered surveys and conducted individual interviews to gather data. The research questions for the study related to the Southern California elementary principals' attitudes towards bullying, discrimination, and harassment, along with what did the principals believe was a safe learning environment. Based on the findings of the study, Barragan-Rebolledo (2013) suggested that principals needed assistance with providing professional development for their staff in their efforts to create a safe learning environment along with integrating LGBTQ topics in the classroom. Barragan-Rebolledo (2013) thought a safe learning environment could be achieved through professional development for elementary principals on LGBTQ topics, education of parents on LGBTQ issues, and the inclusion of LGBTQ bullying and harassment in school plans and policies.

Although more attention has been given to bullying, not much attention has been given to anti-bullying policies. Little research on the effects of anti-bullying policies on LGBTQ students exists. Holliday (2016) completed a qualitative study that examined the role of anti-bullying policies by conducting interviews with high school teachers, administrators, and other staff members. This study took place in an urban school district in the United States. In the study, purposive sampling was used to identify teachers and administrators. Two principals, three vice principals, fifteen teachers, and one school psychologist were interviewed. The results of the study indicated that teachers were not knowledgeable of the content of their school policies and that they have had limited

exposure to those policies (Holliday, 2016). Both teachers and administrators had a limited knowledge on training specific to preventing bullying against LGBT youth.

Across the United States, LGBT students do not feel safe due to the bullying and harassment that is targeted toward them. Many schools throughout the nation are not specifically required to protect the LGBT students. According to Street (2016), who conducted qualitative research about adult members of a rural elementary school community perceptions of LGBT-based bullying, harassment, and violence, LGBT students were not feeling safe a school. Street completed his study at a Title I suburban elementary school in Tennessee where there was no legislative protection from bullying.

In the recent past, Tennessee legislators have even tried to exclude the LGBT population; one bill they tried to pass has been referred to as the "Don't Say Gay Bill." The proposed bill would have prohibited teachers from giving any instruction that was inconsistent with natural human reproduction. The proposed bill also stated that counselors, school nurses, and administrators must notify parents of any discussions they have with their child related to sexuality. The proposed bill would have limited LGBT students talking to anyone about their sexuality. The proposed bills like these in Tennessee drove Street to complete his study to gain a better understanding of what keeps LGBT students from feeling safe a school. Street (2016) addressed three research questions related to adult perceptions of the problems the LGBT students were experiencing, whether the zero-tolerance anti-bullying policy was working, and the possibility of changing the school policy to address the prevention of bullying, harassment, and violence against LGBT students. Street determined that a majority of the participants believed that LGBT students should be protected from bullying and that

the school currently was not doing an adequate job of protecting these students. He also found that most participants felt that policies should change to protect all students, but that this could be difficult due to the religious beliefs of the community. Street (2016) proposed changing the policy in the school district to address LGBT-specific bullying.

How Bullying is Addressed in Schools

The first formal studies on bullying in schools are traced back to the 1970s. Before the 1970s, bullying was not considered a large enough problem on which to conduct research. In the 1980s, three Norwegian students committed suicide as a direct result of being severely bullied by their peers (Roberge, 2012). After these students' deaths, a mass media campaign was carried out, and the public called for action to reduce school bullying (Roberge, 2012).

Once schools began to realize that bullying posed a problem, zero tolerance policies were put into place (Holloway, 2001). The hope was that zero tolerance policies would help eliminate bullying that had been taking place in schools. The idea was that zero tolerance policies would remove students engaging in behavior that threatened or disrupted learning, therefore, deter other students from misbehaving. However, research indicated that zero tolerance policies often targeted the wrong behaviors, and the wrong students ended up being punished (Holloway, 2001). "Zero tolerance critics believe that it is so overly broad that consistent application, regardless of the student's intent or circumstances of the offense, creates an unfair disciplinary model for a student" (Jones, 2013, p. 740). Other than zero tolerance policies, few policies were in place to educate expelled and suspended students. These students ended up having a negative effect on the schools' academic performance (Jones, 2013).

Following the initiation of zero tolerance policies, administrators in many districts tried a different approach. They tried to stop the problems before they became an issue with early interventions policies. According to Skiba and Peterson (2000), "The early response model of disciple emphasizes a comprehensive program to build positive prosocial behavior, rather than merely punishing inappropriate behavior" (p. 342). The early intervention approach to dealing with bullying in schools included creating a culture of respect and understanding in schools. Lessons were also developed for students addressing character education and social skills (Roberge, 2012). Early interventions have different strategies and include partnerships between the schools, families, and the community. Strategies include conflict resolution with social instruction, classroom strategies for disruptive behavior, parent involvement, early warning signs and screenings, school and district-wide data systems, crisis and security planning, school-wide discipline and behavioral planning, and functional assessment of individual behavior plans (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). These strategies can be utilized when trying to prevent bullying happening in the schools.

In some schools, policies are in place that state bullying is wrong, but the policies have been found to have little to no effect (DeNisco, 2015). To help prevent the bullying of LGBTQ youth, educators need to be aware of their biases and the way their biases may affect how they talk to students (Bratsis, 2015). Students must be able to feel safe in their learning environments to be successful. According to the Title IX Resource Guide published by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (2015),

> The fact that an incident of sex-based harassment may be accompanied by anti-
> gay comments or be partly based on a student's actual or perceived sexual

orientation does not relieve a recipient of its obligation under Title IX to

investigate and remedy such an incident. (p. 6)

Students have the right to feel protected while at school. Legal actions have been

brought against schools and districts that did not protect students from bullying. One

example in which students were not afforded protection took place in Minnesota's largest

school district. The district had a controversial policy that required, "teachers to remain

neutral on issues of sexual identity that arose during class" (Shah, 2012, p. 11). This

policy, along with the lack of training for teachers, led six former and current students to

sue the district in federal court. The suit was settled with a consent decree in which the

agreement stated, "that teachers can affirm the dignity and self-worth of students, and any

protected characteristics of students, such as their sexual orientation, without violating

district policy" (Shah, 2012, p. 11).

Policies Being Enacted in Schools

Schools should implement and enforce "comprehensive policies that include

sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression" (Diaz, Kosciw, & Greytak,

2010, p. 14). The presence of policies might help all students feel included (Diaz et al.,

2010). These policies might help send the message to the LGBTQ youth that their safety

is taken seriously by administrators. Having policies that welcome LGBTQ youth may

also help them feel welcome and make sure there are no policies that discriminate such as

gendered dress codes and prohibition of same-sex dates to school dances (Diaz et al.,

2010).

Other ways do exist in districts across the United States to make LGBTQ students

feel more accepted. In New York City, Harvey Milk High School was established for all

students, gay or straight. The school is a haven for LGBTQ youth (Brittenham, 2004). New York City students can transfer to this school if they are struggling or have dropped out of their regular mainstream schools. The Harvey Milk School staff works to assure that students are both educationally and emotionally healthy.

Robertson (2014) conducted a study in Florida in which she interviewed high school students who identified themselves as members of the LGBTQ community. The purpose of her study was to understand the LGBTQ high school students and their school experiences. Robertson (2014) found that students experienced discrimination from school staff and students. The participants in Robertson (2014) study provided suggestions and recommendation that included: educators should provide all students with LBGTQ inclusive curriculum, protocols should be developed to be used as a response to discrimination, LGBTQ events and activities should be represented in the school, and schools should create an ally program. Robertson (2014) also suggested that LGBTQ materials become a classroom resource, along with creating a mentor program and incorporating LGBT organizations in the school.

Toleson (2014) conducted a study to identify the level of life satisfaction in their high school, the level of support they had as LGBTQ students, and other school-based protective factors for the LGBTQ students. Toleson examined LGBTQ college students' high school experiences and their perceptions of their high school climate. She interviewed 36 LGBTQ college students. Toleson (2014) found that the satisfaction factors of the LGBTQ participants relied heavily on the support from family, friends, school, and their living environments. Toleson (2014) concluded that high schools

should focus on providing youth a safe, supportive learning environment for students to achieve more and be more satisfied with the school.

In 2015, changes had started to happen across the country, but the changes have been slow. Some schools have policies to protect LGBTQ youth. In Nebraska, the school activities association drafted a gender policy that allowed a district to have policies that support letting transgender student athletes participate in sports (Toporek, 2015). The policy allows all transgendered youth to participate in any sports under their identified gender after the student provides documentation that they are transgender (Toporek, 2015).

