Teacher management of homophobia and homosexuality in high schools

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TEACHER MANAGEMENT OF HOMOPHOBIA AND HOMOSEXUALITY IN HIGH SCHOOLS

by
Sarah Elizabeth Kiyak

A Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Science in Teaching Degree of The Graduate School at Rowan University
July 27, 2004

Approved by
Dr. Donna W. Jorgenson

Date Approved July 27, 2004

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The purpose of this research project was to examine ways in which high school teachers manage issues of homophobia and homosexuality in high schools. Surveys were distributed to teachers in one southern New Jersey high school in order to measure the frequency of tolerance and adherence to policy regarding homosexual issues of students. The survey, constructed of eleven forced response questions using a Likert scale and one open-ended question, was the instrument utilized in this research project. After the completed surveys were returned, the results were tallied and frequency tables were used to analyze the results. The open-ended questions were coded for 4 major themes, which include tolerance, policy, personal accounts, and miscellaneous. The findings showed that the sample population demonstrates tolerant treatment towards gay and lesbian issues by consistently abiding by the school’s policies. The study was conducted to raise consciousness of management towards homosexual issues as a means of reducing prejudice and discrimination in our society.
Acknowledgments

_Human diversity makes tolerance more than a virtue; it makes it a requirement for survival._ - Rene Dubos

_Treat people as if they were what they ought to be and you help them to become what they are capable of being._ - Goethe

Upon entering the field of education, I reflected on my philosophies of teaching. I discovered I value individual voice and encourage students to be confident with their individuality. As a future teacher, I also believe that education has the ability to reduce prejudices and discrimination existing in our society. Hate and ignorance towards gay and lesbian lifestyles exists, but through the strength of the individual voice and influence of schools, education can facilitate change and create a more equitable society. This research project was designed to raise the consciousness of teachers, students, and members of our society as well as provide a voice for gay and lesbian high school students.

This project could have never been completed without the guidance and encouragement of my thesis advisor, Dr. Donna Jorgensen. She provided clarity and nurtured me through the writing process. I am thankful for her assistance and support. I also thank Chris, my first cooperating teacher, for being a sounding board for thesis ideas and sharing insights about teaching and managing homophobia in education. I am also grateful for my Women's and Gender Studies minor at The College of New Jersey for making me the humanist I am today and my mom and dad for always having open minds and huge hearts. To my best friend Tim, none of this would make sense without your temerity and strength. I am assured that every member of the MST cohort 2003-2004, will achieve greatness in their teaching careers and help make efforts towards equity in education and society.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Throughout history, American society has marginalized anyone considered other. Members of the culture who defy the definition of norm are not as accepted as mainstream individuals. Hate, prejudice, and intolerance are expressed towards people who are different. Such bigotry demonstrates that many citizens are still hesitant to accept diversity. Specifically, homosexuals connote something different because the majority of the population is heterosexual, and as a result, there is a lack of recognition and tolerance for them. There are different values placed upon those who are straight compared to those who are gay, meaning heterosexuals may feel that they possess more importance and worth than a homosexual (Henning-Stout and James, p.155, 2000). Our society has this notion that homosexuality equates to sex while heterosexuality relates to love and family, which is completely false (Petrovic, 2000). Some choose to use the term gay as a label instead of understanding it as a sexual identity (Sharpe, 2002). Homophobia is a way for people to enforce conformity and try to compel homosexuals to maintain the heterosexual norm (Sharpe). Discrimination, harassment, and violence have been directed at individuals who live out sexual orientations that are not heterosexual.

Former Beliefs and Practices

Over the past thirty years, there has been tremendous development in the awareness of homosexuality in our society. Until 1973, the American Psychiatric Association had included homosexuality among mental and emotional disorders (newsbatch.com, 2004).
Even though the American Psychiatric Association dismissed same sex behavior as a disease, counselors during the 1970's still had difficulties treating homosexual clients. Certain psychoanalysts described homosexuality as a stage that adolescents and young adults experience that could be cured through hypnosis or individual therapy (Kremer, Wiggers, & Zimpfer, 1975). Some learning theorists during this time period believed that homosexuality was a result of an unstable family structure with a dominant mother-figure and a lack of a father-figure (Kremer, Wiggers, & Zimpfer, 1975).

Counselors took two different approaches to dealing with homosexual adolescents in the 1970's; many tried to convert them to heterosexuality, however some counselors and social workers began to recognize that homosexuality is normal and natural, thus homosexuals need to be supported (Kremer, Wiggers, & Zimpfer, 1975).

Even though psychologists and social workers were beginning to alter their thinking about homosexuality, the law gave little lenience towards same-sex behaviors. In the 1960's and 1970's, most of the states in the country had legislation that forbade sodomy between homosexuals and categorized it as a criminal act (newsbatch.com, 2004). In 1972, same-sex activities were legal in only 5 states in the country, including Colorado, Connecticut, Hawaii, Illinois, and Oregon (Kremer, Wiggers, & Zimpfer, 1975).

Other injustices occurred at the judicial level. Morrison v. State Board of Education, 1966, was a California case that revoked a teacher's licenses due to a same-sex relationship the plaintiff had with another teacher (D.R.G., 1971). The State Board of Education claimed Morrison engaged in immoral and unprofessional conduct through his homosexuality; fortunately, the decision was reversed by the state supreme court (D.R.G., 2004).
Another case entitled Sarac v. State Board of Education, 1967, involved a teacher losing his credentials because of advances he made towards an individual of the same sex on a public beach (D.R.G., 1971). The State Board of Education claimed Sarac was unfit to teach and that his homosexual proclivities showed him to be immoral (D.R.G., 1971). The two cases proved to be significant in that they changed the criteria for what constitutes an unfit teacher, and made the State Board of Education evaluate how a teacher’s private actions do or do not affect students’ lives in the classroom. “Hopefully the courts will lead the public in developing an understanding, awareness of, and tolerance for, such different life styles by deemphasizing the aberrant connotation” [of homosexuality] (D.R.G., p.60).

More recent unfairness occurred in 1994, during President Clinton’s administration when he announced the “Don’t ask, don’t tell,” policy for the military, restating an already existing practice in the military but showing a lack of support for homosexuals who serve our country (Scarborough, 2003). Although the policy was created to safeguard gay and lesbian individuals, it actually hinders homosexuals and limits their freedoms.

Also of interest is that more than half the states within our country do not have discrimination laws that protect homosexuals, thus crimes against gays and lesbians are occurring without proper punishment (newsbatch.com, 2004).

Current Development

In November of 2003, the U.S. Supreme Court finally ruled against sodomy laws that still existed in thirteen states in the Lawrence v. Texas case (cnn.com, 2003). Justice Kennedy was quoted for saying that, “The state cannot demean their [homosexual]
existence or control their destiny by making their private sexual conduct a crime." (cnn.com, 1).

The media has also played a substantial role in altering the public’s opinions of gays and lesbians through movies, television series, politics, and current events. Being gay in 2004 does not have the same meaning as it did in 1974. Celebrities, such as Elton John, Ellen Degeneres, Michael Stipe, and Rosie O’ Donnell are using their notoriety to raise awareness for homosexuality. Authors, like Armisted Maupin, David Sedaris, and Kate Bornstein, are creating literature representing the life experiences of homosexuals. The success of television shows like Queer Eye for the Straight Guy, Will and Grace, Six Feet Under, The L Word, Queer as Folk, and Sex and the City have made it possible for homosexuals to be portrayed and represented in the entertainment industry.

The growth of universities’ gender studies programs have also offered a venue for people to further investigate issues pertaining to homosexuality and the origins of gender constructs. Organizations, such as the Human Rights Campaign, orchestrates ways in which gays and lesbians can let their voices be heard in society and in politics through petitions, rallies, and protests.

The most significant advancement towards equality regarding homosexuals involves legislation allowing same sex marriages. On May 17, 2004, Massachusetts became the first state in the country to permit same sex marriages (msnbc.com, 2004). On February 12, 2004, Gavin Newsom, mayor of San Francisco, consented to same sex marriages within the city (msnbc.com, 2004). Prior to these two turning points in politics, Hawaii publicly opposed federal sanctions against same sex marriage, and in 2000, Vermont created the title of civil unions granting same sex couples all the rights and
responsibilities of married couples (msnbc.com, 2004). As a result of such change, Congress counteracted such liberalism by designing a bill entitled the Federal Marriage Amendment that defines marriage between man and woman (msnbc.com, 2004). Congressional voting on this amendment took place on July 14, 2004, and was voted against in the Senate.

In New Jersey, the Domestic Partnership Bill was passed in February 2004. Through this legislation, the state recognizes same sex couples and allows them similar responsibilities as married couples regarding finances, healthcare, as well as death processes.

With same sex marriage constantly in the news, gay and lesbian lifestyles are frequently discussed and debated. Current events and media attention provide the opportunity to clarify misconceptions about homosexuality and teach acceptance.

Education

Unfortunately, education is also responsible for expressing intolerance towards homosexuals, especially gay and lesbian adolescents. “The current cultures of many schools, communities, and families ostracize these youth and present them with the real and continuous struggle of being treated as if they are somehow unfit, somehow undeserving of respect and support.” (Henning-Stout and James, p.156, 2000). Many schools demonstrate their intolerance by not including same-sex topics within the curriculum or incorporating discipline and punishment for inappropriate actions and words against homosexuals. In a national survey conducted in 1995, 46% of high school health teachers discuss topics of homosexuality in their classes; of that 46%, 48% stated that they only devote one day to the topic (Lindley and Reininger, 2001). Sexual
orientation does not have to be limited to one day in health education for it is a lifestyle that affects all aspects of life.

People involved in education have taken great strides to prevent acceptance of homosexuality. For instance, in 1996, a city in New Hampshire began to ban literature and poetry, such as Walt Whitman and Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* due to their homosexual contents and allusions (Petrovic, 2000). Also in 1996, a board of education in Salt Lake City, Utah, purposely voted against all after school clubs in order to prevent the creation of a gay-straight alliance; later that year, the state legislated against any homosexual school club (Petrovic). Petrovic (2000), in his article entitled, “Caring without justice: How we deaden the spirits of gay and lesbian youth in schools,” comments on how sexuality affects our daily existences.

Those who might assert that our sexuality is not a major part of our identity need but count in a day the number of times sexuality, especially heterosexuality, is displayed. Count the number of couples you pass holding hands, kissing, or flirting. Count the number of family pictures seen on desks in the office place. Count the number of wedding rings seen on hands. Count the number of male comments about how pretty (she) is and female comments on what a hunk (he) is (p.55).

