

GENDERED HARASSMENT IN HIGH SCHOOL: UNDERSTANDING TEACHERS' (NON) INTERVENTIONS

Elizabeth J. Meyer, Ph.D. (candidate),
McGill University, Montreal, QC
Elizabeth.meyer@mail.mcgill.ca

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the *American Educational Research Association*
Chicago, IL. April 9-13, 2007

The problem of sexual and homophobic harassment in schools has been the subject of scholarly investigation since the early 1990's when two concurrent bodies of research emerged that began examining the phenomena of sexual harassment (Corbett, Gentry, & Pearson, 1993; Larkin, 1994; Louis Harris & Associates, 1993; Roscoe, 1994; Stein, 1992) and homophobic harassment in schools (Friend, 1993; Louis Harris & Associates, 1993; O'Connor, 1995; Reis, 1995; Sears, 1991; The Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth, 1993). More recently, the gendered and sexualized aspects of some bullying behaviors has been explored in both quantitative and qualitative studies (California Safe Schools Coalition, 2004; Chambers, van Loon, & Tincknell, 2004; Duncan, 1999; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2005; Martino, 1995; Renold, 2000; Stein, 1995; Wilson, Griffin, & Wren, 2005). These studies have shown that sexual and homophobic harassment are accepted parts of school culture where faculty and staff rarely or never intervene to stop this harassment. Students report that teachers stand by and allow biased and hurtful behaviors to go unchallenged. Why teachers do not intervene consistently is the central question for the research presented in this paper. Six secondary school teachers in one urban public school district in Canada were interviewed to understand the phenomenon from their point of view.

This paper will start by defining gendered harassment and the behaviors that are examined together under this term. This is followed by a description of the methods used for data collection and analysis. The third section presents the findings of this study which indicate that there are *external* and *internal* influences that shape how teachers respond to gendered harassment in their schools. The *external* influences are divided into *institutional* (formal) and *social* (informal) factors which interact with teachers' *internal* influences to shape their experience of their school culture. The interaction of these three influences is explained with specific regards to how it shapes teachers' *responses* to student behaviors. After presenting the theoretical framework that summarizes the

barriers and *motivators* that shape how teachers respond to gendered harassment in school, I will conclude with a discussion of how the use of this model can assist educators working to create more inclusive school climates.

What is gendered harassment?

Gendered harassment is defined as any behavior, verbal, physical, or psychological, that polices the boundaries of traditional heterosexual gender norms and includes (hetero)sexual harassment, homophobic harassment, and harassment for gender non-conformity. Common examples of such behaviors include name-calling, jokes, gestures as well as physical and sexual assaults that are sexist, homophobic, or transphobic in nature (Meyer, 2006). The focus of this paper is on gendered harassment because research reports indicate that teachers are less likely to intervene in cases of sexual, homophobic and transphobic harassment than other forms of bullying and harassment in schools (California Safe Schools Coalition, 2004; Harris Interactive, 2001; Kosciw & Diaz, 2006).

These behaviors are all linked to the public performance and norm-setting of heterosexual gender roles. It is important to clarify that although these forms of harassment are linked, the categories of harassment in regards to sex, sexual orientation, and gender expression must be understood separately in order to help educators develop a deeper and more complex understanding of these practices in schools.

Queer theorists and other scholars of gender and sexuality have argued effectively that sex, gender, and sexual orientation are three distinct aspects of an individual's identity and experience (Bem, 1993; Butler, 1990; Connell, 1995; Jagose, 1996; Sedgwick, 1990/1993; Sullivan, 2003). I share the perspectives advanced by these theorists that it is the hegemony of heteronormative patriarchy that constructs dominant notions of sex, gender and sexual orientation in very oppressive ways. It is this social construction of opposing binaries (i.e. male/female or gay/straight) combined with the dominance of hegemonic (heterosexual) masculinity that is at the root of gendered harassment. The fact that many individuals conflate these ideas often results in forms of sexual harassment, homophobic harassment and harassment for gender non-conformity. To clarify what constitutes gendered harassment, definitions of each are provided below.

The legal definition for sexual harassment includes two different forms: *quid pro quo* and hostile environment sexual harassment (Lee, Croninger, Linn, & Chen, 1996, p. 384). This study focuses exclusively on forms of hostile environment sexual harassment as no incidents of *quid pro quo* were mentioned by participants. Such forms of sexual harassment appear to be much more prevalent, and have been defined as, “unwelcome behaviour that can include both physical or verbal conduct and that has a sexual or gender component” (Reed, 1996, p. 21). I also include non-verbal, or psychological, behaviors such as gestures, facial expressions and relational behaviors such as social exclusion in this definition.

