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**SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND BULLYING  
HOW EXPERIENCE EFFECTS PERCEPTION**

by  
Ryan M. Rollins

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Psychology  
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Master of Arts in School Psychology  
at  
Rowan University  
April 12, 2012

Thesis Chair: Roberta Dihoff, PhD

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## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my husband and children. Without their support and patience, this research would not have been possible.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my gratitude to both Dr. Roberta Dihoff and Dr. Terri Allen for their guidance and help throughout this research. Also, I would like to thank CC; you know who you are!!

## Abstract

Ryan M. Rollins  
SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND BULLYING:  
HOW EXPERIENCE EFFECTS PERCEPTION  
2011/12  
Roberta Dihoff, PhD.  
Master of Arts in School Psychology

Harassment, intimidation, and bullying (HIB) are a pervasive problem in society. Individuals are bullied for many different reasons including sexual orientation (actual or perceived), social group or status, and ethnicity. All individuals perceive HIB differently and it is important to notice these differences. This study purposes a difference in perception among those who have been victims of HIB and those who have not as well as a correlation between sexual orientation and experience with bullying. Findings show a heightened sensitivity among all subjects to incidents of HIB and a positive correlation between LGBT youth and being a victim of incidents of bullying.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **Need**

With the introduction of the New Jersey Anti-bullying Bill of Rights Act (2010), harassment, intimidation, and bullying (HIB) are very important topics amongst teachers, administrators and parents. According to Batsche, bullying “may be the most prevalent form of violence in the schools and the form that is likely to affect the greatest number of students” (as cited in Bauman & Del Rio, 2006, p. 219). HIB can be found in many environments including schools, neighborhoods, and now with the prevalence of social media, on the Internet and cell phones. Perception is an important component of HIB because everyone perceives HIB differently. The need of this research was to determine how experience affects perception.

#### **Purpose**

Those who are victims of bullying are bullied for such reasons as sexual orientation, ethnicity, and religion. What were of most concern for this study were those individuals who were bullied because of their sexual orientation. This study showed the difference in perception of HIB among heterosexuals and LGBT (lesbians, gays, bisexual, and transgender) youth.

#### **Hypothesis One**

Subjects who have been bullied will perceive HIB scenarios differently than those subjects who were not bullied.

## **Hypothesis Two**

LGBT subjects will have more experience with being a victim of incidents of HIB during their junior and senior years of high school.

## **Operational Definitions**

Gay-baiting – a male being dominated by another male in some way (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003)

Harassment, intimidation, and bullying (HIB) - any gesture, any written, verbal or physical act, or any electronic communication that [is reasonably perceived as being motivated either by any actual or perceived characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or a mental, physical or sensory handicap, or by any other distinguishing characteristic, that takes place on school property, at any school-sponsored function, on a school bus, or through electronic communication and that], due to a power differential between the aggressor(s) and the target(s) (Report of the New Jersey Commission on Bullying in Schools, 2009)

Homophobia - negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors toward non-heterosexual individuals and behavior (Wright, Adams, & Bernat, 1999)

Homophobic epithets – verbal form of homophobic aggression using phrases such as “flamer,” “faggot,” “you’re so gay,” “lesbo,” and “homo.”

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) – individuals who are not exclusively Heterosexual

Perception – subject’s personal view shaped through experience

### **Assumptions**

One of the assumptions faced in this study is cultural fairness in the self-report survey. Being that HIB extends over all cultures, the participants in the study should have no issues with the questions asked and scenarios given on the survey.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this study include sample size, diversity of sample with respect to actual and perceived sexual orientation, and method of data collection (self-report).

### **Summary**

In chapter two, a review of literature of definitions of bullying, prevention strategies, types of bullying, perception of why bullying occurs, effects of bullying, sexual orientation, perceived sexual orientation, and gender nonconformity will be presented.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

A review of the literature on bullying and sexual orientation was done. First, definitions of bullying are presented along with prevention strategies and school factors that influence occurrences of HIB. Next, types of bullying are discussed along with perceptions of why bullying occurs. Then, the effects of bullying, especially among LGBT youth, are discussed. Lastly, how sexual orientation, perceived sexual orientation, and gender non-conformity relates to bullying is discussed.

#### Definitions of Bullying and Prevention Strategies

There is one consensus amongst those researching bullying and those dealing with acts of bullying on a daily basis, bullying is challenging to define and assess. Types and frequencies of bullying vary among different cultures, genders, religions, and ethnicities, but are still prevalent. In order to assess acts of bullying, a clear definition must be given and everyone involved needs to be aware of the definition. In addition, bullying should be assessed on a continuum because there are different levels of bullying (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Mishna and Brown (2008), report that nearly three-quarters of adolescents experience acts of bullying such as rumors being spread about them, name-calling, or public ridicule. These acts of bullying are fairly apparent, yet identifying acts of bullying is still very difficult for most.