Boulder Valley School District located in Colorado has taken numerous steps to be accepting and understanding of transgendered youth. The school district has improved its policies and made changes to curriculum and their computer system (Brown, 2015). The Boulder Valley School District revamped its policies for bathrooms so that transgenders students can use the bathroom according to how they identify. The school district has changed its policies for their curriculum to include training on gender diversity for its staff and teaching about LGBT historical figures in class. The school district also changed their computer software so that it allowed a third option for gender nonconforming students (Brown, 2015). These changes have been made in the effort to be more accepting of all students, especially transgender students. At Boulder Valley, the students can enter their preferred name and gender into the school computer system, instead of the district insisting on using the name that is on the student's birth certificate. The district office keeps the birth certificates confidential so that the principal and teacher may not even know that a student is a transgender (Brown, 2015). Since the changes

were made, the school district has seen a substantial increase of transgender students, as families have moved to the district (Brown, 2015).

In Chicago, a school district was directed by the Department of Education regarding how they could and could not accommodate a transgender student playing sports (Payne & Newsome, 2015). The district tried to have the student change clothes in her identifying gender locker room, but behind a curtain. The Department of Education ruled against the district (Payne & Newsome, 2015). The line between accommodations and discrimination came down to whether the student was able to choose the use of the privacy curtain. The Department of Education further stated that the use of a curtain might be okay; however, the school can not have a policy that singles out one student (Payne & Newsome, 2015).

In 2016, the National School Boards Association (NSBA) published a guide for school boards and staff about transgender students in school. The guide provides definitions; information on student's rights and privacy; and answers general questions, such as what is a transgender student and how to address a transgender student. When addressing a transgender student, the guide indicates treating the student with the same dignity and respect as any other students and making sure to follow the local school policy when addressing the students. The guide also includes explanations of discrimination, harassment, and student privacy. More details are provided to school boards that have questions about transgender students (NSBA, 2016). The guide is a great example how school districts constantly need to review their policies for potential changes.

LGBTQ in the Curriculum

The high school curriculum does not reflect the history of LGBTQ, and scholars have called for a curriculum that promotes the increased awareness of LGBTQ-related issues. Sieben (2010) related

If educators choose to omit LGBT history and literature from the curriculum, students receive messages of negative separateness and odd dissimilarity that are harmful not only to the self-esteem of LGBT youth, but also to the maturation of straight youth. (p. 48)

Many times, the curriculum is restructured to leave LGBTQ literature and related issues out of the curriculum fearing that controversial discussions might arise. Some parents may even disapprove of having LGBTQ topics discussed with their students. Sieben (2010) felt that contrary to the common belief that teaching about LGBTQ issues in the classroom might teach students how to engage in LGBTQ acts, teaching about LGBTQ in the classroom may teach students about acceptance.

Educators can find books that could be used to address LGBTQ issues and would fit into the secondary English language arts curriculum. Examples include *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger, 1951), *The Color Purple* (Walker, 1992), *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Chbosky, 1999). Sieben (2010) contended that if teachers were to integrate more LGBTQ friendly material into their curriculum, students might start seeing members of the LGBTQ community as part of their everyday lives instead of something that is abnormal.

A Massachusetts group called the Shared Heart is an organization that is dedicated to promoting positive images of homosexuals and bisexuals (Galley, 1999).

Shared Heart has developed a curriculum that centers on a book of portraits and

handwritten text that describe the experiences of 40 gay and lesbian individuals. The

book begins as a traveling photo exhibit, but the photographer quickly released them so

that the book would be able to reach more people than the photo exhibit. Along with the

book, other materials are available including a resource guide for teachers, parents, and

students (Galley, 1999).

Some people feel that having young children learn about LGBTQ people in

school could be bad for children, with the "belief that children are not developmentally

ready to learn about LGBT issues and that being exposed to LGBT topics may harm

children" (Fystrom, 2011, p. 3). Research conducted by Fystrom (2011) addressed the

developmental appropriateness of children to learn LGBT topics in elementary school.

The three purposes which guided the study were to: examine elementary school students

developmental readiness for LGBT curriculum, replicate a 2007 Welcoming School

guide that was developed by the Human Rights Campaign, and establish a way to

measure the engagement both cognitively and emotionally of the students participating in

the curriculum. Fystrom (2011) used both quantitative and qualitative techniques to

measure student engagement. The results suggested, "Elementary children could

behaviorally, cognitively, and emotionally engage in LGBT lessons" (Fystrom, 2011, p.

4). Additionally, no significant difference in engagement was measured between the

students when they were working on LGBT lesson and when the students were working

on non-LGBT lessons. According to Fystrom (2011), "Results provide strong evidence

that 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade students are developmentally ready to learn about LGBT

topics and they are not harmed by incorporating LGBT topics in elementary school curriculum" (p. 4).

Garcia (2012) completed a qualitative study on the support for LGBT youth in high school. Included in her study was a research question about whether an inclusive curriculum existed. Garcia (2012) found that there was a lack of inclusive curriculum which negatively affects the climate for the LGBT students. The participants in Garcia's study found the lack of an inclusive curriculum limited academic diversity. Garcia (2012) concluded that for LGBT youth to feel more included, the curriculum in schools needs to be more diverse.

San Francisco Unified School District's Ruth Asawa School of Arts offers a class on LGBTQ studies (Shallat, 2015). Included as part of the class are discussions about history, politics, government, media awareness, literature, film, and art. According to the teacher, there were no textbooks at that time for LGBTQ studies, so she had to be creative. The teacher used technology whenever possible to conduct Skype interviews and stay on top of current events in the LGBTQ community (Shallat, 2015). Since this class was taught in San Francisco, there was local LGBTQ history the students were able to study. The students were able to attend local LGBTQ museums to learn about the history of the LGBTQ community (Shallat, 2015).

LGBTQ Student Suicides

Hotlines are available for suicidal LGBTQ youth. The Trevor Project started with an award-winning short film about a young man becoming comfortable with the idea that he was gay. The short film helped lead the way for the first nationwide 24-hour crisis

line for intervention and suicide prevention for LGBTQ youth was launched. The crisis line has helped hundreds of thousands of young people in crisis (Ocamb, 2000).

Approximately one million adolescents attempt suicide each year (Gould, Greenberg, Velting, & Shaffer, 2003). The media has increasingly made the public aware of these tragedies (Gould et al., 2003). Research has been conducted investigating LGBTQ students and suicide. Hatzenbuehler (2011) completed a qualitative study on LGBT youth in Oregon. Using data from the Oregon Healthy Teen Survey, Hatzenbuehler (2011) found that, "LGBT youth were significantly more likely to attempt suicide in the previous 12 months, compared with heterosexual students was 21.5% versus 4.2%" (p. 900). Hatzenbuehler (2011) also noted that among LGBT youth, the risk of attempting suicide was 20% greater in unsupportive environments compared to supportive environments. Results have demonstrated that gay teens are two to three times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers (Waidzunas, 2012).

Biegel and Kuehl (2010) wrote a brief in collaboration with Williams Institute at the UCCLA LAW School and the National Education Policy Center. In this brief, recommendations were made on how changes in school climate could help LGBT students feel more welcome and safe in high schools. Biegel and Kuehl (2010) recommended the implementation of LGBT-specific programs and activities at schools including safe zones, GSAs, and suicide prevention programs. Another recommendation included ideal wording for an article of legislation prohibiting bullying of LGBT students. The recommended legislation included facts about LGBT students and suicides. Biegel and Kuehl (2010) suggested that

When left unchecked, discrimination, including harassment, bullying,

intimidation and violence, in schools based on sexual orientation or gender

identity can lead, and has led to, life-threatening violence and to suicide. Studies

indicate that gay and lesbian youth were 3-4 times more likely than heterosexual

youth to attempt suicide. (p. 22)

The LGBTQ students committing suicide have been in college, high school, and

even middle school. The list of young LGBTQ members who have committed suicide

continues. Until bullying stops and LGBTQ youth feel loved and supported, the list may

continue to grow.