Homophobic harassment is defined as unwelcome behaviours that can include physical, verbal, and non-verbal conduct that denigrate people who are, or are perceived to be, gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer. As most of these behaviors have a sexual or gender component, I view it as a subset of sexual harassment behaviors. Anti-gay epithets are commonly used as insults in schools. These may be used with no actual connection to one’s sexual orientation. As many scholars of masculinity have argued, these terms are often used because they are seen as the worst thing you can call a boy (Kehler, Davison, & Frank, 2005; Mac an Ghail, 1995; Martino, 1995; Robinson, 2005; Smith & Smith, 1998). It calls into question one’s masculinity by challenging one’s sexual orientation. Girls are also subject to this harassment if they are perceived to be too ‘masculine’ or do not show sexual interest in their male peers (California Safe Schools Coalition, 2004; Duncan, 2004; Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Louis Harris & Associates, 1993; Wood, 1987).

Many victims of homophobic harassment are also targeted due to their gender expression. This is the third form of harassment: harassment for gender non-conformity (also known as transphobic harassment). Individuals whose bodies and identities transgress dominant notions of masculinity and femininity disrupt the dominant paradigm of a gender binary. Recently a few studies on homophobia in schools have addressed this link (Bochenek & Brown, 2001; California Safe Schools Coalition, 2004; Mills, 2001; Poteat, Eads, & Kimmel, 2006; Wilson, Griffin, & Wren, 2005), but further investigation in this area is needed. In order to clarify how bullying, harassment and forms of gendered harassment are related, I designed the following diagram that shows how these concepts intersect and how they differ (Figure 1).

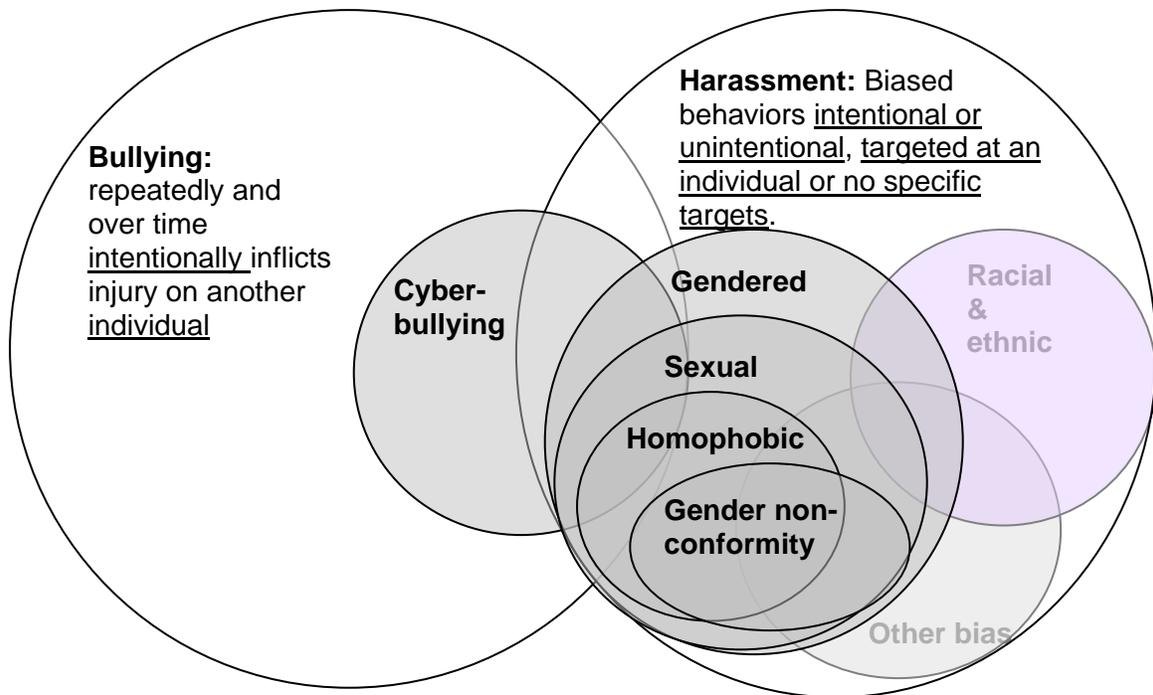


Figure 1 – Forms of bullying and harassment

The ways that teachers understand these forms of gendered harassment will impact how and when they choose to intervene in incidents that they witness at school. It is important to explore the teachers’ perspectives in order to understand the barriers and motivators that shape how and when they choose to intervene. By identifying the barriers from the teachers’ perspectives, we can design more effective intervention programs to support educators in their efforts to create safer spaces in schools. The next section presents the methods used to gather data for this study and the demographics of the participants.