From such a simple description, one can easily detect how excluded gay and lesbian individuals are from simple pleasures that heterosexuals take for granted.

Schools, however, have the ability to deconstruct the boundaries created by our heterosexist society and produce an environment that recognizes and accepts all forms of diversity, including homosexuality. The institution of education has always served as a
microcosm of our society, but it also signifies a place where great change in ideology can occur. Education has the potential to modify preconceived notions about homosexuality, alter perceptions, and prevent further oppression.

Through education, we can instill values of tolerance and acceptance towards gay and lesbian individuals in our society. Teachers, says Desmarchelier in his article in the *Journal of Men’s Studies*, have the opportunity through instruction to help those students who are not equally represented (2003). Teachers and administrators can incorporate concepts about homosexuality into their curricula, as well as deal with homophobia as it arises within the classroom by disciplining students, discouraging hurtful actions, and demonstrating acceptance. By silencing teachers and students, violence resulting from homophobia will continue, and education will not provide equal chances (Jennings, 2003). Students need to learn the value of equity amongst individuals while simultaneously learning to appreciate individuals’ differences.

This proactive approach can prevent students from possessing homophobic feelings and further transform the manner in which society views homosexuality. The reality of today’s society caused this researcher to ask if teachers are addressing issues of homosexuality and homophobia in high schools.

This researcher wanted to discover whether teachers are managing homosexual and homophobic issues of high school students, and if so, what methods are they using to manage situations they encounter. If a teacher overhears one student degrade another using a homophobic term, such as “faggot”, does the teacher use punishment, ignore the problem, or discuss the situation with the students? Does the teacher devalue homosexuals through language in the classroom? Does the teacher promote acceptance
of homosexuality in society through material and contents used in the course in accord with the curriculum?

The researcher posed these three research questions.

RQ1: Are teachers exhibiting tolerance and acceptance towards homosexuality in high schools?

RQ2: Are teachers ignoring incidents and not intervening when students discriminate against homosexuals; will teachers avoid the problem rather than punish the offender or discuss the behavior?

RQ3: Are teachers limited in the ways in which they can incorporate homosexual topics in high schools based on the nature of school policy?

The purpose of these research questions would be to inquire if there needs to more awareness of homosexual issues among teachers so that they can properly educate our students and create accepting and tolerant citizens.

By further investigating relevant literature, the researcher will be able to demonstrate the need for this study, such as why homophobia exists and how both students and teachers are managing the injustices and prejudices that still occur against homosexuals.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Reviewing literature and research on adolescents and homophobia provides a more indepth understanding of how educators presently manage homophobia and homosexuality in their high schools. Different aspects need to be analyzed, such as how homophobia can ignite harassment and violence, how homophobia affects teens’ mental and emotional development, and how homosexuals are and should be represented in schools. Such studies provide further awareness of the struggles of gay and lesbian students and prove that there is a need for change.

Harassment and Violence

A major cause of depression among homosexual teenagers derives from physical and verbal harassment from peers as well as existence of homophobia in their school communities. The Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) had 904 gay and lesbian youths from 48 states respond to a questionnaire. Eighty-four percent of respondents said that they hear homophobic remarks frequently or often in school (Sadowski, 2003). Ninety-one percent of respondents acknowledged that they hear phrases, such as “That’s so gay,” and “You’re gay,” frequently or often (Sadowski). GLSEN also discovered that of these 904 respondents, 83% have been verbally abused due to sexual orientation, 42% have been physically abused because of sexual orientation, and 65% have been sexually harassed due to their sexual identity (Sadowski). This sample population shows that there are gay and lesbian students suffering.
Research by Van de Ven (1994), published in the Journal of Sex Research, focuses on adolescents’ perceptions of homophobia. Van de Ven uses a test entitled the Modified Attitudes Toward Homosexuality Scale (MATHS) and the Affective Reactions to Homosexuality Scale (ARHS) as two means of measuring homophobia in the cognitive and affective domains, respectively (1994). Van de Ven designed a scale entitled Homophobic Behavioral Students Scale (HBSS) which measures students’ physical responses to homosexual topics when teaching sexuality in the classroom. Van de Ven used all three scales to test undergraduates and high school students. Questionnaires were distributed to 100 college students in a psychology classroom in Sydney, Australia, forty students in a diverse high school setting, and about forty youth offenders (1994). The MATHS test asked 30 yes/no questions; ARHS offered a checklist with 15 adjectives where students had to decide the intensity to which they agreed with the word or phrase (very much, somewhat, not so much, not at all); HBSS measured students’ actions in two ways: how much they engaged in contact or shunned contact with gays in the classroom and how much the student supported gay rights. Among the many results found, Van de Ven found that homophobia was not a result of an individual’s age or educational background but derived from an individual’s own experiences and perspectives of the world (1994).

In Kimmel’s article (2003) entitled “I am not insane; I am angry: Adolescent masculinity, homophobia, and violence,” he describes homophobia in the following way: “Homophobia is far less about the irrational fear of gay people or the fear that one might actually be gay or have gay tendencies, and more the fears that heterosexuals have that others may perceive them as gay” (Kimmel, p.72). In other words, Kimmel defines
homophobia as individuals’ fear of being labeled gay, and as a result they discriminate against others thus projecting their own anxieties.

Gays, in our society, are perceived as something less, or in other words, male homosexuality equates to someone not being a “real man” (Kimmel, 2003). Kimmel discusses how the individuals who have been responsible for many of the school shootings over the past decade acted out as a result of same-sex harassment. Whether or not the individual was gay, he was teased incessantly. For example, Dylan Klebold, one of the shooters from Columbine, claimed that he had been bombarded with homophobic taunting and physical abuse for years, and this is what led him to ultimately commit a mass-murdering spree at his high school (Kimmel). Michael Carneal of Paducah, Kentucky, killed 3 students and wounded 5 in his high school in November 1997, after being called a “faggot” by his classmates (Kimmel). These two examples demonstrate how teenage males used violence as a means of either protecting their sexual identity or retaliating against people who have caused them harm.

In 1991, Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas’ senate hearings brought about an expansion in the Civil Rights Act, allowing monetary rewards for those who have suffered sexual, religious, or disabled discrimination, thus changing the way in which we view harassment. Although over the past decade we have come to recognize and put a stop to much of the sexual discrimination that occurs between males and females, we have been ignoring the fact that sexual harassment between same sex individuals also occurs (Fiernan, 2002). Many court cases have been dismissed and many schools have ignored instances where same sex discrimination happens. Schools, however, are liable under Title IX; consequently, they have the obligation to protect all students from
harassment or discrimination (Fiernan). No one should have to endure conditions where they feel unsafe or threatened.

In 1998, the U.S. Supreme Court decided that gender and sexual orientation are not issues in a harassment case, only the behaviors and actions taken by the persecutors is to be evaluated (Fiernan). This was decided in the Oncale v. Sundowner Offshore Services case. Same-sex harassment, along with any kind of sexual harassment, can severely damage one’s mental health, physical health, and social health. Schools need to clearly state in their policies that sexual harassment is illegal and will not be tolerated within the school system (Fiernan). Teachers cannot ignore such ill behaviors and need to report and discipline in order to keep our students secure.

**Psychology and Development**

Erikson, a leading adolescent psychologist, described teenage years as a formative period of identity, and a major component of self-actualization involves internalizing others’ perceptions (Sadowski, 2003). What people say and how people act towards an adolescent are internalized and help shape how a teen feels about himself or herself (Sadowski). Some gay and lesbian adolescents may not be ready to disclose their sexuality during their teenage years or might still be confused about who they are. Research has found that many youths become cognizant of their homosexuality between the ages of 10 and 12 and then start to understand these same-sex feelings at the age of 15 (Sadowski). Being a sexual minority and developing identity can be difficult, especially when a school environment appears to be unaccepting.

In Black’s (1998) article entitled “Young, female, and gay: Lesbian students and the school environment,” the author discusses how lesbians, in particular, have to face all
the issues that “regular” adolescents deal with as well as the negativity associated with homosexuality. To counteract feelings of alienation and isolation, some lesbian adolescents may alter their body images in order to fit into their heterosexual school environment (Black). Some even go as far as becoming pregnant to conceal their true sexuality. Others choose to remain silent and submissive so as to not draw attention to themselves (Black).

Black (1998) also discusses how lesbians, in general, do not really fit into our heterosexual society; therefore, life is especially difficult for young girls who are trying to figure out their identity and assimilate into a culture that is not accepting of same-sex orientation. Because of our heterosexist social constructs, lesbians do not have the same opportunities that straight teenagers have within schools. There are fewer chances for these females to date and have intimate relationships due to the taboo nature of lesbianism (Black). As a result, lesbian adolescents postpone sexual and/or intimate relations until after high school, or they seek out venues that cater more to adults (Black).

While Black studied females, Dube (2000) investigated how homosexual males identify themselves and when in the development process they label themselves as gay. Dube created two categories of identification: sex-centered homosexual males and identity-centered homosexual males. Sex-centered homosexual males refer to individuals who became aware of their same-sex orientation through sexual experimentation with both men and women. Identity-centered homosexual males are described as using rationalizations, insight, and observation as a way of determining their sexual orientation (Dube).
A portion of the questionnaire Dube (2000) used in his research had 36 questions pertaining to homophobia, which was a revised version of Nungesser’s Homosexual Attitudes Inventory. One-third of the questions were directed at homophobia about oneself, 11 questions were about homophobia and others, and the final 14 questions dealt with disclosure or coming out (Dube). A Likert-scale ranging from 1 to 5 was used to measure how much a respondent agreed or disagreed with a statement. The surveys showed that all participants, whether sex-centered individuals or identity-centered individuals, demonstrated low levels of internalized homophobia, but sex-centered males had higher levels of homophobia about others (Dube). This evidence may result from the different and more experimental way sex-centered homosexual males developed their orientation. Some may have engaged in intercourse with both women and men, which may have created anxiety and doubt in the way they think other people view them (Dube).

Another study focusing on teen development, performed by Sharpe through the University of London, involved surveying and interviewing teens ages 11-16 about values, identity, and socialization with focus on homosexuality and homophobia (2002). The research found several misconceptions. For example, some females responded that they feared lesbians and believed that lesbians would take advantage of them, like overzealous heterosexual men (Sharpe, 2002). Sharpe emphasizes the importance for adolescents with such convictions to question causality (2002). Parents should have discussions with their children and teachers with their students about nature versus nurture when considering why certain individuals are gay and why some are straight. Sharpe says that such discussion and intellectual stimulation moves people away from a
Sharpe (2002) summarizes what needs to transpire in education between students to generate understanding about homosexuality and homophobia.

