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Experiences of School Climate Among Sexual Minority Students of Color

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EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL CLIMATE AMONG SEXUAL MINORITY STUDENTS OF COLOR

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To my mom and dad, for forcefully pushing me to get this degree.

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1980's educational research regarding sexual minority students has continued to expand. Researchers have found that school climate can have a profound impact on sexual minority students' outcomes, including their mental health and academic success. However, much of the research on the effects of school climate upon sexual minority students consists of studies that are predominantly composed of White participants, or the researchers do not address other aspects of participant identity. Based on the concept of intersectionality, it is known that an individual's experiences are shaped by all their identities, not just a singular one. The purpose of this study is to explore sexual minority individuals of color experiences with school climate as it pertains to both their sexual minority and racial-ethnic identities. Specifically, this study will examine five areas of school climate that include: 1) school staff, 2) overall school safety, 3) curriculum, 4) extracurricular supports, and 5) policies and practices. Data was collected using a self-created semi-structured narrative interview protocol and later analyzed using categorical analytic methods.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

There has been limited research on K-12 school climate and the experiences of sexual minority students of color. Examining the educational experiences of sexual minority students of color is important because researchers have found that sexual minority students (also referred to as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning LGBTQ students) are at a higher risk for negative outcomes, compared to cisgender and heterosexual students, such as suicidal thoughts, suicidal attempts, being victimized by peers, and a higher number of unexcused absences from school (Robinson & Espelage, 2011). These experiences and outcomes are worse for sexual minority students of color. Poteat et al (2009) analyzed data related to intersecting identities among over 14,000 adolescents and found significant three-way interactions between sexual orientation, race, and gender as it relates to outcomes of substance use and depressed/suicidal thoughts, with questioning racial minority youth (both male and female) experiencing the highest levels of substance use. Questioning racial minority males also experienced the highest levels of depressed/suicidal thoughts. Similarly, multiple researchers, using both qualitative and quantitative analysis, have conducted studies emphasizing that Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) can primarily cater to White students (Herdt et al., 2006; McCready, 2010; Ocampo & Soodjinda, 2015; Poteat et al., 2009). Earnshaw et al (2020) analyzed qualitative data from 27 LGBTQ students. These researchers also found that for those LGBTQ

students of color interviewed, they reported bullying associated with race and/or ethnicity as well as, or sometimes instead of, their sexual orientation (Earnshaw et al., 2020). Further, Gorse et al (2021) analyzed secondary data from over 13,000 LGBTQ+ students in California. The researchers found that compared to White LGBTQ+ students, Asian American LGBTQ+ students (i.e., Asian Indian, Cambodian, Korean, Laorian, Vietnamese, Japanese, and Hmong) experienced greater disparities in threats of actual violence, experiencing physical fights, and being threatened with weapons (Gorse et al., 2021).

Researchers from *GLSEN*, an organization that examines school climate for LGBTQ+ students, published research specifically examining school climate for LGBTQ+ students of color. In 2020, four separate reports on school climate for Black LGBTQ+ students, Latinx LGBTQ+ students, Asian American and Pacific Islander LGBTQ+ students, as well as Native and Indigenous LGBTQ+ students were published. In all four studies, results indicated that students who experienced both racist and homophobic victimization were the most likely to skip school due to feeling unsafe, experience the highest levels of depression and the lowest levels of school belonging when compared to students who only experience either racist or homophobic victimization or neither (Truong et al., 2020a; Truong et al., 2020b; Zongrone et al., 2020a; Zongrone et al., 2020b). For Latinx students specifically, researchers also noted that the presence of an extracurricular ethnic/cultural club was related to greater feelings of safety for students, in terms of both their race/ethnicity and sexual orientation (Zongrone et al., 2020).