Methods

This study is based on in-depth interviews with six Canadian teachers working in secondary schools in one urban public school board (Patton, 2002; Van Manen, 1997). Participants were recruited using both snowball and maximum variation sampling methods (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) to ensure a broad range of experiences and perspectives. I was able to gain a diverse group of teachers for this study with a relatively small group of participants. The demographics of the participants are presented in Table I.

Gender	3 men	3 women
Sexual Orientation	3 heterosexual	3 gay or bisexual
Ethnicity	3 Euro-Canadian	1 Indian 1 French-Canadian/Métis 1 Arab
Religion	3 No affiliation	1 Christian 1 Muslim 1 Bahai
Languages	1st (Native) 4 English 1 French 1 Hindi	2nd (Fluent) 3 French 2 English 1 Arabic
Citizenship	3 - 1 st generation Canadian	2 - 5 th + generation Canadian 1 - 2 nd generation Canadian
Average years Teaching	5.6	1-5 years:3 5-10 years: 2 10+ years: 1
Average Age	31	Min: 27 Max: 39

Table 1 - Participant Demographics

Through a series of three open-ended interviews (Seidman, 1998), teachers described how they understood and responded to incidences of gendered harassment in the context of their individual experiences in their current school culture. The first interview focused on the teacher’s career path, philosophy, and roles in the classroom then discussed the general issue of bullying. The concept of biased harassment was introduced in this first interview by discussing issues of race and ethnicity in their schools. The second interview focused on the three types of gendered harassment and addressed them in the following order: sexual harassment, homophobic harassment, and harassment for gender non-conformity. The third interview allowed teachers to reflect on the discussions of the first two and draw connections and explore their (in)actions in their current school contexts. These interviews were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. Data analysis was conducted in an ongoing and exploratory design as this research seeks to uncover common themes between teachers’ experiences that will help inform future studies and school interventions (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The data were analyzed using both contextual and thematic codes which situated the teachers’ identities and experiences within their school contexts and allowed common themes to emerge among their experiences.

Findings

In order to understand how teachers respond to incidents of gendered harassment in secondary schools, I developed a theoretical model that emerged from the interview process. There are four tiers to this model that demonstrate the relationship between the main factors that influence how teachers respond to gendered harassment in school: *external influences, internal influences, perceptions* and *responses*. As the diagram shows, there are two categories of external influences (circles) that get filtered through the teachers' internal influences (trapezoid) and this process shapes their perceptions of (arrow) and responses to student behaviors (square). The interaction of these external and internal influences shape how a teacher perceives student behaviors and then decides to act on them. Each of these tiers is presented in the following section with excerpts from the data to show how teachers talk about these factors and how they shape their practice.

External Influences

School culture is created by many factors that fall into two categories: *institutional* and *social* influences. In this section, I present the sub-themes in these categories to illustrate how teachers experienced their schools' culture.

Institutional influences

The formal structures that impact how participants perceive their school culture include four main aspects of the organization including: a) administrative structures and responses, b) provincial curriculum demands and teacher workloads, c) teacher education and training, and d) written policies. Through the course of the interviews it became clear that these formal aspects of the school interacted with the informal aspects of the school culture to shape teachers' experiences and interactions with their students.

The first sub-theme in this category, administrative structures and responses, elicited discussion about not feeling supported by their administrators and believing that oftentimes the discipline meted out for instances of sexual or homophobic harassment was not sufficient:

If there's an incident in my classroom I have to seek out the administration to get the follow-up on it. You just have to get to know the system and know what the expectations are 'cause they're stretched. They don't have any time...I personally had a few issues during the year with discipline and

the VP wasn't there, and the principal dealt with it, and I always felt the same, the he just wasn't firm enough. (FT03)

As far as discipline, how it's handled, I had to push for action when another kid called a kid 'faggot'. However, I know that in my school a racist comment was certainly not tolerated and it was dealt with immediately. (MT05)

These comments show a trend of teachers not trusting their administrators to support their actions and the feeling that they have to handle most non-violent discipline issues alone. They spoke quite consistently about their schools' strong and clear response to any kind of physical violence, but in terms of verbal harassment or other forms of psychological torment, they felt that the administration did not want to be bothered with these issues. This is important in light of the findings of other studies that have found that antisocial behavior in students increases when administrative support is inconsistent and when there is an absence of follow-up from school leadership (DiGiulio, 2001, p. 81).