"These include: the recognition and addressing of the gender focus of homophobia; the progressive impact of visibility...recognition of their various fears about gays and lesbians and about their own sexual feelings; a duty of protection to young people who are exploring their sexuality; and perhaps the need to focus on heterosexism rather than homosexuality. Many of these issues may be more appropriately addressed in the wider curriculum or within citizenship education than in classes dedicated to education about sex and relationships" (p.276).

Many people label individuals gay or lesbian solely based on their exterior appearance and characteristics. Desmarchelier (2000), in his article in Journal of Men's Studies, discussed the social construction of homosexuality in comparison to heterosexuality, specifically one’s body image. The body can be viewed as a social capital or resource where one has the ability to display his or her sexuality through certain mannerisms, style of dress, and language (Demarchelier, 2000). Some homosexuals, especially adolescents, feel the need to conceal their outward identity because of fear of rejection from the heterosexual society. Body images can sometimes connote whether someone is straight or gay. Due to homophobic discrimination and violence, homosexuals will exhibit ways in which other gays will be able to identify them but simultaneously keep their sexuality inconspicuous (Demarchelier).
During this trying period of development and identification, gay and lesbian youths may turn to substance abuse, or worse, suicide, as a result of their depression and lack of acceptance in society. The following is an excerpt from an interview with a homosexual male included in Petrovic's (2000) research about spirituality and gay and lesbian adolescents.

“Ninth grade was the worst. I wasn’t accepted. I knew I was gay, and I knew everyone else knew because they told me I was a faggot every day. But I was still trying to be straight with the friends I did have. I stopped doing homework and didn’t pay attention to school. I felt like something was exploding inside of me. I started smoking pot too. I was trying to hide from what I really felt” (p.54).

Isolation and depression of gay and lesbian teens can lead to misuse of alcohol and drugs, but worse could occur. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, out of the 5,000 annual adolescent suicides ages 15-24, 30% are a result of homosexual insecurities; also, homosexual teenagers are 3 times more likely to commit suicide than heterosexual teenagers (Black, 1998).

Representation in Schools

During the past decade, there have been studies performed that emphasize the lack of gay and lesbian issues discussed in schools (Sadowski, 2003). “Lesbian and gay pupils largely feel isolated and marginalized in mainstream classrooms, which is reinforced through the overt and hidden curricula, the lack of visibility and support demonstrated by schools and teachers, and through hegemonic heteronormative discourses prevailing in schools” (Wright and Cullen, 2001, p. 328). Some describe our
schools as having institutional homophobia, meaning that schools perpetuate stereotypes and discrimination by not actively including homosexual issues in the curriculum (Black, 1998). According to the GLSEN study (2003) previously mentioned, 81% of respondents said that there was no positive representation of gay and lesbian individuals in their classes; for those who did have representation in their classes, the respondents felt more part of their school community (Sadowski, 2003). Research conducted by Telljohann and Price (as cited in Black, 1998) reports that lesbian high school students believe that school would be more tolerable for them if homosexuality were discussed more and integrated into the curriculum.

Kevin Jennings, the executive director for Gay, Lesbian, Straight Teachers’ Network (GLSTN), discusses the importance of incorporating issues of homosexuality in education. Limited perceptions, such as fear that children will turn gay by mentioning homosexuality in the curriculum, are exactly what GLSTN is working to amend (Jennings, 2003).

Homosexuality becomes a scapegoat for deficiencies within our society. Parents feel that they can save society by limiting the curriculum and prohibiting certain topics in classrooms. Jennings describes how this actually occurred at a board of education meeting in New Hampshire; the board was forced to appease the parents by prohibiting direct discussion of homosexuality in the classroom and banning it from the curriculum (2003). As a disclaimer, the board stated that the school district would not tolerate same-sex harassment or prejudice. High-quality education includes teaching individuals to think on elevated levels of cognition and this includes thinking about social justice issues, such as homophobia and homosexuality. Education is supposed to give everyone an equal
opportunity, upholding the ideals of our democratic society. Limiting the curriculum impedes the democratic process (Jennings, 2003).

In 1997, the South Carolina Council on Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention conducted an 80 question survey via telephone where they questioned registered voters about the inclusion of homosexuality and other topics regarding sex education in school curriculum (Lindley and Reininger, 2001). Out of 760 voters called, 534 responded to the survey answering yes and no questions. “Registered voters were selected as the target population primarily because the researchers anticipated that results from the investigation would be presented to state policymakers and legislators in South Carolina” (Lindley and Reininger, p.19). With regard to the question, “Should homosexuality be taught in South Carolina public schools,” 48% answered yes, 38% responded no, and 14% said they were not sure (Lindley and Reininger). In response to the question, “What is the earliest grade level homosexuality should be taught” 22% said kindergarten through fifth grade, 34% said middle school, 20% said high school, and 24% admitted they were not sure (Lindley and Reininger). The demographics of this survey include the following: 65% of African Americans were in favor of homosexual topics in school as compared to the 42% of whites who agreed. 65% of democrats were in favor of homosexual topics in South Carolina schools while 57% of Republicans polled were against it. Liberal religious ideology chose inclusion of the topic more than fundamentalists in this particular study (Lindley and Reininger). The survey indicates that there are many community members in South Carolina who would support sexual orientation topics in their schools’ curriculum. The research also shows that there are people opposed to
homosexual topics in education, perhaps due to religious or political beliefs, or even homophobia.

According to Wright and Cullen (2001) in their article “Reducing college students’ homophobia, erotophobia, and conservatism levels through a human sexuality course” in the Journal of Sex Education & Therapy, the authors offer suggestions for why homophobia exists and what high school teachers can do to promote change. Schools, unfortunately, are institutions representative of the society; therefore, schools perpetuate heterosexist discourse (Wright and Cullen, 2001). We can train educators to be agents of change, making them aware of present stereotypes and eradicating them in lieu of beliefs that are more equitable. Homosexuality is usually absent from curricula for several reasons. The Judeo-Christian mores that were the foundation for our society still have a significant influence, thus same-sex orientation is viewed as a taboo (Wright and Cullen). Aspects of heterosexual power and privilege are evident in our society and may explain why there is difficulty in accepting homosexuality (Wright and Cullen). The authors of the article also mention how some educators feel that topics of sexuality should be left to health teachers or discussed only in humanities classes. Not all teachers need to instruct on such social justice issues but they do need have a knowledge base of same-sex orientation and homophobia and promote equity amongst students in their classes (Wright and Cullen).

Adult relationships are vital during adolescent development. Teens need role models to emulate as well as someone to whom they can talk (Sadowski, 2003). Gay and lesbian teens may not be able to confide in parents or other family members. Teachers who are open and accepting may serve in place of a family member and act as a confidant
to a homosexual student. Referring once again to the GLSEN survey, 40% of the teens surveyed felt that their teachers were not supportive of gay and lesbian students (Sadowski). The results from the surveys also reported that 82% of respondents said that teachers and other faculty members never or only sometimes interceded and stopped homophobic language (Sadowski). Twenty-four percent of respondents even admitted to hearing their teachers use inappropriate language (Sadowski).

We need to educate teachers about the inequities that exist in schools as well as in society in order to prevent teachers from passing along their own biases and prejudices to their students (Wright & Cullen, 2001). Not all teachers must directly incorporate homosexual topics into their curriculum, but teachers should have an understanding and knowledge of topics about homosexuality and ways to prevent homophobia in their schools (Wright & Cullen). Staff development may also include annual research presentations as well as discussions on homophobic language. Faculty could also identify gay role models and train teachers in discipline related to homophobic situations (Black, 1998).

In 1995-1996, 11 Catholic high schools in St. Paul, Minnesota, created an assemblage entitled Study Group on Pastoral Care and Sexual Identity. The purpose of the group was to study gay culture and history and analyze ways in which they could provide a safer haven for homosexuals within their schools (Gevelinger and Zimmerman, 1997). Representatives from each high school decided on four immediate goals. Each school would hold several workshops per school year discussing gay and lesbian issues, holding forums, and having presentations for teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors. These eleven Minnesota high schools also agreed on training particular staff...
members who want to specialize in helping gay and lesbian youth. The Study Group on Pastoral Care and Sexual Identity also described promoting tolerance through school policy, extracurricular activities, as well as the curriculum. Lastly, the group found that there was a need for a gay-straight alliance within the school, a source of student support (Gevelinger and Zimmerman). It was quite remarkable for conservative institutions to recognize the problems with homosexual teenagers and make progress towards better conditions almost ten years ago. Both heterosexual and homosexual adolescents have probably benefited from the encouragement and acceptance permeating throughout those eleven Minnesota high schools.

After reviewing the literature, the researcher wanted to conduct a study where teachers were surveyed on how they manage homophobia and homosexuality in high schools. The researcher examined scholarly documents on harassment and violence in regards to homophobia, development of gay and lesbian adolescents, as well as depictions of homosexuals in schools. The literature shows the need for further investigation regarding the treatment and management of homosexual issues in high schools. Some of the studies that were evaluated also aided the researcher in assembling the data methodology for this project.
Chapter 3: Methodology

After reviewing literature related to issues of homophobia and homosexuality and its effects on adolescents and education, the researcher deduced the following research questions: q1: Are teachers exhibiting tolerance and acceptance towards homosexuality in high schools?; q2: Are teachers ignoring incidents and not intervening when students discriminate against homosexuals; will teachers avoid the problem rather than punish the offender or discuss the behavior?; q3: Are teachers limited in the ways in which they can incorporate homosexual topics in high schools based on the nature of school policy? The researcher created a study that would lead her to investigate and discover whether there is truth and validity to these research questions.

Participants

Research was conducted among the teaching staff at a high school in southern New Jersey. The school was chosen due to the proximity to the researcher’s university. The researcher also engaged in a clinical internship at this particular high school in the fall of 2003, and was aware that a larger faculty might ensure more survey responses.

The high school, grades 9-12, has a population of 2990 students. Sixty-nine percent of the student population is of white, non-Hispanic descent and about 6% is African American. The remaining percentage of the student population is both Hispanic and Asian. The student to faculty ratio is 11.5.
The faculty consists of 300 teachers; all 300 served as the researcher’s population for this study. Surveys were distributed to each of the 300 teachers as to not exclude any members of the faculty.

