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**Exposing Sexual Harassment and Bullying In Secondary Schools:
An Intersectional Feminist Analysis**

BY

REBECCA ERICKSON

**PREVIOUS DEGREES
BACHELOR of ARTS in SOCIOLOGY**

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Sociology

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

May, 2010

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the students of the “Core” district as well as the students, teachers, staff, and administrators who shared their experiences during the “Metro” district research. It is indebted to the school communities who graciously offered data and participation in this study.

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Rebecca Ruth Erickson

B.A., Sociology, New Mexico State University, 2005

M.A., Sociology, University of New Mexico, 2010

ABSTRACT

Incidents of sexual harassment and bullying in secondary school are extremely commonplace, yet student experiences are underreported to school officials. Moreover, there are competing definitions regarding what constitutes sexual harassment among administrators, staff, and students. How does social identity influence incidents of sexual harassment and bullying in secondary schools? What kinds of sexual harassment and bullying occur and what are their consequences? How do gender, race/ethnicity, and class affect who is disciplined for sexual harassment and bullying? What role do peers and friends play in the choice to report an incident of sexual harassment?

Two distinct school districts are compared, and mixed methodologies are utilized to begin to answer these questions. Disciplinary records for a 9th grade student population (N=777) are analyzed to explore harassment offenses. Student behavior handbooks are examined to garner official positions on sexual harassment and bullying. Administrator, staff, and student focus groups and interviews are assessed to examine discourses on and experiences with sexual harassment and bullying in secondary school.

Overall, sexual harassment is not treated seriously within secondary schools. There is a low rate of officially recording sexual harassment and bullying offenses. Male and female students harass and female students perpetuate the sexual harassment of their female peers. Education is imperative and needs to incorporate all forms of harassment.

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CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION

Latina Female Student: Guys, like, always try to grab me, but I always just slap them, so...

Researcher: Did you tell a teacher about that?

White Female Student: Is it like real, or was it just, like, messing around?

Latina Female Student: It's like messing around, I guess. They always try to grab me and stuff, and I'm just like, please, like, get off me.

Researcher: And you wouldn't tell anybody about it?

Both: No.

White Female Student: I've got friends who are just joking around, we will grab each other's butts and stuff like that, but we're just joking around and we know it.

Sexual Harassment and Bullying in Secondary Schools: The Problem

The sexual harassment and bullying among peers and between staff and students are a growing concern in secondary school systems in the U.S. (American Association of University Women, 2001). These issues at the secondary school level require the school community to focus their attention to this educational sector and treat sexual harassment and bullying as the serious matter.

Incidents of sexual harassment and bullying are extremely commonplace, yet student experiences are underreported to school officials (American Association of University Women, 2001; Miller, 2008). Moreover, school officials frequently dismiss many instances of sexual harassment and bullying as part of normal adolescent development and they neglect meaningful intervention (Stein, 1998; Fineran & Bennett, 1999).

If and when teachers, staff, and administrators do intervene, they habitually do so only in accordance with narrowly defined assumptions regarding who can sexually harass

and who can be sexually harassed. The primary assumption is that the only recipients of sexual harassment are girls and that the harassment and bullying of boys (e.g. 'hazing') does not constitute sexual harassment (Stein, 2002; Renzetti and Curran, 2003). These patterns stem from confusion about the terminology and concepts surrounding "sexual harassment" and "bullying," as well as overarching, unclear distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

Sexual harassment and bullying constitute sites of intersection for multiple dimensions of social identity and inequality, including but not limited to: 'race'/racialization, ethnicity, sex/gender, sexuality, and class. This means that one's social, political and economic positions influence occurrences of sexual harassment and bullying. One's social identity shapes the experience of the target, the motivation of the perpetrator, the type of sexual harassment or bullying, the empowerment to report an offense to authorities, and the response by school officials, other students, and the school community.

Primary and secondary school students conceptualize sex, sexuality, and sexual harassment in ways that may differ from students in higher education as well as adults in workplace settings. Adolescents do know about sex: they are bombarded by images of sex in the media, they are developing their own sexuality, and their gender and sexual identities are significant parts of their social interactions. How much do they know about sexual harassment? How can they be protected from experiencing it and performing it?

If we accept the premise that secondary school is intended to prepare students for adult life in the 'real' world, then meaningful comprehension, prevention, and

intervention of sexual harassment and bullying need to occur now. This would ensure respectful behavior in personal, social, and professional relationships. Trivializing these issues has far-reaching consequences for everyone involved: our negligence contributes to current and future abuse, both within and outside the school.

The school system has a legal and ethical obligation to educate and protect its students. From this position, it is imperative that we combat dehumanization on all levels and to foster genuine comprehension and appreciation of when and how our behavior is problematic, even abusive toward, others and ourselves.

How do diverse social identity variables influence incidents of sexual harassment and bullying in secondary schools? How do schools define sexual harassment and bullying? What kinds of sexual harassment and bullying occur? What are the consequences for sexual harassment and bullying? How do gender, race/ethnicity, and class affect who is disciplined for sexual harassment and bullying? What role do peers and friends play in the choice to report an incident of sexual harassment?

Intersectionality and Feminist Methods

To conduct my research in an analytically critical way, I employ intersectional and inclusive feminist frameworks. From an intersectional framework, there are diverse and multiple social identities that interact with, relate to, and correlate with variable social experiences and phenomena. This approach requires theory and research to be centered on the lived experiences of everyone, and especially members of subjugated

groups. Intersectional feminist literatures anchor theory and theorizing in the reality that our everyday experiences inform our knowledge (Collins, 2000; Hurtado, 2003).

Importantly, in my perspective and within the context of my research project, ‘feminist’ as a term and concept denotes women’s empowerment and community activism and a commitment to social justice. This critical activism is not relegated to “women’s issues” or “white women’s issues” or “wealthy white women’s issues;” but instead stems from intersectionality itself and the significant recognition and incorporation of the diversity of lived experiences. It is rooted in the call to work for the improvement of the entire community, not just one group and not just oneself.

Operating from this intersectional feminist framework, I explore administrative, staff, and student conceptualizations of and responses to sexual harassment and bullying in schools. This includes the school districts’ definitions of sexual harassment and bullying, administrator, staff, and student comments about sexual harassment and bullying, the actual occurrence of sexual harassment and bullying, and reporting sexual harassment and bullying offenses. It also includes the schools’ disciplinary measures and intervention-based responses as well as other student and staff responses to incidences of sexual harassment and bullying.

The scholastic concepts and structures of feminist epistemology and intersectional methodology help to understand and organize research. The endeavor of intersectional analysis as well as that of collaborative, community, and participant/member-based research are challenging and often stifled by the strictures of traditional and institutionalized methods of inquiry. Nonetheless, it is important to confront that

challenge and to continuously work toward deeply meaningful intersectional scholarship and genuine collaborative interdisciplinary research.

Using these theoretical and analytical frameworks, I evaluate selected administrative, staff, student, and parent components of the secondary school setting. I investigate how representatives of each group engage with the occurrences of and responses to sexual harassment and bullying. I also explore how their involvement is influenced by their diverse social identities.

What is Sexual Harassment and Bullying?

Sexual harassment has a range of definitions, many of which will be further explicated and examined in the pages that follow. There is a generalized consensus that in academic and workplace settings, sexual harassment includes unwanted and unwelcomed sexual behavior that interferes with an individual's daily life (Stein, 1998; Fineran & Bennett, 1999; Buchanan & Ormerod; Terrance, Logan, & Peters, 2004; Hand & Sanchez, 2000; American Association of University Women, 2001; Renzetti & Curran, 2003; Robinson, 2005; Meyer, 2008; Miller, 2008; Ballantine and Hammack, 2009).

This unwanted and unwelcomed behavior can include sexual contact and interactions occurring among individuals and groups, as well as maintaining a hostile environment, climate, culture, and space. Bullying consists of intimidating, aggressive, and/or hostile behaviors that stop short of physical contact. This definition is inclusive of most forms of harassment: racial harassment, sexuality harassment, disability harassment, and so forth, and many forms of sexual harassment.

Sexual Harassment

Definitions of and policies for sexual harassment have fluctuated over time. They have been negotiated in the courts, the workplace, the schools, and the public domain. The term was only coined in the 1970's when it was first recognized as a legal offense in the workplace setting (Sterba, 1996, p.337). Over the last four decades, the definition and understanding of sexual harassment has extended to include males as potential victims and educational contexts as potential settings of sexual harassment. Two main categories of sexual harassment have been established: 1) quid pro quo and 2) hostile environment.

According to the American Association of University Women, "*Quid pro quo sexual harassment*" is harassment that directly threatens an individual's employment or educational security and success (2001, 5). It most often involves a differential power dynamic wherein an occupational or education superior uses their position of authority to make inappropriate requests or demands. For instance, a professor threatens to fail a student from their course unless the student provides sexual favors. This type is less common in secondary schools, where peer sexual harassment dominates (American Association of University Women, 1993 and 2001).

"*Hostile environment sexual harassment*" refers to the creation and maintenance of a hostile or offensive work or school environment that indirectly affects economic or educational benefits by causing negative working or educational conditions (Renzetti and Curran, 2003, 136). The characteristics that constitute a hostile environment have wide-ranging variance, from sexist comments during class to unwanted touching in the hall.

A hostile environment can occur in contexts where the individuals involved are in different positions of an institutionalized hierarchy. Moreover, it can occur in contexts where individuals involved are peers and where an organizational power differential does not exist. It is this hostile environment that often occurs in elementary and secondary school settings: it can be enacted and maintained by students, teachers, staff, or administrators (American Association of University Women, 2001).

Sexual harassment is often myopically conceptualized as only occurring if the perpetrator is male and the target is female. Scholars have labeled this dominant ideology that sexual interaction of any kind is always heterosexual and only involves members of the opposite or other sex/gender as *heteronormativity* (Collins, 2000). In reality, sexual harassment can occur between members of the same sex and in the context of sexual orientation. It is important to recognize and critique the heteronormativity and hegemonic heterosexuality inherent in the presumption that sexual harassment only occurs across sex/gender and only with male perpetrators and female targets.

Contrary to what heteronormative and hegemonic assumptions would have us believe, sexual harassment is both a girl's and a boy's issue, not merely a "girl's issue." There are multiple possibilities for dyads and groups involved in incidents of sexual harassment: boy-to-girl, girl-to-boy, boy-to-boy, girl-to-girl sexual harassment. And these interchanges are precipitated by multiple, variable, and complex understandings, motives, and opportunities.

Bullying

Bullying and sexual harassment in schools are interrelated, and both are often perplexing. Many types of sexual harassment can also be considered bullying. In fact, bullying and harassment are arguably interchangeable terms and concepts. One possibility would be to conceptualize sexual harassment among members of the same sex as “sexual bullying” or “gender bullying” when it consists of peer interactions, such as hazing (Slute, Owens, and Slee, 2007).

Furthermore, there is a significant connection between bullying and sexual harassment. Certain kinds of sexual harassment could also be considered bullying. And many types of bullying are inherently sexualized (Miller, 2008). The literature establishes bullying in elementary school as a precursor to sexual harassment in secondary school (Stein, 1999). In addition to preceding sexual harassment, bullying continues to occur (Stein, 1999; Shute, Owens, & Slee, 2008; Gruber & Fineran, 2007)

Racialized Sexual Harassment

It is important to engage in a discussion of the various and diverse conceptualizations of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment and bullying constitute sites of intersectionality as well as the embodiment of hegemony. There are numerous possible forms of harassment and bullying: Sexual harassment, gender harassment (e.g. sexist hostility), sexuality harassment (e.g. homophobic bullying), racial harassment, ethnic harassment, religious harassment, xenophobic harassment, disability harassment, harassment based on language, and so on.

The notions of sexist, heterosexist, and racist harassment are conceptualizations of types of harassment that acknowledge the structural and cultural dominance of the hegemonic system. They also reveal the unequal power dynamic infiltrating the situation, the interaction, and the harassing behavior. This complicates the conversation of a usually dichotomized subject, problematizing and questioning the common assumptions we make regarding the perpetrators and recipients of sexual harassment.

The occurrence and discussion of sexual harassment is further complicated by the gender and racial dynamics of the dominant system. Hegemonic and racialized masculinities and femininities constitute controlling images that infiltrate and shape attitudes and behaviors (Collins, 2000). In the context of sexual harassment, they do so along the dimensions of gender, sexuality, and racialization (Robinson, 2005).

Gender interacts with other social factors, such as race, class, and sexual orientation. The dynamics, occurrences, and experiences of racialization and sexualization are intertwined: they intersect and cannot be easily separated (Collins, 2000). This interaction increases the likelihood of certain groups being targeted for sexual harassment and it affects the outcome of and response to sexual harassment incidents. Sexual harassment creates an unpleasant and intimidating learning environment for all students, which consequently affects their scholastic performance, their personal and academic growth, and even their future careers (Renzetti and Curran, 2003, 192-130).

The combined dynamics of racialization and sexual harassment are powerful. It is imperative to recognize intersections between ethnicity, racialization, gender, and sexual

harassment and to understand the complex ways sexual harassment can intersect with racist discourses. The coercive power of stereotypes is evident in the enactment, observation, interpretation, and assumption of sexual harassment by its perpetrators, victims, and witnesses (Robinson, 2006).

Buchanan and Ormerod offer an imperative and provocative discussion on sexual and racial harassment. They expose the fact that scholars investigating sexual harassment have been disturbingly silent about issues facing women of color; they insist that one cannot easily separate out the issues of race and gender: there is a critical intersection between the two (2002, 107). Although the authors do not specifically study secondary school or the educational context as much as sexual and racial harassment in general, their research provides an important conceptualization to the intersectional framework and approach to sexual harassment and bullying in any context.

In their work on racialized sexual harassment, Buchanan and Ormerod elucidate three distinct yet related dimensions of sexual harassment that can occur in varying degrees of severity: 1) gendered harassment, including sexist and sexual hostility; 2) unwanted sexual attention; and 3) sexual coercion, otherwise known as the quid pro quo type of sexual harassment (2002, 108) [See Appendix A p. 80 for details on each of these dimensions].