The second theme brought up by all the teachers was the challenge they faced meeting the curricular and workload demands of their jobs. This was one of the most common obstacles that teachers talked about that prevented them from acting as consistently as they would like towards various forms of verbal harassment. Many teachers felt great pressure from their administration to cover the required amounts of curricular material and the stresses placed on them by large classes and demanding course loads caused them to ignore certain behaviors.

[I don't stop name-calling] if I'm too tired, if there are set things I need to get through in a lesson. I know my lesson is going to take 60 minutes, I've only got 70 minutes to deliver it, I've got 10 minutes to waste. Right now my job is being a teacher and I have to get through the math before the end of the year. It's not on my priority list. (MT01)

Sometimes as a teacher I just want to ignore it. There are times that I ignore it. I'm not perfect. There's so many times when I have TOO much to do, like we gotta get through this lesson. (FT03)

You're running all the time, you're pretty well tired constantly and you don't sit. You let stuff slide sometimes. (MT05)

These teachers are exhausted and overwhelmed with the professional demands placed on them and don't feel as if they are given the necessary support or resources to deal with everything that they are expected to address. They expressed frustration when talking

about the limitations they felt, but very few of them offered any critique of the formal structures that caused them to feel overwhelmed. By only acting within the micro-structures of their classroom when dealing with behavior issues rather than addressing the macro structures of the school, they are extremely limited in what they can do to improve student safety and school climate.

Education and training was the third theme. Most teachers felt that their teacher education programs did not sufficiently prepare them to address incidents of harassment or bullying. Additionally they did not feel that they had many opportunities to pursue additional training in this area since they were encouraged to do professional development primarily in their area of instruction.

I've had no training [on how to address bullying]... The educational degree was really worthless. I felt that we didn't really get that kind of necessary education. How to deal with certain issues like [bullying]. We were just told, "avoid this and this"... We're constantly being told how to protect ourselves. We're not constantly being told how to protect these young people from other young people. (MT06)

[I never got any] training in school [on] bullying. I do not think that we ever studied anything related to that... I don't know if I was really attuned to [sexual harassment] – to be quite honest. Maybe that's why I wasn't so aware that it was going on because as a part of my training it had never really been brought up as an issue to be concerned with. (FT02)

Other teachers had taken their own initiative to pursue additional studies that had exposed them to issues of gender, sexual orientation, and race, and they spoke about the importance of these opportunities in improving their practice as teachers.

I'm not the average teacher or the average individual coming in on the issue. I received a lot of training on gender harassment and bullying and sexual orientation and identities, multiculturalism and racism. All of that was part of my training [as a student leader in university]. I have other personal issues that have challenged me through the past couple years that I've had to deal with, but in general I've got the artillery behind me if I want to use it. I was involved in giving workshops in a lot of these areas to the other student leadership groups ... I've done a lot in the area, compared to a lot of other people. (MT01)

The teachers who did get some education in this area are ones who took it upon themselves to seek out these opportunities. These decisions were shaped by their intrapersonal influences such as their personal identities and educational biography. A

discussion of how these internal factors shape teachers' perceptions and responses in schools is included later in this paper.

The final theme under institutional influences was that of written policies and how teachers' knowledge of their schools' and school board's policies influenced how they addressed various forms of bullying and harassment. One teacher did voice a belief that his school's policy on bullying was clear, yet he spoke at other points in the interview about his frustration with colleagues for their lack of awareness of and attention to the issues of racism, sexism, and homophobia in his school (MT06). The rest of the participants did not share the belief that they had a clear understanding of their school's policies. The perceptions that teachers shared about their experiences with the formal structures of their schools present a clear description of some of the structural obstacles that exist and prevent educators from responding consistently and effectively to incidents of gendered harassment.

Social influences

It quickly became apparent that the informal structures of the school, or the social norms and values, exerted the most powerful influence over teachers' behaviors. The three most prevalent themes were: a) perceptions of administration, b) interpersonal relationships, and c) community values. These will be addressed in this order to explore how these factors impacted teachers' experiences in their schools.