Anonymity was important when conducting the study, thus there were no names of teachers recorded. A consent form was distributed but asked participants to only check a box after reading and agreeing to the regulations of the study. See Appendix A for a copy of the consent form used. As a result, there are no defining characteristics of participants, such as age, gender, or content area of teaching.

Instrument

After reviewing the literature, the researcher made a list of themes that reoccurred in articles and scholarly journals with regard to homophobia and homosexuality in high schools. The researcher found that two categories emerged from the literature review: policy and tolerance. Under the category of policy, four subcategories seemed pertinent, which included harassment, abuse, discipline, and curriculum. Both the category and subcategories related to how a teacher would manage issues of homophobia and homosexuality within a high school. Tolerance as a category had no subcategories.

Once the researcher developed categories, she made a list of possible scenarios that represented how a teacher would manage homophobia and homosexuality in relation to policy and tolerance. Scenarios included a student being criticized or taunted for sexual orientation by other students or two same sex students displaying affection in the hallway. The researcher considered other scenarios, such as inclusion of homosexual topics in the curriculum, altercations arising due to homophobia, assemblies on homosexuality, and conversations with individual students about sexual orientation.
As the researcher began developing the possible scenarios into survey questions, she sought assistance from a friend with a B.A. in psychology. The friend aided the researcher in creating questions #2 (A teacher witnesses a student taunting another student on the basis of his or her perceived homosexuality. The taunting should be dismissed as typical adolescent behavior.) and #10 (An adolescent female student approaches a teacher and informs him/her that she is experiencing romantic feelings for another female student. The student must then be gay.). The friend showed the researcher that constructing these two questions would lead to reverse scoring when analyzing the data.

Twenty questions/scenarios were composed for the survey but only eleven were used. Of the twenty questions, some overlapped themes or appeared confusing, thus they were eliminated. Some questions were fused with others to better represent one of the two categories the researcher wanted to incorporate in the survey.

The researcher decided to create scenario questions to include in the survey because she wanted to construct situations in which teachers have been involved to which they could relate. Using their experiences as teachers, the participants could then surmise how they would react to different predicaments involving homophobia or homosexuality.

The literature review also aided the researcher in deciding how to construct her survey for the study. In Dube’s research (2000) on sex-centered homosexual males and identity-centered homosexual males, he used a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 to measure how much a respondent agreed or disagreed with a statement. Dube’s study gave the researcher the idea to incorporate the same scale in her survey.
The rationale for using a Likert scale is that it measures the strength of agreement with a statement and is used to gauge attitudes or reactions. The Likert scale forces respondents to choose an answer to the question, but gives the respondent the responsibility of deciding which of the five choices best represents his or her beliefs.

The researcher designed the final question on the survey to be open-ended and optional. Question #12 reads, “Describe a teaching experience where you had to deal with gay and lesbian issues. What did you do and how did you react?” The researcher opted for an open-ended question on the survey because the respondent has the opportunity to share opinions without being controlled or persuaded by the researcher (Reja, Manfreda, Hlbec, and Vehover, 2003).

After completion of the survey, questions #3 (Student A, who is openly gay, requests that additional educational issues be added to health studies for purposes of modern integration of all sexual orientations. His request should be honored as it is important to discuss modern issues as part of a complete education.), #5 (School policy dictates that no public displays of affection are permitted on school grounds during school hours. A teacher witnesses two same-sex students violating this regulation. Mindful of recent media attention to discrimination, the teacher should choose not to discourage such fraternization during school hours.), #6 (A teacher has been called into the locker room because a fight is occurring. After the fight has been stopped, the aggressor informs the teacher that he/she had initiated the altercation after learning that a classmate is gay, which the aggressor finds offensive. This fight should then be treated as any other.), #7 (A special assembly is held to educate the student population on homosexuality and couples in today’s world. Students who choose to leave the assembly
should be excused without question.), #8 (A homosexual student belligerently makes assertions and comments that make other students feel uncomfortable. When other students bring the matter to a teacher’s attention, the teacher should then mediate the situation by turning the situation over to guidance and the administration.), and #11 (A popular entertainer in the music community commonly refers to homosexuals in derogatory terms in his lyrics. A coach finds an athlete playing this music in the weight room. The coach should then request the music to be turned off.) were grouped as the questions representing policy. Questions #1 (Students criticizing same sex orientation amongst their peers should be reprimanded.), #2 (A teacher witnesses a student taunting another student on the basis of his or her perceived homosexuality. The taunting should be dismissed as typical adolescent behavior.), #4 (An educator is teaching history when a student raises the topic of homosexuality. Whether this discussion be positive or negative, the teacher should be mindful that the subject may be uncomfortable for some students; therefore, the teacher should suggest that the topic should be discussed after class.), #9 (A student comes from a gay household. Both men/women raising the child should be included in all discussions of the child’s academics regardless.), and #10 (An adolescent female student approaches a teacher and informs him/her that she is experiencing romantic feelings for another female student. The student must then be gay.) were grouped under the tolerance category. See Appendix B for the survey that was used in this study.

Procedures

In order to successfully conduct the study, the researcher went through many processes before distributing the surveys to her population of teachers at a southern New
Jersey high school. The researcher first had to receive permission to conduct the study both from the high school as well as the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Rowan University. The researcher first submitted a detailed application with cover letter, consent form, and survey to the IRB the first week of February 2004. The IRB must evaluate a student's work to ensure that it will not cause any harm to participants involved. A letter of approval was issued 4 weeks later.

Simultaneously, the researcher sent a letter to the principal of the high school that she wished to conduct her research, asking permission to distribute surveys to the teaching staff. See Appendix C for copy of the letter sent to the principal. The principal also received a copy of the survey, cover letter, and consent form that would be given to the faculty of the high school if granted authorization to perform the study.

Correspondence by phone and email then occurred between the researcher and vice principal of the high school. The vice principal carefully evaluated the survey, consent form, and cover letter that were to be distributed to the teachers of her high school. The vice principal granted the researcher permission and sent a letter of approval to the IRB. See Appendix C for copy of the vice principal's letter of approval to the IRB.

Three hundred copies were then produced of the cover letter, consent form, and survey that would be given to each teacher within the high school. All three documents were paper clipped together along with a blank white envelope that would be used to conceal the participants' completed surveys.

On March 21, 2004, the researcher distributed the cover letter, consent form, survey, and blank envelope into each teacher's mailbox within each of the three main
offices of the high school. Secretaries working in each of the three main offices were notified beforehand of the researcher's arrival. The secretaries were also informed that collection boxes, clearly labeled Rowan University Graduate Research Project, would remain in each of the three main offices for three weeks until the end of collection process. The researcher alone distributed the surveys to each teacher mailbox and placed the collection boxes for the surveys on the counter of each of the three main offices. Three main offices exist for different grade levels throughout the building.

In the cover letter (See Appendix B), the researcher clearly stated that participants had between March 22, 2004, and April 8, 2004, to complete the survey, seal the survey and consent form in the blank envelope, and drop the envelope off in any of the three main offices in the collection boxes labeled Rowan University Graduate Research Project.

During the three week collection process, the researcher visited the high school every Thursday to collect surveys that had been completed and dropped off. No follow up letters were distributed. At the end of the three weeks, the researcher had collected 69 surveys out of the 300 distributed.

After the data had been collected, the researcher sent a card to the vice principal thanking her for her cooperation and assistance in regards to the study.

In May 2004, the researcher sat down and organized the data collected. The researcher grouped the completed surveys into two categories: surveys with responses to question #12 and surveys without responses to #12. Surveys 1-30 have no responses to question #12 and surveys 31-69 have responses to question #12.
The researcher then numbered the surveys and tallied the different responses for each question.

The researcher then read through surveys 31-69 and categorized the responses to question #12 as policy, tolerance, personal accounts, or miscellaneous. The researcher used inductive analysis to identify each response as one of the four categories. Each response to question #12 was then summarized in a document kept by the researcher.

Data Analysis

Using SPSS, a frequency analysis was performed on questions 1-11 to determine how each question was answered. In regards to question #12, coding was done on the open-ended responses to identify key themes, such as policy, tolerance, personal accounts, or miscellaneous. Coding of the responses to question #12 helped the researcher determine how teachers are managing homophobia and homosexuality within high schools.

Through frequency analysis of the survey questions and coding of the open-ended response, the researcher will determine how the data relates to her research questions. The analysis of data will then lead the researcher to answer and reflect on the three research questions.
Chapter 4: Findings and Results

Based on the literature review, the researcher initiated a study to learn how teachers in one southern New Jersey high school were managing issues of homophobia and homosexuality. After reviewing the literature, the researcher believed that there was a need to survey teachers about their handling of teens and homosexual issues. With the researcher's three research questions in consideration, a survey was distributed and completed by 69 respondents. The following information contains the results from these 69 surveys (See Appendix B for exact questions from survey).

Table 1 shows how the 69 respondents answered each question. Table 1 illustrates how many respondents strongly disagreed, disagreed, were neutral, agreed, strongly agreed, and did not respond to each of the 11 questions in the survey.

Table 1
_Frequency Table for Questions 1-11_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>n/r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question #1 showed a high degree of agreement, with 37.7% who strongly agreed and 43.5% who agreed. Question #2, which was reverse scored, had a high degree of agreement. Fifty-eight percent strongly agreed and 34.8% agreed with question #2. Question #3 also had a high degree of agreement with 18.8% of respondents who strongly agreed and 33.3% who agreed. Question #3, however, also had a high percentage of neutrals, 20.3%. Question #4 had a wide range of responses, with 11.6% who strongly disagreed, 33.3% who disagreed, 20.3% were neutral, 23.2% who agreed, and 10.1% who strongly agreed. Question #5 had a high degree of disagreement with 50.7% of respondents who strongly disagreed and 40.6% who disagreed. Question #6, similar to questions 1, 2, and 3, had a high degree of agreement with 36.2% who strongly agreed and 23.2% who agreed. Question #7 also had varied responses with 36.2% who disagreed and 23.2% who agreed. Question #8 had a high degree of agreement with 29.0% of respondents who strongly agreed and 44.9% who agreed. Question #9 also had a high level of agreement with 66.7% who strongly agreed and 24.6% who agreed. Question #10 had 46.4% of respondents who disagreed but also had 29.0% who were neutral. Question #11 had a high degree of agreement with 39.1% who strongly agreed and 44.9% who agreed. Table 2 shows these results.
Table 2

*Frequency Table for Questions 1-11*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>05.8%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>01.4%</td>
<td>43.5%</td>
<td>37.7%</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>04.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>01.4%</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
<td>58.0%</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>08.7%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5</td>
<td>50.7%</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
<td>02.9%</td>
<td>02.9%</td>
<td>01.4%</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>01.4%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7</td>
<td>05.8%</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8</td>
<td>02.9%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>04.3%</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9</td>
<td>01.4%</td>
<td>02.9%</td>
<td>04.3%</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q10</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
<td>05.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q11</td>
<td>04.3%</td>
<td>02.9%</td>
<td>08.7%</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Research Question 1*

In order to assess the first research question (Are teachers exhibiting tolerance and acceptance towards homosexuality in high schools?) the researcher constructed questions 1, 2, 4, 9, and 10. Question #1 (Students criticizing same sex orientation amongst their peers should be reprimanded.) was designed to find out what teachers do when they witness harassment of students based on same-sex orientation. A student may be gay or straight, but the student is still mistreated based on the assumptions that the student is
gay, which is viewed pejoratively. The researcher found that the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that students criticizing same sex orientation among classmates should be disciplined.