In addition to their discussion of what sexual harassment can be, Buchanan and Ormerod furthered the more commonplace definition of sexual harassment with incorporation of race/racialization and the introduction of the concept of “racialized sexual harassment” (2002, 111). Racialized sexual harassment can occur in many

different ways as well as in multiple forms at once. A distressing example is the degrading epithet, “all black women are sluts.” When there are multiple forms of harassment interacting and compounding, it makes the intertwined dehumanizing experience all the more severe (2002, 111). Buchanan and Ormerod reveal that even white women can collude with, participate in, and perpetuate the sexual harassment of women of color (2002, 120)

The Discipline Study Project

This study emerged from the Discipline Study Project (hereafter referred to as the DS Project) directed by University of New Mexico Sociologists, Drs. Nancy Lopez and Jane Hood. Drs. Lopez and Hood began their research in 2007 and it is still in progress today. The DS Project is a community-based research endeavor investigating the achievement gap and the discipline gap in high schools. The DS Project is a study of Special Education placement, the achievement gap, and the discipline gap in high schools. It is investigating how race, class, gender, and other social and educational variables play a role in Special Education placement, the achievement gap, as well as the discipline gap.

The “Core” district

The study began with the acquisition of student records from a core district in a large urban area in New Mexico. The records from this “Core” district were for the 9th grade population (N=6,846) for the 2005-2006 school year. The datasets included

Standard Based Assessment records, which are the mathematical and reading scores from standardized exams, as well as disciplinary infraction records.

The “Core” district is a large centralized urban school district in New Mexico. It consists of 14 high schools and a 9th grade student population of 6,846 for the 2005-2006 school year. For this district, there is standard based assessment data and a disciplinary record for the 9th grade students for the 2005-2006 academic year. Table 1.1 provides the demographic breakdown for the “Core” district’s 2005-2006 9th grade student population (N=6,846)

Table 1.1 Demographics of “Core” District 2005-2006 9th Grade Student Population

Total Student Population	6,846
Special Education	15%
Gifted Education	6.6%
Free Lunch	39.4%
Gender Distribution	
Female	48%
Male	52%
Ethnicity Distribution	
Caucasian (white)	35%
Hispanic	52.7%
Native American	5%
Asian American	2.5
African American	4.7%

The DS Project acquired incident level data on first-year students’ disciplinary infractions from the 2005-2006 academic year for the “Core” district. It also acquired individual level data on Standard Based Assessment for the same year from administrators in the school district. The DS Project aggregated the incident level discipline data and merged that individual-level data with the standard based assessment

data. This gave the research team the ability to assess a total population of 6,846 students and to compare more social, educational, and disciplinary variables.

The investigation included multivariate analyses of social and educational variables for the majority of the population, and disciplinary variables for subpopulation existing in the disciplinary records. Interestingly, the disciplinary records consisted of 1,095 students, only 777 of whom had matching identifiers in the standard based assessment data, leaving 318 students who had disciplinary offense records missing from the standard based assessment records for the 2005-2006 school year.

For the “Core” district’s 2005-2006 9th grade student population (N=6,846), the DS Project found that ‘race’/ethnicity, Special Education placement, Gifted Education placement, and Free Lunch status affect who is more likely to get office referrals. Table 1.2 outlines the student groups who are more likely to receive office referrals, controlling for other variables.

Table 1.2 “Core” District Students Who Are More Likely to Get Office Referrals

Student Population	More Likely to Get Office Referrals	Reference Population
Hispanic students	3.75 times	White Students
Asian American students	2.6 times	White Students
Native American Students	2.5 times	White Students
Non-gifted Special Education Students	1.25 times	General Education
Non-gifted General Education Students	3 times	Gifted Students
Free Lunch Recipients	1.37 times	Students without Free Lunch
Male Students	1.5 times	Female Students

The “Metro” district

The DS Project qualitative fieldwork intended to investigate the discipline gap, but it was unable to access the appropriate data/information in the “Core” district. The DS Project had no alternative but to seek out another district in a nearby metro region to gather qualitative interviews and focus groups on the topic.

The “Metro” district is also located in a large urban area in New Mexico, though its surrounding neighborhoods are much less crowded and more spread out than those of the “Core” district schools. One school in this district represents the case study for the “Metro” district and is the field site for all qualitative work in the DS Project. Table 1.3 provides a brief overview of the student demographics for the “Metro” district’s field site school.

Table 1.3 Student Demographics for “Metro” District Field Site School

Total Student Enrollment	2735
Special Education	11.9%
Free/Reduced Meals	37.4%
Ethnicity Distribution	
Caucasian (white)	47.3%
Hispanic	40.7%
Native American	4.1%
Asian American	2.8%
African American	5.2%

The DS Project conducted key informant interviews, study groups, focus groups, formal observations of the lunch detention room and the in-school suspension room, and informal observations of the courtyard, hallways, the cafeteria, and classrooms. This was unique to the “Metro” district as qualitative work with the “Core” district was not

possible. While the Discipline Study Project's fieldwork is ongoing, all qualitative data used for this project was collected during the 2009-2010 calendar years.

The DS Project recruited participants for a key informant interview with an administrator and an initial study group with school staff. With these preliminary meetings, the team inquired about their interests, needs, and expectations for the research project, requesting their input. They occurred in preparation for other focus groups and the information and insight gained was then utilized to construct subsequent administrator, student, and parent focus group questions. This process provided insightful background on the "Metro" district's educational setting. It also gave the opportunity to include the issues most relevant to the school community and its respective members in the research.

The initial study group consisted of eight female teachers and one male security staff member. For the student focus groups, the DS Project conducted separate focus groups with females and separated focus groups with males. The all-female and all-male student focus groups were purposefully selected to provide a comfortable setting and in hopes of receiving the most candid responses from participants. The first female student focus group had three participants and the first male focus group had one; the second female student focus group and the second male student focus group each had one participant.

The Study on Sexual Harassment and Bullying Emerges

The DS Project research team observed a number of apparent inconsistencies in the quantitative data, both within the disciplinary dataset as well as the student behavior handbook for the “Core” district. Briefly, these anomalies included: the extremely small number of students with records of harassment (N=130); the absence of “sexual harassment” in the student behavior handbook’s disciplinary offense and mandatory response reference matrix; an extensive section on Title IX in the second half of the student behavior handbook; and the specific delineation of both “sexual harassment” and “disability harassment” in the handbook’s glossary.

Furthermore, there was substantial commentary on sexual harassment from the administrator, staff, and student study and focus groups within the “Metro” district. The assistant principal participants (the administrators) had a significant interchange in which they discussed specific examples of sexual harassment on their campus and the subsequent disciplinary actions taken. Staff participants briefly mention their viewpoint on sexual harassment issues in the school. Female student participants divulged their perspectives on sexual harassment in the school. They related their past experiences as the recipients of peer and teacher sexual harassment, and one shared an experience being disciplined by a teacher for sexual harassment.

This study emerged from the DS Project and will emphasize issues related to sexual harassment and bullying, two very common disciplinary offenses. The topic developed not only from contradictions discovered during the research, but also because

of my personal experiences as the recipient of sexual harassment and bullying, both in schools and elsewhere.

Following a feminist intersectional framework and approach, it is paramount to ground the research in lived experience. In this vein, it was and is important to engage in a research topic from which I am not abstracted and detached. The following is a brief explication of my positionality and a narrative of my personal experiences with sexual harassment in school.

A Personal Experience with Sexual Harassment

According to scholars in the field of feminist epistemology, the theory of knowledge constitutes our approach to and understanding of the world. It informs the relationship between the ‘knower’ and the ‘known,’ between the ‘researcher’ and the ‘researched,’ and between what we seek to know and what can be known (Personal Communication, R. Trinidad Galvan, February 10th, 2009). Feminist epistemology implores researchers to critically reflect upon and acknowledge our own influences and perspectives in the researcher process. Incorporating a personal narrative of my own experiences with sexual harassment and sexual assault in the schools explains the dual role of ‘researcher’ and ‘researched,’ thus integrating myself into the research process.

I am a 26 year old middle-upper-class female and I consider my racial-ethnic identity to be white Anglo. “Anglo” is an ethnic term that refers to non-Hispanic groups, primarily whites (Schaefer, 2006, p. 241). It is most commonly applied in regions with large Latino populations, like the Southwest. I obtained my undergraduate degree from

New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, New Mexico. I majored in Sociology and minored in Women's Studies and Counseling and Educational Psychology. Currently, I am working to complete my Master's degree in Sociology.

My emphasis is in Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Sexuality, and Education. My impetus for graduate school and this area of study is motivated by my personal commitment to equity and social justice. My interest in this research subject emanates from my work as a graduate research assistant and resonates with my personal experiences with sexual harassment and bullying, in school settings and elsewhere.

“Below the Belt, Above the Knees, and Between the Legs”

I have had multiple experiences with sexual harassment and bullying in schools, as well as many other locations. My most significant memory is of the sexual harassment, and what I consider sexual assault, that took place during primary school in the 4th grade. The harassment I received from a male peer did not only happen once, but was an ongoing occurrence. It began with daily pinches on the buttocks when I would walk down the hallway between classes, none of which I reported. It escalated over time to the violation I consider assault, which I did report to my teacher.

This particular day, again while walking through the hall, this same male peer approached me from the front, reached down and grabbed my privates. He then laughed and ran away. My friends happened to be walking with me and were as shocked and outraged as I was. I think that is what helped me to have the confidence to report the incident. I remember telling my teacher that he touched me “below the belt, above the

knees, and between the legs,” feeling uncomfortable and embarrassed to even articulate the actual area. Luckily, my friends were alongside me for moral support the entire time.

I do not know what, if anything at all, happened as a disciplinary response to the sexually harassing and assaulting behavior of my male peer. I know I reported it to my teacher, and that he did not pinch or touch me after that. I do not know if his offense was recorded officially by the school, or if they felt “a good-talking-to” would do the job. It does seem as though they did talk with him, and possibly called his parents, but I cannot be sure of this. All I remember being told was that they would deal with it; and while I felt relieved to have finally come forward and have my teacher know, I do not remember being involved in any further discussions of the issue, or having any additional closure. Again, while I was happy enough having revealed the pattern of sexual harassment and the incident of sexual assault, I feel that it would have been even more beneficial had the school provided more of a follow-through to support my needs and ensure my sense of safety.

I think it is a first step to name the problem: expose what is going on and that it is intolerable. Once my friends and my teacher knew what was happening, they had the context and the reference base to know how to notice, determine, and intervene in the situation more effectively, as well as be more vigilant for their own prevention and protection. Yet, I am quite curious to know what my male peer took away from the experiences, whether he was able to gain an understanding of how and why his behavior was offensive, unacceptable, and should never be repeated. It is not enough for the potential recipients of sexual harassment and sexual assault to learn how to stand up for

themselves; the perpetrators of sexual harassment and sexual assault must learn to take responsibility and accountability for their own behavior and make the conscious choice not to disrespect, degrade, and deny the humanity of others.

My personal experiences with sexual harassment in schools heightened my sensitivity to this subject during the DS Project. My awareness of my own and others commonplace experiences of sexual harassment made the “Core” district’s records seem problematic. Sensitive to the issues, I paid close attention to comments by school staff and students in the “Metro” district as well as indications that the school treated sexual harassment and bullying seriously.

The issues of sexual harassment and bullying in secondary schools are complicated. Research on the topic must also be complex, using multiple methodologies and comparisons. It is important to outline the extent of this study and analyses of sexual harassment and bullying in secondary schools.

Chapter 2 consists of the review of the current literature on sexual harassment and bullying in secondary schools. It acknowledges the gaps in the field of sociology in regards to sexual harassment and bullying in secondary education. It includes an examination of research and data on the occurrences of and experiences with sexual harassment and bullying in schools.

Chapter 3 explicates the methodologies utilized for this study. This research engages in comparative methodology as well as a mixed method approach. Cross-sectional quantitative and qualitative data collected by the DS Project are used to explore the topic of sexual harassment and bullying in secondary schools. This allows a

comparison of the two distinct school districts from a large urban area, the “Core” district and the “Metro” district.

Chapter 4 provides findings for the “Core” district. This consists of analyses of the content within the student behavior handbook as well as quantitative analysis of a disciplined student population. This multivariate approach utilizes the five social and educational identity variables of gender, ethnicity, class, Special Education status, and Gifted status and the outcome variables of being disciplined for sexual harassment, bullying a student, or bullying a staff member, profane/abusive language, or displaying obscene materials.

Chapter 5 contains the findings for the “Metro” district. This includes analyses of the content from the student code of conduct handbook and preliminary observations of place. The bulk of the qualitative data consist of theme analyses of commentary by students, teachers, staff, administrators, and parents from the various study and focus groups collected through the DS Project. It also includes a comparison of the “Core” district and the “Metro” district.

Chapter 6 concludes this project with a discussion of the implications of the findings from the “Core” and “Metro” districts. It reviews key issues in the context of sexual harassment and bullying in secondary schools that reinforce the current literature and that bring forth new and different questions and directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: GAPS IN THE RESEARCH ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT &

BULLYING

A review of the literature includes an exploration of the existing publications on Intersectionality and Sexual Harassment, whether intersectionality is involved as an anchoring framework and where it is marginalized at the end as an afterthought (Buchanan & Ormerod, 2002; Ferfolja, 2008; McGuffey & Rich; Robinson, 2005). It also incorporates intersectional research that does not include sexual harassment, as it provides valuable insight for my research (Collins, 2000; Hurtado, 2003; Kohlman, 2006; Morris, 2005; Purdie-Vaughn & Eibach, 2008).

The current social sciences literature on intersectionality and sexual harassment as well as sexual harassment in schools is lacking, particularly in sociology. Intersectionality is a newer research paradigm and framework. Literature from outside of sociology, specifically feminist works from the humanities and social sciences, provides the multidimensional dynamic required for a project on intersectionality. Drawing from many sources is a purposeful exercise in the methodological endeavor of intersectionality and the imperative of interdisciplinary research.