The first area is teachers' perceptions of their school's administrators. Under this theme, participants spoke of issues such as: leadership style, personal values, professional priorities, and policy implementation. The following excerpts demonstrate how the teachers perceived their administrators, and how these perceptions shaped their actions in the school.

Our administrator who dealt with disciplinary problems was a real jock and the real 'man's man' and he'd sit the boys down and say, 'what the hell do you think you're doing?' I think that he gave them the old football huddle, sit down and I'm gonna tell you how to act in the classroom. And I think that's as far as it went...I feel that the administration didn't want to get involved because they were these [ethnicity y] men and, if they were to come into a staff meeting and say, 'we need to address some of the homophobic attitudes,' I could never hear them talking about something like that. So maybe that's part of the problem; even the administrators had that [ethnicity y] kind of mentality...The image of the principal was very

important. It was very much about the school's image that the principal is behind everything...I don't think [he] ever left his office. (FT02)

I always find that when I'm working with principals and vice principals that its their own morals and their own beliefs that come through and if its something that they don't really think's a big issue, then why are they going to be proactive about it? Or just the gender of the administrator, I think that plays into it as well. (FT03)

These perceptions reported by teachers demonstrate how powerful an administrator's style is in shaping the culture of a school. Teachers get messages from their school leaders about what they personally value and what issues they feel are important to address. Whether it be through official communications in staff meetings, or more typically through observed patterns of behavior and advice from more experienced teachers, a Principal's priorities and attitudes towards issues permeate the school and shape the culture.

Another area of administrative influence is that of policy implementation. The way administrators interpreted and applied various school board and school-wide policies sent clear messages to teachers about how they should enforce and apply those policies. Some teachers felt there was a clear expectation communicated about bullying policies, whereas others believed that very little had been done to inform teachers about how certain policies should be interpreted and applied.

The kids are astute enough to see that when they use the word faggot they won't get sent to the office and when they use a racial slur, they get sent to the office. It's a very quick connection to make...I had one kid call another a faggot. I hauled him to the principal; I asked for a suspension, the principal didn't want to suspend him. It was one of the vice-principals and they saw that I was about to blow my top so they suspended the kid. But I really had to push for it. (MT05)

In the two high schools I've been it really depends on your Vice Principal. They basically set up according to their beliefs. Their policies reflect a lot about them and how they deal with it. (FT03)

The lack of consistency and the lack of clear guidelines or suggestions on how to respond to bullying and harassment left teachers feeling isolated and unsupported in their efforts to address various forms of non-physical harassment.

A second area that was discussed was the role of interpersonal relationships in shaping the school culture. Their personal relationships with administrators were a

significant influence in how they perceived their ability to act in the school. Teachers in two of the three schools did not speak highly of their administrators.

Eventually I told [my Principal] that I was going to tell the kids [that I'm gay]. She said, 'if you come out to those kids I will not guarantee your safety at this school'. I had to make a decision at this point. She was tough. I couldn't stand working for her...She didn't like me because I was gay. That was clear. (MT05)

If there's bullying going on in your classroom, then you must be a bad teacher. You don't feel like you can go to [the administration] because it reflects badly upon you as a teacher, because it's like saying to them, 'I can't handle my classroom. I need your help.'...You play the game because the principal decides what you're going to teach the following year and if he doesn't like you then he gives you the worst classes and five different subjects to teach and everybody knows it works that way. So if you don't get along with the principal and you don't kiss butt a little bit then you'll pay for it the next year. That's the power that they have. (FT02)

The perceptions of administrators varied significantly in the three schools, but were consistent within the two teachers at each school. This is interesting to note because although each teacher has his or her own individual relationship with the administration, there are certain messages that Principals and VPs send to their staff through their leadership style and personal philosophy that influence those interpersonal relationships.

The working and personal relationships with colleagues also had an impact on their experiences in their schools. The participants in this study spoke regularly about their struggles and alliances with other members of the school staff. They also complained about a lack of consistency in enforcing certain school rules and policies. Many felt that they could not defend taking certain actions against students if other teachers were not also addressing those same issues.