Question #2 (A teacher witnesses a student taunting another student on the basis of his or her homosexuality. The taunting should be dismissed as typical adolescent behavior.) was also created to see how teachers were dealing with tolerance and acceptance in regards to homophobia and homosexuality. This question was designed to be reverse scored from question #1, where the researcher wanted respondents to realize that ridiculing another student about being gay should not be taken lightly. As learned through the literature review, the repercussions of such teasing and lack of acceptance can be scarring to a teenager, whether he or she is gay or straight. The researcher anticipated that respondents would strongly disagree or disagree with question #2, but after the scores were reversed the results should show a high degree of agreement. The researcher did find these results.

Question #4 (An educator is teaching history when a student raises the topic of homosexuality. Whether this discussion be positive or negative, the teacher should be mindful that the subject may be uncomfortable for some students; therefore, the teacher should suggest that the topic should be discussed after class.) also dealt with issues of tolerance and acceptance. If a student initiated discussion about homosexuality in an intellectual and relevant manner, a teacher and students could use the opportunity to voice opinions with respect and courtesy, perhaps presenting new perspectives on tolerance and acceptance with students. The question, however, could not clearly demonstrate whether or not teachers are exhibiting tolerance and acceptance towards
homosexuality in high schools due to the array of responses. Reasons for the varied responses to question #4 may be due to the confusing nature of the question. When reading question #4, a respondent may interpret the scenario as a student attempting to disrupt class and force the teacher to digress from the lesson. The question does not state whether a student's comments are relevant to the particular history lesson. Another reason for varied responses to question #4 may result from the uncertainty of the respondents. Maybe participants were unsure how to handle such a situation because it never occurred during their teaching career. Other respondents may try to avoid talking about homosexuality in their classes because they are uncomfortable with the topic. Whatever the reason may be, question #4 did not help the researcher answer research question 1.

For question #4, 11.6% of respondents strongly disagreed, 33.3% disagreed, 20.3% were neutral, 23.2% agreed, and 10.1% strongly agreed. These percentages illustrate how diverse the answers were to question #4.

Question #9 (A student comes from a gay household. Both men/women raising the child should be included in all discussions of the child's academics regardless.) was also designed to challenge the research question about tolerance and acceptance. The respondent hoped that the respondents would strongly agree and agree with question #9, and the results show a high degree of agreement with a 24.6% of respondents who agreed and 66.7% who strongly agreed. The recognition of a student's parents, whoever they may be, shows that the sample population is respecting parents and guardians. Whether a teacher agrees or disagrees with homosexual lifestyles, that teacher still needs to treat that parent as any other.
Question #10 (An adolescent female student approaches a teacher and informs him/her that she is experiencing romantic feelings for another female student. The student must then be gay.) also relates to the researcher’s first research question. The researcher hoped respondents would be open-minded and not make assumptions about a student’s sexuality, thus disagreeing with question #10; however, the results show a variety of responses, thus not helping the researcher answer research question 1. Many teachers may not understand the confusing nature of sexuality during adolescence. Even though a teenager may think she is gay at one point during high school, she may completely change her mind by the time she enters college. The question was designed to have respondents recognize that disclosure of sexual orientation does not necessarily confirm one’s sexuality. Teachers serve as counselors and mediators, as well as instructors. Students may reach out to a teacher when they feel like they cannot talk to friends or family; thus, teachers need to keep an open mind and be supportive.

Table 3 shows percentage of ratings for each response on the Likert scale, mean, and standard deviation for questions 1, 2, 4, 9, and 10 for research question 1.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Percentage of Ratings</th>
<th>Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>05.8% 10.1% 01.4% 43.5% 37.7%</td>
<td>M 3.99 SD 1.17 n 68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>04.3% 0.0% 01.4% 34.8% 58.0%</td>
<td>M 4.44 SD 0.90 n 68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>11.6% 33.3% 20.3% 23.2% 10.1%</td>
<td>M 2.87 SD 1.21 n 68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9</td>
<td>01.4% 02.9% 04.3% 24.6% 66.7%</td>
<td>M 4.52 SD 0.83 n 69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1 shows how many of the 69 respondents answered questions 1, 2, 4, 9, and 10, questions representing the tolerance category of the survey. The graph illustrates how many respondents strongly disagreed (SD), disagreed (D), were neutral (N), agreed (A), and strongly agreed (SA) for questions 1, 2, 4, 9, and 10.

Research Question 2

The researcher created questions 1 and 2 to help analyze her second research question (Are teachers ignoring incidents and not intervening when students discriminate against homosexuals? Are teachers avoiding the problem rather than punishing the offender or discussing the behavior?). Question #1 (Students criticizing same sex orientation amongst their peers should be reprimanded.) and #2 (A teacher witnesses a student taunting another student on the basis of his or her homosexuality. The taunting should be dismissed as typical adolescent behavior.) directly discuss harassment and
discrimination of students in relation to homosexuality. The researcher believes that teachers are not intervening when necessary or disciplining students in these situations. According to the results of survey questions 1 and 2, respondents are actually defending the rights of homosexuals and informing students that harassment, discrimination, and abuse towards gays and lesbians is wrong. In question #1, the researcher wanted respondents to strongly agree or agree, and the results show they did agree. The researcher anticipated that respondents would strongly disagree or disagree with question #2, but after the scores were reversed the results should show a high degree of agreement. The majority of respondents answered in agreement to question #2 once reverse scored. According to the survey results, respondents from the sample population are in fact addressing and disciplining students who directly or inadvertently harass homosexuals.

Figure 2 shows how many of the 69 respondents answered questions 1 and 2 of the survey. The graph illustrates how many respondents strongly disagreed (SD), disagreed (D), were neutral (N), agreed (A), and strongly agreed (SA) for questions 1 and 2.
Research Question 3

The third research question, which asks are teachers limited in the ways in which they can incorporate homosexual topics in high schools based on the nature of school policy, discusses the limitations of school policy in promotion of acceptance and tolerance of homosexuals in high schools. Questions 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11 incorporate policy in their scenarios.

Question #3 (Student A, who is openly gay, requests that additional educational issues be added to health studies for purposes of modern integration of all sexual orientations. His request should be honored as it is important to discuss modern issues as part of a complete education.) related to the inclusion of homosexual issues in curriculum. The researcher wanted respondents to recognize the importance of representing homosexuality in the curriculum and have respondents agree with question #3; however, the curriculum is controlled by the school board of education and voted upon by them, thus teachers have limited control in curriculum. More than half of respondents were in agreement with this question, however, many neutral responses were
also received. This may be due to the confusing construction of question #3. A student does not have the authority to request for material to be added to a content area; but he or she does have the right to ask for change. If a recommendation is made to the superintendent and presented to the school’s board of education with support from the community, perhaps then the issue would be taken into consideration and a vote on modification could be made. The ambiguity of the question probably perplexed respondents. Question #3, therefore, did not assist in answering research question 3 about policy because there are certain procedures that need to take place before any changes in the curriculum can occur.

Question #5 (School policy dictates that no public displays of affection are permitted on school grounds during school hours. A teacher witnesses two same-sex students violating this regulation. Mindful of recent media attention to discrimination, the teacher should choose not to discourage such fraternization during school hours.) was constructed to assess teachers’ ability to abide by school policy regardless of the situation and not be lenient towards situations that might be more difficult to manage. Consistency is needed to enforce the policy whether the two students violating the rule are homosexual or heterosexual. The researcher anticipated respondents to disagree with the statement in question #5, and they did, which indicates that respondents adhere to policy and will not make exceptions to rules and regulations. Such an approach to the situation described in question #5 shows that these teachers are trying to create an equal learning environment where everyone is treated fairly. Some may oppose the equality of homosexuals and argue that gays and lesbians have endured enough strife and should be encouraged to be comfortable in their identities no matter what school policy mandates.
In this particular scenario, the researcher feels that teachers need to be consistent with rules otherwise problems will occur. Even though a same sex couple felt proud enough to display their affection towards one another, they violated the rules and must suffer the consequences regardless of who they are and what their sexual orientation may be.

Question #6 (A teacher has been called into the locker room because a fight is occurring. After the fight has been stopped, the aggressor informs the teacher that he/she had initiated the altercation after learning that a classmate is gay, which the aggressor finds offensive. This fight should then be treated as any other.) involves the school’s rules about fighting and discipline. The researcher wanted the respondents to recognize that any physical abuse related to homophobia and homosexuality needs to be treated more than an average fight. The students participating in this sort of fight need to understand the underlying homophobia that may exist. This part of policy could be modified so that a learning experience occurs rather than solely punishment. The researcher hoped that respondents would disagree with question #6, however, there was a high degree of agreement among respondents.

Question #7 (A special assembly is held to educate the student population on homosexuality and couples in today’s world. Students who choose to leave the assembly should be excused without question.) discusses incorporating topics of homosexuality in students’ learning experiences. Although policy may not allow for students to exit a assembly, question #7 asks teachers to be aware that not all people are accepting of this certain lifestyle due to religious, political, or personal beliefs, and that these students may feel more comfortable not watching the presentation. Similarly, a gay or lesbian student may feel that the information presented during an assembly of this nature is inaccurate or
offensive; they, too, have the right to be dismissed. The researcher wanted respondents to agree with question #7. Responses to question #7 were quite varied and did not meet the researcher's expectations. 36.2% disagreed, 15.9% were neutral, 23.2% agreed, and 18.8% strongly agreed.