Current Research on Sexual Harassment in Secondary School

There is a substantial amount of literature on sexual harassment in middle and high schools, though publication on this subject has increased only more recently. However, many scholars have remarked that elementary and secondary schools have received less attention (Miller, 2008; Fineran & Bennett, 1999). This is largely due to

high levels of normalization where sexual harassment is considered harmless banter and part of adolescent development (Stein, 1998; Hand and Sanchez, 2000; Terrance, Logan, and Peters, 2004).

There is a sizable quantity of research on school bullying (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, and Hymel, 2010). However, the majority of research on school bullying tends to be presented in gender-neutral terms (Miller, 2008), ignoring the complexities of these interactions. Moreover, there is only a moderate amount of research on sexual harassment *and* bullying, the bulk of which exists in the psychological literature. It is important to highlight the links between sexual harassment and bullying in schools and to increase sociological research on the subject.

In a recent article, educational researchers Swearer, Espleage, Vaillancourt, and Hymel (2010) advance an analytical framework to enhance the methodological and practical endeavors of defining, assessing, preventing, and intervening in school bullying. They present a social-ecological model of bullying that views youth behavior as being shaped by individual characteristics in conjunction with a range of nested contextual systems of schools, adults, neighborhoods, and society (2010, p. 42).

Swearer, et al (2010) delineates the contextual systems within this nested framework that directly affect children and adolescents. These include: families, schools, peer groups, teacher-student relationships, parent-child relationships, parent-school relationships, neighborhoods, and cultural expectations. Their model provides a critical analytical framework for the investigation of sexual harassment and bullying in the secondary school setting (2010).

In 1993, the American Association of University Women carried out a project, “Hostile Hallways: The AAUW Survey of Sexual Harassment in America’s Schools.” This seminal piece is cited in Ballantine and Hammack, 2009; Fineran & Bennett, 1999; Renzetti & Curran, 2003; and many more. While the survey queried participants about any students, teachers, or staff who may have acted inappropriately, the study’s findings emphasize that it is young women’s peers who most commonly sexually harass them (1993, p. 3).

After an eight-year lag, the AAUW provides acknowledgement of the reality that sexual harassment happens to girls and boys, women and men. In 2001, the American Association of University Women published a second major document on sexual harassment in schools, “Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing, and Sexual Harassment in Schools.” This report is more extensive than the 1993 study and includes sections on various kinds of sexual harassment, personal experiences with sexual harassment, where and how often sexual harassment and bullying occur, issues with reporting, as well as students who harass. [See Appendix B p. 81 for examples of sexual harassment from this study.]

The 2001 AAUW report, a study of students in grades 8 to 11 shows a significant majority of respondents, 83% of female students and 79% of male students, experienced some form of sexual harassment; ranging from sexual jokes, gestures, and comments to sexualized touching or grabbing (4). While these statistical figures are only ostensibly meaningful, they do imply that sexual harassment of girls and boys in secondary school is a commonplace event. In fact, the 2001 study reveals that sexual harassment, bullying

and teasing are so widespread that they are seen as “no big deal” and that many students accept them as part of everyday school life (4).

The AAUW 2001 research surveyed several hundred high school students and assessed similar issues and dynamics as the 1993 study. It provides a comparison with that 1993 study, indicating areas of change, both in regards to increases and decreases, improvements and set-backs, as well as areas that seem to remain constant over the eight-year span. Areas of improvement include student knowledge of sexual harassment, policies and literatures on sexual harassment, and levels of staff harassment. Table 2.1 presents figures from 1993 and 2001 on these various dimensions of sexual harassment in schools.

Table 2.1 Comparison of American Association of University Women 1993 and 2001 Reports on Sexual Harassment in Schools.

	1993 Report	2001 Report	Increase or Decrease
Knowledge of sexual harassment	91%	98%	Increase
School distributes literature on sexual harassment	26%	69%	Increase
School has policies on sexual harassment	13%	36%	Increase
Harassment by teachers or staff	44%	38%	Decrease
Students Harassing Others (All)	59%	54%	Decrease
Students Harassing Others (Males)	66%	57%	Decrease

There have been slight increases in students’ self-reported awareness and knowledge of sexual harassment and substantial increases in students reporting that their schools have a policy or distribute literature on sexual harassment. There have been decreases in student survey-response reports of harassment by teachers or other school

employees. However, it should be stated that while a decrease is notable, 38% of students surveyed reporting staff harassment is still very high.

Areas where nothing appears to have changed include the dominance of peer harassment over teacher/staff harassment as well as the level of student experiences of sexual harassment during their school lives: 81% experience some form of sexual harassment and 59% experience it often or occasionally. So, while there may have been substantial increases in students reporting that their schools have policies or distribute literature dealing with sexual harassment, this does not necessarily translate into decreased experiences of sexual harassment.

There is an additional measurement that reveals a decrease between 1993 and 2001, yet it is difficult to determine if it is a clear indication of improvement considering the figures that show no change in the level of students experiencing sexual harassment. This measurement is the level of student self-reports of perpetration: that is, students who report that they have sexually harassed someone during their school lives. On the face of it, this area seems to be one of improvement.

Much like the figures with reports of staff harassment, 54% and 57% of students harassing another is exceedingly high. These figures on perpetrators are also questionable, both in regard to the decrease between 1993 and 2001 as well as in regard to their absolute value. They are inconsistent figures representing experiences of sexual harassment. That is to say, student self-reports of sexually harassing another (54% and 57% in 2001) are incongruent with student reports of experiencing sexual harassment (83% of girls and 79% of boys in 2001). Both 1993 and 2001 studies may have low

estimates here, as participants are required to report on their own behavior rather than on the behavior of others and it is often easier to be aware of and critique the behavior of others than one's own behavior.

Beyond its assessment of change, and with the caveat of the previous critique, this perpetrator measurement is promising. If the figures for self-reports of perpetration are truly representative, there is a meaningful decline in offenses. Furthermore, the substantial decrease in boys self-reporting the harassment of others alludes to and reinforces the fact that girls also sexually harass and bully others.

Fineran and Bennett (1999) expose that sexual harassment between high school peers is widespread. However, they admonish that scholars and researchers have paid less attention to sexual harassment in secondary schools than they have higher education and the workplace. Like Stein (1998), Fineran and Bennett, argue that this negligence is fed by the view of sexual harassment as a normative, even expected adolescent behavior (1999). Nine years later, Miller (2008) still finds that the secondary school setting is overlooked in studies of sexual harassment and gender violence.

Fineran and Bennett reveal that some definitions of sexual harassment overlap with criminal definitions of sexual assault. Treating it as normative behavior ignores the criminal aspects of sexual harassment and ignores its effects on the target/victim. They discuss various negative effects of sexual harassment: school-related effects can include ditching and lower grades; and personal effects can include mental health issues and interference with routine activities, for instance, when an individual feels the need to avoid certain places and activities in attempts to prevent continued harassment (1999).

Terrance, Logan, and Peters (2004) examine sexual harassment among high school students. They reinforce Fineran and Bennett (1999) work with their assertion of the premise that the school culture consistently normalizes harassment by dismissing it as a regular feature of adolescent social-sexual behavior. Because of this tendency, the secondary school setting is frequently overlooked in regards to sexual harassment. When it is investigated, it can be exceedingly difficult to identify where and when hostile environments exist (2004).

Terrance, Logan, and Peters (2004) depict peer harassment scenarios wherein the students experience physical, verbal, and derogatory harassment [See Appendix C p. 78 for descriptions of these peer harassment scenarios]. In their conceptualization, derogatory harassment is comparable to Buchanan and Ormerod's (2002) definition of gendered harassment in the form of sexist hostility (Terrance, Logan, and Peters, 2004, p. 489).

Nan Stein (1998) explores how sexual harassment in schools is both pervasive and tenacious. Schools often do not name behavior as sexual harassment. They then neglect to respond and reinforce the assumption that this behavior is normal. Stein asserts that our schools act as a training ground for the cycle of gendered violence in the public and private spheres. When sexual harassment is actually reported, the sexual harassment or sexual assault itself is trivialized, the victim or target of the harassment/assault is interrogated and demeaned, and the offender is 'sanctioned' with non-intervention (1998, p. 230).

Non-intervention and neglect are especially prominent when harassment occurs among members of the same sex, as the commonplace view of sexual harassment is limited to opposite sex encounters. Stein emphasizes the schools' legal obligation to protect both boys and girls from sexual harassment by their peers. She impresses that it is unacceptable to treat sexual harassment as routine misbehavior, misconduct, or mischief, rather than the violation of federal law that it is (1998, p. 240-241). Educators need to see that sexual harassment is a form of gendered violence. They must recognize that it is most often a public performance wherein they, as educators, have the power, the authority, and the moral, ethical, and educational responsibility to name it and to intervene meaningfully (1998).

Sociologists Hand and Sanchez (2000) explore gender differences in perceptions of sexual harassment. They find that girls experience sexual harassment with greater frequency and severity than boys and, correspondingly, girls perceive sexual harassment as more harmful than boys do. Hand and Sanchez, like Stein (1998), establish the secondary school context as the key setting for the socialization of adolescents into the sexist gendered order. It constitutes the training ground for higher education and the workplace, as well as the public realm (2000, p. 270-271).

Social dynamics influence who are chosen as targets and who aims to harass them. Significantly, Hand and Sanchez find that the likelihood of ever experiencing harassment is higher in elementary and secondary school, for both boys and girls, than for adults in higher education or the workplace. Furthermore, Hand and Sanchez reveal

that perceptions of, reactions to, and consequences for harassment may differ depending on the relationship between the perpetrator and target (2000).

Stein (1998) and Robinson (2006) establish sexual harassment as gendered performance, where performing sexual harassment equals to asserting hegemonic masculinity. In this performance, hegemonic masculinity dominates ‘others,’ devaluing femininity as well as other masculinities available to boys, particularly those outside of heterosexuality. Robinson focuses her research on boys and explores how they engage in sexual harassment (2006).

In exploring the boys’ attitudes and behaviors, Robinson finds a number of discourses that follow various themes. Many assert that “it’s only a joke,” while others, purporting an essentialist and biological determinist view, insist we should not be concerned because the situation is “normal;” both of these discourses are often reinforced by teacher attitudes and a lack of an official response. Others blame the recipient, commonly stating that “some girls ask for it,” where the behavior itself is motivated by anger and power, and girls are made responsible for boys’ behavior (2006). Robinson and Miller (2008) uncover how harassers and observers habitually project blame on the actual and potential female victims of sexual harassment, a dynamic wherein girls have the responsibility to police and avoid boys’ behavior.

And, finally, a common excuse is, “what will my friends say,” indicating the status pressure on males to embody and enact the dominant, hegemonic masculinity. They perform this hegemonic masculinity through misogyny, boasting, and engaging in sexually harassing behavior for the benefit of other males. These discourses offer

rationalization and justification for both the perpetration of sexual harassment and the negligence and non-intervention of observers (Robinson, 2006).

Robinson defines sexist harassment as generalized sexist remarks and behavior intended to convey insulting, degrading, or sexist attitudes. She explains how hegemonic masculinity is a social performance and that the success of this performance is often determined by the extent of dominance, aggression, and intimidation shown towards the gendered 'other', i.e. girls and women as well as boys and men who take up alternative forms of masculinities. Males experience sexual harassment, homophobia, and heterosexism in reaction to their identities. In this context, the use of gendered violence is dismissed as a legitimate, anticipated, almost expected means through which one expresses and reinforces the supremacy of hegemonic masculinity within a heterosexualized gendered order (2006).

In his influential book, *The Gendered Society*, sociologist Michael S. Kimmel (2000) provides a crucial discussion of sexual harassment and unmasks it as a chief way in which men resist gender equality. He describes the two typical forms of sexual harassment, 'quid pro quo' sexual harassment and the creation of a 'hostile environment,' emphasizing how the hostile environment makes women feel compromised, threatened, and/or unsafe. Unfortunately, Kimmel reveals that men and women will often excuse sexually harassing behavior, insisting that the remarks and behaviors are meant to attract women and show romantic interest (2000, p. 191-194).

This situation feeds varying interpretations of sexual harassment: males often view it as innocuous dating rituals, while females feel stress, anxiety, sexual pressure;

they experience irritability, eating and sleeping disorders, and absenteeism; and they feel humiliated and helpless. While the popular discourse regarding sexual harassment may be that it is harmless flirting, Kimmel exposes how the underlying motivation is in fact the opposite of attraction: it is a strategy of dominance and exclusion, a method to keep women in their place and out of men's space. It is intended to repel women, not attract them. It is meant to remind them that the space belongs to men, and for them to occupy it constitutes the defiance of an unwritten gendered ordinance (2000, p. 194-195).

Kimmel includes an important discussion of the 1998 U.S. Supreme Court decision that expanded the definition of sexual harassment to incorporate men as potential victims. This precedent-setting case established that men could be the victims of sexual harassment from other men, even when all the men involved are heterosexual. Kimmel describes how men who are not traditionally and hegemonically "masculine" are often targeted for sexual harassment. In a paradoxical situation, men are being punished for not acting masculine "enough," while women are punished for acting "too" masculine (Kimmel, 2000, p. 196).

Jody Miller (2008) provides a seminal intersectional publication on gendered violence in schools and dedicates an entire chapter to sexual harassment in her book, *Getting Played: African American Girls, Urban Inequality, and Gendered Violence*. As a leading scholar in the fields of criminology, sociology, and gender studies, she critiques previous research for presenting school violence in gender-neutral terms when conflicts at school are almost always gender-based. Miller offers feminist and intersectional insight from her intensive qualitative work with youth from an economically

disadvantaged urban community and school environment. She focuses on the powerful effects of gender, class, and racial inequality in the experience of violence and sexual victimization (2008).

Miller's chapter on sexual harassment is aptly entitled "Playing Too Much," a direct quote from a female participant in her study. Like Hand and Sanchez (2000), Miller finds that girls see sexual harassment as more harmful and more serious. Like those in Robinson's (2006) study, males in Miller's study report that they are "just playing around." It is clear they perform for the benefit of their mostly male audience, emphasizing the role of male peers in the enactment of sexual harassment. Males divulge perceptions of gender superiority and a desire to make the girls feel bad about themselves (2008).