I spent the first couple months enforcing all of this [uniform policy, swearing, and name-calling] and there are some teachers that just never enforce it and so you realize that out of 20 teachers, we have about five who do all the enforcing and you just can't anymore. You can't do it. (FT03)

In my classroom I can deal with it and give my students a thousand detentions, but if they go into another classroom and they're allowed to bully then they'll come back into my classroom the next day and I'll be dealing with the exact same issues. (FT02)

This lack of consistency can contribute to greater problems with behavior in the school. Other researchers have found that inconsistent responses by the school results in inconsistent follow-through by staff which often results in more behavior problems (Mayer 1995 cited in DiGiulio, 2001, p. 81). The influences of co-workers on teachers who are new to a school cannot be overstated. It is clear that new teachers have to learn the hidden curriculum and unwritten rules of each school they work in. Unfortunately, these codes of conduct that get taught in the staff room and through informal interactions, oftentimes lead to teachers learning bad habits and accepting lower standards of professionalism than they would otherwise set for themselves.

Teachers' interactions with and perceptions of their colleagues are also factors that shape how they will act in various situations. Participants in this study spoke of racist, sexist, and homophobic comments from other staff and a lack of awareness of these issues from more experienced teachers. The stories that these teachers shared about the frustration they felt and the difficulties they faced due to colleagues who acted in irresponsible or oppressive ways were troubling. It is not surprising to see how challenging it is to work against various forms of bias and harassment in students when professional educators and employees of the school are modeling the exact behaviors these teachers are trying to prevent.

Teachers' relationships with students and parents also had an influence on their responses to various forms of bullying and harassment. The participants in this study spoke mostly of a high respect and a deep level of care for their students and their overall well being. They worked very hard to have positive relationships with their students and often made themselves available during their own free time to provide homework assistance, extracurricular supervision, and opened up their classrooms for students to hang out during lunch periods. They felt that these extra efforts made them more approachable than other teachers, and allowed them to develop more meaningful connections with certain students so they could provide them additional support. Several teachers spoke of special relationships with certain students that had resulted from these extra efforts. It was clear that these connections were quite meaningful to the teacher and were most likely of significant positive impact to the students and their perceptions of their school community.

The fourth area of interpersonal relationships that shaped teachers perceptions and responses is interactions with parents. This was not a prevalent theme through all teachers' experiences, but the teachers who did address the issue of parents, indicated that it had an impact on how they felt they were able to work in the school community on addressing certain behaviors in the school. Many teachers expressed feeling that they had adversarial relationships with some of the parents and this often undermined their ability to discipline certain behaviors.

It seems evident that the accumulation of these interactions with administrators, colleagues, students and parents convey clear and consistent messages to teachers about which behaviors are tolerated in a school and which ones are not. These social norms do not emerge in a vacuum, but are often a reflection of the community in which the school resides. Each of the three schools in this study were in the same school board, but were situated in very different communities. It was clear in the conversations with these teachers, that the values and expectations of the community were significant factors that shaped what could and could not happen in their school. Their interpersonal relationships with colleagues and families are created in this context and are often actively transmitting the values of the broader school community. These, in turn, influenced the school culture. Teachers noted how external influences from students' families and out-of-school time played a role in shaping the climate and priorities of the school. In one school, the high expectations of families placed an extraordinary emphasis on students' grades and extracurricular involvements (FT04, MT06). In another school, the cultural values of one dominant European ethno-cultural group heavily shaped students', teachers', and administrators' behaviors (FT02, FT03). In the third, the harsh realities of poverty, violence, and racism were prevalent and permeated all aspects of the school (MT05). Although all of these schools had very different cultures and social realities, the participants' spoke of very similar obstacles to addressing forms of gendered harassment.

As other scholars have found, school culture is much more likely to determine and support what it is that students, teachers, and others say and do than is the formal management system. This means that teachers are more inclined to act in ways that reflect shared norms and values of other teachers than in ways defined by school policy (Stader & Thomas, 2006, p. 16). The way teachers choose to navigate the culture of their

school is shaped by several internal factors that they spoke of in their interviews. The next section offers an explanation of these influences.

Internal Influences

Each individual brought a specific set of identities and experiences to his/her teaching as well as the research process. What quickly became evident in the interviews was the significant influence of their personal identities and their own experiences in school (educational biography) on shaping how they perceived and acted in the culture of their current school. All of the participants talked about their experiences of having felt marginalized in society due to their identities as gay, bisexual, women, or people of color. These experiences in their own schooling and professional life acted as very strong motivators to act out against discriminatory behavior that they witnessed as teachers. At times, these motivators also acted as barriers to consistent intervention because they felt vulnerable as minorities in their schools. This vulnerability and the tensions it caused for the teachers was a major source of struggle for the participants. They cared deeply about reducing the harms of homophobia and sexism and other forms of bias for their students, but also had to negotiate how they experienced these forces as teachers. Selected excerpts from the teachers' narratives are presented below to highlight the aspects of their internal influences that impacted how they responded to incidents of gendered harassment.