Question #8 (A homosexual student belligerently makes assertions and comments that make other students feel uncomfortable. When other students bring the matter to a teacher's attention, the teacher should then mediate the situation by turning the situation over to guidance and the administration.) describes a situation that contrasts many of the other scenarios presented in the survey. Gay and lesbian students deserve all the rights and privileges to education as any other student does. If anyone attempts to discriminate or harm a gay or lesbians student, policy is supposed to protect that student. Similarly, if a homosexual student says something to offend another student, he or she needs to be disciplined as any other student. The researcher anticipated respondents to agree with question #8, and the findings indicate that respondents agreed with question #8.

Question #11 (A popular entertainer in the music community commonly refers to homosexuals in derogatory terms in his lyrics. A coach finds an athlete playing this music in the weight room. The coach should then request the music to be turned off.) is the final question regarding the policy issues discussed in the third research question. This survey question discusses teachers' responsibilities to protect students from offensive and harmful material whether it be within the classroom or after school. In this particular scenario, any music that discriminates against a certain sect of society should not be condoned on school property. The researcher hoped that respondents would agree with question #11, and the findings show this to be true. The coach recognizes, however, that
by not taking action he shows that he or she supports degradation of homosexuals. The simple act of turning off the radio illustrates model behavior that hopefully students will emulate. The coach does not tolerate music that offends minority groups, and perhaps the student will think twice before listening to the same music. This action may be broadly described in school policy, hence why respondents were in agreement with question #11.

Table 4 displays percentage of ratings for each response on the Likert scale, mean, and standard deviation for questions 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11 for research question 3.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>08.7%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5</td>
<td>50.7%</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
<td>02.9%</td>
<td>02.9%</td>
<td>01.4%</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>01.4%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7</td>
<td>05.8%</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8</td>
<td>02.9%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>04.3%</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q11</td>
<td>04.3%</td>
<td>02.9%</td>
<td>08.7%</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3 shows how many of the 69 respondents answered questions 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11 on the survey. The graph illustrates how many respondents strongly disagreed (SD), disagreed (D), were neutral (N), agreed (A), and strongly agreed (SA) for questions 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11.
**Figure 3.** Bar Graph for Survey Questions 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11 for Research Question 3

**Responses to Question #12**

Thirty-nine of the 69 respondents answered the open-ended question #12. Figure 4 illustrates the number of respondents who answered question #12 versus those who did not respond to question #12.
Considering 30 of the 69 respondents chose not to reply to question #12 may imply several things. The 30 respondents wanted to complete the survey but did not have the time to devote to a written answer. Some of the respondents may not have had anything to write in response to question #12, thus leaving it blank. Perhaps incidents that occurred between teachers and students were too personal to convey through a graduate study survey or maybe the respondent did not agree with the subject matter and felt it best not to write anything for question #12. Such reasons are all speculations for the researcher cannot know for certain why 30 respondents opted to not answer question #12.

The responses to question #12 revealed the emergence of reoccurring themes. The themes found in the responses to question #12 include tolerance, policy, personal accounts, as well as miscellaneous, which included subtopics, such as generalized and vague responses about gays and lesbians in schools. Each response was coded by finding certain
key phrases or ideas for each category. Figure 5 shows how many of the 39 respondents answered question #12 in different categories.

![Bar chart showing responses to Q12 in different categories: Tolerance, Policy, Personal, and Miscellaneous.]

**Figure 5.** Categories for Responses to Q12: Tolerance, Policy, Personal, and Miscellaneous

Under the tolerance category, 8 open-ended responses were received. The following are synopses.

R39: Attitudes toward homosexuality should be tolerant but not advocacy or endorsement. The respondent’s personal religious views are not accepting of homosexuality, but he/she says that same sex orientation is just another form of sexual expression.

R40: Respondent 40 said that everyone should be treated the same regardless.

R41: This respondent discussed how he/she has witnessed students whispering and mumbling about an assumed sexuality of another student. The teacher talked to the
students about respect, and the rest of the school year was successful. The teacher even
received a letter from one of those students the following year thanking him/her for being
open-minded and respectful towards homosexuality.

R42: Psychology lessons on tolerance led to an open forum where gay students came out
to the class. The class periods gave students who did not know much about
homosexuality an opportunity to ask questions. The respondent noted how the class’
discussions were a healthy way of dealing with tolerance and acceptance. The respondent
also said that girls more than boys disclose their sexuality in high school.

R43: This respondent discussed an incident where students were questioning a particular
staff member’s sexuality. The respondent said he/she interjected and told students that
they needed to respect every person equally and not judge a person based on sexuality.

R44: A teacher overheard a student conversation about homosexuality during a study
hall. The teacher joined the discussion and added some ideas for students to consider.
This respondent said he/she always makes himself/herself accessible to talk about matters
with students for the main goal is to educate.

R45: During class, a student inappropriately says, “that blacks, Jews, and gays are all
sick.” Teacher discusses how everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion but tells
students to make sure their words do not hurt other people. The teacher then initiated a
discussion on civil rights and constitutional rights.

R46: The respondent said one teaches tolerance by exhibiting tolerance.

The responses are telling of teachers’ behaviors and management towards
homophobia. For example, R41 described how he or she witnessed students making
assumptions and starting rumors about a particular student’s sexuality. The respondent
tells how he/she used this incident to teach about mutual respect and tolerance for every 
member of the class and society. The class’ discussion resulted in a school year where 
few problems of that nature arose, and the teacher even received a letter from students the 
following year thanking him/her for his/her commitment towards an equitable school 
environment. This example demonstrates that teachers are recognizing problems and 
working with their classes to bring about understanding and acceptance.

Fourteen respondents wrote answers to question #12 that can be grouped under 
the category of policy. Two subgroups of the category policy are discipline and 
curriculum. Respondents 31-38 have open-ended answers in the discipline subcategory, 
and respondents 47-52 have responses in the curriculum subcategory.

R31: Teacher tells students that the phrase, “That’s gay,” is inappropriate and 
unnecessary. Respondent says that teachers need to let students know that they will not 
put up with that language.

R32: Respondent writes up any students who use homophobic language because teachers 
have to treat the language like any other hateful terminology.

R33: Respondent says when he/she hears students say, “That’s gay,” he/she asks students 
to stop. If language does not cease, he/she follows up with discipline.

R34: Respondent hears boys calling each other faggots as a form of insult. Respondent 
comments on how such language is unacceptable in the classroom and elsewhere.

R35: “Dude, you’re gay,” says one student to another. Teacher told student that such 
language and behavior is inappropriate. Respondent admits that he/she should have 
handled things differently but situation never reoccurred with these particular students.
R36: Respondent says that whenever he/she hears students use inappropriate homophobic language, he/she tells them to stop in class, but in the locker room the same teacher does not say anything.

R37: Respondent saw same-sex couple holding hands in the hallway. Another student made nasty remarks at them. Teacher overhears the insults and writes up the student.

R38: Respondent says fag is an obscene word and not to be used.

R47: Teacher talks about homosexuality in regards to HIV/STD’s but not enough time in curriculum to further discuss matters in health class.

R48: Teacher talks about gay issues in current events. Classes talk about broader implications but not the personal.

R49: History class discussed both sides of same sex marriage. Respondent says, “I think it was a positive experience to discuss the issue intelligently.”

R50: A science class talked about snails being hermaphrodites, but teacher says that 9th and 10th graders laugh at anything not “normal”. The teacher used the lesson to explain tolerance and tried to make students understand the biological construction of snails.

R51: Students engage in debate regarding President Bush’s proposal for a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriages.

R52: Teacher says homosexual issues should only be discussed in health education and that teachers should remain neutral. “Discussion should be referred to the child and his/her family.”

Six respondents in this category wrote about students overusing phrases, such as “You’re so gay,” as a way of degrading another student. These respondents were consistent in saying that they would warn a student when hearing such discriminatory
comments, but if the behavior persisted then that student would be written up and reported to an administrator.

Six respondents in the policy category also wrote about curriculum in regards to homophobia and inclusion of homosexuality. These respondents recorded how they incorporate topics about homosexuality into their curriculum, with a majority responding about current event discussions. The proposal for a constitutional amendment banning gay marriages sparked much argument within and outside of schools. Three of the respondents mentioned using the topic in their particular content areas to fuel discussion between students. One health teacher, however, commented on how there is limited time to everything that already exists in the curriculum so there is little time allotted to discuss homosexuality within health education. Another health teacher wrote how homosexual topics should be left to discussion between the student and his or her family, not health class.

Nine respondents wrote answers to question #12 that can be categorized as personal and individual accounts. The following are summaries of respondents’ 53-61 answers.

R53: Teacher disclosed to students that his/her brother is gay. Respondent also mentioned how two same sex faculty members have a long-term relationship, which gives students a chance to see and accept homosexuality within the school.

R54: A gay student expressed attraction towards a heterosexual student. The teacher served as mediator between two.

R55: Respondent discussed how he/she is an advocate for gay rights. The teacher talked to NEA to include “gay” and “retard” as derogatory insults. Respondent also discussed
how a fairly popular gay student brought his same sex date to the prom. The media tried to cover the story but school officials forbid it.

R56: Respondent says he/she takes time to listen to his/her one lesbian student and her issues with her girlfriend.

R57: Respondent talks about how a student at the alternative high school came out. The social worker talked to that student and classmates to discuss any questions anyone might have. The staff was very supportive of the gay student.

R58: Respondent talks about how he managed a group of male students. One group was picking on a boy because of his perceived sexuality. The teacher assigned detention to the students responsible for the taunting then made sure the victim was okay. The teacher used the detentions as an opportunity to deconstruct myths and misunderstandings regarding homophobia.

R59: Respondent says how one student on bowling team is gay. The coach reminds everyone to respect and treat each other fairly.

R60: A student confides in a teacher about his homosexuality and difficulties with his father. The student also talked to teacher about how the student’s religious views seemed to be against his sexual orientation.

R61: Teacher discusses the importance of truth and being true to oneself. The respondent also wrote about how we need to respect people’s choices no matter how they arrive at that choice.

Several teachers wrote about students disclosing their sexuality to that particular teacher or the class. An adolescent’s coming out is significant and deserves recognition of the student’s strength and temerity. The respondents who answered question #12 about
their students’ disclosure conveyed how they served as someone the student could come and talk to about their lifestyle choice. These responses demonstrate that some teachers are taking the time to encourage and promote healthy perceptions of homosexuals.