As can be observed, the negative outcomes experienced by sexual minority students are oftentimes worse when students hold multiple marginalized identities (i.e., sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, ability, etc.); this phenomenon is referred to intersectionality a term first described

by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw. In the late 1980's and early 1990's, Professor Crenshaw published research specifically focused on Black women. Structural intersectionality, as Crenshaw describes it, concerns the intersection of unequal social groups. Currently, there are multiple approaches to intersectionality. Intra-categorical intersectionality examines groups of people that have not been previously analyzed ''in order to reveal the complexity of lived experience within such groups.'' (Walby et al., 2012, p.227). Intersectionality refers to the idea that human lives cannot be explained by considering single categories such as race or gender (Hankivsky, 2014). "Intersectionality conceptualizes social categories as interacting with and co-constituting one another to create unique social locations that vary according to time and place. These intersections and their effects are what matters ..." (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 9). For this reason, examining the educational experiences of sexual minority students of color, specifically, is an important area of research.

Wimberly (2015) conducted a review of research on the educational experiences of LGBTQ students which included over 400 articles. In addition, Wimberly posted a request for research on this topic on the American Educational Research Association (AERA) website and sent emails and memos to researchers. The researchers noted the importance of school climate for LGBTQ students. According to the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, "school climate is a broad, multifaceted concept that involves many aspects of the student's educational experience. A positive school climate is the product of a school's attention to fostering safety; promoting a supportive academic, disciplinary, and physical environment; and encouraging and maintaining respectful, trusting, and caring relationships throughout the school community no matter the setting—from Pre-K/elementary school to higher education"

(National Center on Safe Supporting Learning Environments, 2022). According to Wimberly (2015), there are five important aspects of school climate for LGBTQ students include: 1) having supportive school staff, 2) having a safe school environment, 3) having LGBTQ-supportive policies and practices, 4) having inclusive curriculum, and 5) having inclusive extracurricular supports. The aspect of supportive school staff include how they are sometimes supportive of LGBTQ students, as well as how they can also perpetuate safety or harm to LGBTQ students, and how they may respond (or not respond) to LGBTQ based bullying (Abreu et al., 2021; Blackburn & Pascoe, 2015; Espelage, 2015). Safe school environments include LGBTQ students' overall feelings of safety in school as well as their experiences with LGBTQ based bullying, harassment, and assault (Abreu et al., 2021; Blackburn & Pascoe, 2015; Espelage, 2015). Inclusive policies and practices entail whether general school, school discipline, and anti-bullying-based policies and practices explicitly protect LGBTQ students (Abreu et al., 2021; Blackburn & Pascoe, 2015; Espelage, 2015). Inclusive curriculum entails how LGBTQ topics are addressed by teachers, lessons, and materials in the classroom (Abreu et al., 2021; Blackburn & Pascoe, 2015; Espelage, 2015). Inclusive extracurricular supports include clubs and programs, such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), that are meant to support LGBTQ students outside of the classroom (Abreu et al., 2021; Blackburn & Pascoe, 2015; Espelage, 2015). Although these aspects of school climate are important for all students, due to the increased visibility of LGBTQ students in school and their traditionally marginalized social standing within society, such affirming policies, curriculum and extracurricular activities play a particular role in either supporting or further marginalizing LGBTQ students (Wimberly, 2015).

Several years later, Abreu et al (2021) published an article that was a systematic review of the literature on LGBTQ students experiences in school. The researchers identified studies to include in their literature search using a modified approach of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) [Abreu et al., 2021] combined with an ancestral approach. In the PRISMA approach, the researchers conduct a detailed search for each article. The search for literature entailed five of the six authors of the study to search school psychology journals for keywords such as LGBTQ, students, K-12 students, lesbian, gay, transgender, sexual and gender identity, transgender, sexual minority, gender, former student, and psychology in the schools. The researchers then assigned the 23 articles to one of the three pairs to determine if it met inclusion criteria The four inclusion criteria for studies to be included in the systemic review: 1) empirically based, 2) published in any of the 11 school psychology journals identified by the researchers, 3) published between 2009-2019, and 4) focused on the LGBTQ student's experiences in schools. The research pair had to come to a consensus regarding the inclusion of an article. If a pair could not reach a consensus on a specific article, the more experienced researcher of the pair brought it up for consensus via the whole research team. The ancestral approach (Abreu et al., 2021) to article identification necessitated that the researchers fully read all articles to ensure they met inclusion criteria. As part of the ancestral approach researchers also examined individual studies reference lists to identify any additional articles to include in their systemic review (Abreu et al., 2021). Abreu et al (2021) confirmed the research by Wimberly (2015), Blackburn & Pascoe (2015) and Espelage, (2015) in identifying These five important aspects of school climate for LGBTQ students include: 1) having supportive school staff, 2) having a safe school environment, 3) having LGBTQ-supportive