Research has been conducted to determine how to prevent youth suicide. Caceres

(2014) conducted quantitative research on how to help LGBTQ youth. The purpose of

Caceres's research was to develop a suicide prevention and intervention program that

would collaborate with local schools to assess risk factors and suicidal behaviors among

LGBTQ youth. Caceres (2014) addressed four research goals to increase staff and

teacher support with LGBTQ youth, develop interventions specific to LGBTQ youth,

develop a 24-hour crisis response hotline, and develop a Likert scales for judges to

evaluate the interventions put together of the LGBTQ youth. Caceres (2014) obtained

feedback from four multidisciplinary judges based on their professional experiences

working with LGBTQ population. The results of Caceres study showed that LGBTQ

youth were not able to access mental health or crisis intervention services.

Efforts to create a safe, inclusive school for LGBTQ youth need to apply to

students enrolled in K-12th grade. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics

(2015), gender identity is established by the age of 4. To make all LGBTQ youth feel

safe and included, elementary school educators also need to be aware of how to make all students feel included. According to Kahn (2016), educators need to stop making assumptions based on gender roles and stereotypes. Kahn (2016) also stated that students need a place where they feel safe being themselves and educators use respectful language

Summary

Conditions must change for LGBTQ students. Bullying policies in schools are needed to protect LGBTQ students. The history of LGBTQ shows the struggles the community has dealt with for decades. Bullying is still going on in schools, bullying was not addressed until the 1970s, and there is still room for much improvement (Hall, 2010). In more recent years, gender has started playing a bigger role in bullying. The study results from Street (2016) and Bratsis (2015) have shown that LGBTQ students and perceived LGBTQ students are frequent targets of bullying. The curriculum in schools does not currently include LGBTQ people. Small steps have been taken to help LGBTQ youth such as the Gay-Straight Alliances and the NOH8 Campaign, but there is room for much more improvement before the LGBTQ community feels safe. Chapter three contains a description of the research design, selection of participants, measurement, data collection procedures, analysis and synthesis of data, the researcher's role, and limitations.

Chapter Three

Methods

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of former LGBTQ

high school students related to their experiences while attending high school in northeast

Kansas. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to understand LGBTQ former high

school students' perceptions of and experiences with being bullied in high school, district

staff's responses to the bullying of LGBTQ students, district policies related to bullying

of LGBTQ students, the extent that the policies protected the students, the curriculum and

how curriculum is or is not inclusive of the LGBTQ community, and LGBTQ students

threatening or committing suicide. This chapter includes a description of the research

design and the selection of participants. Also, included in this chapter are the

measurement, data collection procedures, analysis and synthesis of data, researcher role,

and the limitations of the study.

Research Design

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) "Each qualitative . . . researcher has

ways of defining a research topic, critically engaging the literature on that topic,

identifying significant research problems, designing the study and collecting, analyzing

and presenting the data so that it will be most relevant and meaningful" (p. 45). This

study followed a qualitative research design. Responsive interviews were used to explore

the experiences and perceptions of LGBTQ former students from northeast Kansas.

According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), "Responsive interviewing emphasizes searching

for context and richness while accepting the complexity and ambiguity of real life" (p.

38). Rubin and Rubin (2012) also stated that in responsive interviewing, questions

remain flexible, from the research topic to the last bit of analyzing the data. The issues

that are explored in depth can evolve as the researcher finds more evidence (Rubin &

Rubin, 2012). The researcher prepared pre-determined questions in advance, and follow-

up questions were asked of the participates when more information was needed.

Selection of Participants

Purposive sampling was used in the selection of participants. According to

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), "The logic of purposeful sampling lies in selecting

information-rich cases, with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the

phenomenon under investigation" (p. 148). The participants were selected based on their

belonging to the LGBTQ community, their attendance at a public high school in northeast

Kansas, and their graduation from high school between 2011 and 2016. Potential

participants were invited by social media, email, word of mouth, and handouts (see

Appendix A) that were distributed at LGBTQ functions in the area. While finding

participants, the researcher attempted to get members from each classification of the

LGBTQ community. A balanced number or proportion of each part of the LGBTQ

community was sought. The seventeen participants picked for the interview represented

all subcategories of the LGBTQ community. After the researcher had seventeen

participants, the names of other potential participants were kept in case one of the

original participants chose not to participate.

Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the participants. For example,

Joe attended a small rural school with 45 students in his graduation class. Joe identifies

as a gay man. Ann attended a large urban school and graduated with over 300 students.

Ann identifies as transgender.

Measurement

Per Rubin and Rubin (2012), qualitative interviews are conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion. Per Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), for a qualitative study to establish trustworthiness, it is important to seek and establish credibility and dependability. The researcher elicits depth and detail about a research topic by following up on answers given by the interviewee during the discussion. While conducting the interviews for this study, the researcher had open-ended conversations with the participants. Open-ended conversations are defined as dialogs between the researcher and the participants, where the participants are able to share as much information as they are comfortable (Rubin, 2012). Interviews for this study were conducted by video conferencing and in-person to gain information.

The following statements and questions were posed to each of the participants:

1. Tell me about yourself and your high school experiences.

2. What experiences have you had or observed of LGBTQ students being bullied in high school?

3. What experiences have you had or observed with teacher and staff responses to the bullying of LGBTQ students?

4. If you as an LGBTQ person or someone you observed that was an LGBTQ person was bullied, what was your response?

5. What were LGBTQ students' responses when they were bullied?

   a. What experiences did you have while in high school of LGBTQ students threatening or committing harm to themselves?

6. What school policies were in place to protect LGBTQ students from bullying?

7. When LGBTQ students were bullied at school, what consequences were

enforced?

a. How effective were school policies at protecting LGBTQ students?

8. What did you learn in classes about the LGBTQ community and history in high

school?

The main questions used in this study were directly related to the research

questions and the purpose of this study. The eight interview questions for this study were

designed so that the person being interviewed could be truthful and elaborate their

responses to give as much detail as possible. The questions were developed so that study

participants could share their experiences. The researcher used prompts and probes to

encourage the participants to provide additional details whenever needed. Rubin and

Rubin (2012) suggested that "Follow-up question explore the interviewee's answer to

obtain further depth and detail" (p. 117). The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Data Collection Procedures

Before the study was conducted, permission from Baker University was obtained

after the Institutional Review Board (IRB) form (see Appendix B) was submitted. The

Baker University IRB committee granted approval for the study (see Appendix C). Data

collection began after the approval was granted by the Baker University IRB committee.

Seventeen former northeast Kansas high school students, who identify as LGBTQ, were

contacted by recruitment email or handouts, which were distributed on social media, and

at local LGBTQ events and meetings. Individuals who responded to the email or

recruitment handouts were contacted via e-mail to confirm their interest and voluntary

participation in the study. Members from each of the five groups in the LGBTQ

community were recruited. After the researcher had recruited 17 participants, he kept the names of other people interested, in case more participants were needed. Demographic information including age, school district attended, and how the interviewee identified as part of the LGBTQ community were collected to provide a comparison of trends from the data. Participants were interviewed in one of three ways: in person, by phone, or by video phone calls. The consent forms were presented to each participant before the interview (see Appendix D). The consent form explained that the researcher was conducting a study on LGBTQ bullying policies and their participation would take from thirty minutes to an hour. The researcher asked for permission to record the interview. Participants were required to read the consent form and were asked if they had any questions. Before any interviews were conducted, the participant's questions were answered, and a signed consent form was received. Participants were reminded that they could stop the interview at any time and choose not to participate in the study. Participants were informed that they would be assigned pseudonyms to protect the identity and privacy of the participants.

Data collection for this study consisted of an interview session with each participant. The interview sessions were conducted at locations that were convenient for the participants. All interviews took place from December 2016 to February 2017. Each interview was audio recorded, and interviews were then transcribed by using Trint online transcribing program. During the transcription process, all language used during the interviews was captured, including transition words, such as and, um, etc. After the interviews had been transcribed, a transcript was provided to each participant for review. Participants were given the opportunity for a member check. A member check is when

participants are given a chance to have changes made to the transcript if there was incorrect information included (Creswell, 2014). These recordings and transcribed interviews were kept on an external drive along with the consent forms and stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home. The external drive and the consent form were disposed of three years after the dissertation was defended.