Another respondent, R53, discussed how he/she told his/her class that his/her brother was gay. By letting students know that one has a personal connection and history attached to gays and lesbians, then there might be less chance of discrimination and disrespect towards homosexuality in that classroom. Respondent 55 wrote about how he/she was an advocate for gay rights and how he/she supported a same sex couple who went to prom together. The respondent described how the media wanted to publicize the same sex couple’s attendance of the prom, but this teacher and others dissuaded the media in efforts to make the prom a positive experience for everyone involved.

Respondents 62-69 were categorized as miscellaneous, which means that they wrote a response but their answer did not show signs of any the themes used during the coding process; therefore, their open-ended responses did not fit into the three previous categories created for question #12.

High Degrees of Neutrality

When constructing the survey, the researcher chose 5 answer response Likert scale where one of the options was neutral. The neutral response in a research study is telling for it shows respondents lack of commitment to an issue or uncertainty about a question. In this study, the researcher decided that neutral responses to a question amounting to ten and higher constituted a high degree of neutrality in the study. There are four questions that had high degrees of neutrality, which include questions #3, 4, 7, 10. Question #3 had 14 respondents (20.3%) select a neutral answer. Question #4 also had 14
neutral responses (20.3%). Eleven respondents (15.8%) chose neutral for question #7.

Twenty respondents (28.9%) selected neutral for question #10. Figure 6 illustrates these high degrees of neutrality for questions 3, 4, 7, and 10.

![Figure 6. Percentages of Neutrals for Questions 3, 4, 7, 10](image)

The researcher also wanted to examine the difference between the number of neutrals chosen by respondents 1-30 who did not answer question #12 versus respondents 31-69 who did answer question #12. With eleven questions and 30 respondents in the first group, there were 331 different answers. Thirty-two out of 331 answers (15.1%) were neutral. With eleven questions and 39 respondents in the second group, there were 429 answers chosen. Forty-two out of the 429 answers (9.7%) were neutral. Even though the percentages are low, the results show that respondents who did not answer question #12 had a higher percentage of neutrality than respondents who did answer question #12.
Certain respondents had a high frequency of neutral responses. The researcher decided that respondents who selected 3 or more neutrals out of the 11 surveys questions qualified for high frequencies of neutrality. Respondent 8 had 3 neutral responses for questions 3, 5, and 11. Respondent 21 had 5 neutral responses for questions 3, 4, 7, 8, and 10. Respondent 26 selected 4 neutral responses to questions 3, 4, 7, and 9. Respondent 34 had 3 neutral answers for questions 7, 10, and 11. Respondent 36 also had 3 for questions 2, 4, and 11. Respondent 45 had 4 neutral answers to questions 4, 7, 10, and 11. Respondent 47 chose 3 neutral responses to questions 3, 4, and 9. Respondent 50 also had 3 for questions 3, 4, and 10. Respondent 53 had 3 neutral answers to questions 4, 7, and 11. Respondent 69 had 4 neutral responses for questions 1, 4, 7, and 11.

The results from the study's surveys have shown an interesting range of results. The data will assist the researcher in answering her three research questions: are teachers exhibiting tolerance and acceptance towards homosexuality in high schools?; are teachers ignoring incidents and not intervening when students discriminate against homosexuals, and are teachers avoiding the problem rather than punish the offender or discuss the behavior?; and are teachers limited in the ways in which they can incorporate homosexual topics in high schools based in the nature of school policy, discusses the limitations of school policy in promotion of acceptance and tolerance of homosexuals in high schools. The statistics from the survey can be further discussed to understand their meanings and implications for the management of homophobia and homosexuality in high schools.
Chapter 5: Discussion

After running statistical tests on the data, the researcher was able to record the results described in chapter 4. This chapter will discuss the implications and significance of the findings in relation to the three research questions. Limitations of the research study also need to be explored to understand why certain outcomes occurred due to restrictions. There will also be discussion of what teachers can do to better manage homophobia and homosexuality in high schools as well as what New Jersey can do to ensure the safety of our students.

Limitations

When the researcher first chose homosexuality as a thesis topic, she faced much adversity. The researcher was forewarned by faculty at the university that any questionnaires or surveys on such a controversial topic would not be cordially accepted at a high school. For reasons of convenience, the graduate program suggested that each student conduct her research at her student teaching placement during the spring of 2004. Unfortunately, this researcher was denied assistance from her cooperating teacher and, therefore, did not force the issue to ensure a positive relationship with her cooperating teacher. Her cooperating teacher insisted that the high school in which she worked had a small, conservative faculty that would not respond positively to open discussion about homosexuality. According to the cooperating teacher, previous situations relating to gay and lesbian topics created problems within this particular high school; therefore, the cooperating teacher did not want to be associated with any such
graduate research project and asked the researcher to refrain from conducting her study at that high school.

Being prohibited from conducting a research study on teacher management of homosexuality and homophobia in a southern New Jersey high school directly demonstrates the fear and intolerance occurring within high schools. Since the staff of this high school had less than 70 teachers, a high degree of respondents may not have been likely. Forbidding a student to perform research, however, has strong implications. Even though the researcher was denied access to distribute her survey, she informed her 10th and 11th grade classes about the research project and held several discussions where students could converse about homosexual lifestyles and same sex marriages.

The researcher fortunately turned to an ally she had during her clinical internship in the fall of 2003, a cooperating teacher who supported her project. The cooperating teacher suggested contacting the principal of his school and asking permission to conduct the study at their high school. An assistant principal of the high school offered her assistance and allowed the researcher to proceed with her study.

Since the high school had separate wings for different grades, the researcher spent a majority of her clinical internship in the 11/12 wing of the high school. She was better associated with teachers who taught the upper grades than grades 9 and 10. When the researcher collected the surveys, she discovered that twice as many surveys were returned from the 11th and 12th grade teachers as the 9th and 10th grade teachers. The researcher's exposure in the 11/12 wing of the high school as well as familiarity with several teachers most likely helped the researcher in accumulating more survey responses there.
Although 300 surveys were distributed, only 69 completed surveys were returned. The 23% return rate probably reflects the controversial nature of the research topic. Perhaps members of the sample population felt uncomfortable with responding to questions about homosexuality, or maybe they did not want to admit that they were not dealing with issues of homophobia and homosexuality in their high school. The 231 teachers who did not respond convey messages through their silence and lack of participation. Although many faculty members may have been busy with different aspects of their job and their lives, the researcher can assume that the low number of respondents reflects the lack of support for gay and lesbian issues. The researcher did not anticipate all teachers to be activists, but she does feel that teachers have the responsibility to make their students cognizant of homosexual lifestyles as well as teach their students to have mutual respect for all citizens of society.

Another limitation that impeded the research project is that there is little to no past precedent set, meaning that the researcher did not find previous research performed in a similar manner. This may be viewed positively in that the content is original, but, unfortunately, the researcher lacked studies to emulate.

Research Questions

Research question 1 asked, “Are teachers exhibiting tolerance and acceptance towards homosexuality in high schools?” According to responses for questions 1, 2, 4, 9, and 10, the sample population is attempting to teach and model tolerance and acceptance towards homosexuality.

Even though the results from these questions show that the sample population is stopping harassment of homosexuality, the data is not indicative of all teachers’
behaviors in this specific high school nor the state or the country. The 69 respondents did meet the researcher’s expectations and demonstrated that they are making efforts towards equity for gays and lesbians in high schools.

Three out of the five questions created in the tolerance category show that the teachers surveyed are exhibiting tolerance and acceptance towards homosexuality in high schools. The word tolerance, however, implies that someone opposes a belief or behavior but does not outwardly oppose it, or tolerance can be defined as showing respect for a different belief or set of practices. Ideally, students and teachers should learn and exhibit acceptance, not just tolerance as a means of better understanding homosexual culture in attempts of reducing prejudice and discrimination. An individual may still disagree with same sex orientation but if he or she is educated, then hopefully prejudgments and generalizations will diminish. Through use of hidden curriculum, teachers can instill values of acceptance and respect for all members of our diverse community of learners.

Research question 2 asked, “Are teachers ignoring incidents and not intervening when students discriminate against homosexuals? Are teachers avoiding the problem rather than punishing the offender or discussing the behavior?” The researcher believes that homosexuals have been used as a scapegoat for a long time. If one wants to offend another person or put them down, they are called faggot, queer, or gay. Through conditioning, such terms threaten certain males’ masculinity and females’ femininity, for being gay is associated with being less than a heterosexual. The only difference between homosexuals and heterosexuals is with whom one engages in sexual intercourse. Such private matters should not be used to define a person nor reduce him or her to something
less valued in this society. Teachers have the responsibility to discipline those who discriminate against homosexuals or anyone else for that matter.

Research question 3 asked, "Are teachers limited in the ways in which they can incorporate homosexual topics in high schools based on the nature of school policy?" Questions 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11 incorporate policy in their scenarios.

In relation to survey question #6, many fights originate from some personal conflict between two people, but in order to reduce homophobia within schools, teachers and administrators need to handle a homophobic fight in a way that will create a learning experience for the people involved. Students need to learn that such behavior will not be tolerated and that students need to demonstrate respect for one another. The punishment for the offender could involve some type of workshop where students learn about each other to create understanding and respect.

The scenario in question #7 could be interpreted as students being able to freely exit the assembly. Teachers, of course, cannot allow students such freedom for it is their responsibility to account for their students at all times. Should a teacher allow students to leave if they feel uncomfortable with discussion of homosexual topics or should they remain seated and learn new information about a different lifestyle? The school does not want to make students feel perturbed from an assembly, but it is also the role of education to expand the knowledge and understanding of the world. Question #7, thus, did not really help answer the third research question, but it helped the researcher realize how different teachers interpret policy depending on the situation and the students involved.
The questions used in the survey to assess policy show that respondents adhere to policy and discipline consistently, thus demonstrating equality. With issues of homophobia and homosexuality, the researcher believes that situations need to be handled equitably, meaning that policy should recognize that certain situations demand different management due to their severity. In order to reduce prejudice and acts of hate towards gays and lesbians, perhaps more stringent measures need to be applied. Such policy may scare students who want to act out and make them rethink actions that may hurt or offend another.

The researcher anticipated that whoever opted to answer question #12 was most likely going to write about experiences where he or she did something beneficial towards gay and lesbian youth. The researcher expected to receive only a few open-ended responses where someone would describe how their personal beliefs disagreed with homosexual lifestyles. For the most part, the researcher’s predictions became the reality.