policies and practices, 4) having inclusive curriculum, and 5) having inclusive extracurricular supports as important aspects of school climate for LGBTQ students. These five aspects of school climate are the main areas that will be further examined throughout this study.

Problem Statement

Both Abreu et al (2021) and Wimberly (2015) also noted an overrepresentation of White participants in studies. For example, Abreu et al (2021) noted that across all the studies reviewed in their systemic review, 59.5% of the participants were White. Abreu et al (2021) first calculated the percentage of racial-ethnic participants for each study, and then average percentages were calculated across all studies to arrive at the conclusion that 59.5% of the participants were White. Researchers conducting a Gallup poll, which collected questionnaire data from over 12,000 U.S. adults, found that 33% of LGBT respondents also identified as people of color (Movement Advancement Project et al., 2013), emphasizing the idea that the LGBT population is not a monolith in terms of their racial-ethnic identity. Based on the concept of intersectionality, sexual minority students of color are expected to have different realities than White sexual minority students. Wimberly (2015) and Abreu et al (2021) emphasized that aspects of school climate are important for White LGBTQ students. Therefore, are the same five aspects of school climate, which include: 1) having supportive school staff, 2) having a safe school environment, 3) having LGBTQ-supportive policies and practices, 4) having inclusive curriculum, and 5) having inclusive extracurricular supports, that are important for White LGBTQ students also salient for LGBTQ students of color, who have multiple marginalized identities? This study will be a retrospective study, in which participants will be given the opportunity to reflect upon their salient experiences with school climate throughout their entire

K-12 schooling. The reason to focus on the entire K-12 schooling experience is so participants aren't restricted in sharing salient experiences that could have happened at any point during their education.

Research Questions

As will be discussed in further detail during the literature review, researchers who have examined school climate's impact on predominantly White LGBTQ students have found that it has an impact on various student outcomes, including academic achievement, self-esteem, truancy, depression, drug/alcohol use, and suicide ideation/suicidality. The purpose of this study is to examine the school climate experiences of sexual minority students of color throughout their K-12 education. Exploring such experiences may result in identifying ways in which educators can create a more affirming school climate for all LGBTQ students. The following research questions guiding this study include:

1. Did sexual minority people of color experience any of the following factors during their K-12 education, in terms of both their queer and racial-ethnic identities?

    A. Supportive school staff

    B. A safe school environment and climate free from sexual orientation based and racially based bullying, harassment, and/or assault

    C. Inclusive policies and practices

    D. Exposure to curriculum that was affirming of diverse sexual orientations and racial/ethnic backgrounds

    E. Inclusive extracurricular activities

2. If sexual minority people of color did experience any of the above mentioned aspects of school climate, what was the impact on their school experience?

3. Based on the K-12 experiences of sexual minority people of color, what changes, if any, should be made to improve school climate for sexual minority students of color?