Analysis and Synthesis of Data

The interview recordings and transcripts were examined thoroughly for any differences. Dedoose Research Analysis software was used to analyze and code the responses from each interview. The interviews were first transcribed into text and then uploaded to the Dedoose website. Dedoose was used to help separate and organize the contents of interviews into different categories and themes.

After each participant had been interviewed, the interview was transcribed. The transcript was uploaded to the password protect online software Dedoose. Rubin and Rubin (2012) said, "Systematic coding forces you to look not just at what you remember from the interviews but also at the passages that might modify your ideas or indicate when and how your ideas might be true or not true" (p. 192). Through personal reading and the work of Dedoose, the researcher reviewed the responses for concepts, themes, and examples. Using Dedoose excerpts from transcripts, the same theme or concepts were coded for referencing. The material in each systematically coded section was sorted, and then the results were summarized.

Following the advice of Rubin and Rubin (2012), the researcher started with the systematic coding of the concepts and the themes. The research then looked for concepts and explanation that the interviewee emphasized. Finally, the themes and the concepts

the researcher worked out may, in turn, suggest others that were closely related (Rubin & Rubin 2012). The researcher combined the concepts and themes into categories, and the responses were used to arrive at conclusions.

Researcher's Role

Per Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), "Researchers recognize and acknowledge that their own background shapes their interpretation, and they thus 'position' themselves in the research to acknowledge their own cultural, social and historical experiences" (p. 43). The researcher was an elementary principal in a small rural town in a northeast Kansas school district. He held a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in school leadership and was a doctoral candidate in educational leadership. The researcher is also a member of the LGBTQ community. The researcher has had experiences in his life as a member LGBTQ community that have been negative. The researcher had experienced bullying, which could potentially bias the researcher's analysis and conclusions. The researcher held a practice interview before conducting the interviews with participants. The researcher maintained an objective and professional attitude throughout the interviews. The researcher asked the prepared questions and allowed for follow-up questions and responses to keep the interview and answers in the same format.

Limitations

Per Lunenburg and Irby (2008), the limitations of a study are not under the control of the researcher, and there may be factors that influence the interpretations of the findings. The results of the study are limited to only the people who voluntarily responded to be interviewed. Some of the participants may have remembered incorrectly

how LGBTQ students were treated at their high schools. The participants may not have been honest in answering all the questions and may have had a bias toward the school district they attended. A potential limitation is that the interviewer may not have been unbiased and could have potentially influenced the participations.

Summary

Chapter three included the research methods employed in this study. Provided in the chapter were the research design, selection of participants, measurement, data collection procedures, data analysis, the researcher's role, and the limitations. The research findings are discussed in chapter four.

Chapter Four

Results

The results of this study are described in this chapter. The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of former LGBTQ high school students related to their experience while attending high school in northeast Kansas. The researcher believes a better understanding of the people in LGBTQ community would help educators understand LGBTQ students. Seventeen participants who identify in the LGBTQ community were interviewed for this study. This chapter presents the key findings related to the six research questions. Each finding includes an explanation of what the major finding was, developments that emerged from the finding, and participant responses.

The participants for the study were a diverse group of people. Eight men identify as gay, five women identify as lesbians, one participant identifies as a bisexual, one participant identifies as a trans male, one participant identifies trans female, and one participant identifies as questioning. All participants interviewed were between the ages of 18 and 25 and graduated from high school between 2011 and 2016. The participants attended a high school in Marshall, Nemaha, Brown, Doniphan, Pottawatomie, Jackson, Atchison, Leavenworth, Wyandotte, Jefferson, Wabaunsee, Shawnee, Douglas, Johnson, and Osage Counties in Kansas.

Experiences with Bullying

The first research question was "What are former LGBTQ high school students' perceptions of and experiences with bullying of LGBTQ students while attending high school?" All but one of the 17 participants had either been bullied or had seen LGBTQ

students being bullied in high school. One participant, Nancy, who identifies as a lesbian and was not out in high school, attended a small rural school with fewer than 50 people in her graduating class. She was not on the receiving end of bullying, but she witnessed much bullying. She relayed an example,

> There was a kid younger than I was and he got a lot of grief for it [being gay]. I mean he came out when he was in middle school . . . . People kind of always like made fun of him for it . . . . He got a lot of crap for it, and it took a toll on him.

> Another participant, Albert, who identifies as gay and was out in high school, attended a large urban school with over 400 students in his graduating class. His experiences were limited to verbal bullying and teasing. He said,

> Teasing is just about it [bullying that he received] that's pretty much it. There was definitely a time before I came out when I was you know teased about it [being gay] but you know I hadn't been out yet, people were just assuming things.

The one participant who did not experience or see any bullying of LGBTQ people was Bart, who attended a large suburb district and was not out in high school. The high school he attended included over 400 students in his graduating class. He stated, "I didn't really hear very much about it." When asked to explain more, Bart went on to say that, "A majority of the people who went to my high school would not come out until they're out of high school." When asked why, he stated, "It's just something we didn't talk about. I mean like there was a perception that being gay was bad, and they would be bullied. But the bullies didn't really know who was gay to bully them."

Only one participant, Gerald, brought up both cyberbullying and physical bullying when asked about students being bullied in school. Gerald identifies as a gay man. He attended an urban school with over 300 students in his graduating class. He said,

It's mostly a lot of cyberbullying lately. I've seen a lot of comments on Facebook lately . . . I think most of the bullying that I've noticed has been cyberbullying at least with my high school. There have been a few incidents where there was a girl who was pushed down, her books thrown everywhere outside because she had a crush on a girl and somebody freaked out about it. But as far as bullying it's mostly comments and cyberbullying.

In relationship to RQ1, participants mentioned verbal bullying in their responses. Nine of the participants talked about different forms of verbal bullying. The forms of bullying ranged from teasing to gay slurs and derogatory names being said to participants. Other types of bullying mentioned in one of the interviews were cyberbullying and physical bullying.

District Staff Responses to Bullying

To address research question two, "What are former LGBTQ high school students' perceptions of and experiences with district staff responses to the bullying of LGBTQ students?," the participants were asked, "What experiences have you had or observed with teachers and staff responses to the bullying of LGBTQ students?" Eight participants talked about teachers and staff who supported stopping the bullying of LGBTQ students. The remaining nine participants did not have a positive experience with the teachers and staff. Two participants experienced teachers who ignored the bullying that happened. The teachers would leave the room, or pretend as if they had not

heard the bullying of the student. While two other participants had experienced with teachers, who bullied them and would also join in on the bullying when they saw the participants being bullied.

James identifies as questioning and was not out in high school. He attended a rural district with almost 100 students in his graduating class. He stated "I've witnessed a few times teachers like taking part in the language [bullying of LGBTQ students].

Another participant interviewed was Cara, a lesbian who was out in high school. She attended a suburban school district with approximately 150 students in its graduating class, Cara had quite different experiences with acceptance from her teachers. Cara stated, that

> If anyone was the bully in school, it would have been the teachers and in a very
>
> passive way . . . . The teachers would say, see I like you as a person, but I don't
>
> accept your lifestyle, which isn't bullying per say, but it made me feel less safe in
>
> their classrooms and less accepted.

One participant who went to a school that was very supportive was Derek, a gay male who was not out in high school. He attended high school in a large suburban school district with over 400 students in its graduating class. At his school, Derek said that "Most teachers back up the LGBTQ members, and the school is very supportive, and I know that if they saw or witnessed any type of bullying of that sort they would stand up for them [the victims of the bullying]."

Another participant who struggled with how teachers and other staff responded to the bullying of LGBTQ students was Harold. Harold is a gay male, who was out while in high school. He attended school in a rural area with about 100 students in his graduating

class. Harold stated that he was bullied quite a bit in high school. He went on to state

that in his opinion, some of the administrators' favorite students were the students that

would follow him around and do whatever they could to make his life a little more

difficult. He said,

> The administrators could have very easily nipped this problem in the butt [bud],
>
> they could have just flexed just a little bit of their administrative power, and they
>
> didn't. The administrators chose to allow it to happen . . . And eventually like my
>
> friends at school helped handle a situation where three teachers and an
>
> administrator were able to keep them [the bullies] in school allowing them to
>
> continue doing what they did. And because the problem was never dealt with
>
> even in life now when they [the bullies] see me and I see them they don't mess
>
> with me any longer. But I also don't want to, see them, I would never want to
>
> shake hands or say hello. I mean four years of hell is a lot to catch back up with.