Miller, resembling Buchanan and Ormerod (2002) and Kimmel (2000), establishes gendered harassment as not explicitly sexual, but designed to convey disrespect towards women. Gendered harassment can be verbal, physical, visual, and it can be more or less threatening or coercive. Reinforcing Kimmel (2000) and Robinson (2006), Miller reveals how acts of sexual harassment are about space, territory, putting women in their place, and the overarching gendered dynamics of misogyny and hegemonic masculinity. Gendered violence in general, and sexual harassment in particular, are multifaceted and systematic and they perpetuate a multitude of harm (2008)

Robinson (2006) and Miller (2008) express concern for the position of women in the heterosexualized, racialized, classed, gendered order, emphasizing the influence of

broader cultural values and power relations within the school. Sexual harassment and sexual violence become a meaningful part of the performance of hegemonic masculinity. They can entrench gendered cultural bonds for those boys and men who accept hegemonic masculinity as their own, integrating it into their sense of identity.

Current Research on Sexual Harassment and Bullying

Expanding on her earlier work, Nan Stein (1999) explores the question, is bullying sexual harassment? She states that the simple answer is yes. In practice, however, the situation is much more complex. If the interaction is a boy-to-girl interchange, it will more likely be seen and labeled as sexual harassment. In situations of same-sex or girl-to-boy interactions, the interchanges are viewed as bullying, and sexual harassment laws are rarely seen as operative or applicable. Stein implores that the connection between sexual harassment and bullying is critically relevant. It needs to be made explicit and public, and discussions of bullying could be used to further our understanding of sexual harassment (1999, p. 423-426).

Stein establishes bullying in elementary school as a critical precursor to, even prediction of, sexual harassment and bullying in secondary and tertiary schools, the workplace, and the public and private spheres. She maintains that in the context of sexual harassment and bullying, repeated and pervasive behavior is more important than severity. This means that the severity of the harassment does not dictate its seriousness. It is imperative to pay attention to the ubiquitous incidents of sexual harassment and bullying in all of their diverse and insidious forms, not just the most severe. And it is

crucial to recognize the power and influence previous behavior and experience has on the future. Ultimately, it is unacceptable to diminish the reality and impact of any form of sexual harassment and bullying (1999).

Shute, Owens, and Slee (2007) inquire whether everyday victimization of adolescent girls by boys is sexual harassment, bullying or aggression. They establish that school-based sexual harassment is pervasive and commonplace. Yet, they critique aggression and bullying studies for frequently failing to address sexualized material. In their study of Australian students and teachers, researchers purposefully designed their interviews to explore and bring forth the sexualized aspects of bullying (2007).

Shute, et al (2007) reveal that verbal, indirect, and physical victimizations are everyday occurrences and that they are almost entirely sexual [see Appendix C p. 82 for examples of verbal, indirect, and physical victimization]. They posit that the concept of “sexual bullying” captures the gendered power structure that underlies sexual harassment and bullying behavior and may help us to understand and make sexual harassment and bullying more visible (2007).

Gruber and Fineran (2007) contend that sexual orientation, race, and disability are related to sexual harassment and bullying experiences as well as their consequential health outcomes. Their findings reveal a significant gender variation where female students experience more verbal harassment while male students experience more physical harassment (2007).

In 2008, the same researchers, Gruber and Fineran, provide further detail on the subject. In their work, they present findings from surveys from over 500 middle and high

school students on the occurrences of and their experiences with bullying and sexual harassment. They find that bullying is more frequent than sexual harassment; girls experience harassment with the same frequency as boys; while sexual minorities experience significantly more of both sexual harassment and bullying (2008, p.1).

CHAPTER 3: MULTIPLE AND MIXED METHODOLOGIES

This research will apply a comparative methodology, as well as a mixed methods approach for the analysis of sexual harassment and bullying in secondary schools. I use cross-sectional quantitative and qualitative data collection to compare two distinct yet complementary school districts in a large urban area in the Southwest, namely the “Core” district and the “Metro” district from the DS Project. The comparative method, feminist intersectionality, and mixed methodologies have in common a trajectory that aims to transcend the strict boundaries and false dichotomies of quantitative and qualitative research.

The comparative method encourages researchers to move beyond the traditional borders and binaries of quantitative and qualitative study, away from exceedingly simplified or narrowly idiosyncratic explanations, and towards a critical, complex, and dynamic systems analysis of the social phenomena under study. Sexual harassment and bullying in secondary education is a complicated and convoluted issue. While it can be illuminating enough to garner critically deep understanding of only one location, investigating and comparing information and dynamics from two districts allows a more complex picture to be painted and seen.

I apply the analytical framework developed by Swearer, Espleage, Vaillancourt, and Hymel (2010), a nested-system, social-ecological model of school bullying, to assess how the two districts compare, contrast, and compliment each other. According to this social-ecological model of bullying in schools, each district offers insight into a select

number of contextual systems directly affecting children and adolescents. These nested contextual systems are: families, schools, peer groups, teacher-student relationships, parent-child relationships, parent-school relationships, neighborhoods, and cultural expectations. In this circumstance, within the “Core” district I am able to examine the systems of schools and teacher-student relationships with the handbook and disciplinary record; and within the “Metro” district I am able to explore the systems of schools, peer groups, and teacher-student relationships with the commentary from interviews, study and focus groups.

I proceed with the comparative analysis of two secondary school districts. I utilize quantitative and qualitative data from the DS Project for the analyses of administrative, staff, and student involvement in sexual harassment and bullying in schools. Instead of attempting to deductively prove a particular theory with my data, I take an inductive approach to assess the theory that works best. Furthermore, I continue to engage in the ongoing exploration and integration of newly relevant interdisciplinary theory and literature as my project progresses.

In order to examine the extent of sexual harassment and bullying in the secondary school systems under study, any references to sexual harassment or bullying will be included in analysis. Such references exist in the “Core” district’s student behavior handbook and the “Metro” district’s student code of conduct with explicit definitions of and sanctions for various forms of sexual harassment and bullying. They appear in the “Core” district disciplinary records and they also arise in “Metro” district study groups, focus groups, and interviews with secondary school administrators, staff, and students.

Furthermore, I assess the content of the student behavior handbook for the “Core” district as well as the student code of conduct for the “Metro” district. In both handbooks, I focus specifically on the contents regarding sexual harassment and bullying. This provides insightful contextualization for the quantitative data representing reports and records of sexual harassment and bullying as well as for the qualitative commentary from administrators, staff, and students. I include these documents because they provide the most direct comparison between the two districts.

For the “Core” district, I focus on the educational administration, including disciplinary records, standard-based assessment records, and the student behavior handbook. For the “Metro” district I focus on the student code of conduct and commentary from administrators, staff, and students. Finally, I employ the comparative method to assess the similarities and differences between the “Core” district and the “Metro” district in regard to their conceptualizations of, prevention of, and responses to sexual harassment and bullying in the secondary school context.

Structure of Quantitative Research for “Core” District

Multivariate analysis was conducted with the 130 students with records of sexual harassment and bullying records out of a total population of 777 students with disciplinary records for 2005-2006. This population consists of students disciplined for sexual harassment, bullying, and a number of other offenses. It is a subsection of the “Core” district’s larger 2005-2006 9th grade student population (N=6,846). 9th grade students are traditionally and dominantly known as high school “freshmen.” The terms

“9th grader” or “first-year” are preferable to the term “freshmen,” in the interest of resisting and deconstructing sexist language and its usage (see Dumond, 1990).

Multiple analyses were employed on this population to uncover occurrences and associations among various social and educational identity variables and a mixture of disciplinary offenses that constitute sexual harassment and bullying. The social and educational variables included from the “Core” district’s standard based assessment record are: *gender, ethnicity, free lunch program* (income indicator), *Special Education status*, and *Gifted Education status*.

The disciplinary offense variables from the “Core” district’s disciplinary infraction record that signify incidents of sexual harassment and bullying are: *bullying staff, bullying student, abusive/profane language, obscene materials, and sexual harassment*. These offense variables were selected because they explicitly represent sexual harassment and bullying and implicitly represent sexual harassment and bullying (language and materials). Table 3.1 provides a list of the social and educational variables and the disciplinary variables used for this study.

Table 3.1 Social and Educational Variables and Disciplinary Variables

Social and Educational Variables	Constants	Discipline Variables – Harassment Student written up for:
1. Gender 2. Ethnicity 3. Free Lunch (Class Proxy) 4. Special Education Status 5. Gifted Status	1. Grade (9 th)	1. Sexual Harassment 2. Obscene Materials 3. Language, Profane and/or Abusive 4. Bullying Staff 5. Bullying Student

The “Core” district’s 2005-2006 disciplinary record consists of 1,095 students. However, only 777 had matching identifiers in the standard based assessment dataset. Surprisingly, 318 students had disciplinary records, yet were absent from the standard based assessment records (SBA) for the 2005-2006 school year. This means only 777 of the 1,095 disciplined students can be included in the multivariate analyses with the five social and educational variables available through the standard based assessment records. These were selected in order to incorporate a proxy measure for class, namely free lunch status. Class, ethnicity, and gender are important social identity variables and constitute essential components of analyses from an intersectional perspective.

The 24 cases of student-against-student sexual harassment, the 17 cases of a student bullying a student, the 9 cases of a student bullying a staff member, the 7 cases of displaying obscene materials, and the 98 cases of abusive/profane language were assessed. These five offenses were included to explore the occurrence of different types of sexual harassment and bullying offenses as well as to examine the association between various social identities and being disciplined for harassment.

The five offenses of *bullying staff*, *bullying student*, *abusive/profane language*, *obscene materials*, and *sexual harassment* from the disciplinary dataset can be theoretically and analytically combined to account for all possible cases of sexual harassment and bullying recorded by the “Core” district during the 2005-2006 school year. The grouped harassment and bullying offenses were compared with the key social and educational variables of gender, ethnicity, free lunch program, Special Education status, and Gifted status.

Finally, the total number of harassment records for the entire disciplined population (N=1,095) was assessed. This measures the “Core” district’s entire amount of harassment offenses and the overall percentage of offenders out of the total student population of 6,846. It also allows for a comparison of this total percentage of harassment offenders from the “Core” district with the percentages of offenders reported in other studies, specifically the figures from the American Association of University Women 2001 report.

Limitations of the “Core” District Data

There are significant limitations to quantitative data. The disciplinary data only captures the ‘offender’ in the incident, not the recipient. It is important to keep in mind that this data reflects only official records of sexual harassment and bullying in schools. They were the cases that were reported by the students and formally recorded by “Core” district school staff. There may be many instances that go unreported to the school. And school administrators, teachers, and staff may engage in informal intervention when students do report.

Additionally, these data were collected by numerous teachers, staff, and administrators from various schools throughout the “Core” district. As such, the dataset is often inconsistent and unsystematic: during the initial data coding, the DS Project had to recode numerous variables in order to establish coherent variables and make sense of the patterns. Moreover, the ethnicity variable may not be fully representative as the “Core” district only records one ethnicity in the standard based assessment and

disciplinary student records, even if the student or family includes multiple ethnic/racial identities.

Free lunch is also problematic. It is the only variable in the “Core” dataset that can provide a proxy measure of class or socioeconomic status. However, in a recent article, authors Harwell and LeBeau (2010) critique the validity and reliability of the free lunch variable and challenge its use in educational research. Overall, free lunch eligibility is a poor measure of socioeconomic status, and utilizing it can bias inferences and fail to accurately represent class. They acknowledge that free lunch is often the only variable available, as is the case with the “Core” district. However, any analyses with free lunch should be interpreted with the understanding of its limitations and scholars need to work to develop more robust measures of class.

Another drawback to using these data is that the only analyses possible are association and correlation analyses. Multiple logistic regressions and predictive indications are not feasible with this dataset: there are too few reported cases. The number of harassment offenses does not constitute a large enough population size to run multivariate regression and establish a predictive model. Logistic analyses could be possible, yet it is not reliable as the number of harassment offenses, 130, is not close to a balance with the cases in the population of 777 who do not have harassment offenses in their record, 647.

Data alone cannot capture the nuances, subtleties, and complexities of social interaction and behavior. This results in excessive oversight and underrepresentation of the actual amount of sexual harassment cases that are most likely occurring on an

everyday basis. This issue reveals the limitations and surface-level quality of quantitative analyses; it reinforces the imperative to conduct qualitative research that will supply the in-depth analyses and insight necessary to complement quantitative superficiality.

Structure of Qualitative Research for “Metro” District

The DS Project conducted an initial study group of staff and teachers, a focus group with the school vice principals, and multiple student focus groups and interviews with the “Metro” district. Topics of sexual harassment and student behavior arose during this qualitative fieldwork exploring wider disciplinary dynamics. Beyond discourse and theme analysis, patterns of who responds to queries regarding sexual harassment and how seriously they treat it are examined.

The formal and informal observations from the DS Project’s fieldwork at the “Metro” district’s secondary school revealed significant findings in regard to school dynamics in general as well as to sexual harassment and bullying in particular. Examination of the “Metro” district includes informal observations of the visual indications that the “Metro” district treats sexual harassment and bullying as a serious disciplinary offense.

To further understand the patterns and trends in sexual harassment and bullying, I explored the “Metro” district’s observational, study and focus group and interview data. I investigated the affect of gender, race/ethnicity, class, Special Education placement, and other possible social variables on both the experiences (being the recipient or victim) and

the offenses (being the harasser or bully) of sexual harassment and bullying. I also examined the role of peers and friends in students' perceptions of sexual harassment and bullying as well as the choice to report it to school authorities.

Limitations of the “Metro” District Data

The “Metro” district data collected by the DS Project focused on school discipline overall. Consequently, there is extensive interview, study group, and focus groups on the broader topic of discipline in schools, with only a small portion of the commentary specifically focusing on sexual harassment and bullying. The discussions analyzed in this study constitute the majority of the “Metro” district commentary on sexual harassment and bullying. More investigation is needed on the topic of sexual harassment and bullying in the “Metro” district.