Terminology

The participants included in this study will be sexual minority people of color, which means they will self-identify their sexual orientation as any identity other than heterosexual (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, questioning, asexual, etc.). They will also self-identify their racial-ethnic identity as anything other than White or Caucasian. Many researchers use umbrella terms (e.g., LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQ+, queer) when describing sample populations that include any number of gender and sexual minority participants. Other researchers may also factor in gender identity into their studies. While sexual orientation refers to the inner feelings of who a person is attracted to emotionally/physically, gender identity refers to how an individual identifies in terms of their gender, or set of cultural identities, expressions, and roles (GLSEN, 2014). For consistency purposes, the researcher will use the phrase sexual minority people of color when describing this current study. When referencing other studies, the researcher will attempt to use the terms described in the study to ensure an accurate description of those studies.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the researcher will first describe the theoretical framework for this dissertation. Then the researcher will provide a brief overview of the history of school climate as it relates specifically to sexual minority students. As previously explained in chapter one, a majority of the school climate research on sexual minority students includes mostly White participants, or the researchers only examined school climate as it relates to sexual orientation without a focus on race. It is necessary to first understand this research in order to understand sexual minority students of color experience with school climate as it relates to their queer and racial-ethnic identities.

Theoretical Framework

This study will utilize a social constructivist theoretical framework. The idea of social constructivism holds that knowledge is constructed individually through one's experiences (Schreiber & Valle, 2013) and that an individual cannot be understood without examining the context of the external social world in which one's life is developed (Jaramillo, 1996). Social constructivism "…emphasizes the impact of social and cultural influences on students, the ways their varied backgrounds and experiences shape students' learning, and the ways students understand and interpret concepts" (Schreiber & Valle, 2013, p. 396). The purpose of this study is to examine sexual minority students of color experiences with school climate as it relates to

both their sexual orientation and racial-ethnic identities. As mentioned, earlier the concept of intersectionality "... conceptualizes social categories as interacting with and co-constituting one another to create unique social locations that vary according to time and place. These intersections and their effects are what matters ..." (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 9). Therefore, the researcher believes that social constructivism will be an appropriate framework for this project because the intersectionality of participants' multiple marginalized identities play an important role in shaping their experiences.

Social constructivism is also a theoretical framework that has been used for various educational studies detailing how students can optimally learn in school. For example, in Schreiber & Valle (2013)'s study the researchers noted that learning takes place through human interaction within a sociocultural context and that instruction is more effective when students have learning experiences that mimic real world problems and environments. Due to this aspect of social constructivism it is also paramount that teachers recognize and embrace the diversity of their classroom, allowing for discussions of various backgrounds in the classroom (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Given the diversity of the participants being included in this study, social constructivism is believed to be an appropriate theoretical framework for understanding the experiences of sexual minority students of color as it pertains to the larger school climate, a system which like many other systems, is shaped by the rules, bias, and attitudes of White heteronormativity.

School Climate for Sexual Minority Students

As stated in Graves (2015), there has recently been increased visibility of LGBTQ students in school. In 1984, teacher Virginia Uribe was one of the first to develop school

counseling services for LGBTQ students. Fueled by the AIDS crisis, then U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop urged elementary schools to incorporate AIDS education in 1986. Following suit, the National Education Association (NEA) Representative Assembly published a resolution to address the general needs of LGBTQ students in 1988; this led to Kevin Jennings organizing Massachusetts' first Gay-Straight Alliance in 1989, and notably he would later found the Gay, Lesbian, Straight, Education Network (GLSEN). By the end of the 1980's the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services published a report on youth suicide, finding that gay and lesbian youth were two to three times more likely to die from suicide compared to other youth due to forms of abuse and prejudice (Graves, 2015). One of the recommendations of the report was for schools to provide students with accurate and positive information about homosexuality, specifically in the curriculum. At the time, Massachusetts was the only state to adopt this recommendation. However, this report is believed to have prompted the growth of educational research on LGBTQ students (Graves, 2015). As the educational research regarding LGBTQ+ students has continued to grow from the 1990s to now there is still a substantial lack of research on intersecting identities. Of the over 400 articles included Wimberly (2015) only 35 publications address multiple aspects of one's identity (Graves, 2015) emphasizing the significant gap in the research that this study hopes to address by examining school climate as it pertains to sexual minority individuals of color's race and sexual orientation.