Educators were perceived to have handled differently the LGBTQ bullying

problems that arose. The nine participants who did not have the support of their

educators saw some behavior that upset them. Teachers and administrators ignored

bullying, would not acknowledge that bullying was taking place, and at times joined in

with the verbal bullying.

District Policies Related to Bullying

The third research question was, "What are former LGBTQ high school students'

perceptions of and experiences with district policies related to the bullying of LGBTQ

students?" The participants were asked, "What school policies were in place to protect

LGBTQ students from bullying?" Two students did not know about the bullying policies

in their school districts. The other 15 participants knew there were no harassment and no bullying policies at their schools. All participants said there were no policies that exclusively mentioned LGBTQ students.

Inga is a bisexual woman who came out in high school. She attended high school in a large urban district with over 400 students in her graduating class. When asked about policies she stated,

> I'm trying to think because I can't remember if there is any policy specifically put in place for LGBTQ. I'm almost certain that there were like general policies put in place about school violence and things of that nature, obviously around things like that, but none specifically towards the safety of LGBTQ students.

Inga's response reflected the perception of the majority of the participants. No bullying allowed policies existed, but none that specifically addressed LGBTQ bullying.

Melissa is a lesbian who was not out in high school; she attended a suburban school district with approximately 150 students in her graduating class. When she was asked about school policies in place to protect students from bullying, she said,

> I don't think there was anything that was specific to them [LGBTQ students]. I think there was a general bullying policy. The rules, don't say mean things on the Internet, be nice to each other. I mean I was involved in student government, so I knew the handbook and the rule book pretty well. There was nothing that was specific to that, [LGBTQ] same with race, honestly or anything that was like specific. It was very broad it was very much a golden rule everyone be nice to each other . . . . We will not discriminate.

All participants were aware of the bullying policies in their schools. They had a good understanding of what type of bullying was addressed in their school policies. Some of the participants were able to quote the policies while others could summarize the policies.

District Policies Related to Protection

The fourth research question was, "What are former LGBTQ high school students' perceptions of and experiences with district policies related to the protection of LGBTQ students who are bullied?" The participants were asked two questions for this research question. The first question to address research question four was, "When LGBTQ students were bullied at school, what consequences were enforced?" None of the participants were aware of a defined punishment for bullying of LGBTQ students, but there were consequences for bullying. Depending on the school district and the number of times the offense was committed, the consequences included visits to the office, detentions, in-school suspensions, and out of school suspension to the administration being lax and having no consequences at all for the bully. Inga summarized the type of consequences that resulted from bullying well, "The normal consequences as if they had been doing any other type like disobedient action in school. They were very often given detention."

James also summarized what he saw in school well. James stated, "The bully would probably get detention." He went on to say, "I think there was one instance where there was like a threat of some kind. And the person got out of school suspension. By no means were they like punished by law . . . . It seemed glossed over or hush hushed."

The second question to address research question four was, "How effective were school policies at protecting LGBTQ students? Over half of the participants did not feel the school policies were effective at protecting the LGBTQ students. Quinn, who identifies as transgender, was out in high school, and attended a large urban school district, simply answered the question by saying, "Ineffective, little to none" [referring to the protection]. Melissa also answered the question.

> I don't think they [the policies] were very effective at all. I think that they [the district] assume it doesn't happen or that they can treat it the same as they would treat someone who is getting bullied for being overweight or for whatever for being weird . . . . I don't think it was a very effective like and there wasn't really anything there to protect like a specific individual.

One of the two participants who did think policies were effective at his school was Ethan. He is a gay man, who was out in high school. He attended a large suburban school district with almost 300 students in his graduating class. He stated that "Oh I feel for the most part it was a very good environment . . . They [the teachers] would be able to keep away from the bullying and keep a positive environment around."

The second person who thought their school did a good job protecting the students was Peter. He came out as transgender in high school, in the middle of transitioning, and attended a large urban district. The large school Peter attended had over 400 students in his graduating class. Peter said,

> I think the school probably did as good as it could have done; they did pretty well. I think I was the first trans person to come out at school and to be open about it, and do the transition while in school.

All participants stated in their interviews that there was not a defined punishment that singled out the bullying of LGBTQ students. There were broad policies for bullying, but nothing that made the consequences specific if it was bullying due to the person identifying as LGBTQ. The range of consequences varied quite a bit depending on what school the participants attended.

Inclusive Curriculum

The fifth research question was, "What are former LGBTQ high school students' perceptions of and experiences with a curriculum that was inclusive of LGBTQ students?" The question asked of the participants was, "What did you learn in your classes about the LGBTQ community and history in high school?" Three participants said they had learned something related to LGBTQ in high school. Gerald said,

> I mean in history, I kind of learned about Stonewall. I was kind of interested in that from the brief thing that we had learned on it. And so I researched it more. I was in the GSA. And so every week we would have a meeting we would have like a history lesson or something else with that.

Olivia is another participant who learned about LGBTQ history at school. Olivia is a lesbian who was not out in high school. She attended a small urban school district with fewer than 100 graduating students in her class. She said,

> My literature teacher for my junior and senior year. I think she knew [about Olivia being gay]. And she was like super supportive in her own way without actually confronting me. So, she recommended Virginia Woolf as an author to me. And Virginia Woolf was an early 1900s author, female author . . . She's

[Virginia Wolf] married but had bisexual like tendencies or influences especially in her writing. Some of her stuff was banned because of it.

The third person to learn about the LGBTQ community and history in high school was Harold. He said,

We covered Harvey Milk. I was a junior when I first remember hearing about it . . . We talked a little bit about you know how back then they saw homosexuality as a mental illness . . . . But we did discuss in class, and I had great teachers who would look at people and go, 'So how does that make you feel?'

A majority of the participants said they learned nothing about the LGBTQ community or famous LGBTQ people in school. Kay is a lesbian who was not out in high school. She attended a large suburban school district with almost 300 students in her graduating class. Kay's response was similar to the other 14 participants, she said, "No, I don't think we ever talked about that in class. We might have mentioned stuff like related to the government class, but just briefly."

When asked about the curriculum being inclusive of LGBTQ, the participants were quick to answer. The reactions of eight of the participants were short quick answers as if they found the question humorous; three actually laughed a little at the question. Participants thought it was humorous to think about learning something about LGBTQ in school.

Suicide

The sixth research question was, **"**What are former LGBTQ high school students' perceptions of and experiences with LGBTQ students threatening or committing

suicide?" The participants were asked two questions for this research question. "What were LGBTQ students' responses when they were bullied?" was the first question asked.

The first question for research question six was answered in many different ways by the participants, but most of the responses the LGBTQ participants mentioned, were how the participants came up with coping mechanisms to protect themselves. Olivia, who provided an example of a student, said, "He would just be like comeback after comeback after comeback, [whenever he was verbally bullied]." Derek said that

I think we're all like; I think everybody kind of reacts the same way. I have seen one incident when just like, why are you doing this to me. What's so threatening about who I am or like what I'm doing right now. And I think that's a good way to respond because most of the time they can't come up with an answer. It's just oh you are different than what I am, and that's pretty much it.

Ethan offered a response that was similar to seven of the other participants. Ethan said, "Those people don't matter if they can talk to you like this and just tune them out. You have people who support you and love you and care about you."

Another participant with a good example of how students responded to bullying was Frank. He identified as a gay male and attended a suburban district with just under 100 students. He was not out in high school. He responded to the question by stating, "They kind of brushed it off . . . they seemed to not care. They seemed like they were used to it."

Inga said, "Their responses were always kind of like yeah I understand why this happened . . . . We live in a rural district in Kansas, so anytime anyone of us was bullied we were always just kind of like well this is where we live, and this is how it is." Larry

said, "His [the out students'] responses were just like screw you guys. I mean this is what it is. Are you comfortable with it? I mean he was more comfortable with himself, and that makes sense."

The second question asked for research question six was, "What experiences did you have while in high school of LGBTQ students threatening or committing harm to themselves?" Out of the 17 participants interviewed, 13 had some experiences while in high school of LGBTQ students threatening or committing harm to themselves. Inga's response was similar to the other participants who had experiences with self-harm, Inga said, "I was good friends with several people who identified as LGBTQ spectrum who cut themselves. I had a couple of friends who tried to commit suicide several times."