CHAPTER 4: THE “CORE” DISTRICT

The Student Behavior Handbook – The “Core” District

The “Core” district’s student behavior handbook outlines the rules, regulations, and expectations for all students in the district. It consists of written passages, a breakdown of disciplinary offenses/consequences, and a glossary of terms. Specific schools in the district may have supplemental materials for their respective students.

The handbook includes the disciplinary offenses and the corresponding consequences for: “assault/bullying,” “harassment,” “obscene materials,” and “profane and/or abusive language.” There are corollary records in the “Core” district’s disciplinary dataset for these offenses that are outlined in the student behavior handbook. In the dataset, schools in the “Core” district recorded offenses of: “bullying a staff member,” “bullying a student,” “profane/abusive language,” “obscene materials,” and “sexual harassment.”

The glossary definition of “harassment, sexual” is significantly more extensive than the others:

Sexual harassment is a form of gender discrimination as defined by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Sexual harassment is a violation of federal law. Examples of sexual harassment include but are not limited to the following: sexual assault, unwanted touching, inappropriate comments or conversation, certain non-verbal behaviors and gestures which threaten or belittle others on the basis of gender. Further information regarding sexual harassment is provided in the included brochure: Title IX, Students’ Rights.

Table 4.1 offers a breakdown of the definitions and consequences of “assault/bullying,” “harassment,” “obscene materials,” and “language, profane and/or abusive” as outlined in the “Core” district’s student behavior handbook.

Table 4.1 “Core” District Definitions and Consequences of Assault/Bullying, Profane/Abusive Language, Displaying Obscene Materials, and Harassment

Offense	“Core” District Definition	Consequence for First Offense	Consequence for Second Offense
Assault/Bullying	<i>Threatening physical harm to another, causing a present fear of imminent danger to the person; included are threats, gestures, and verbal assaults</i>	Contact between student and staff	Conference with student, parents, and administrator
Language, profane and/or abusive	<i>Using language which is crude, offensive, insulting, or irreverent; use of coarse words to show contempt or disrespect</i>	Contact between student and staff	Conference with student, parents, and administrator
Materials, obscene	<i>Displaying material which is indecent and has the potential of being disruptive</i>	Contact between student and staff	Conference with student, parents, and administrator
Harassment	Glossary lists sexual harassment and disability harassment which is <i>“conduct including but not limited to the following: mocking, taunting, intimidating, criticizing, or punishing a student with a disability because of his or her disability (Americans with Disabilities Act).</i>	Conference with student, parents, and administrator	Long-term Suspension

There are noticeable inconsistencies in the “Core” district’s student behavior handbook. Sexual harassment is listed generally as “harassment” in the discipline matrix reference, the guidelines for minimum mandatory responses. Additionally, it is not alphabetized correctly, but instead appears in between robbery and theft. Interestingly, if

harassment had been termed “sexual harassment” in this discipline matrix reference, the placement between robbery and theft would be alphabetically accurate.

Even though harassment is listed generally in the disciplinary offense and consequence matrix, there is the delineation of sexual harassment and disability harassment in the glossary. That neither of these specific types of harassment is listed in the discipline matrix alludes to an inconsistent recognition of “sexual” harassment.” It appears the word “sexual” was removed from the specific nomenclature of this offense, as its placement indicates that it was initially “sexual harassment.”

There is an entire section on “Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972,” a written portion of the handbook that thoroughly acknowledges sexual harassment and its extensive legal procedures and ramifications. It appears after the disciplinary matrix reference in the handbook, and is one of the last sections before the glossary, suggesting it was added later rather than integrated into the handbook when it was created.

This section on Title IX includes very detailed subsections: ‘Gender discrimination’; ‘Sexual harassment’; ‘Sexual harassment is considered to occur when’; ‘Sexual misconduct’; ‘Pregnancy’; ‘Internal Complaint procedures’; ‘Who may file a complaint’; ‘How to file’; ‘Retaliation’; ‘Where to file’; and ‘Appeal process’ [See Appendix D p. 83 for the details of each of these subsections.] It is at the end of this section, in the subsection on “Who may file a complaint,” where the “Core” district mentions other forms of harassment. Complaints can be filed if a student “believes he or she has been discriminated against on the basis of sex, gender, race, national origin or

disability”. Here, sex, gender, and race are listed, and sexual orientation could be subsumed under gender, but it is not listed specifically.

Renzetti and Curran (2003) discuss the 1992 Supreme Court ruling that sexual harassment in schools is a form of educational discrimination and that schools can be held legally responsible for lack of intervention. The extensive section on Title IX in the “Core” district’s student behavior handbook reveals a serious theoretical awareness of this legal obligation. However, the addition of this section is incongruent with the disciplinary offense and consequence reference matrix that fails to articulate sexual harassment specifically. It appears that “sexual” harassment is marginalized in the “Core” district student behavior handbook. The guidelines for dealing with it may not always be clear for school staff.

Both “sexual” and “disability” harassment are outlined in the glossary, but not included in the disciplinary matrix reference. “Disability harassment” and “sexual harassment” presumably fall under “harassment” in the matrix. It appears that any harassment, be it “sexual” or “disability” or otherwise, would be a disciplinary offense. The connection between the extensively detailed section on sexual harassment, misconduct, and Title IX and the general mention of ‘harassment’ in the disciplinary matrix reference is missing. Moreover, while race is listed and sexual orientation is implied in the midst of the “Who may file...” subsection of the Title IX section, the fact that they are not included in the reference matrix indicates that the “Core” district does not recognize racial harassment and sexual orientation harassment on a practical level.

Terrance, Logan, and Peters (2004) establish that there is severe ambiguity surrounding the concept of sexual harassment. This dominates particularly when the sexual harassment is not physical, and especially because views of sexual harassment are subjective and change over time. This ambiguity emerges in the “Core” district’s student behavior handbook for sexual harassment as well as harassment or discrimination based on gender, race, national origin, and disability.

Disciplinary Records – The “Core” District

The “Core” district’s 2005-2006 disciplinary record dataset has some cases of “sexual harassment” but no cases of “disability harassment,” “harassment” in general, or any other type of harassment/discrimination. That “disability harassment” is listed in the student behavior handbook and does not show up in the disciplinary record implies that it is understood in theory but not yet in practice. Arguably, though, the marginalized glossary location of “disability harassment” makes it more challenging to see and apply on an everyday basis. A centralized location in the disciplinary offense and consequence matrix may make “disability harassment” more readily applicable.

In the “Core” district’s disciplinary dataset, there is a severe underrepresentation of sexual harassment. There are only 27 cases that are explicitly recorded as ‘sexual harassment,’ at both the individual and incident level. And these cases are spread across twenty or so high schools, with some having only 1 incident of sexual harassment reported for the entire school year of 2005-2006. Again, these are the reported cases, not

the actual number of occurrences. The few reported cases of sexual harassment could be a result of the inconsistencies in the student behavior handbook guidelines.

Table 4.2 provides a breakdown of the various populations under study. It includes the percentages of student groups for the five social and educational variables, gender, ethnicity, class proxy, Special Education placement, and Gifted Education placement, for the total 9th grade population (N=6,846), the disciplined student population (N=777), and students with harassment records (N=130). It also includes indicators (+/-) of whether the percentage of the student group increases or decreases as they funnel through the three populations, starting from the total population and ending with the students with harassment records.

According to Table 4.2, the “Core” district’s student records, both standard based assessment and disciplinary infraction records, show certain student subpopulations as overrepresented while others are underrepresented in the disciplined population (N=777) based on their associated proportion of the total student population (N=6,846). Then there are student subpopulations that are overrepresented or underrepresented in the population of students with harassment records (N=130) based on their proportion in the disciplined student population (N=777).

The missing 4.7% in the Free Lunch category for the total 9th grade population (N=6,846) are the 318 students that do not have standard based assessment records, the only dataset with the class proxy. They are included in the total population of N=6,846, yet those 318 will be missing in any analysis with the class proxy of Free Lunch Program.

Table 4.2 “Core” District Social and Educational Variables - Student Population Percentage for Total 9th Grade Population, Disciplined Population, and Students with Harassment Record

Social Variable	Total 9th Grade Population N=6,846	+/-	Disciplined Student Population N=777	+/-	Students with Harassment Record	Over or Under Represented (+/-)
Females	48.3	-	38.2	-	36.9	Under
Males	51.7	+	61.8	+	63.1	Over
Total	100%		100%		100%	
White	35.2	-	23.8	+	24.6	Under then Over
Hispanic	52.7	+	61.4	-	58.5	Over then Under
African American	4.7	+	7.5	+	9.2	Over
Native American	5.0	+	6.2	+	7.7	Over
Asian American	2.5	-	1.2	-	0	Under
Total	100%		100%		100%	
Free Lunch Program	39.4	+	53.5	+	56.2	Over
Not in Free Lunch	55.9	-	46.5	-	43.8	Under
Total	95.3% *		100%		100%	
Special Education	15.2	+	20.7	+	29.2	Over
Not in Special Education	84.8	-	79.3	-	70.8	Under
Total	100%		100%		100%	
Gifted Education	6.6	-	1.9	-	0	Under
Not in Gifted Education	93.4	+	98.1	+	100	Over
Total	100%		100%		100%	

*Free Lunch Program for the total 9th grade student population (n=6,846) only sums to 95.3%.

Males, Hispanic students, African American students, Native Americans students, students receiving the free lunch program (lower Socioeconomic Status), Special Education students, and students who are not in Gifted Education are all overrepresented in the disciplined student population. Males, African American students, Native American students, students receiving free lunch, Special Education students, and students not in Gifted Education are all also overrepresented in the population of students who have harassment records.

Interestingly, Hispanic students are substantially overrepresented in the disciplined student population, yet they are moderately underrepresented in the population of students with harassment records. The white student subpopulation follows a similar inversion dynamic, only they are significantly underrepresented in the disciplined student population, but then slightly overrepresented in the population of students with harassment records.

Asian American students and students placed in Gifted Education are underrepresented in the disciplined student population (N=777) based on their proportion in the total population (N=6,846). Then, neither Asian American students nor students placed in Gifted Education have any records of harassment offenses for the “Core” district’s 2005-2006 school year.

The figures from the “Core” district’s disciplinary record seem to reinforce the dynamic where certain identities act as “protective” factors in the context of school discipline, while other identities increase the chances, or “risk,” of being disciplined in general as well as being disciplined for harassment. The DS Project found that Gifted

Placement significantly reduced the chances of an office referral, they are 1/3rd as likely to receive office referrals; and no student in Gifted Education has a record of a harassment offense for the 2005-2006 year.

However, the situation is more complex for the other subpopulation (Asian American students) without harassment records. In a logistic regression controlling for variables in the standard based assessment dataset, the DS Project found that Asian American students are 2.6 times more likely than white students to have office referrals in the multivariate analyses with the total 9th grade student population (N=6,846) and the *total* disciplined student population (N=1,095) from the “Core” district. In the disciplined student population selected for this study (N=777), Asian American students appear to be slightly less likely to have disciplinary records in general. This difference is intriguing and requires more exploration. Investigating the population of disciplined students who do not have standard based assessment records (N=318) could be revealing here.

It is important to note that these data reflect the official school records of sexual harassment and bullying in schools as they represent the cases deemed worthy of reporting from the standpoint of the targets, and those cases that administrators made the effort to record. As such, they only account for a fraction of the cases and thus do not capture the “dark figure,” or unreported, never recorded cases.

Table 4.3 provides a breakdown of the five harassment offense variables combined for analysis: sexual harassment, displaying obscene materials, bullying a staff member, bullying a fellow student, and using profane/abusive language. Table 4.3

includes their frequency in the selected dataset of disciplined students (N=777), the percentage of each individual harassment offense as a proportion of the disciplined student population (N=777), as well as the percentage of each as a proportion of the total 9th grade student population (N=6,846).

Table 4.3 Frequencies and Percentages of the Five Harassment Variables for the “Core” District’s 2005-2006 School Year.

Harassment Variables	Frequency of Students with Harassment Offense	Percentage of Disciplined Population N=777	Percentage of Total “Core” District 9th Grade Student Population N=6,846
Sexual Harassment	24	3.09%	0.35%
Obscene Materials	7	0.90%	0.10%
Bullying Student	17	2.19%	0.25%
Bullying Staff Once	9	1.16%	0.13%
Profane/Abusive Language	98	12.61%	1.43%
Total Number of Offenses	155	19.95%	2.26%
Students with At least 1 Harassment Offense	97	12.48%	1.42%
Students with Two or More Harassment Offenses	33	4.24%	0.48%
Total Student Count with At Least One Form of Harassment in 2005-2006 Discipline Record	130	16.7%	1.90%

Profane/abusive language has the highest frequency and percentages, followed by sexual harassment, and bullying another student. There are 155 harassment offenses spread among 130 student’s records. 97 of those 130 students only have one form of harassment in their disciplinary record; 33 students share the remaining 58 harassment offenses. Further analysis is needed to investigate the disciplinary records for these 33 students to assess what combinations of harassment records they hold. It would be

interesting to see whether these students tend to be disciplined for the same offense, or for different offenses.

For the selected population of disciplined students (N=777), the number of harassment offenses (155) only amounts to 2.26% of the total 9th grade student population. The total count of students with harassment records (130) signifies only 1.90% of the total 9th grade student population for the “Core” district’s 2005-2006 school year. These figures do not seem nearly representative of the day-to-day harassment, sexual harassment, and bullying performed and experienced by boys and girls.

To assess the overall amount of harassment for the “Core” district, the figures from the population of 777 students who have all social and educational records are combined with those from the population of 318 who could not be merged with the standard based assessment data. This measures the “Core” district’s entire percentage of harassment offenders out of the total student population of 6, 846. It also allows for a comparison of this total percentage of harassment offenders from the “Core” district with the percentages of offenders reported in the American Association of University Women 2001 publication.