Steve Pyre

You are a role model.
Am I more vigilant because I'm gay?
Probably, but it's the right thing to do.
I'm willing to deal with the backlash.

Jessica Crosby

I was interested in social change
I felt like an outsider. I was a woman.
You worry until your job is secure.

Anita Day

It's tough as a teacher of color. I have very little room to slip up.
Is that really about race? Yeah, maybe.
You get desensitized.
I consciously make an effort to get at my own prejudice.
My dad was outright discriminated against.

Pierre LeSage

I got called fag. I'm more sensitive. I was always afraid.
Being a gay man, having experienced harassment,
made me define my role as a teacher.

Homer

I want students to feel welcome.
We were the only minority group, I got incredibly bullied.
I catch myself saying, 'oh that's so gay.'
I'm conscious of what I'm doing. I'm trying to correct myself.

Sam Kaye

Be a role model. Have my students be in a safe spot for a change.
When you yourself are gay, you're even more scared.
I'm so sensitive. It pertains to me.

The connection of personal experiences with discrimination has proved to be a motivating factor in other studies as well. In a study of eleven educators in the Southern U.S., Jones concluded that victimization emerged as a significant impetus for educator activism and intervention regarding sexual harassment in their schools (2005, p. 26). This is an interesting finding as there was not a single volunteer in this study who identified as a white, heterosexual male. As several teachers pointed out, it is their personal experiences with discrimination and marginalization that made them particularly sensitive to these issues in schools. The challenge that this finding presents is how to raise the awareness of educators who have not personally felt the impacts of discrimination or exclusion from dominant culture.

Understanding teachers' (non)interventions

What became clear through the course of the three interviews was that these teachers did not feel that they could put a stop to gendered harassment in their schools. The presence of so many external barriers challenged their ability and eventually even their willingness to consistently interrupt sexist, homophobic, and transphobic language and behaviors. A similar study in the UK concluded that the prevailing rhetoric of liberal individualism acted as a barrier to teachers' responding to misogynistic bullying by obscuring "structurally reproduced relations of gender domination" (Chambers, van Loon, & Tincknell, 2004). As other researchers have pointed out, sexual and homophobic harassment have been normalized as aspects of everyday school culture and

are often not questioned or approached by educators from a critical or feminist perspective (Chambers, Tincknell, & Van Loon, 2004; Hepburn, 1997; Larkin, 1994).

Several teachers during the interview process commented that they had reduced their attempts to intervene later in the school year which demonstrates the impacts of the external influences on the actions of individual teachers. This complex interaction of external and internal forces illustrates the institutional and social barriers that exist to stopping gendered harassment in schools. To help educators better understand how these variables interact, I have developed a diagram for this theoretical model (Figure 2). This diagram indicates the key areas for change in order to transform existing barriers into motivators to assist teachers in creating safer and more inclusive school environments. There is insufficient room here to elaborate on these recommendations but I have addressed them at greater length in an earlier publication (Meyer, 2006).