According to Olweus (1999), there is a three-part definition for bullying, which includes deliberate harmful behavior that is repeated and results in the target unable to defend themselves (as cited in Aalsma & Brown, 2008). The key to Olweus' definition is the imbalance of power. If there were no imbalance of power, then there is no bullying;

although, these acts would be considered to be aggressive. For instance, a fourth grader, who was smaller than most of his peers, was constantly poking a sixth grader each time they saw each other in the hallways at school. This act is not considered bullying under Olweus' definition because there is no imbalance of power because the individual doing the poking is in fourth grade and the "victim" is in sixth grade; even though, the behavior maybe harmful and is repeated. Hampel, Manhal, and Hayer (2009) define bullying as "an abuse of power and refers to the repeated, intentional aggressive behaviour against a particular individual with less physical or psychological strength who is unable to defend him/herself" (p.475). This definition is also in agreement with Olweus' definition.

According to Sawyer, Bradshaw, and O'Brennan (2008), the behavior-based definition of bullying includes "acts of violence; behavior intended to harm, physically or emotionally, persons in school and their property; or victimization, student's report that another student or staff member perpetrated school violence against him or her" (as cited in Aalsma & Brown, 2008, p.101). There is no mention of an imbalance of power. According to this definition, the example given of the fourth and sixth grader would be considered bullying.

The state of New Jersey recently revised their anti-bullying laws and created the New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (2010). According to this act, harassment, intimidation, and bullying is "any gesture, any written, verbal or physical act, or any electronic communication that [is reasonably perceived as being motivated either by any actual or perceived characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or a mental, physical or sensory handicap, or by any other distinguishing characteristic, that takes place on school

property, at any school-sponsored function, on a school bus, or through electronic communication and that], due to a power differential between the aggressor(s) and the target(s)” (Report of the New Jersey Commission on Bullying in Schools, 2009). This definition is aligned with Olweus’ definition because of the power differential between the bully and the victim.

According to the Report of the New Jersey Commission on Bullying in Schools (2009), the single most effective way to prevent HIB is to create a strong and safe school climate and culture. A recommendation made by the Commission was to incorporate the study of HIB into regular curriculum. Also, each school should have a team or task force dedicated to the prevention and intervention of HIB. These suggestions are universal and will work in all grade levels, in all types of schools, and in all states.

The first step in implementing strategies of prevention is to inform all individuals involved of the definition being used. It is pertinent to distinguish acts of bullying from acts of aggression by being sure the definition used identifies acts of aggression with a power differential. Schools need to be sure to clearly state these definitions and inform all administration, staff, parents, and students of what acts constitute harassment, intimidation, and bullying. Having children bring the HIB policies home to their parents and having these policies accessible through the school’s website are two ways of informing students and parents. The administration and staff should be initially trained on the HIB policies of the school at the beginning of the school year and these policies should be enforced and retrained throughout the school year.

Another way to help prevent HIB is to gain parental support for both children and

the school's policies. Wang, Ianotti, and Nansel (2009) found correlation between parental support and a decrease in involvement in HIB. Children in grades six through ten, who received higher parental support, were less likely to engage in all forms of bullying. Those who received low amounts of or no parental support were more likely to be bullies, to be victims of bullying, or to be bully-victims. Preventing HIB is collaborative effort between school and home.

Swearer et al. (2008) discussed two school factors that can influence the amount of HIB a school experiences. These factors include school climate and teacher's attitudes. First and foremost, students need to feel safe in school. If they do not feel safe, they are less likely to report cases of HIB. If the school climate is one of acceptance towards cases of HIB, students are more likely to engage in acts of HIB (Swearer et al., 2008). Students who perpetrate acts of HIB have a poorer perception of their school climate than do victims and bully-victims (Nansel et al., 2001). Teachers are a great asset in prevention and intervention of acts of HIB and their attitudes towards HIB can effect the whether students feel safe in school. When implementing a prevention or intervention program, teacher's attitudes towards HIB should be assessed (Swearer et al., 2008). Teachers need to lead by example. In order to teach students how to respectfully treat their peers, teachers need to treat one another respectfully.

### **Types of Bullying and Perception of Why Bullying Occurs**

There are three types of bullying discussed in this section: overt, indirect, and cyber-bullying. The present study focused on all three types. Overt or direct bullying includes physical and verbal bullying. Physical bullying involves a physical power

struggle between two or more individuals using physical force such as punching, kicking, or pushing. Verbal bullying includes name-calling, teasing, verbal threats, and intimidation. These two forms of overt bullying are easily noticed and intervention is more prominently used. Research has found teachers believe that only physical bullying needs intervention (Bauman and Del Rio, 2006).

Indirect bullying or relational bullying is present when a power differential results in damage to peer relationships (Bauman and Del Rio, 2006). This form of bullying involves group exclusion, spreading of rumors, and conditional friendship. According to van der Wal, de Wit, and Hirasing (2003), indirect forms of bullying “cause the greatest amount of suffering, while they have a greater chance of going unnoticed by teachers” (as cited in Bauman and Del Rio, 2006, p. 220). Although relational bullying is not treated as severely as direct bullying, victims have reported that social exclusion is the worst form of bullying they have experienced (Bauman and Del Rio, 2006).