Table 4.4 shows the breakdown of populations and percentages, including the “Core” district’s total disciplined student population of 1,095. There is a vast discrepancy between the “Core” district’s overall disciplinary records of harassment and the figures reported by the American Association of University Women 2001 study. Even when all possible forms of sexual harassment and bullying are included and

combined (bullying staff, bullying student, abusive language, obscene materials, and sexual harassment) the divergence is extreme.

The percentage of offenders recorded in the “Core” district’s disciplinary record pales in comparison with the AAUW student surveyed self-reports of offending, at 54% for girls and boys. Even if this 54% were broken into the six secondary school grades (7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th), there would be approximately 9% of students offending for any one grade. With 1.90% and 2.79% for the “Core” district’s 2005-2006 9th grade population, the disciplinary record has an inadequate account of sexual harassment and bullying offenses and indicates a lack of reporting.

Table 4.4 “Core” District Students with Harassment Records as a Percentage of the Disciplined Student Population and the Total 9th Grade Population, 2005-2006

	Student Population with Disciplinary Record for 2005-2006	Students Harassment Record (At least 1 of 5 offenses)	Students with Harassment Record as a Percentage of the Discipline Cases (N=1,095)	Students with Harassment Record as a Percentage of Total Student Population (N=6,846)
2005-2006 “Core” District Disciplinary Offense Cases Overall	1,095	191	17.44% (191/1095)	2.79% (191/6846)
Discipline Cases Chosen for Multivariate Analyses	777	130	16.73% (130/777)	1.90% (130/6846)

The figures from the “Core” district’s disciplinary record reveal a troublesome underrepresentation of the incidences of sexual harassment and bullying. It is important to examine what happens on an informal level in response to and deterrence of sexual

harassment and bullying. The “Core” district’s disciplinary record is the official reported and recorded offenses. This is only a fraction of what is going on. Students sexually harass/bully and experience disrespectful and abusive behavior; and teachers and staff witness, perform, and experiences dehumanizing mistreatment themselves. Further investigation is needed to explore the unreported, unrecorded incidents of sexual harassment and bullying, particularly the experiences of the victims.

CHAPTER 5: THE “METRO” DISTRICT

The Student Code of Conduct Handbook – The “Metro” District

The student code of conduct handbook contains a breakdown of disciplinary offenses and consequences. This discipline reference matrix is formatted according to a severity index with three levels of offenses. The hierarchy of levels range from least severe/serious, Level I, to most severe/serious, Level III, with a number of offenses outlined in each.

Sexual harassment and bullying are both located in the most severe and serious level, Level III. The definition of “Harassment/Bullying” is included in the discipline reference matrix alongside the offense. “Sexual Harassment/Misconduct” is listed in the discipline reference matrix with a reference to a specific definition in a separate location on the following page.

Table 5.1 provides a breakdown of the definitions and consequences for harassment/bullying and sexual harassment for the “Metro” district. The “Metro” district’s inclusion of sexual harassment and of racial harassment/bullying is significant. The integration of ‘racial harassment/bullying’ indicates an awareness of diverse forms of harassment. The “Metro” district’s acknowledgement of ‘racialized harassment’ is impressive and important. Interestingly, though, “racial harassment” is separate from “sexual harassment” in the “Metro” district’s disciplinary reference matrix. What remains is the connection between the two: the recognition that racial harassment is usually gendered and that sexual harassment is often infused with racialization.

Table 5.1 “Metro” District Definitions of and Consequences for Harassment/Bullying and Sexual Harassment

Offense	“Metro” District Definition	Consequences for First Offense	Consequences for Second Offense
Harassment/Bullying	<i>Physical, racial, verbal intimidation</i>	Three days out-of-school suspension, two days in-school suspension, and attending harassment seminar	Ten days out-of-school suspension, pending a hearing
Sexual Harassment	<i>Sexual harassment regarding student-to-student, adult-to-student and student-to-adult conduct means unwelcome or unwanted conduct of a sexual nature (verbal, nonverbal, or physical). Any sexual harassment should be reported to a staff member immediately</i>	Five days out-of-school suspension, pending an investigation, and a behavior contract	Ten days out-of-school suspension, pending a hearing

Comparison of the “Core” District Student Behavior Handbook and the “Metro”

District Student Code of Conduct

The Student Behavior Handbook and Code of Conduct Handbook provide the most substantial material for exploring the school systems. They present the dominant school discourses on sexual harassment and bullying. The “Core” district’s handbook and the “Metro” district’s handbook consist of written passages, a breakdown of disciplinary offenses and consequences, and a glossary of terms. While the student behavior handbook for the “Core” district and the student behavior handbook for the “Metro” district vary considerably, they do have these basic structural commonalities.

The student behavior handbook for the “Core” district and the code of conduct for the “Metro” district offer substantial material for the comparison of their approach to sexual harassment and bullying. It is not possible to precisely assess which district takes sexual harassment and bullying *more* seriously than the other, as one district presents unique and variable content from the other. Nonetheless, the “Metro” district appears to have a more integrated and practical approach to sexual harassment and bullying, while the “Core” district appears to have a more legalistic yet fragmented approach to sexual harassment and bullying. Both districts treat sexual harassment as serious, just in very different ways.

For the “Core” district, the discipline offense and consequence reference matrix is not leveled according to the severity of the offense, whereas the “Metro” district has a three-tiered discipline offense and consequence matrix clearly delineating which offenses are most serious. The “Core” district’s student behavior handbook lists disciplinary infractions alphabetically in the discipline matrix and researchers in the DS Project had to create their own severity index out of this list. On the other hand, the student code of conduct for the “Metro” district has a discipline matrix that is already leveled and a severity index is inherent in the discipline matrix structure.

The “Core” district, however, does include an extensive section on Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 [See Appendix D p. 83] and the illegality of sexual harassment and sexual misconduct. The legal protocol and procedure regarding sexual harassment and misconduct are clearly explicated in this section, highlighting the “Core” district’s emphasis on the legality of the issue. Moreover, the “Core” district’s glossary

definition of sexual harassment acknowledges sexual assault as a possible offense, and it provides a further reference to a special brochure on Title IX, Students' Rights.

The "Metro" district includes 'racial harassment/bullying' as a Level III disciplinary offense that warrants serious consequences. This is significant both in regards to the inclusion of 'racial harassment/bullying' as an infraction in general and in comparison with the "Core" district that neglects to acknowledge racialized harassment of any kind. Interestingly, though, the "Core" district does include 'disability harassment' in the glossary list, while the "Metro" district neglects to explicitly articulate this type of harassment offense.

The "Metro" district does not mention Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; much less have a multiple page section on the federal law. It does, however, provide a brief, yet workable definition of sexual harassment, articulating that it can occur in student-to-student, student-to-adult, and adult-to-student situations. The "Metro" district student code of conduct does not explicitly list sexual assault as part of the definition, while the "Core" district student behavior handbook lists sexual assault first in its definition sexual harassment.

In regards to the consequences of sexual harassment and bullying, it appears that the "Metro" district takes this disciplinary infraction more seriously than the "Core" district. The "Core" district only requires contact with staff and administrators for the first offense and reserves long-term suspension for the second offense. The "Metro" district requires 3-5 days out-of-school suspension and a harassment seminar or behavior

contract on the first offense, and 10 days out-of-school suspension, pending a hearing, for the second offense.

Overall, both the “Core” district and the “Metro” district demonstrate that they take sexual harassment and bullying as serious matter, at least on paper. They are officially and theoretically disciplinary infractions that are against the rules. Emphasizing the illegality of sexual harassment (“Core” district) and establishing strict disciplinary consequences (“Metro” district) are important first steps in treating sexual harassment and bullying as the critical issues.

Observations of Place and Space At the “Metro” District Field Site School

The DS Project research team was able to make informal observations of student and staff behavior and interactions in the courtyard and the hallways, and during our focus groups, which took place within a classroom. Researchers noticed the subtle and obvious variances among the three major locations: courtyard, hallways, and classrooms. These observations were reinforced with discussion from the staff study group and student focus groups.

The classroom is a sphere with a seemingly stricter enforcement of policy and discipline. Dress code checks happen periodically. Students have extensive guidelines for their shirts, pants, shorts, skirts, dresses, accessories, outerwear, and footwear. They are specifically prohibited from wearing any items or accessories that advertise, display, or promote any drug (including tobacco and alcohol), sexual innuendo, violence, weaponry, profanity, hatred, or bigotry toward any other group.

During inspections, school security staff will enter the classroom and assess students for violations; they then take those who are not following the rules to the In-School Suspension room where the students will wait until a parent, sibling, or friend can bring them the appropriate attire. Due to this, students regularly conform to the specificity of the dress code during class and ease up during the passing periods and lunch. Here they are often among a crowd of other students, traversing the halls, eating in the cafeteria, and hanging out in the courtyard. The security personnel are often dealing with other, more serious issues, such as fights.

There were posted signs indicating the school's support for students and teachers to report sexual harassment and bullying. The DS Project team observed two signs encouraging staff and students to "Report Incidents of Sexual Harassment and Bullying Immediately" to a male vice principal and a female guidance counselor. One was in the "Metro" district school's front office and the other was in the Language Arts building.

The sign in the front office, a mere 8½ by 11 inch sheet of copy paper, was located along a hallway in the front administrative office where it was hidden among large pieces of artwork. It was not easily noticed from the front desk, the place students most frequent. The sign was directly across from the entrance to the front office restrooms, a facility that the students are not allowed to use. Considering the extent of material posted on these hallway walls, the placement of the sign is exceptionally inconspicuous and subtle.

The other posting of this 8½ by 11 inch sign for sexual harassment and bullying was located above the water fountains on the second floor of the Language Arts building.

This copy listed three individuals the students could contact in the case of an offense. It too seemed more out of the way than it ought to be, located unassumingly on the second floor of the Humanities building, even if it is in the communal space of the water fountains. As of yet, the DS Project team has only observed those two signs. Based on comments from administrators, teachers, staff, and students, the “Metro” district may be well served to post more of signs supporting reports of sexual harassment and bullying.

Another key observation made by the DS Project team was the restriction of bathroom use. The facilities in each building are locked and students must obtain a key from a staff member in the building to enter those bathrooms. There is only one unlocked bathroom near the cafeteria that students can use anytime.

Administrator, Teacher, Staff, and Student Comments on Sexual Harassment

The topic of sexual harassment arose during the DS Project team’s study group and focus groups at the “Metro” district field site school. Commentary appears during the initial staff study group, the Vice Principal focus group, and the female student focus groups. They were prompted from other established questions on discipline problems, and participants were then probed to expound on the issue. Some questions that brought the issue of sexual harassment to light included: Do you feel safe at this school? Have you been in trouble, and for what behaviors? Are there teachers who “set you off” or who disrespect the students? Are students treated differently for the same behavior?

Administrators' Points of View

There was a substantial discussion of harassment and discrimination during the assistant principal focus group from the “Metro” district. All of the assistant principal participants are in charge of discipline. Comments revealed examples of what sexual harassment could be as well as the administrator’s actual experiences disciplining sexual harassment. In this administrator focus group, it was the male assistant principals who shared the most.

Male Assistant Principal A: I think it depends on the level and the frequency of it. If it’s happened, a lot of times at the low end level, it may be, “well I didn’t know it was an unwelcomed advance,” if it’s kind of obvious, you know, “well now you know, so you’ve got to make sure any, any future transgressions is going to be considered sexual harassment.” We’ve had that conversation with a kid. And it could be a girl, okay. But then you pursue it and you treat it as what it is.

Male Assistant Principal B: I just recall dealing with a male student drawing pictures of different things and passing them off to girls. And he thought it was really cool and that it was not offensive. But the person receiving it was offended and so... in explaining it to him, that’s where the sexual harassment occurs. “You, you had it, that was your business. As soon as you passed it off, and she was offended, that was a sexual harassment.

Researcher: And the consequences for that kid...?

Male Assistant Principal B: First time we dealt with it, we just had that conversation with him, contacted his parents. And, just warned him that if it does happen again, you know, it is going to be a suspend-able offense... He never did it again.

Researcher: So part of it is educating, because many of them don’t know that is it sexual harassment...

Male Assistant Principal A: That’s right. And there have been a couple of boys that I have had in my office where they were crying because they didn’t realize what they had done and they were just so sorry about it and they couldn’t apologies enough to the young lady they had done this to.

In addition to issues of boy-to-girl sexual harassment, the “Metro” district administrators also discussed an incident where a male student was harassed.

Male Assistant Principal B: We had a boy make the girl's dance team for the first time this past year. And when that was announced at the end of last year, that created a lot of problems because the girls who had been on the team for years and years now had a boy in there who, I don't know...

Researcher: It was new

Male Assistant Principal B: It was new for them and they were really, really offended that he was part of the team. And so they really harassed him.

Male Assistant Principal A: He didn't really get too much from the guys, did he?

Male Assistant Principal B: Not the guys, from the girls. And not the girls on the team, the girls who were graduating were harassing him.

Researcher: Wow. And how did you handle that?

Male Assistant Principal B: We had to do a lot of mediation; contact a lot of parents let them know what was going on. There was texting going on, some word going on. The girls who were seniors were already dismissed because they were seniors, but they were coming back on campus to harass him. And so we had to immediately let them know they cannot return to campus or they are not going to participate in the graduation ceremony.

And so they complied with that request...

The incident depicted in the dialogue among the assistant principal exposes numerous assumptions surrounding sexual harassment recipients and offenders. It reveals that boys are the potential victims of sexual or gender harassment, as Stein (1998), Kimmel (2000), and others discuss. The situation described above unveils that girls can be sexual harassment offenders. This pattern is not well established in the literature on sexual harassment in schools. Girls are also socialized into the same gendered order as their male counterparts and they may sexually harass boys and other girls who fall outside of traditional gender boundaries.

Teacher and Staff Perspectives

Teachers and staff in the initial study group had a much more brief discussion on sexual harassment. Like the assistant principal focus group, it was the male participant in the study group, the security personnel, who talked about the issue.

Researcher: So is there a lot of sexual harassment or anything like that with the girls. I'm assuming, like, boys grabbing girls.