One common trend that was mentioned by most of the participants when discussing self-harm was cutting. Some of the participants themselves said they did self-harm by cutting. Melissa summarized the issue well; she said, "It came down to cutting was kind of a big thing. I feel like for people or certain people who didn't feel like they fit in or had an issue they could talk about."

Two of the participants had experienced the suicide of a student while they were in school. Cara said, "The school was grief stricken." Gerald also had an experience at school that was difficult for him, he said,

> There was one girl in my junior year who she was in a choir . . . It was second
> semester, and she just didn't come to school one day . . . And you know she was
> she was upbeat always happy and never showed any signs of anything like . . .
> But I guess she was being bullied, and nobody said anything about it . . . She had
> ended up killing herself, and it was I mean it shook the whole school.

The participants were the most emotional with this question. The participants took a longer time with this question, and two of the participants were very close to tears. Over half of participants made comments about how when there were suicides or self-harm, the problem was not addressed head on; instead, it was not mentioned.

Summary

A summary of the six findings from the interviews indicated that participants perceived that their high school experiences as members of the LGBTQ community were not always good. Participants experienced bullying, educators who were not supportive, and a curriculum that was not inclusive. Some participants even struggled with self-harm. None of the participant's schools had policies exclusively for the protection of the LGBTQ students. The schools where some of the participants attended were doing things that helped the LGBTQ students. In chapter five, a study summary including a study summary, the findings related to the literature, and the conclusions.

Chapter Five

Interpretation and Recommendations

This qualitative study was conducted to examine former LGBTQ high school students' perceptions related to their experience while attending high school in northeast Kansas. The first section of this chapter is a study summary, which includes an overview of the problem, the purpose statement and research questions, the review of the methodology, and the major findings. The second section reports the findings of the study related to the literature. The last section, conclusions, contains the implications for action, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks.

Study Summary

This study was designed to investigate the experiences and perceptions of LGBTQ students when they attended high school. Seventeen participants from northeast Kansas schools were interviewed for this study. The following is a review of the major sections of the study to provide information for the conclusion and suggestion for further research.

Overview of the problem. Student bullying can be found in almost every school in America (DeVoe & Murphy, 2011). LGBTQ students are bullied in schools every day, and their experiences in high school can make life very difficult for them. Sometimes the difficulties lead to suicides. The current bullying policies at most school district do not protect the LGBTQ students. Some school districts have policies that discriminate against LGBTQ students. It is not known if the school districts are doing enough to protect the LGBTQ students.

In 2016, the U.S. Justice Department published a Federal guidance over transgender students and restrooms in response to states barring transgender students from using restrooms consistent with their gender identity (Walsh, 2016). Many states have filed lawsuits against these guidelines. These guidelines help school districts understand how the Department of Justice and Education feel school districts should be treating transgender students.

School district needs to know what to do for LGBTQ students, so they feel safe and included. School districts must be aware of the changing laws so that they can do more to protect LGBTQ students from bullying. School districts should also learn how to work with LGBTQ students so that the students can feel safe and protected.

Purpose statement and research questions. The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of former LGBTQ high school students related to their experience while attending high school in northeast Kansas. Specifically, the purpose was to understand LGBTQ former high school students' perceptions of and experiences with being bullied in high school, district staff's responses to the bullying of LGBTQ students, district policies related to bullying of LGBTQ students, the extent that the policies protected the students, the extent that the curriculum was inclusive of the LGBTQ community, and LGBTQ students threatening to commit suicide or committing suicide. Six research questions were posed to address the purposes of this study.

Review of the methodology. The researcher used a qualitative approach to examine the perceptions of former LGBTQ high school students from northeast Kansas. The approach allowed the researcher to discover how various members of the LGBTQ community were treated in high school. The qualitative research also provided an

opportunity to explore the knowledge of the participants with school policies concerning LGBTQ protection. The researcher facilitated face-to-face and video conferencing interviews with LGBTQ participants. During the interview process, the researcher explored the participants' perceptions and experiences in high school. The interview questions were designed to gather participants' knowledge, perceptions, and experiences relating to LGBTQ students being bullied, how staff responded to bullying, how bullied students responded, if self-harm was witnessed, what type of protection and policies were available, what type of consequences were enforced, and what type of LGBTQ history or curriculum was taught while they were in school. After the interviews had been transcribed, they were loaded into Deedoose Research Analysis software. Dedoose was used to separate the information from the interviews, and then contents were compared and analyzed.

Major findings. The first major finding from this study was related to the first research question regarding the participants' perceptions and experiences with bullying while in high school. The results of the interview analysis were used to determined that all but one of the participants were either bullied or witnessed bullying due to being LGBTQ. The trend with this finding was that students even who were assumed LGBTQ or not even out were also bullied. The bullying was mainly verbally bullying, but both cyberbullying and physical bullying were reported.

The second major finding of the study is related to the participants' perceptions and experiences with district staff responses to bullying of LGBTQ students. Eight of the participants reported that teachers and staff were supportive of stopping the bullying of

LGBTQ students. The other nine participants did not have positive experiences with the staff. One of the participants perceived they were bullied by the teachers and staff.

The third major finding of the study was related to the participants' perceptions and experiences with district policies related to the bullying of LGBTQ students. Fifteen of the 17 participants were aware of the school policies. The school policies addressed bullying and harassment, but none of the policies were specifically designed to protect the LGBTQ students. Some of the participants were able to quote the policies while others could summarize what the policies at their schools addressed.

The fourth major finding of the study was related to the participants' perceptions and experiences with the district policies and how they did or did not protect the students who were bullied. None of the participants were aware of any defined consequences for the bullying of LGBTQ students. Fifteen of the participants did not feel as if the school policies were effective at protecting the LGBTQ students. The participants were aware of the bullying policies, but no one reported district policies that offered specific protection to the LGBTQ students.

The fifth major finding of the study was related to participant experiences with a curriculum that was inclusive of LGBTQ students. Out of the seventeen participants, only three could recall discussing or learning anything about LGBTQ people in high school during a literature class. Many of the participants only had learned about LGBTQ history by researching the information themselves.

The sixth major finding of the study was related to the participants' perceptions and experiences with LGBTQ students threatening or committing suicide. The participants had many examples of how the LGBTQ students in their school developed

mechanisms to protect themselves. Thirteen of the participants were aware of LGBTQ students harming themselves or trying to commit suicide; the harm included both cutting and suicide.

Findings Related to the Literature

Six research questions were developed related to the purposes of this study. Each research question was based on information found in the literature. In this section, the results of the current research are compared to what was written in the literature.

According to Bullying Statistics (2016), one of every four children could be bullied sometime during their adolescence. This statistic proved to be an underestimate from the population interviewed; each of the seventeen participants had witnessed bullying while in high school. The participants in this study talked about different types of bullying including direct bullying, verbal bullying, and cyberbullying.

Chatman (2015) stated that 77% of participants were bullied because they were gay or perceived to be gay. The results of McFall's (2015) study showed that it can be difficult to be out in high school. The results of the current study were similar to Chatman's and McFall's results because 16 of the 17 participants either witnessed bullying or were themselves bullied.

The results from the current study did not agree with Cooper and Blumenfeld (2012). The result of Cooper and Blumenfeld's survey showed that over 60% of the LGBT and 8% of the allied participants reported being electronically harassed. In the current research, only two participants discussed electronic bullying.

Marshall et al. (2015) stated that to help students from being bullied, it was vital that LGBTQ students have supportive school personnel. The results of this research

indicated that not all district staff were supportive. For example, the participations that

experienced bullying from the staff were not supported. The results of the current

research were the same as Robertson (2014) study, which found that students experienced

discrimination from both school staff and students. These results also agreed with

Street's (2016) results, which determined that the school was not doing an adequate job

of protecting these students.

According to Bratsis (2015), to help prevent the bullying of LGBTQ youth,

educators need to be aware of their biases and the way their biases may affect how they

talk to students. Diaz et al. (2010) stated that schools should implement and enforce

"comprehensive policies that include sexual orientation, gender identity and gender

expression" (p. 14). The results of Diaz et al.'s research showed that educators needed to

be aware of their biases and have comprehensive policies. In the current study, fifteen of

the participants knew what their school district policies were, but stating that the policies

were not working well since all but one participant were either bullied or witness bullying

due to being LGBTQ.