Cyber-bullying, a recently added form of bullying, involves the use of aggression through electronic means including cell phones and the Internet. Cyber-bullying is a form of relational bullying yet has its own category because of the prevalent use of computers and cell phones amongst youth. Kowalski and Limber reported that 11% of their sample reported being the victim of cyber-bullying (as cited in Wang et al., 2009).

There is a link between indirect and direct aggression especially amongst females (Hampel, Manhal, & Hayer, 2009). When individuals are involved in relational bullying, the symptoms are sometimes expressed outwardly and can turn into overt bullying of others. These situations involve individuals who are victims of bullying as well as bullies



themselves. There is also a gender difference in forms of bullying. Females tend to be involved more often with relational bullying and males tend to be involved more often with physical bullying, while boys tend to use cyber-bullying as their chosen form of aggression and girls tend to be victims of cyber-bullying (Nansel et al., 2001; Wang et al., 2009).

Perceptions of why bullying occurs differs between youths and adults. Many adults do not consider bullying anything outside of physical bullying (Frisén, Jonsson, & Persson, 2007). Erling and Hwang (2004) reported that students perceived the most common reason for being bullied was a different appearance. Frisé, Jonsson, and Persson (2007) also found that the number one reason why children believe that other children are bullied is because of their appearance. The second reason they perceived children to be bullied was because of the victim's behavior; they were weak and did not fight back (Frisén, Jonsson, & Persson, 2007). Children perceive bullies similar to the way that adults perceive bullies. Frisé, Jonsson, and Persson (2007) found that 28% of the children in their study believed that bullies acted the way they did because of low self-esteem; 26% perceived the bully thought they were cool, and 15% perceived the bully had problems. These studies show how important a role perception plays in the prevention, identification and intervention of HIB.

### **Effects of Bullying**

Bullying effects not only the victims, but also the bullies themselves, assistants to the bullies, defenders of the victims, and bystanders. These effects include poor psychosocial, emotional, and social adjustment and health problems (Vanderbilt &

Augustyn, 2010). The present study focused on the victims of bullying. Victims of bullying report more instances of depression, medication use, and suicidality, while bullies have more negative attitudes, greater aggression, and are more likely to drop out of school (Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010). Victims often miss a great deal of school because they fear of being victimized while in school and many suffer a decrease in their quality of schoolwork. Many victims choose to internalize their feelings because they do not feel there is anyone they can talk to which leads to depression, anxiety, and possible self-injury. Others turn their feelings outward and harm others. In an investigation by the U.S. Secret Service, 71% of school shooters had been victims of bullying (as cited in Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Long-term effects that can last into adulthood include depression, low self-esteem, and abusive relationships (Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010).

Many bullies have aggression problems that stem from antisocial personality and anxiety disorders. According to Vanderbilt and Augustyn (2010), bullies who acknowledge their behavior have higher rates of depression than the bullies who deny their behavior. Long-term effects of bullying for bullies include an increase rate in criminal behavior and problems with being employed and having intimate relationships (Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010). Those individuals, who are classified as bully-victims, have a higher rate of depression than do individuals who are classified as bullies. The problem with bully-victims lies in their justification for hurting others. Most of these individuals have been bullied before they became the bully, which they feel justifies their aggression.

LGBT youth are especially vulnerable to the effects of bullying and these victims are affected both physically and psychologically (Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1995). These

effects include physical injury by others; self-injury, self-blame, heightened internalized homophobia, and diminished self-worth (Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1995). Sexual orientation is not something that can be changed like a hairstyle or clothing style. LGBT victims of HIB recognize that they may be relentlessly bullied due to their sexual orientation and fear for their safety.

### **Sexual Orientation, Perceived Sexual Orientation, and Gender Nonconformity**

According to Swearer et al. (2008), LGBT youth experience HIB to a greater degree than their heterosexual peers. The Human Rights Watch conducted an interview of 140 LGBT youth and these individuals “reported persistent and severe homophobic bullying including taunts, property damage, social exclusion, and physical attacks” (Swearer et al., 2008, p.161). Research shows that LGBT youth are three times as likely than their heterosexual peers to be physically attacked and threatened or injured with a weapon, and four times as likely than their heterosexual peers to skip school because they feel unsafe (Swearer et al., 2008). Rivers (2000) reports that adults, who were former victims of HIB in school and reported absenteeism, were more likely to express suicidal ideation and attempt suicide. This increase in likely victimization is staggering and the present study focused on victims that were bullied due to their sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation.

Homophobic behavior consists of physical, verbal, or relational aggression that makes homophobic references by using homophobic epithets or derogatory language (Poteat, 2008). The most frequent homophobic behavior towards LGBT and heterosexual youth is homophobic epithets (Rivers, 2001). Both heterosexual and LGBT

youth are victimized through homophobic behavior. During adolescence, an individual's socialization is very important. They begin to solidify relationships with certain peer and friendship groups. If an individual is involved with a peer group that is aggressive, antisocial, and engages in a number of risky behaviors, that individual is more likely to be aggressive, antisocial, and engage in the same risky behavior (Poteat, 2008).