As previously detailed in chapter one, according to Wimberly (2015) and Abreu et al (2021), five important aspects of school climate for LGBTQ students include: 1) having supportive school staff, 2) having a safe school environment, 3) having LGBTQ-supportive policies and practices, 4) having inclusive curriculum, and 5) having inclusive extracurricular

supports. The remainder of this literature review will extensively detail existing research on all five important aspects of school climate for LGBTQ students.

School Staff's Role in Protecting and/or Harming Sexual Minority Students

School staff play a particular role in either supporting or further marginalizing sexual minority students. Rivers and Noret (2008) analyzed data from 53 students attracted to same-sex partners and 53 students attracted to opposite sex partners, 90% of whom were White. The researchers found that same-sex attracted youth were more likely to seek support from school staff than opposite-sex-attracted peers (Rivers & Noret, 2008). Drawing on their own experiences as educators, Hernandez & Fraynd (2014) also discussed how school leaders should counter the heteronormative perspectives of their schools and implement activities that affirm LGBTQ+ students, with means to combat said perspectives in school that include instituting rituals and activities designed to affirm LGBTQ youth and refrain from assuming all students are heterosexual. Researchers, taking data from the Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey, compared the safety of over 200 sexual minority adolescents; found that perceived staff support and victimization predicted suicidality, wherein sexual minority youth with no supportive adult in the school were more likely than other students to have made multiple suicide attempts. Over 60% of the participants were White (Goodenow et al., 2006). Murdock & Bolch (2005) conducted multiple regression analysis on data from 101 LGB high school students, 71% of whom were White, and the results indicated that school climate variables, including support from teachers, explained significant variance for school belonging (i.e., students' sense that they are valued in their school community) and discipline problems after controlling for GPA.

Despite school staff's duties to be supportive of sexual minority students, LGBTQ+ students are not always met with positive reactions from them. Researchers were able to gather questionnaire data from 298 Israeli high school students, 86% of whom identified as LGB. Three-fourths of the students surveyed remarked hearing homophobic comments from their teachers (Pizmony-Levy et al., 2008). White et al (2018), analyzed survey data using MANOVA, univariate ANOVAs, and pairwise comparisons, finding that straight students reported more frequent positive teacher relationships compared to lesbian/gay, bisexual, and "other sexual-identified" students (e.g., pansexual, asexual). The demographic information of the participants included 55.93% White, about 25% LGBQ and 4.52% transgender or different gender identified students. Adelman & Woods (2006) also surveyed high school students in Arizona; 51.12% of the students were White and 18.1% of the students identified as LGBTQ. The researchers found that students perceived school staff as perpetuating hostile school norms through either passive reinforcement, active reinforcement, or indifference to anti-LGBTQ+ comments. Passive reinforcement relates to school staff not intervening when queerphobic behavior occurs (e.g., a student is called a homophobic slur, in the presence of the teacher, and the teacher does nothing). Active reinforcement relates to school staff reinforcing queerphobic behavior (e.g., punishing a student trying to intervene against a peer using anti-LGBTQ remarks). Indifference relates to school staff not caring about anti-LGBTQ+ behavior (e.g., counselors making students feel like being bullied for being an ally isn't important) [Adelman & Woods, 2006].

Researchers have also found that whether school staff are supportive or not of sexual minority students can have an effect on student outcomes. Seelman et al (2015) surveyed LGBTQ high school students, in Colorado where 64.5% of the students were White. Results

from two sequential multiple linear regression models, conducted by the researchers indicated a positive relationship between the number of types of school staff (e.g., teachers, administrators, etc.) students felt comfortable discussing their sexual orientation with and school engagement (i.e., how a student feels they fit in at their school) (Seelman et al., 2015). Dessel et al (2017) analyzed data from students in southeast Michigan, using multiple linear regressions. Researchers noted that facets of teacher-student relationships, specifically access to a trusted adult and intervention in anti-LGBTQ bullying, were significant in predicting self-esteem; while, conversely, teacher use of biased language was associated with lower academic achievement (Dessel et al., 2017). Kosciw et al (2013) conducted structural equation modeling of data from over 5,700 LGBT youth, 67% of whom were White. The researchers found that supportive school personnel contributed to better academic outcomes and less victimization (Kosciw et al., 2013).