Female Teacher Participant [to male security personnel]: Well, you've probably seen this the most....

Male Security Personnel Participant: I think the most we've had in that is our Special Ed population. And I think they just don't, like you were talking about [referring to an earlier discussion on social boundaries], know how to appropriately interact with people. They think it's okay...

Female Teacher Participant: Yeah, they don't see...

Male Security Personnel Participant: ...to hug longer than they're supposed to.

After this momentary interchange, the conversation moved on to the topic of PDA, public displays of affection, and consensual sexual contact between students. This discussion of PDA did not include episodes of sexual harassment. The brief commentary here reveals very specific assumptions regarding which students could be engaging in sexual harassment.

Robinson (2006) exposes how stereotypes play into assumptions about who the perpetrators are, a type of profiling that reinforces a myopic and projectionist view of sexual harassment and those who perform it. It detracts from critical awareness that acknowledges the reality that sexual harassment perpetrators can be male or female and can come from any group. Stereotypes are powerfully influential in both the practice of sexual harassment as well as in how it is interpreted and understood by the perpetrator, the recipient, and observers (Robinson, 2006).

Many school personnel fail to recognize commonplace incidents of sexual harassment and consequently neglect intervention. What complicates the situation even more is that students themselves may not even label experiences of sexual harassment as such, much less report offenses to the school (Renzetti and Curran, 2003).

Students Experiences with Other Students

In the first female student focus group, the three participants briefly discussed their perspectives and experiences.

Researcher: Have you ever seen, like, guys touching girls or acting in a way that could be construed as, you know, sexual harassment, like grabbing, or

Latina Female Student Participant: Well, I...

White Female Student Participant: Never. I never experience that.

Latina Female Student: Guys, like, always try to grab me, but I always just slap them [laughs] so...

Researcher: Did you tell a teacher about that?

White Female Student: Is it like real, or is it just, like, messing around?

Latina Female Student: It's like messing around, I guess. They always try to grab me and stuff, and I'm just like, please, like get off me.

Researcher: And you wouldn't tell anybody about it?

Both: No.

White Female Student: I've got friends who are just joking around, we will grab each other's butts and stuff like that, but we're just joking around and we know it.

In the female focus group, the interchange between two of the students is quite indicative of the power of peer groups. One female student subject, a Latina, shares that she experiences sexual harassment all the time while not reporting it to the proper authorities. The second student subject, a White female, quickly retorts with the surmising question, "was it real or were they just messing around?" This dynamic between these two female students reveal an incident in which a white woman colludes

with and perpetuates the sexual harassment of a woman of color (Buchanan and Ormerod, 2002).

Lopez and Lechuga (2007) find that Latina students often feel disrespected based on their culture, language, and heritage. The authors heard stories from Latina student participants regarding their experiences with a male teacher who displayed a photo of a woman's behind on his computer. Yet when the researchers queried the school's administrator about that teacher, he dismissed the incident as "poor judgment" and did not recognize the opportunity for larger school-level discussions on the multiple oppressions of racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, and classism. This indifferent response reveals how administrators may fail to take the harassment claims of its Latina students seriously (105-106). In the case of the "Metro" district female student focus group, it is the Latina student's female peers who fail to take her experiences seriously.

In the "Metro" district female student focus group, it seems the white female student immediately reinforces the fact that friends will often mess around and it's all fun and games. For the Latina student subject, the harassment may not have truly been not just fooling around. However, the white female student subject's response to her reporting her experiences, even in this informal setting, quickly invalidated the severity and realness of the Latina female student subject's experiences. It also turns a serious discussion into a playful one, leading the Latina student to question what she has experienced as well as her language for describing it. If she cannot even find support from her friends, how will she feel empowered to report these violations to school officials?

Hand and Sanchez (2000) reveal that sexual harassment in secondary schools is normalized as regular adolescent sexual banter, and the extent of the issue, as well as its detrimental effects, are denied. When the incident occurred between peers, it is often viewed as less serious than if the incident occurred between individuals who occupy differential power positions (Hand and Sanchez, 2000, 742).

Stein (1998) discusses how the enactment of sexual harassment is often a public performance and it is usually not a condemned behavior. As such, sexual harassment easily becomes a social norm. Stein lists numerous locations in which students have experienced sexual harassment, including places like the hallway, the classroom, the schoolyard, the locker room and the restroom (1998, 234). These diverse settings and situations reveal how sexual harassment is not always a boy-to-girl interaction but can be enacted by members of the same sex, mixed-sex groups, and girl-to-boy interactions.

Stein describes various instances in which students experienced sexual harassment and felt that it was a serious issue, yet had trouble getting help from teachers and staff. Adults would watch and offer little support or meaningful intervention, indicating critical actions of neglect on the part of the teachers, principals, and even superintendents. Students take notice when most teachers and staff sit back and do nothing in the face of sexual harassment. They learn from these examples, thus reinforcing the school as a training ground for the perpetuation of gendered violence. (1998, p. 236-243).

The students from the “Metro” district female student focus group chose not to report their experiences. Perhaps they truly did not feel harassed. Or perhaps they did

not receive the support from their peers in seeing their experience as a serious violation. Their dialogue illuminates the various ways in which students who have been recipients of sexual harassment, and students in general, conceptualize sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is contextualized by the status of the perpetrator, i.e. whether they can be considered a friend, and the behavior is subsequently categorized as non-serious and non-problematic. And, as in the case of the Latina student, even if the behavior is seen as problematic, the reporting rate for these offenses does not reflect this.

Miller (2008) discusses the various issues that keep recipients of sexual harassment from reporting the incident to school authorities. Victims may not even feel that they are able to tell their friends and peers that they felt sexually harassed, especially if the harasser is within their peer group. For the girls in Miller's study, there is severe stigmatization associated with such unwanted sexual contact and an extensive fear of violent retribution for reporting sexual harassment. Boy's behaviors may be acknowledged as dangerous for girls, but it is still the girls who are in focus, leaving the boys unseen and unaccountable (2008).

Student Experiences with Teachers as Disciplinarians

The theme of "just joking around because we are friends" arises again in a discussion on harassment during the female student interview from the "Metro" district.

African American Female Student Participant: I break harassment a lot. Sill...

Researcher: How so?

Student: Me and my friends just joke around and when we do we do it loudly. And so we talk about, like, rape and stupid stuff. And we got as

sexual harassment ... thing going on. And we're just like, "really? It's toward each other so, why do you feel harassed by us this?"

Researcher: So it wasn't you or your friend who that complained, it was someone who had overheard the conversation?

Student: Yeah. It was the teacher who was, I guess, watching us, somewhere. We just mess around a lot. Like we'll touch each other and like mess with each other, and eventually someone will yell out rape or something stupid, and I guess this teacher found it really offensive. And we tried to explain to her that we were just joking 'cause we're friends and that's what we do. And she was like, 'This is sexual harassment,' and 'blah, blah, blah,' and we're just like, 'Wow!'

Researcher: And did the teacher try to talk to you as to why they were bothered by that? Or was it just sort of "This is this," end of story?

Student: Yeah. That was basically it. She was like, "Well, I feel harassed by this," and we're just like, "Well, we didn't know that and we didn't know that you were watching..." That's how it is at this school, though. If you're an authority figure, at least... they talk down to us a lot. Like if you get in trouble ... you'll explain your side of the story and they'll just be like, "it's happening anyway."

Like the female student participants in the focus group, this participant sees her interactions with friends as "playing around." These attitudes reinforce Robinson's (2006) and Miller's (2008) findings that students see harassment as "no big deal." What is different here is that, while Robinson and Miller found that the males in their studies saw sexual harassment as "playing around" more than the female students in their respective studies, the female student participants from the "Metro" district are the ones who uphold sexual harassment as normal adolescent behavior.

The female student participant's initial terminology, breaking "harassment," is especially interesting in relation to diverse conceptualizations of harassment and bullying as well as in relation to the "Core" district's generalized presentation of "Harassment" in its disciplinary offense and consequence matrix. Her mention that she "still" breaks

harassment alludes to her involvement in an incident where she was disciplined for harassment, and yet she was not deterred from this misbehavior.

In essence, she feels students are told “no” and “don’t do it” without any additional information for understanding or guidelines for more respectful behavior. In fact, and unfortunately, a common feeling expressed throughout the interview was that teachers do not respect the students. Whether or not teachers feel they engage in disrespectful behavior towards students, the fact that students perceive this type of approach and interaction is significant, especially in regard to the potential impact a teacher can have for a student’s transformational education.

From an intersectional perspective, the fact that this African American female student was disciplined, even though she tried to explain herself, suggests that the teacher viewed this student as needing to be disciplined when she may have been more lenient with a white female student. Morris (2005) finds that adults in an urban school tended to view the behaviors of African American girls as not “lady-like” and would discipline these girls according to what was considered more gender appropriate (25). The experience of the African American female student participant reflects this dynamic. Furthermore, the teacher’s reaction to this student’s behavior is inconsistent with the typical responses shared by the “Metro” district assistant principals where they would talk with students but not discipline them formally.

In the assistant principal focus group, a number of participants discussed instances of sexual harassment where the student offender did not realize they were engaging in sexual harassment. They required a discussion where the administrator

explained to the student how and why their behavior was inappropriate. In the interview with the female student participant, the discussion she received was apparently less successful at communicating the how and the why. Despite being disciplined and regardless of what the teacher actually said, the female student participant admits to “still” breaking harassment.

The situation between the female student participant and the teacher who disciplined her for sexual harassment highlights the limits of traditional discipline. Stein (1998) discusses this issue, where conventional disciplinary measures fail to sufficiently intervene and prevent sexual harassment. Schools need to provide meaningful education to their students and staff on what constitutes sexual harassment, why it is unacceptable, how to prevent it, and how to intervene.

Student Experiences with Teachers as Harassers

During that same focus interview, the female student participant exposed a serious incident wherein a male teacher repeatedly harassed his female students.

Student: Well, there was this one teacher, and I think he got suspended.... He'd make the female students in his class feel so uncomfortable. Like I was in his class, and he'd always make all the girls like sit in the first three rows that were closest to the boards. And He'd wear his shirt like buttoned down so we could see his chest and it was horrible. And he would never help the boys... And, ... if he did help the guys, he would kind of lean, you know, by the desk. And if he was helping a girl, he would go behind her and like lean over her. I stopped going to that class.

Researcher: Wow! Sure, because of that environment.

Student: Yeah, [it was] not comfortable. And if you told him, like, “I don't feel comfortable with this” he'd be like, “oh,” and just shift

Researcher: He would never acknowledge it really or apologize or...

Student: No...

Researcher: Wow... you said that you think he was suspended. Do you recall, if somebody brought forward an incident, or?

Student: Yeah. This girl actually... I think he brushed her or so he was saying that that he “brushed” her chest on accident. And she reported it and was like “bushed” nothing. She was like, “he wasn’t even by me until I raised my hand for one question, about something that he could have answered from the board.” And I think he got suspended or his license got taken away...

Fineran and Bennett (1999) assert that there are complex factors related to the enactment of sexual harassment as well as the experience of sexual harassment. Critical factors include gender, power, and relationships. The authors explore how the relationship between the target and the harasser affects how threatened the target feels, and they connect this with high levels of teen peer sexual harassment. When harassment occurs between peers, the perception of a threat is often lower than it would be if the harasser were an authority figure. Sexual harassment is utilized to enact dominance and control. It can feel even more acute when the harasser already has dominance and control over the target prior to any inappropriate behavior (1999, 628-629).

The severe and pervasive sexual harassment with the male teacher that the female student participant described is alarming. It reveals multiple forms of sexual harassment: derogatory, physical, and an overall hostile environment. It highlights how such a hostile environment leads students to avoid those individuals and, in this case, miss classes. It is important that a student came forward and that the situation was remedied, either by suspension or revoking his license. Had this student participant revealed in the interview that she, or her peers, were experiencing harassment currently, my role as a feminist researcher and a social advocate would be to report the incident(s) to the “Metro” district

authorities. Further investigation of this incident is required; assistant principals of the “Metro” district need to be queried about their knowledge of and response to the behaviors of this teacher.

Commentary from the “Metro” district study group and focus groups expose the confusion that surrounds this issue: students deny the seriousness of peer sexual harassment; staff rely on stereotypes regarding who may offend; and staff may even engage in unacknowledged perpetration of harassment. There are multiple and various ideas and dynamics at play here that are competing, contradictory, and difficult to unpack and deconstruct.

CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND CONCLUSION

In the context of sexual harassment and bullying in secondary schools, teacher-student relationships affect whether sexual harassment and bullying are even recognized as offenses when they occur as well as what the consequences will be if they are actually seen. Peer groups are significantly influential in the perceptions of, experiences with, and the choice to report sexual harassment and bullying. Even if someone feels violated from the harassment by another, their friends may dismiss their true feelings, especially if the offender is another friend.

The extremely low statistical figures from the “Core” district’s 2005-2006 9th grade disciplinary record reveal that the actual application of the official rules may be less than adequate. This alludes to the possibility that incidents of sexual harassment and bullying are being frequently overlooked. At the very least, these incidents are not being brought to the attention of the school’s formal authorities and the offenders are not being officially disciplined for harassment. This begs the question: What *informal* ways do teachers and staff/teachers utilize to deal with sexual harassment and bullying?

The “Metro” district focus groups offer examples of sexual harassment in the schools as well as ways in which the assistant principals discipline and intervene. A number of participants shared instances wherein they had to educate the offending students as to ‘how and why their behavior was sexual harassment.’ This kind of instruction is vital, especially in comparison with the perspective of the female student participant who was disciplined for sexual harassment, but still did not see the issue as serious or troublesome.

Stein (1998) emphasizes that dealing with sexual harassment only through the traditional disciplinary practices has little effect on the frequency of gendered violence. Education and discussion is essential: sexual harassment could open the conversation to the larger dynamics of gender violence. Secondary schools need a sexual harassment curriculum for their students and staff, not just policies and literature (1998).