Although bullying can occur between two people, research shows that it usually occurs within a large group of individuals. A group of individuals usually victimize one or two individuals. Kandel (1978) hypothesized that individuals that belong to the same friendship group have the similar attitudes and behaviors (as cited in Poteat, 2008). This hypothesis is known as the homophily hypothesis. The hypothesis may be what accounts for groups of bullies victimizing one or two individuals. Individuals care about what their counterparts, in the group, think of them. Males tend to engage in homophobic behavior so they can prove their masculinity to their peer and friendship groups. Plummer (2001) found that it was very common for male individuals to express homophobic epithets as part of their friendship group. They may direct these comments towards another member of the group or someone outside of the group. If the epithets are directed to another group member, the person using these words may not feel as though it is harmful and if the epithets are directed at someone outside of the group, it is more likely that other group members will join in. Even if an individual would not normally use homophobic epithets, they would more likely use them while with a friendship group that does use them.

The same symptoms are felt by both LGBT and heterosexual youth when accosted with homophobic behavior. These symptoms include withdrawal, depression,

and distress (Poteat & Espelage, 2007). Regardless of whether an individual is LGBT or perceived as LGBT, homophobic behavior is painful and has long-term effects. An individual is perceived atypical when they do not fit the societal role placed upon their gender. Males are seen as more aggressive and dominant, while females are seen as more warm and nurturing (Young & Sweeting, 2004). Gender nonconformity plays a large role in homophobic behavior more so for males than females. If a male youth is not as aggressive or dominant as he should be, he could be a target for homophobic epithets and physical assault whether he is actually LGBT or not.

The present study focused on victims of bullying who were bullied due to their sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation and how their experiences have effected their perception of occurrences of bullying. Perception plays a very important part in everyday life; it helps individuals to make choices. Perception is a strong component in occurrences of HIB and this study focused on whether victims of HIB have a difference in perception as those who were not victims.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to determine how actual sexual orientation, perceived sexual orientation, and experience with bullying effects an individual's perception of bullying.

#### **Participants**

The participants were recruited from the Rowan University student pool, which consists of Rowan University undergraduate students enrolled in Introduction to Psychology, an undergraduate psychology class, and students from the university's Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) via Survey Monkey. These participants voluntarily completed the survey and their identities were kept anonymous. All data collected was kept in a locked safe. There were a total of 75 students who responded to the survey.

#### **Materials**

A survey involving questions about sexual orientation and bullying was presented to the participants (see Appendix A). The participants were first asked their age and ethnicity. Participants were also asked to reveal their actual and perceived sexual orientation in their junior and senior years of high school and their current actual and perceived sexual orientation. Questions were asked regarding their history, if any, of being a victim of HIB; including how often they experienced certain specific acts of HIB. Finally, participants were asked to answer whether or not they believed given scenarios were acts of HIB.

## **Design**

The data, with respect to experience examples, was ranked using a four point Likert scale (never = 1, sometimes = 2, often = 3, and almost always = 4). The data, with respect to experience and type, was ranked using a two point Likert scale (no = 1 and yes = 2). The data, with respect to the bullying scenarios, was also ranked with a two point Likert scale (no = 1 and yes = 2). Each participant was given a “bullying score,” which consisted of participant’s answers to experience, type, and example questions, and a “scenario score,” which consisted of participant’s answers to the given bullying scenarios. A high bullying score represents a greater experience with being bullied and a high scenario score represents a greater perception of HIB in the scenarios given. This data was analyzed using a bivariate correlation test.

## **Method**

The study’s independent variable was sexual orientation and the dependent variable was the “bullying score.” The subjects participating in the study answered questions regarding basic demographic information (age and ethnicity) that was not used in the interpretation of data, sexual orientation and perceived sexual orientation (heterosexual, LGBT, or questioning)/(other’s perception of their sexuality), homophobia/homophobic slurs, and bullying. All information remained anonymous; no subject was asked to give their name or other defining characteristics. A definition of harassment, intimidation, and bullying was given at the beginning of each section of the survey. The subjects were given examples of types of bullying and asked to rate their experiences in their junior and senior years of high school with qualitative responses such as never, sometimes, often, and almost always. The subjects were then given five

scenarios that involve harassment, intimidation, and/or bullying according to the definition given. They answered yes or no to whether they perceived acts of HIB in the scenarios. After the data was collected, the subject's surveys were given two scores, a bullying and scenario score. The data was interpreted using SPSS software. The goal of this research was to see if actual or perceived sexual orientation and experience with bullying affected the participant's perception toward acts of harassment, intimidation, and bullying.



## Chapter 4

### Results

This study examined the correlation between sexual orientation and experience of being a victim of bullying as well as the relationship between sexual orientation and experience with bullying in the participants junior and senior years of high school with current perception of incidents of bullying.