Kosciw et al (2019), conducted research that contributed to *GLSEN*'s: "The 2019 National School Climate Survey." LGBTQ students ages 13-21, across the U.S. were surveyed regarding their experiences in school. The racial composition of the sample participants was 69.2% White. In their extensive report, Kosciw et al (2019) discussed each of the five aspects of school climate used for this project and their outcomes for students. In terms of school staff, the researchers indicated that being able to speak with a supportive adult can have a positive impact on LGBTQ+ students' experiences in school, with 97.7% of the students being able to identify at least one supportive adult in their school. Having supportive staff was related to an increase in school attendance, educational achievement, and connection to school. Staff intervening in LGBTQ bullying was also related to LGBTQ students feeling safer in school. However, over

60% of students noted staff telling them to ignore the bullying or do nothing when they went to report it (Kosciw et al., 2019).

Researchers at GLSEN also published four separate reports looking specifically at the experiences of Black, Latinx, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and Native and Indigenous LGBTQ students' experiences. The researchers found that in each survey over half of the students never reported victimization to the staff, with the most common reason being they didn't believe the staff would do anything about it. Similar positive results were also shown for LGBTQ students of color who had more supportive school staff: resulting in increased feelings of connectedness to their school, higher levels of self-esteem, and lower levels of depression (Truong et al., 2020a; Truong et al., 2020b; Zongrone et al., 2020a; Zongrone et al., 2020b).

As detailed in this section, school staff (e.g., teachers, administrators, counselors) play a significant role in creating an affirming or non-affirming school climate for sexual minority students. They have the power to either reinforce homophobic behavior or help intervene in bullying. School staff can help protect sexual minority students by implementing activities that affirm LGBTQ+ youth (Hernandez & Fraynd, 2014). However, school staff can perpetuate harm to sexual minority students, by explicitly making queerphobic comments (Pizmony-Levy et al., 2008) or reinforcing students queerphobic behavior (Adelman & Woods, 2006). Having supportive school staff, however, has been shown to be positively linked to sexual minority students school engagement and self-esteem and negatively related to students' levels of depression (Dessel et al., 2017; Seelman et al., 2015; Truong et al., 2020a; Truong et al., 2020b; Zongrone et al., 2020a; Zongrone et al., 2020b). The next section of the literature review will focus on the bullying, harassment and assault of sexual minority students.

Bullying, Harassment and Assault of Sexual Minority Students

Sexual minority students are often victims of bullying, harassment, and assault in the school setting. Researchers analyzed data from 194 LGB adolescents, 66% of whom were White, and found most respondents had experienced at least some form of victimization, including in schools, and that youth who self-disclosed their sexual orientation at an earlier age were particularly vulnerable to victimization (Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1995). As the previous study highlights, research on bullying, harassment, and assault for sexual minority students goes back multiple decades. Even in the last few years, researchers have corroborated evidence from a few decades prior.Williams et al (2021) conducted ANOVA analysis of 260 Canadian adolescents, 74% of which were White and 50% of whom identified as LGBQ+. The researchers found that sexual minority youth as well as questioning youth were also more likely than heterosexual youth to be victims of peer sexual harassment, bullying and peer or dating partner physical abuse (Williams et al., 2021).