The researcher found that the participants were very knowledgeable about the

policies at their schools regarding LGBTQ students. According to DeNisco (2015), some

school policies are in place that state bullying is wrong, but the policies have been found

to have little to no effect. Toleson (2014), concluded that high schools should focus on

providing youth a safe, supportive learning environment for students to achieve more and

be more satisfied with the school. Over half of the participants in the current study did

not feel the school policies were effective at protecting the LGBTQ students at their

school. The other participants felt that their policies at their school did help protect all

students from bullying. These results also agreed with Barragan-Rebolledo (2013) which suggested that principals needed assistance with providing professional development for their staff with integrating LGBTQ topics in the classroom. These results agree with what Holliday (2016) found in that teachers are not knowledgeable of the content of their school policies and that they have had limited exposure to those policies.

According to Sieben (2010), the high school curriculum does not reflect the history of LGBTQ and scholars have called for a curriculum that promotes the increased awareness of LGBTQ-related issues. Also, according to Vega et al. (2012), the term heteronormativity denotes everything being referred to as normal when heterosexual, and everything that is not heterosexual is referred to as the "other." Findings from the current research found that only three of the participants learned or heard anything in class about the LGBTQ community. The majority of the participants in this study did not learn anything about LGBTQ community at school. These results also agreed with Garcia (2012) who concluded that for LGBT youth to feel more included, the curriculum in schools needs to be more diverse.

According to Gould et al. (2003), approximately one million adolescents attempt suicide each year. Biegel and Kuehl (2010) recommended the implementation of LGBT-specific programs and activities at schools including safe zones, GSAs, and suicide prevention programs. Hatzenbuehler (2011) found that LGBT youth were more likely to attempt suicide in the previous 12 months. The results of the current research agreed with the literature, a majority of the participants had in some form an experience with LGBTQ students threatening self-harm or suicide.

Conclusions

      This qualitative study was designed and conducted to examine LGBTQ former high school students' perceptions and experiences while attending high school. Specifically, the former high school students' perceptions and experiences with being bullied in high school were examined. In this section, the implications for action, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks are included.

      Implications for action. The findings from this study provided evidence that action was needed in several areas. For the bullying that is taking place in high schools, educators and school boards need to have policies that are followed and can truly protect all the students in the schools. Bullying should not be something that students should have to deal with while they are attending high school. The results of this research lead to a recommendation that school administrators review their district's bullying policies to see if they can be changed to help end the bullying at school. The results also indicate that administration needs to follow through to make sure all students feel protected.

      The results of this research also showed that school staff, including teachers and administrators in some schools, have joined in the bullying of LGBTQ students or completely ignore the bullying when it was taking place. Some of the participants of the study had very poor interactions with their educators, which is unfortunate, and could be prevented if school staff received appropriate training. These actions by school employees do not help the LGBTQ students feel safe at school. Diversity training is recommended for all school staff so that they have a greater understanding what it is like to be a member of a community different from than themselves. Policies also need to be

developed by the school districts that prohibit employees from ignoring bullying or joining in with the bullying towards the students.

The high school curriculum in northeast Kansas was shown in the results of this research not to be inclusive. Students, especially LGBTQ students, need to learn about the LGBTQ people and community in school. School districts need to look at using a curriculum that is not only inclusive of the LGBTQ community, but that is not heteronormative. Schools are made up of a diverse population, and the students in schools deserve to feel included.

The last recommendations related to the results of this research deals with students harming themselves or threatening to commit suicide. LGBTQ students in school need to know that there is help if they need it, where to get help, and that they are not alone. School districts should explore having GSAs or another type of welcoming group so that all students have a place they feel they can belong and feel welcome. Suicide prevention training should also be required for all school staff. The training would help all staff be aware of the signs of students considering suicide.

Recommendations for future research. The following recommendations represent areas in which the researcher has identified as areas which could use more research. Researchers could build upon the results of this study to determine whether the experiences of LGBTQ students are the same for students from different areas of Kansas. Since Kansas is a conservative Midwestern state, it would be interesting to determine whether LGBTQ students in other states had experiences similar to those of the participants in this research.

A mixed methods study could be conducted by adding a pre-interview survey to capture quantitative data. The data could be analyzed and compared to the qualitative data to see if the results are similar. The quantitative data could reveal other areas for discussion during the interviews.

Further research could also be conducted with the high school staff. A survey could be administered before and after staffs receive training on how to work with LGBTQ students. The survey could be used to determine whether their attitudes toward and knowledge of policies related to LGBTQ students changed after the training. The survey results would also inform administration of the areas in which more training is needed.

Another area of additional research would include how different school districts handle the punishment for the bullying of LGBTQ students. From the results of this research, districts handle consequences very differently for the same offenses. Further research into how schools decide on their policies and consequences for students to make things fairer for students across the state. This research could be accomplished by interviewing or surveying superintendents and inquiring about their policies, the process for policy development, and the consequences for not following the policies.

Additional research could compare the difference between "straight" and LGBTQ students' perceptions and experiences with LGBTQ students being bullied in high school, district staff's responses to the bullying of LGBTQ students, district policies related to bullying of LGBTQ students, the extent that the policies protected the students, the curriculum and how it was inclusive of the LGBTQ community, and the experiences of LGBTQ students with negative consequences of the bullying. Interviews of the straight

participants could be compared to the LGBTQ participants to determine similarities and differences.

Further research could be conducted to see if a diversity curriculum helped students feel more included in school, along with helping with the bullying problems. A survey could be administered to students before and after receiving diversity training. The results of the surveys could be compared to determine if the diversity training helped with bullying and if more students are feeling included.

One of the major findings of the current study was that bullying of LGBTQ students that took place was primarily verbal rather than cyber-bullying or physical bullying. Future research should be conducted to determine whether these results were unique to the participants in the current study. Other results may appear related to cyber-bullying due to advances in technology. Additionally, with a different participant pool, physical bullying results may be different.

Additional research could be conducted to determine the knowledge of LGBTQ issues among superintendents. The superintendents as leaders of the district could be the example of how to treat LGBTQ students. Administering surveys to the superintendents to measure their knowledge of working with LGBTQ students could help identify areas that the superintendents need more training.

Concluding remarks. Educators must understand the diversity of their students to protect and educate them. Bullying is happening in the schools, even when schools have policies against bullying. Teachers must be more proactive in protecting the students, especially the LGBTQ students who are at a higher risk of self-harming behavior. Teachers can be more proactive if they have the proper training to know how

to work with LGBTQ students. School districts should examine their current, and if necessary, be required to adopt bullying policies that protect all their students including LGBTQ students. LGBTQ students need to know they have support at school so that they are not tempted to harm themselves. When LGBTQ students learn about LGBTQ people like themselves at school, in the curriculum, they can feel more accepted and normalized. When LGBTQ students feel accepted and included, they are more likely to be successful in of their lifework.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Handout

1. Are you a member of the LGBTQ community?

2. Are you from NE Kansas?

3. Are you between the ages of 18 and 25?

4. Did you graduate from a non-virtual high school in one of these northeast Kansas counties: Marshall, Nemaha, Brown, Doniphan, Pottawatomie, Jackson, Atchison, Leavenworth, Wyandotte, Jefferson, Wabaunsee, Shawnee, Douglas, Johnson, and Osage?

If you answered yes to all of the above four questions…

… and you are willing to be interviewed for my research project for my doctoral dissertation at Baker University, please respond to me, David Fernkopf, at this email address dfernkopf@gmail.com.

You will remain anonymous and all of your personal information will be kept confidential when I report the interview data.