#### Hypothesis One

Hypothesis one stated that subjects who have been bullied would perceive HIB scenarios differently than those subjects who were not bullied. Regardless of bullying score and actual sexual orientation, the majority of the subjects scored each of the five scenarios given as incidents of HIB. Figure 1, bar graph, shows the relationship between the bullying score and the scenario score. Actual sexual orientation in high school is depicted on the x-axis (1.00 = heterosexual, 2.00 = LGBT, and 3.00 = questioning).

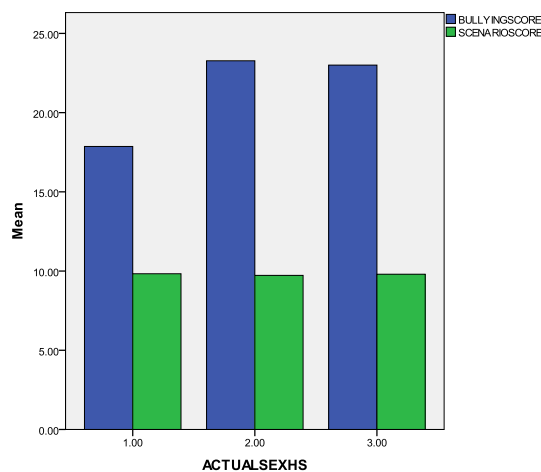


Figure 1 Mean Bullying and Scenario Scores

A bullying score of 10.00 illustrates the subject's sensitivity toward incidents of HIB. Figure 2 depicts the percentage of scenario scores. Eighty-five percent of the subjects had a bullying score of 10.00.

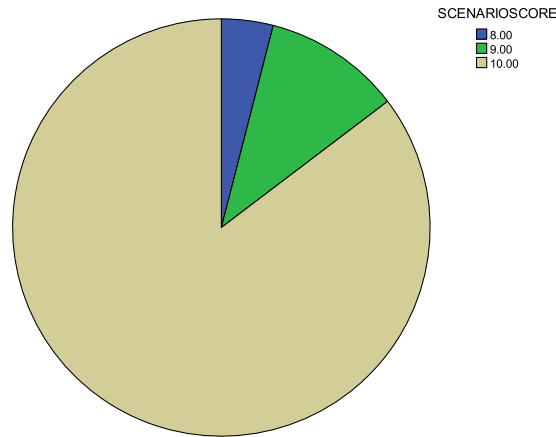


Figure 2 Percentage of Bullying Scores

The mean bullying score for the 75 subjects of all sexual orientations was 19.00 and the mean scenario score was 9.81.

### Hypothesis Two

Hypothesis two stated that LGBT subjects would have more experience with incidents of HIB during their junior and senior years of high school. The data was analyzed with respect to the subjects' actual sexual orientation in their junior and senior years of high school and their bullying score. There was a significant positive correlation of .383 between the two variables with a Pearson correlation coefficient of  $p = .001$ .

Figure 3 depicts the correlation in a line graph.

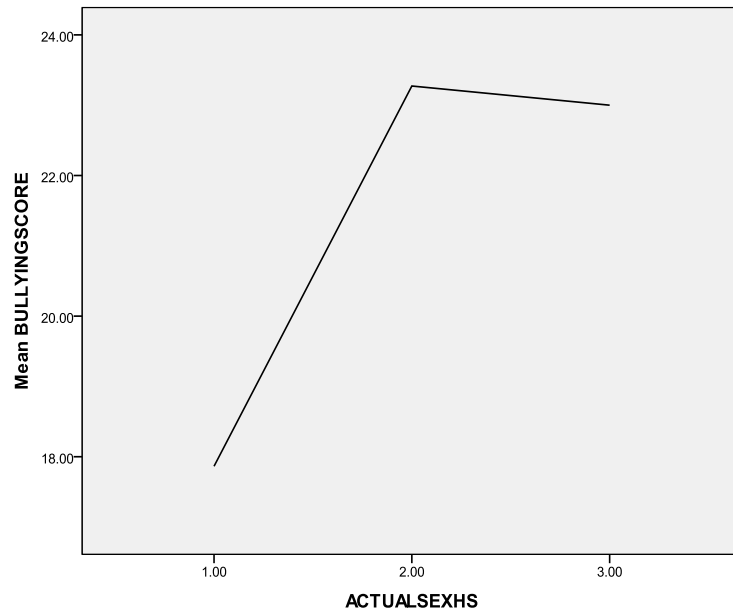


Figure 3 Correlation Line Graph

### Other Descriptive Data

Of the 75 subjects in this study, 40% reported no experience of being bullied and of the 45 subjects who reported being bullied 17 subjects (37.78%) experienced more than one type of bullying. There were 16 reported experiences with verbal bullying, five reported experiences with physical bullying, 20 reported experiences with relational bullying, and four reported experiences with cyber-bullying. Twenty-two percent of the subjects who were bullied were victims of more than one type of bullying. Of the subjects whose actual sexual orientation was heterosexual in their junior and senior years of high school, 30.5% of them were bullied. In contrast, 63.6% of the subjects whose actual sexual orientation was LGBT were bullied. Of those who were perceived as LGBT, regardless of their actual sexual orientation, in their junior and senior years of

high school 75% were victims of bullying and of those who were perceived as questioning, regardless of their actual sexual orientation, 80% were victims of bullying.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion and Conclusion