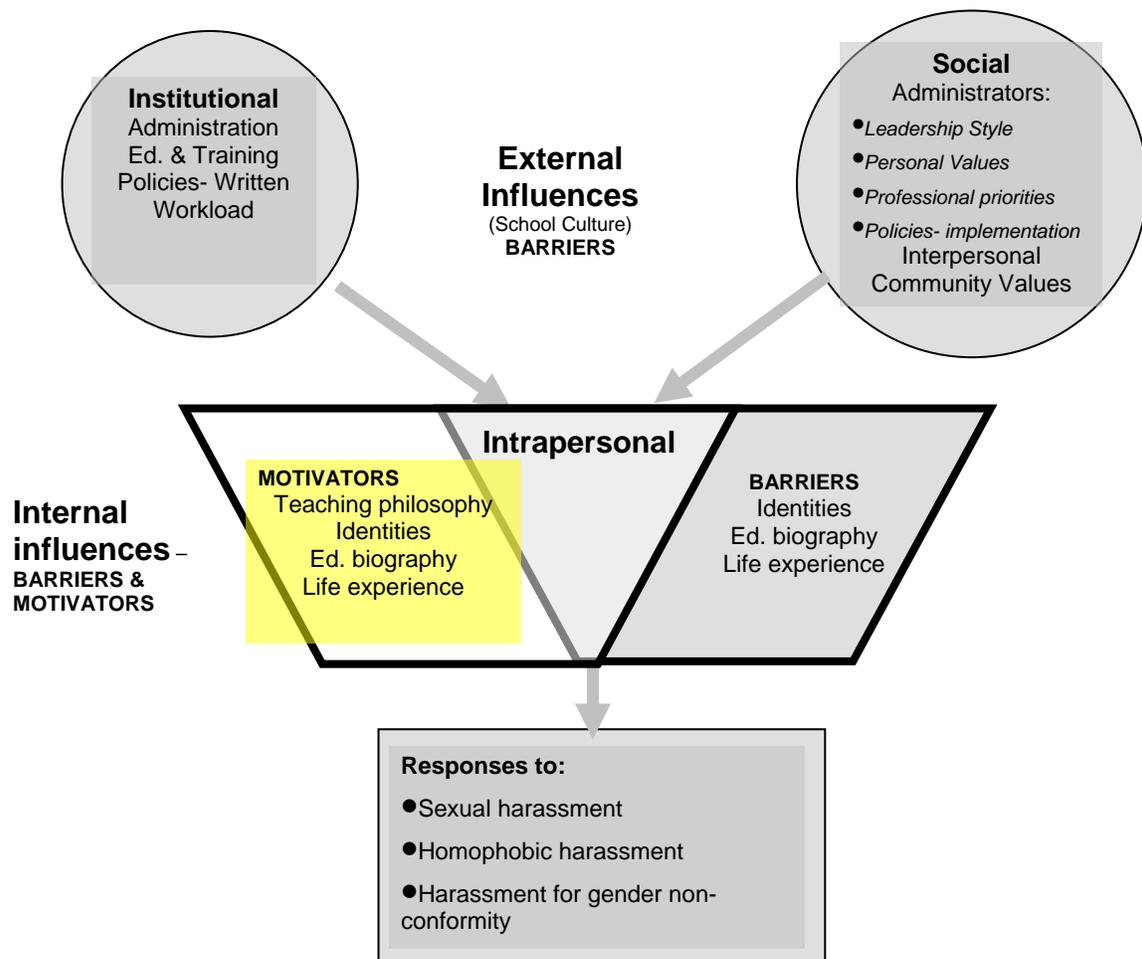


Figure 2 – Factors influencing teachers' (non)interventions

Conclusion

Most teachers spoke of their personal desire or commitment to challenge issues of gendered harassment but felt limited in their actions due to a perceived lack of support from the administration and their colleagues. They felt isolated in addressing the problem of homophobic name-calling in particular, and that it was too prevalent an issue in their school for them to tackle alone. The lack of intervention by colleagues and the lack of demonstrated support from the administration resulted in many of these teachers giving up and limiting their interventions to only the most severe offenses. The lack of consistency in reporting and response to such incidents among colleagues and the lack of a clear policy and definitions to guide teachers in the classrooms and hallways were significant obstacles these teachers faced in their school cultures.

On the other hand, every single participant spoke of a personal commitment to challenging bias in the classroom. This was often paired with an articulation of a marginalized aspect of their own identity: woman, gay, or ethnic minority. Each of these teachers had a political consciousness about social inequalities that had been shaped by their own education and personal experiences. This consciousness influenced their teaching philosophy and how they perceived their students and school cultures. They were articulate in critiquing issues with the social structure of the school and the impacts of other cultural factors that influenced students' experiences in their schools.

The interaction between the external influences and internal influences can explain the wide variety of perceptions of and responses to gendered harassment by secondary school teachers. Both external and internal influences present *barriers* and *motivators* to teachers' interventions. These influences vary based on teachers' identities and experiences in their school cultures, but in all cases in this study, the barriers outweigh the motivators for intervention. This imbalance creates a constant struggle for the teachers who are trying to reduce such behavior in their classrooms and schools. These findings offer us a deeper understanding of how various forms of bullying and harassment are perceived and acted on by teachers in secondary schools. This data offers scholars, educators, and school leaders a clearer picture of some of the challenges that exist when trying to confront such forms of harassment between students in schools. Through the process of listening to teachers talk about their experiences with gendered harassment in secondary schools it is clear that it is not possible to create safer and more

positive learning environments until school leaders initiate a whole-school process that would transform the formal and informal structures of the school.

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