Appendix B: IRB

BAKER
UNIVERSITY

Date: 11/28/16

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION   IRB PROTOCOL NUMBER _____
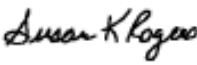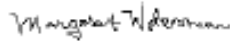
GRADUATE DEPARTMENT   (IRB USE ONLY)

IRB REQUEST
Proposal for Research
Submitted to the Baker University Institutional Review Board
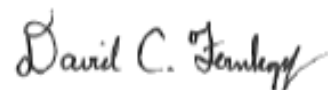
I.   **Research Investigator(s)** (Students must list faculty sponsor first)

Department(s)   School of Education Graduate Department

Name   Signature

1. Susan Rogers   *Susan K Rogers*   Major Advisor

2. Margaret Waterman   *Margaret Waterman*   Research Analyst

3. Harold Frye   University Committee Member

4. Steve Pegram   External Committee Member

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Expected Category of Review: ___Exempt _X_ Expedited ___Full

II: Protocol: (Type the title of your study)

Former Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning High School Students
Perceptions of Bullying

Summary

In a sentence or two, please describe the background and purpose of the research.
The purpose of this study is to determine former LGBTQ high school students'
perceptions related to their experience while attending high school in northeast Kansas.
Specifically, the purpose of this study is to understand LGBTQ former high school
students' perceptions of and experiences with being bullied in high school, district staff's
responses to the bullying of LGBTQ students, district policies related to bullying of
LGBTQ students, the extent that the policies protected the students, the curriculum and
how it was inclusive of the LGBTQ community, and the experiences of LGBTQ students
with negative consequences to the bullying.

Briefly describe each condition or manipulation to be included within the study.
There are no conditions or manipulations included within this study.

**What measures or observations will be taken in the study? If any questionnaire or
other instruments are used, provide a brief description and attach a copy.**
Face-to-face interviews will be conducted with each participant. A set of interview
questions developed by the researcher and reviewed by an expert panel will be asked of
each participant. See attached interview questions.

**Will the subjects encounter the risk of psychological, social, physical, or legal risk?
If so, please describe the nature of the risk and any measures designed to mitigate
that risk.** The only risk the participant may encounter is bringing up possible bad
memories from when they were in school. Assurance of anonymity will, hopefully,
lessen any concerns interviewees may have. The participant will know that they can to
discontinue the interview at any time.

Will any stress to subjects be involved? If so, please describe.
Subjects may experience some stress by talking about any unpleasant experiences they
might have had in high school. If the situation becomes too stressful, the participant
know that they can discontinue the interview.

**Will the subjects be deceived or misled in any way? If so, include an outline or
script of the debriefing.**
No deceptions or misleading information, interview questions, or follow-up will be used
in any way.

**Will there be a request for information which subjects might consider to be personal
or sensitive? If so, please include a description.**
Yes. Subjects may be hesitant to share about their experiences with bullies in school. All
interviewees will be fully informed prior to the beginning of interviews and will be
advised that they may choose to not respond partially or fully to any question and they
can terminate the interview at any time.

Will the subjects be presented with materials, which might be considered to be offensive, threatening, or degrading? If so, please describe.
No offensive, threatening, or degrading materials will be used in the interview process.

Approximately how much time will be demanded of each subject?
Individual interviews are expected to be conducted in 45 to 60 minutes.

Who will be the subjects in this study? How will they be solicited or contacted? Provide an outline or script of the information which will be provided to subjects prior to their volunteering to participate. Include a copy of any written solicitation as well as an outline of any oral solicitation.
To find former students who are members of the LGBTQ community, local Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) groups and Gay Straight Alliances (GSA) groups will be contacted to find volunteers who would fit the criteria for the study (see attached recruitment flyer).

The participants will be selected based on their belonging to the LGBTQ community, their attendance at a non virtual high school in one theses northeast Kansas counties: Marshall, Nemaha, Brown, Doniphan, Pottawatomie, Jackson, Atchison, Leavenworth, Wyandotte, Jefferson, Wabaunsee, Shawnee, Douglas, Johnson, and Osage, and their graduation from high school between 2011 and 2016. Potential participants will be invited by email, by word of mouth, and by handouts that were distributed at LGBTQ functions in the area. While locating participants, the researcher will attempt to find members of each part of the LGBTQ community who are willing to participate. Participants will be randomly selected from each LGBTQ group until 15 participants are selected. The 15 participants will be interviewed. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identities of the participants.

What steps will be taken to insure that each subject's participation is voluntary?
The participants will sign the informed consent form (see attached). The names of all participants and their answers will be kept confidential.

What if any inducements will be offered to the subjects for their participation?
No inducements will be offered at any time.

How will you insure that the subjects give their consent prior to participating? Will a written consent form be used? If so, include the form. If not, explain why not.
No interviews will be conducted until after the signed consent form is received by the researcher. The participants have the right to not answer any questions that make them feel uncomfortable and can stop the interview at any time.

Will any aspect of the data be made a part of any permanent record that can be identified with the subject? If so, please explain the necessity.
No aspect of the interview will be made part of any permanent record that can be identified with the subject. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identities of the participants.

Will the fact that a subject did or did not participate in a specific experiment or study be made part of any permanent record available to a supervisor, teacher or employer? If so, explain.

The fact the subject did or did not participate in the study will not be made part of any permanent record available to anyone. No permanent record will be made of participation.

What steps will be taken to insure the confidentiality of the data? Where will it be stored? How long will it be stored? What will be done with it after the study is completed?

The recording and notes made during the interview will be saved with the pseudonyms and not with participates actual name. Data with the pseudonyms of participants will be stored on the investigator's personal computer and will not leave the investigator's possession at any time. All data and records will be deleted upon completion of the study.

If there are any risks involved in the study, are there any offsetting benefits that might accrue to either the subjects or society?

There are no risks involved in the study.

Will any data from files or archival data be used? If so, please describe.

No data from files or archival data will be used.

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself and your high school experiences.

2. What experiences have you had or observed of LGBTQ students being bullied in high school?

3. What experiences have you had or observed with teacher and staff responses to the bullying of LGBTQ students?

4. If you as a LGBTQ person or someone you observed that was LGBTQ person was bullied, what was your response?

5. What were LGBTQ students' responses when they were bullied?

a. Did you have any experiences while in high school of LGBTQ students threatening or committing harm to themselves?

6. What school policies were in place to protect LGBTQ students from bullying?

7. How did the policies protect the students at the high school you attend?

a. How effective were school policies at protecting LGBTQ students?

8. What did you learn in classes about the LGBTQ community and history in high school?

Appendix C: IRB Approval Letter

Baker University Institutional Review Board

December 5, 2016

Dear David Fernkopf and Dr. Rogers:

The Baker University IRB has reviewed your research project application and approved this project under Expedited Status Review. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

Please be aware of the following:

1. Any significant change in the research protocol as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
2. Notify the IRB about any new investigators not named in original application.
3. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents of the research activity.
4. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.
5. If the results of the research are used to prepare papers for publication or oral presentation at professional conferences, manuscripts or abstracts are requested for IRB as part of the project record.

Please inform this Committee or myself when this project is terminated or completed. As noted above, you must also provide IRB with an annual status report and receive approval for maintaining your status. If you have any questions, please contact me at EMorris@BakerU.edu or 785.594.7881.

Sincerely,

Erin R. Morris

Erin Morris PhD
Chair, Baker University IRB

Baker University IRB Committee
      Joe Watson PhD
      Nate Poell MA
      Susan Rogers PhD
      Scott Crenshaw

Appendix D: Participant Consent Form

You are invited to participate in research conducted by David Fernkopf related to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning (LGBTQ) and experience while attending high school in northeast Kansas. Your participation will take approximately 60 minutes.

The purpose of this study is to understand LGBTQ former high school students' perceptions of and experiences with being bullied in high school, district staff's responses to the bullying of LGBTQ students, district policies related to bullying of LGBTQ students, the extent that the policies protected the students, the curriculum and how curriculum is or is not inclusive of the LGBTQ community, and LGBTQ students threatening or committing suicide.

I am asking your permission to conduct and record an interview with you as part of the research. The recording will be used to assist in writing field notes. The recording will include only how you identify, not your actual name. The recordings will be stored on a secure digital file and will be destroyed after the dissertation has been defended. I will not use the recording for any other purpose than those stated in the consent form.

Your signature on this form grants me, as the investigator, permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced research.

If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from this study.

If you agree to participate in this research, please sign your name on the line below along with filling out the other information below.

_____   _____
Sign your name   Date

_____
Print your name

_____
Email Address

_____
Phone Number

Please circle how do you identify:

Lesbian   Gay   Bisexual   Transgender   Questioning