Being bullied, harassed, or assaulted in school has been associated with particular outcomes for sexual minority students. Older research has shown bullying, harassment and assault to have an effect on school truancy (Rivers, 2000), depression and substance use (Espelage 2008), suicidality (D'Augelli, 2002)

Similarly, research in the past five years has also corroborated some outcomes that bullying, harassment, and assault can have upon sexual minority students. Hatchel et al (2019) gave a questionnaire to LGBTQ high school students, 74.3% of whom were White, from Dane County, WI. The researchers, analyzing data using structural equation modeling, indicated that LGBTQ youth who were victimized by their peers reported feeling less connected to their

school, with lower levels of school belonging (i.e., the degree to which students feel accepted at their school) also being associated with higher rates of suicidality (Hatchel et al., 2019). Garaigordobil & Larrain (2020) analyzed data from over 1,000 Spanish adolescents, 12.5% of whom were non-heterosexual students. The researchers also found that non-heterosexual students who were the victims of bullying experienced higher levels of depression, social anxiety, and psychopathological symptoms (e.g., somatization and obsessive-compulsions) compared to heterosexual victims of bullying (Garaigordobil & Larrain, 2020).

Beckerman (2017) conducting a retrospective qualitative study of LGBT former students, found that those who were bullied experienced hypervigilance to their surroundings, and when possible isolated themselves from peers when they experienced LGBT based bullying. Fifty percent of the participants were White (Beckerman, 2017).

In relation to bullying, harassment and assault, the researchers at *GLSEN* noted that more than 80% of LGBTQ students experienced harassment or assault in school. Students who experienced high levels of victimization in schools had lower GPAs and were less likely to pursue college or other post-secondary education. They also had lower levels of self-esteem, higher levels of depression, were more likely to be disciplined, and were more likely to not attend school due to feeling unsafe. (Kosciw et al., 2019).

Similarly, in relation to bullying, harassment and assault, the researchers at *GLSEN* examining LGBTQ students of color's school experiences found that across all the studies over 40% of LGBTQ students of color experienced harassment or assault at school based on both their sexual orientation and race/ethnicity. Multiracial LGBTQ students of color experienced greater levels of victimization based on sexual orientation, gender expression, and race/ethnicity

compared to LGBTQ students of color who identified as only one race/ethnicity; the exception to this being that multiracial Latinx students only experienced somewhat greater levels of victimization compared to Latinx students who only identified as only one race/ethnicity. Similarly, Native LGBTQ students who identify only as Native experienced somewhat greater levels of sexual orientation victimization compared to other multiracial Native students. Across all four studies, queer students of color who experienced more harassment in school had higher levels of depression, lower feelings of school belonging, and were more likely to skip school because they felt unsafe (Truong et al., 2020a; Truong et al., 2020b; Zongrone et al., 2020a; Zongrone et al., 2020b).

The aforementioned research in this section emphasizes that sexual minority students can face higher levels of bullying, harassment, and assault compared to heterosexual youth (Williams et al., 2021) Consequently, researchers have linked sexuality-based victimization to various negative outcomes including increased levels of depression, truancy, social withdrawal and social anxiety (Beckerman, 2017; Garaigordobil & Larrain, 2020; Hatchel et al., 2019; Kosciw et al., 2019; Truong et al., 2020a; Truong et al., 2020b; Zongrone et al., 2020a; Zongrone et al., 2020b). The next section of the literature review will focus on how school policies and practices can support sexual minority students.

Policies & Practices to Support Sexual Minority Students

Abreu et al (2021) highlighted the importance of creating and enforcing policies that focus on including and protecting LGBTQ students (i.e., non-discriminatory laws and anti-bullying policies). For example, school leaders should clearly define what constitutes LGBTQ bullying and ways in which different school staff should intervene in said bullying (Kull et al.,

2015). Specifically, the policies and practices examined in this study include specific policy protections against sexual orientation-based harassment or bullying, staff providing "safe spaces" for sexual minority students to receive support, staff professional development for addressing sexual minority student concerns, and schools providing referral services for community based resources (e.g., counseling).