#### Summary and Integration of Results

The general purpose of this study was to evaluate the relationship between sexual orientation, experience being a victim of bullying, and perception of incidents of HIB. Perception is a very important aspect of assessing incidents of HIB. Of most concern for this study was the grouping of individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT). Results were obtained through a self-report survey given to undergraduate Psychology students and members of the campus' Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) at Rowan University, through the Rowan student pool, an undergraduate psychology class, and Survey Monkey.

It was hypothesized that subjects who were bullied will perceive HIB scenarios differently than those subjects who were not bullied. To evaluate this hypothesis, subjects were asked about their actual and perceived sexual orientation in their junior and senior years of high school (heterosexual, LGBT, or questioning) and their experience being a victim of bullying. The subject's perception was rated by whether or not they perceived five given scenarios as incidents of HIB per the New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act 2010 definition. According to the definition, HIB must be pervasive, repetitive, and involve a power differential. Four out of the five given scenarios, according to the definition, were incidents of HIB, yet the majority of subjects perceived all five scenarios to be incidents of HIB, regardless of their sexual orientation and/or experience with being a victim of bullying.

It was also hypothesized that LGBT subjects will have more experience with being a victim of incidents of HIB during their junior and senior years of high school. The same data of sexual orientation and experience was used to evaluate this hypothesis. Results showed that there was a positive correlation between being LGBT and experience with being a victim of bullying. These experiences included homophobic slurs, physical assaults, rumors being spread about them, being excluded from social situations, being picked on because of their clothing or friends, being bullied through text messages or social media, and having threats made on their life. The largest grouping of experiences was from rumors being spread about the subjects and the smallest grouping of experiences was from threats being made on the subject's lives.

### **Explanation of Findings**

The results showed that 85% of the subjects scored all five of the given scenarios as incidents of HIB. A "correct" scenario score would have been a 9.00. The mean scenario score, 9.81, was higher than the "correct" score. The purpose of the study was to show that sexual orientation and experience being a victim of bullying would alter an individual's perception of incidents of HIB. These results showed a higher than expected mean scenario score. This high mean score could be due to an increased sensitivity to incidents of HIB and the subjectivity of the scenarios given.

Today's society has an especially sensitive perception towards incidents of HIB. There have been many high profile cases of HIB, primarily of cyber-bullying, that have garnered the attention of many due to the harshness of the HIB and/or its effects.

Whether through text messaging or social media, these young victims were relentlessly

bullied until they were either brutally beat or they killed themselves. These victims include Tyler Clementi, Megan Meier, and Phoebe Prince.

The given scenarios were subjective and each subject could have taken a different meaning from each of the given scenarios. The following is one of the given scenarios on the self-report survey given to subjects: “James is a shy 13 year old who does not have many friends. He eats his lunch alone in the cafeteria and is often ridiculed. The table next to him is full of football players who, on a daily basis, throw their trash at James. The cafeteria aides ignore what is being done to James, which has been happening for a year. Do you consider James to have been bullied?” The researcher considers this scenario to be an incident of HIB because the victim is being verbally and physically accosted, the behavior lasts for a year, and there is an imbalance of power between the shy 13-year old boy and the football players. This scenario was not very subjective; it states the pervasiveness, repetitiveness, and imbalance of power.

The one scenario that is not an incident of HIB involves a male athlete who has a great deal of friends. He recently revealed that he is a LGBT and supported by his friends. While on the soccer field his teammates and friends begin shouting homophobic slurs, such as “fag/faggot.” The researcher does not consider this scenario an incident of HIB because there is no repetition or imbalance of power; although, the homophobic slurs could be considered pervasive. For this scenario, subjects could have thought this was an incident of HIB because there was no statement of repetition or an imbalance of power.

The results also showed a greater degree of LGBT subjects being bullied than heterosexual subjects. These results are in line with the researcher’s second hypothesis.

There were a greater amount of heterosexual subjects that participated in the survey than there was LGBT and those who are questioning. The sample size is not representative of the amount of LGBT students there are on campus. With that being said, the researchers would expect similar results with a larger sample size of LGBT subjects.

Reliability and validity are issues of concern to the researcher due to the use of a self-report survey for measurement. Reliability is the true score, which would be the score received if the measure was completely accurate, plus error (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008). Reliability evaluates stability (test-retest reliability), internal consistency, and interrater reliability (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008). The self-report survey used for measuring the variables of this study may have lacked stability and internal consistency. Depending on the subject's recent experiences with regards to bullying, their answers to the given scenarios may have changed. Also, the questions that were meant to measure the same aspect may not have correlated. For instance, if a subject answered that they experienced relational bullying, but answered that rumors were never spread about them or they were never excluded from certain social situations, then there would be a lack of internal consistency in the way either the questions were created or answered.