The responses in the tolerance category show teachers treating their high school students as mature young adults who are capable of engaging in intellectual conversation about respect and equity and how each student has the ability to modify the perceptions of gays and lesbians in society.

Recognition of students’ discriminatory language indicates that certain teachers are in fact disciplining students in hopes of decreasing its use. As previously discussed, using homophobic language is insulting and offensive, just as it would be offensive towards any other societal minority. To instill respect, teachers need to reduce students’ exploitations of homophobic language.
Responses from the various content area teachers is interesting because some teachers recognize the importance of including subject matter on homosexuality while others choose to ignore it. Disregarding homosexuality in school is demonstrating ignorance to an entire culture that exists in our society that deserves a voice. Even though some teachers are making the efforts to incorporate and represent the lifestyle in their curriculum, others choose to avoid it.

The researcher found that all the responses were telling of teachers’ behavior and management of homophobia and homosexuality in this particular high school. Teachers are taking tremendous risks in the classroom, in the hallway, and after school to incorporate gays and lesbians in the school environment. Responses to question #12 show that educators are attempting to modify the perceptions of homosexuals and instill acceptance, respect, and equity.

High Degrees of Neutrality

Comparison between respondents who did answer question #12 and respondents who did not answer question #12 shows that there were more neutral responses among those who did not answer question #12. As previously speculated, the high degrees of neutrality may be a result of a question that lacked clarity or a lack of commitment to a response. The slightly higher percentage of neutrals among respondents 1-30 seem fitting since they are the ones who left question #12 blank. In retrospect, the researcher should have omitted the neutral response in the Likert scale on the survey.

Reasons for high degrees of neutrality in individual respondents, such as R8, R21, R26, R34, R36, R45, R47, R50, R53, and R69, may have occurred for similar reasons of confusion or little certainty about an answer to a specific scenario.
Released on July 15, 2004, by the New Jersey Department of Education, the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) assessed school policies in order to determine their level of safety towards gay and lesbian students. Out of 50 states, 42 failed, yet New Jersey ranked number one. William Librera, the commissioner of education for the state, was quoted as saying, “This rank is a testament to our commitment to provide a thorough and efficient education for New Jersey’s students in a safe environment regardless of race, creed, gender or sexual orientation” (NJDOE, 1). The assessment also showed that New Jersey was 1 of 8 states in our country to have sexual orientation state laws for students and 1 of 3 states to have policies protecting gender identity (NJDOE, 1). This information from the state’s department of education demonstrate that New Jersey is actually making efforts towards including gays and lesbians through every aspect of school and making attempts to protect them from discrimination.

Even though this research study only focused on one high school in southern New Jersey, the results from the survey and open-ended question are encouraging for they indicate that teachers in this particular high school recognize the need for equity for gays and lesbians in education and society. The researcher, as a high school student ten years ago, observed and experienced disregard towards gays and lesbians in high school. Entering into the field of education, the researcher inquired whether conditions have changed due to the somewhat inclusion of gays and lesbians in mainstream society. The findings from the research indicate that teachers are transforming the ways they manage homophobic discrimination as well as showing support and encouragement for gay and
lesbian students. The goal of education is not to create conformists but to nurture knowledge, thinking, and growth. Educators have the responsibility to teach students how to form their own opinions but simultaneously accepting and respecting their classmates. Learning about mutual respect will lead to a more equitable environment for gay and lesbian students as well as everyone involved in the educational community.
Reference List


New Jersey ranked #1 in supporting safe school laws for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students and educators. New Jersey Department of Education.


Appendix A

Consent Form
Consent Form

I agree to participate in a study entitled “Teacher Management of Homophobia and Homosexuality in High Schools”, which is being conducted by Ms. Sarah Kiyak, a graduate student working towards her M.S. in Teaching at Rowan University. The purpose of this research study is to evaluate how teachers are handling homophobia within schools and what they are doing to promote acceptance regarding homosexuality. The data collected in this study will be submitted for publication on Rowan University’s campus.

I understand that I will be required to answer a survey of twelve questions. My participation in the study should not exceed twenty minutes.

I understand that my responses will be anonymous and that all the data gathered will be confidential. I agree that any information obtained from this study may be used in any way thought best for publication or education provided that I am in no way identified and my name is not used.

I understand that there are no physical or psychological risks involved in this study, and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without penalty.

I understand that my participation does not imply employment with the state of New Jersey, Rowan University, or the principal investigator.

If I have any questions or problems concerning my participation in this study, I may contact Ms. Sarah Kiyak at xxx-xxx-xxxx or via email at ________________.

Please check the box below after reading the consent form in its entirety.

☐  I understand the conditions of this research project and all the information stated in this consent form.

Signature of Investigator____________________ Date____________
Appendix B

Cover Letter and Survey
Dear Faculty:

My name is Sarah Kiyak, and I am currently a graduate student at Rowan University pursuing a M.S. in Teaching. I was fortunate enough to intern at your high school in fall of 2003 and was grateful to work in such a positive and encouraging environment. As part of my Master’s program, I must complete a research project data. Since my time at your school was so rewarding, I chose Washington Township High School as the location to gather the necessary information for my research.

The research project involves evaluating how teachers are dealing with homophobia and homosexuality in schools and what teachers are doing to promote acceptance regarding homosexuality. The surveys will be distributed today, March 22nd and will be collected through Thursday, April 8th. Each respondent’s answers will remain completely anonymous. No names will be asked nor will any names be included in the analysis of the research. I will be solely responsible for distributing the surveys through the use of your mailboxes. You will also receive a blank envelope with your survey used to seal your results and ensure anonymity. There will be a bin to collect sealed surveys in the 9/10, 11/12, and core main offices.

The survey should not take more than 15-20 minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary, and participants do not have to respond to all questions.

Your involvement and assistance with this research project would be greatly appreciated and would benefit the study tremendously. If you have any problems or concerns, please feel free to call 4-4189 or via email at sarahkiyak@yahoo.com. The consent form, survey, and envelope are attached to this letter. Thank you so much for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Sarah Kiyak
**Teacher Management of Homophobia and Homosexuality in High Schools**

**DIRECTIONS:** For questions numbered 1-11, read each statement. Below each statement is a range of options used to demonstrate how much you agree, disagree, or feel neutral about each statement. Circle the number that best represents your opinion about each statement.

For example:
Some say that the sky is blue everyday.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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</table>

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

Complete the survey and consent form. Please seal both the survey and consent form in the attached envelope. Between March 22\(^{nd}\)-April 8\(^{th}\), you can drop off your sealed envelope in the 9/10, 11/12, or core main offices in a container marked **Rowan Research Project**.

Your participation in this research is greatly appreciated!

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1. Students criticizing same sex orientation amongst their peers should be reprimanded.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
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2. A teacher witnesses a student taunting another student on the basis of his or her perceived homosexuality. The taunting should be dismissed as typical adolescent behavior.

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<tr>
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</table>
3. Student A, who is openly gay, requests that additional educational issues be added to health studies for purposes of modern integration of all sexual orientations. His request should be honored as it is important to discuss modern issues as part of a complete education.

4. An educator is teaching history when a student raises the topic of homosexuality. Whether this discussion be positive or negative, the teacher should be mindful that the subject may be uncomfortable for some students; therefore, the teacher should suggest that the topic should be discussed after class.

5. School policy dictates that no public displays of affection are permitted on school grounds during school hours. A teacher witnesses two same-sex students violating this regulation. Mindful of recent media attention to discrimination, the teacher should choose not to discourage such fraternization during school hours.

6. A teacher has been called into the locker room because a fight is occurring. After the fight has been stopped, the aggressor informs the teacher that he/she had initiated the altercation after learning that a classmate is gay, which the aggressor finds offensive. This fight should then be treated as any other.
7. A special assembly is held to educate the student population on homosexuality and couples in today's world. Students who choose to leave the assembly should be excused without question.

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<thead>
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8. A homosexual student belligerently makes assertions and comments that make other students feel uncomfortable. When other students bring the matter to a teacher's attention, the teacher should then mediate the situation by turning the situation over to guidance and the administration.

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<tr>
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9. A student comes from a gay household. Both men/women raising the child should be included in all discussions of the child's academics regardless.

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10. An adolescent female student approaches a teacher and informs him/her that she is experiencing romantic feelings for another female student. The student must then be gay.

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11. A popular entertainer in the music community commonly refers to homosexuals in derogatory terms in his lyrics. A coach finds an athlete playing this music in the weight room. The coach should then request the music to be turned off.

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Question #12 is open-ended. Use the space below to write your answer.

12. Describe a teaching experience where you had to deal with gay and lesbian issues. What did you do and how did you react?
Appendix C

Letter to Principal and Vice Principal's Letter of Approval to IRB
Dear Ms.:

My name is Sarah Kiyak, and I am currently a graduate student at Rowan University pursuing a M.S. in Teaching. As part of my internship experience, I was fortunate enough to observe and teach 11th grade English with the esteemed Mr. Xxxxxxx at Xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx High School. I am very grateful for my eight weeks spent at your high school in the fall of 2003, and I thank you, Xxxxxxxxxxxxx, and your Board of Education for the opportunity to work in an accepting and encouraging environment.

Since my experiences at your high school were incredibly positive, I was hoping, with your permission, to conduct my research for my Master's thesis project at Xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx High School. The research would involve evaluating how teachers are handling homophobia within the classrooms and what they are doing to promote acceptance regarding homosexuality. The surveys would be distributed to each teacher on staff the week of March 22nd and would be collected through April 8th. Each respondent's answers would remain completely anonymous. No names will be asked nor will any names be included in the analysis of the research. I would be solely responsible for distributing the surveys through the use of the teachers' mailboxes and collecting the surveys in blank envelopes in both the 9/10 and 11/12 main offices.

I have included a copy of the actual survey and consent form that will be used to collect data. I thank you for taking the time to read this. If you have any problems or concerns, please feel free to contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx or via email at __________________. Your high school's assistance with this research project would be greatly appreciated and would benefit the study tremendously. I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Sarah Kiyak
March 4, 2004

, Ph.D.
Chair, Rowan University IRB
Department of Psychology
Rowan University
Glassboro, NJ 08028

Dear Dr. ,

Please accept this letter as verification that Sarah Kiyak has been approved to conduct a survey of the faculty of High School as part of her graduate studies at Rowan University. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at .

Sincerely,

Executive Assistant Principal

Cc: Sarah Kiyak