Comments from staff in the study group mention that sexual harassment only occurs with the Special Education population. This exposes a strong prejudice that may in fact blind these staff to seeing sexual harassment happening within the general student population. It is also particularly intriguing to assess this commentary from the “Metro” district in reference to the “Core” district’s inclusion of disability harassment in the student behavior handbook glossary. The stereotyped-based commentary from the “Metro” district staff study group is discriminatory and could arguably be considered disability harassment.

The student interactions described in this study reveal various perspectives on and experiences with sexual harassment. They highlight a cavalier attitude associated with the occurrence of sexual harassment among peers. Students insist that the harassment is “just fooling around” and it is among friends. This perspective accepts such behavior as innocuous and permits it to continue. It is also invoked to deny the experiences of others. Students do not hesitate to excuse the potentially harassing behavior they experience. And they are just as quick to ask their peers to dismiss their experiences as well.

Beyond the peer-level negotiations and interactions, schoolteachers and staff frequently invoke the normalized routine of non-intervention. The limits of the school’s

responsiveness to issues of sexual harassment are exposed. Overall, these students do not feel empowered, nor do they feel supported to stand up against sexual harassment and gendered violence. Negative gender stereotypes encourage the mistreatment of young women and young men. They fuel male sexual entitlement and domination, while reinforcing hegemonic masculinity and justifying sexual harassment (Miller, 2008).

It is essential to deconstruct and move past the common myths, stereotypes, and misconceptions surrounding sexual harassment and bullying. Among these are assumptions regarding the age of the perpetrator, wherein either only young boys sexually harass or only older boys sexually harass; assumptions that sexual harassment occurs only with adults and only in the workplace setting; seeing sexual harassment as only a girl's issue; treating non-physical sexual harassment as trivial and less worthy of attention; and seeing female-to-male sexual harassment as non-problematic unless it threatens masculinity (Robinson, 2006).

It is crucial to distinguish the multifarious ways in which individuals utilize sexual harassment as an effective means to reinforce and maintain oppressive power relations across gender, 'race', ethnicity, class, sexuality, and so forth. These dimensions are powerful social institutions that influence everyday interactions. They inform assumptions about sexual harassment and they shape diverse forms of harassment and bullying (Robinson, 2006).

Sexual harassment is a serious issue for both girls and boys. It is imperative to destabilize the norms that support sexual harassment and hegemonic masculinity. This would allow for changes in masculine identities as well as a space in which different and

more equitable power relationships between boys and girls can emerge and develop.

This shift would then encourage gendered performances that are not constituted through sexually harassing behaviors (Robinson, 2006).

The ramifications of insufficient education and non-intervention regarding sexual harassment and bullying in secondary schools extend outside of the school context and influence our futures (Stein, 1999). If we fail to prevent, intervene in and educate on this unacceptable and damaging behavior during periods of educational formation, we cannot be surprised with repeated and continued harassment, abuses, assault, and violence. If we fail to ensure appropriate boundaries and demand respective behavior now, we can only expect it to persist.

Policy Implications

Specific policy suggestions for “Core” district include clarifying inconsistencies in the handbook and providing more practical guidelines for sexual harassment and disability harassment as well as incorporating racial harassment, sexuality harassment, and other forms of harassment as disciplinary offenses in a meaningful way. The findings from this research should encourage the “Metro” district to develop a sexual harassment curriculum for students and training for staff to increase awareness, understanding, and communication among various members of the school community.

The curriculum on sexual harassment should not be relegated to a mere policy statement or a handful of training workshops..It should become an integral part of skill development for secondary school students that is instituted over time and space for

meaningful understanding and transformational education. It should include links and parallels between bullying and sexual harassment. On-going conversations about bullying behavior can deepen understanding and encourage further discussions of sexual harassment, as well as other types of identity- and group-based harassment.

Good curriculum development requires a needs assessment of diverse school communities, their staff, and their students. Regional variations may exist in the frequency and types of sexual harassment and bullying. Sociopolitical discourses surrounding gendered violence, economic advantage or disadvantage, racial heterogeneity/homogeneity, and other contextual systems or structural and cultural dimensions also will affect the implementation of a sexual harassment curriculum. Even though sexual harassment and bullying are highly problematic nation-wide, as the American Association of University Women 1993 and 2001 reports show, these regional factors will be important to consider in prevention, intervention, and education.

Overall, sexual harassment education must integrate the multiple forms of identity- and group-based harassment and discrimination relevant to the global and local community. Curriculums should continue to develop, integrating new and various forms of harassment and discrimination when discovered among diverse communities.

Areas of Future Research

The focus of this research is a feminist, intersectional, and interdisciplinary examination of sexual harassment and bullying within the educational context as well as other social contexts, networks, and institutions. This work has significant possibility as

a springboard for a larger project that would explore how sexual harassment and bullying transcend the boundaries of our educational system and of our common assumptions and conceptualizations of sexual harassment.

There is substantially more to explore in both the “Metro” and the “Core” districts in regards to issues of sexual harassment and bullying in schools and beyond. More interviews with administrators, staff, teachers, and students from the “Metro” district would be a useful next step. The results from this project on sexual harassment and bullying in schools could be used as the basis for these discussions. It would be interesting to interview high school administrators and staff who are responsible for dealing with sexual harassment and bullying to examine what happens both formally and informally in response to these incidents.

It would also be particularly illuminating to interview students who have been sexually harassed and/or bullied. These interviews could explore: what kinds of harassment do they experience? What was their subsequent decision: to report or not to report? What role do their peers, male and female, play in their choice to report? If they did report, how was the harassment stopped and how was the offender disciplined? If issues of sexual harassment and bullying are not being dealt with officially and formally, what is happening instead?

Finally, a topic that needs further exploration is a study of female student sexual harassment offenders. While boys offend more frequently than girls (American Association of University Women, 2001), girls still offend. Examples from the “Metro” district attest to that fact. Interviews could be conducted with students who admit to

sexually harassing their peers or teachers. What are the ways in which female students engage in sexual harassment? Do they view sexual harassing behaviors as ‘just messing around with friends,’ like the comments from the “Metro” district students suggest? Do they harass other girls because of their sexuality? Do they harass boys because of their alternative gender performance?

Conclusion

This study of the “Core” and “Metro” school districts in a large New Mexico city reveals that sexual harassment is not taken seriously within secondary schools.

Furthermore, the current policies and procedures are inconsistent across the districts.

There is an extremely low rate of officials documenting sexual harassment and bullying offenses in the “Core” district. In the “Metro” district there is a disconnect between administrators and the rest of the school population. While assistant principals acknowledge and intervene when sexual harassment occurs, students and other school staff treat the same behavior as either something that only happens within one kind of student group or school population, or as something that is not significant because it is perceived as ‘just playing around among friends.’

The findings of this analysis expose how prevention, intervention, and particularly education are all imperative. Clear policies and literature are a start, but they are not nearly enough. Moreover, prevention, intervention, and education need to incorporate all forms of harassment. “Metro” district students exhibit cavalier attitudes toward and quickly dismiss experiences of sexual harassment. Assistant principals talk

about male students they have disciplined for sexual harassment who did not know their behavior was inappropriate; once they learned that they had offended or hurt other students, they were apologetic and did not repeat the behavior.

Diverse social identity variables influence incidents of sexual harassment and bullying in secondary schools. “Metro” district staff study group participants assume only Special Education students sexually harass. In the process of denouncing one form of harassment, they enact another form of discrimination and stereotyping. Racialization and ethnicity affect perceptions of what constitutes valid experiences of harassment. This is exhibited in the interaction between the white student and the Latina student in the “Metro” district female student focus group. They also affect teacher and staff perceptions of who needs to be disciplined for harassment, as the interview with the African American female student suggests.

It is vital for the entire school community to recognize and prevent harassment and bullying in all of their diverse, overt, and covert forms. Intersectional frameworks can help scholars and educators to think crucially about sexual harassment. It is hypocritical to denounce sexual harassment and then turn around and perform another kind of harassment. It is duplicitous to criticize sexual harassment and in the same instance engage in disability harassment, or harassment of any other sort. It is discriminatory to stereotype certain groups as offenders and target them as needing harsher discipline. It is inadequate to acknowledge sexual harassment between girls and boys, yet deny that it occurs among same sex peers. It is invalidating to tell another that the harassment they experienced was ‘just fooling around.’

The previous literature and the findings from this study reveal how sexual harassment is a structural problem and a school-wide issue. Secondary school students, staff, teachers, or administrators do not treat sexual harassment and bullying seriously enough. Dehumanization of any kind is abhorrent, whether a legal obligation exists or not. We must intervene in these damaging behaviors and patterns to protect each other in the present and prevent abuse in the future.

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APPENDIX A: Three Dimensions of Sexual Harassment

1. Gendered harassment refers to behaviors and comments that serve to insult and degrade women as a group without the goal of getting sexual cooperation. Gendered harassment can be divided into two sub-types: sexist hostility (misogynistic behaviors that degrade women without explicit sexual content) and sexual hostility (explicitly sexual comments, gestures, and jokes).
2. Unwanted sexual attention includes unwanted touching, stroking, or repeated requests for dates or sexual interactions.
3. Sexual coercion, which is similar to quid pro quo harassment, refers to unwanted sexual attention with direct or implied bribes or threats to one's work or job.

Source: Buchanan, N. and Ormerod, A. (2002). "Racialized Sexual Harassment in the Lives of African American Women," p. 108.

APPENDIX B: EXAMPLES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Made sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or looks.
Showed, gave, or left you sexual pictures, photographs, illustrations, messages, or notes.
Wrote sexual messages/graffiti about you on bathroom walls, in locker room, etc.
Spread sexual rumors about you.
Said you were gay or lesbian.
Spied on you as you dressed or showered at school.
Flashed or “moonied” you.
Touched, grabbed, or pinched you in a sexual way.
Intentionally brushed up against you in a sexual way.
Pulled at your clothing in a sexual way.
Pulled off or down you clothing.
Blocked your way or cornered you in a sexual way.
Forced you to kiss him/her.
Forced you to do something sexual other than kissing.

Source: American Association of University Women. (2001) “Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing, and Sexual Harassment in School,” p. 2.

APPENDIX C: PEER HARASSMENT SCENARIOS

Physical

1. Tara was standing outside the school. She was leaning against the building waiting for a bus. Tim walked up to her. Her put an arm on each side of her so she was trapped against the wall and asked her what her plans for the weekend were. (Implicit)
2. Dawn was standing at her locker getting her books. Damien brushed his hand across her chest and said, "You've been developing lately. We should go out sometime." (Explicit)

Verbal/Visual

1. Nancy and Nick are in the same science class. During class Nick has repeatedly asked Nancy for a date. Recently Nick has started calling Nancy's house to ask her out almost every day even though she did not give him her number or agree to date him. (Implicit)
2. Erica was standing in line at the pop machine. While she was waiting, Evan walked up and joined the line behind her. When Erica turned around, Evan looked her up and down, checking her out and whistled (Explicit)

Derogatory

1. Anne signed up to take an auto mechanics class in the fall. On her first day, she overheard Adam say to another guy in the class, "I don't know why Anne is taking this class. Everyone knows women can't be mechanics, most of them can't even change their own oil." (Implicit)
2. Some students were asked to compete in a statewide math competition. On the bus ride to the competition site, Mike turned to Melissa and said, "I don't know why they chose you. Women aren't nearly as good in math as men are. You should be in a beauty competition, not a math competition." (Explicit.)

Source: Terrance, C., Logan, A., & Peters, D. (2004). "Perceptions of Peer Sexual Harassment Among High School Students." p. 489.

APPENDIX D: “CORE” DISTRICT HANDBOOK SECTION ON TITLE IX

“**Gender discrimination** occurs if students are treated differently based on their gender, in academia or extracurricular activities.” It “may include: academic programs, discipline, classroom assignment, physical education, grading and/or athletics.” Sexual harassment “is a form of gender discrimination as defined in Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972.

“**Sexual harassment** is a violation of federal law [school district] Board policy, District Procedural Directives and school policy.” It “is illegal under state human rights statutes and may be considered a criminal offense under state and local assault and child abuse laws.” It “includes sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and written or verbal conduct of a sexual nature.” “If behavior toward another student makes him or her feel intimidated, uncomfortable or if the student feels threatened, it may be considered sexual harassment even if the harasser did not intend for his or her actions to be offensive.”

“**Sexual harassment is considered to have occurred when** submission to that conduct or communication is made a term or condition, either explicitly or implicitly, of the academic status of a student of obtaining an education. Submission to or rejection of that conduct or communication by an individual is used as a factor, which affects the academic standing or education of a student. That conduct or communication has the purpose or effect of substantially or unreasonably interfering with the education of a student, or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive educational environment.”

“**Sexual Misconduct** includes, but is not limited to: physical acts of aggression, force or threat against another student, threatening to force or coerce sexual acts, touching of private/intimate parts of the body, [and] coercing, forcing or attempting to coerce or force sexual intercourse.”

The “**internal complaint procedures**” state that “students and parents/legal guardians are encouraged to resolve concerns with the school site administrator. If the site administrator is unable to resolve your concern, you are encouraged to seek assistance at the next highest level: Report sex, gender, race, national origin or disability harassment and/or discrimination to the principal, either verbally or in writing.

Students who have knowledge of inappropriate behavior and fail to contact appropriate personnel will be subject to disciplinary action. Any knowledge of inappropriate behavior must be reported to the principal, assistant principal, teacher, or counselor. School personnel who receive reports of harassment and/or

discrimination shall immediately inform the principal. If the complaint is in regard to the principal, contact the appropriate Assistant Superintendent. Upon receipt of notification of harassment and/or discrimination, the principal or Assistant Superintendent must contact the Office of Equal Opportunity Services within 72 hours to report the incident. Any school personnel who fail to report incidents of harassment and/or discrimination will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action.”

In regards to “*who may file a complaint,*” the handbooks states that any “student, parent or legal guardian, on behalf of his or her student, who believes he or she has been discriminated against on the basis of sex, gender, race, national origin or disability.” The remainders of the subsections under “Title IX” provide detailed instructions on how and where to file a complaint.

Source: “Core” district student behavior handbook.

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