Validity evaluates that a measure actually measures what it is supposed to (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008). An instrument can be reliable and not valid, but must be reliable in order for it to be valid (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008). As of yet, there is no construct validity, accumulation of evidence from various studies using the same instrument, because the self-report survey created for this study has only been used one time (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008). This study is also lacking criterion validity



because it has not been correlated with other measuring instruments measuring the same construct (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008).

### **Integration of Literature**

Rivers, Duncan, and Besag report that regardless of actual sexual orientation, 1.6 billion youths in public schools are bullied due to their perceived or actual sexual orientation (as cited in Swearer et al., 2008). This statement corresponds with the descriptive statistics resulting from the current study pertaining to victims of bullying who were perceived LGBT or questioning and actually LGBT or questioning in their junior and senior years of high school. Swearer et al. (2008), studied the psychological affect of being bullied through the use of homophobic epithets. This study's participants were comprised of 251 subjects from an all-male, college preparatory school (Swearer et al., 2008). The measuring instrument used was Swearer The Bully Survey. The results showed that those male victims of bullying through homophobic epithets can be differentiated from those bullied because of other reasons. The current study, which hypothesized that sexual orientation and experience being a victim of bullying would have an effect on an individual's perception of incidents of HIB, was not able to conclude that one variable or the other or both of the variables had an impact on the individual's perception, yet the study found a positive correlation between an individual's actual sexual orientation as LGBT and victimization.

### **Implications**

The findings of the current study imply that incidents of HIB are most prominent among individuals who are perceived as LGBT or questioning and who are actually LGBT. Further research on the relationship between sexual orientation and bullying

should use an empirically based measurement instead of a researcher created self-report survey. Also, a larger sample size should be used as well as a greater representation of both LGBT and questioning youths. Perhaps, a survey should be done of students still in their junior and senior years of high school instead of having participants who are a year or more removed from their experiences. Questions such as what type of school the subjects attends or attended and whether the student is male or female may impact the results.

### **Areas of Limitations and Future Directions**

One great area of limitation occurred during the collection of data. At first, the researcher only collected participants through the University's student pool and it turned out that 25 of the 26 participants were both actually and perceived as heterosexual in their junior and senior years of high school. At this point the researcher had to revise the collection method being used. The largest area of limitation was the measurement instrument of the self-report survey that was used. As stated previously, the measurement lacked stability and internal consistency as well as construct validity. The statistical method used was one of correlation. In order to determine if sexual orientation or experience had any effect on perception, an ANOVA should have been used to determine main and interaction effects. In the future, the study of incidents of HIB should include whether or not the participants have a good understanding of what constitutes as HIB because it can be a very subjective topic. Using an already empirically based measurement for bullying such as the Swearer Bullying Survey could lead to more reliable and valid results.

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## Appendix A

### Sexual orientation and bullying: Does experience effect perception?

The purpose of this survey is to determine if sexual orientation and bullying experience have any impact on perception of bullying scenarios. The research, entitled "Sexual orientation and bullying: How experience affects perception," is being conducted by Ryan M. Rollins of the Psychology Department, Rowan University, in partial fulfillment of her M.A. degree in School Psychology. **You must be at least 18 years of age in order to participate in this study.**

For this study you will be required to answer the questions below regarding your sexual orientation and experience with bullying in your junior and senior year of high school. You will then answer yes or no to five scenarios based on your perception of bullying. Your participation in the study should not exceed 20 minutes. There are no physical risks involved in this study, and you are free to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. Your responses will be anonymous and all the data gathered will be kept confidential.

By taking this survey you agree that any information obtained from this study may be used in any way thought best for publication or education provided that you are in no way identified and your name is not used. Participation does not imply employment with the state of New Jersey, Rowan University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator.

If you have any questions or problems concerning your participation in this study, please contact Ryan M. Rollins at [rollin23@students.rowan.edu](mailto:rollin23@students.rowan.edu) or her faculty advisor, Dr. Roberta Dihoff, [dihoff@rowan.edu](mailto:dihoff@rowan.edu).

<i>Section 1: Demographics</i>	
What is your current age?	<input type="radio"/> 18-24 years old <input type="radio"/> 25-34 years old <input type="radio"/> 35 years and older
What is your ethnicity?	<input type="radio"/> African American, Black <input type="radio"/> Asian American <input type="radio"/> Caucasian <input type="radio"/> Hispanic/Latino <input type="radio"/> Native American <input type="radio"/> Pacific Islander <input type="radio"/> Other

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**Section 2: Sexual Orientation Questions**  
*Please answer the following questions as best as you can.*

What was your perceived sexual orientation in your junior and senior year of high school?

- Heterosexual
- LGBT
- Questioning

What was your actual sexual orientation in your junior and senior year of high school?

- Heterosexual
- LGBT
- Questioning

What is your current sexual orientation?

- Heterosexual
- LGBT
- Questioning

What is your current perceived sexual orientation?

- Heterosexual
- LGBT
- Questioning

**Section 3: Bullying Experience**  
*Please answer the following questions as best as you can.*

**Definition of Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying**

*Any gesture, any written, verbal or physical act, or any electronic communication that [is reasonably perceived as being motivated either by any actual or perceived characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or a mental, physical or sensory handicap, or by any other distinguishing characteristic, that takes place on school property, at any school-sponsored function, on a school bus, or through electronic communication and that], due to a power differential between the aggressor(s) and the target(s.)*

Were you a victim of bullying in your junior and senior year of high school?

- Yes
- No

If yes, what type of bullying did you experience in your junior and senior year of high school (check all that apply)?

Verbal (name calling)  
 Physical (punching/hitting)  
 Relational (excluded, rumors)  
 Cyber-bullying (bullying through electronic means)

Do you believe that you were a victim of bullying due to your sexual orientation?

Yes  
 No

Do you believe that you were a victim of bullying due to your perceived sexual orientation?

Yes  
 No

*Section 3 continued: Bullying Experience*

**Definition of Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying**

*Any gesture, any written, verbal or physical act, or any electronic communication that [is reasonably perceived as being motivated either by any actual or perceived characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or a mental, physical or sensory handicap, or by any other distinguishing characteristic, that takes place on school property, at any school-sponsored function, on a school bus, or through electronic communication and that], due to a power differential between the aggressor(s) and the target(s).*

<i>If you were a victim of bullying, how often did the following happen to you?</i>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Almost Always</b>
Homophobic slurs "lesbo," "fag/faggot," "you're so gay," or "homo"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Punched, kicked, slapped, or pushed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Rumors were spread about you	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Excluded from social situations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Picked on because of your clothing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Picked on because of your friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bullied through text messages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bullied across social media such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Threats on your life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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#### **Section 4: Bullying Scenarios**

*For the following five scenarios, please decided whether or not you think they include instances of harassment, intimidation, or bullying.*

##### **Definition of harassment, intimidation, and bullying**

*Any gesture, any written, verbal or physical act, or any electronic communication that [is reasonably perceived as being motivated either by any actual or perceived characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or a mental, physical or sensory handicap, or by any other distinguishing characteristic, that takes place on school property, at any school-sponsored function, on a school bus, or through electronic communication and that], due to a power differential between the aggressor(s) and the target(s.)*

Rachel and Lori are twelfth-graders and best friends. They are not very involved in extracurricular activities and are not considered to be athletic. A new girl, Jessie, begins eleventh grade halfway through the school year. Jessie is very athletic and dresses mostly in active wear. She tries out for the high school softball team in the spring. She also has a boyfriend from her previous school. Rachel and Lori begin calling Jessie names such as "lesbo." Jessie ignores them and makes her own friends at her new school. The name-calling stops by the end of the school year. Do you consider Jessie to have been bullied?

Yes  No

James is a shy 13 year old who does not have many friends. He eats his lunch alone in the cafeteria and is often ridiculed. The table next to him is full of football players who, on a daily basis, throw their trash at James. The cafeteria aides ignore what is being done to James, which has been happening for a year. Do you consider James to have been bullied?

Yes  No

Charlie is well liked and has many circles of friends. He is very athletic and plays soccer and baseball. It was just revealed that Charlie is homosexual. His friends support him and not a lot changes in his day-to-day life. On the soccer field, a few of Charlie's teammates and friends begin calling him "fag/faggot." Do you consider Charlie a victim of bullying?

Yes  No



Sally is an eleventh grader who has a learning disability. When walking in the hallway between classes one morning, she was approached by a twelfth grader who began calling her names such as "retard." Sally ignored the twelfth grader. As Sally walked away, the twelfth grader pushed her and Sally fell to the floor. Sally picked her self and her books up and walked away. The same situation happened for the next three school days until school administration was notified. Do you consider to have been bullied?

Yes  No

Lauren and Jennifer were neighbors and best friends. When they entered high school, they both made new friends separate of the friends they had together. As the school year advanced, Lauren began hanging out with friends that Jennifer did not know. As a result, Lauren and Jennifer did not see one another very much, but when they did see one another they had fun. The friends that Lauren was hanging out with did not particularly like Jennifer and began writing text messages to her saying to stay away from Lauren. They also began attacking her on social media websites. Lauren began alienating Jennifer until one day Jennifer decided to end their friendship. Do you consider Jennifer to be a victim of bullying?

Yes  No

*Thank you for completing this survey!*

Additional Information:

Rowan University Counseling and Psychological Services Center  
Savitz Hall, Top Floor  
(856) 256-4222

Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network  
<http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/home/index.html>

NJ Cares About Bullying  
<http://www.nj.gov/oag/dcj/obccr/njcab.htm>

Bullying Information Center  
<http://www.education.com/topic/school-bullying-teasing/>

New Jersey Coalition for Bullying Awareness and Prevention  
<http://www.njbullying.org/>