Having inclusive policies and practices has been shown to have positive outcomes for sexual minority students. Hatzenbuehler & Keyes (2012) analyzed data from 31,852 11th grade public school students (4.4% of whom identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual) who completed the Oregon Healthy Teens survey. The researchers found that lesbian and gay students living in counties with fewer schools having inclusive anti-bullying policies, that include specific sexual orientation based protections, were over twice as likely to have attempted suicide, in the past year, compared to those students whose schools have inclusive policies. Inclusive anti-bullying policies were also significantly associated with reduced risk of suicide attempts among gay and lesbian youth, even while controlling for sex, race/ethnicity, and exposure to peer victimization. Anti-bullying policies that did not include sexual orientation were not associated with lower suicide attempts for gay and lesbian youth. (Hatzenbuehler & Keyes, 2012). Day et al (2019) analyzed pre-existing data on school policies from the 2014 California School Health Profiles. The researchers found that inclusive school policies that included both sexual orientation and gender identity had a direct association with less truancy. Inclusive policies were also related to more positive perceptions of school climate for LGB youth. Demographic information of the sample included over 50% racial-ethnic minorities and 5% of students identified as LGB (Day, et al 2019). Researchers taking data from the Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey,

compared the safety of over 200 sexual minority adolescents; finding that antibullying policies prohibiting sexual orientation based violence were also significantly and negatively related to suicide attempts, even when victimization and perceived support in school were considered. Over 60% of the participants were White (Goodenow et al., 2006). Similarly, Chesir-Teran & Hughes (2009) conducted correlation analysis of data from over 2000 LGBQ students, 82% of whom were White. The researchers found that inclusive programs and policies, including 1) policies that specifically prohibit sexual orientation or gender identity-based harassment, 2) spaces where students can receive LGB based support from staff, 3) staff being encouraged to participate in professional development for safe schools, and 4) schools providing referral services for social and psychological health services (e.g., counseling and HIV/STD testing) were positively correlated with one another. Students who reported more inclusive policies also noted less harassment (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009). Day et al (2019), through multivariate regression, found that presence of LGBTQ-focused policies (i.e., anti-bullying policies that specifically address LGBTQ students) were associated with higher perceived teacher and peer support as well as less bullying. Over 1,000 participants were included in the study, only 22% of participants were White, with 57% of participants identified as LGQ, and 43% of participants identifying as bisexual (Day et al., 2019). Saewyc et al (2014) conducted multinomial logistic regression on data from over 20,000 Canadian students. The researchers found LGB students experienced lower chances of discrimination in the past year and lower suicidal thoughts/attempts when anti-homophobic bullying policies had been in place for at least three years. Three percent of participants in the study identified as LGB (Saewyc et al., 2014).

Studies with more advanced analyses also yielded similar results. Kaczowski et al (2022) conducted multilevel regressions measuring the associations of school practices and policies on student health outcomes. LGBTQ-supportive school policies and practices, including 1) policies that specifically prohibit sexual orientation or gender identity based harassment, 2) spaces where students can receive LGB based support from staff, 3) staff being encouraged to participate in professional development for safe schools, and 4) schools providing referral services for social and psychological health services (e.g., counseling and HIV/STD testing) were significantly associated with lower suicide-related behaviors and illicit drug use as well as lower chances of feeling threatened at school among LGB students. Increasing the number of affirming policies and practices was also linked to lower odds of suicide-related behaviors for LGB students and lesser safety concerns and illicit drug use for heterosexual students. Among the students included in the study, over 85% of them were ethnic-racial minorities and 11% of students identified as LGB. (Kaczowski et al., 2022). Similarly, Kull et al (2016) conducted MANCOVA analysis on data from over 7,000 LGBT students, 68% of whom were White, and found students in districts with sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression protections in their policies reported greater school safety, less social aggression, and less victimization based on queer identities than students in districts with generic or no policies. Jones & Hillier (2012) conducted mixed methods analysis of over 3000 Australian GLBTIQ individuals (ages 14-21) and key policy informants. The researchers found that perceived school policy-based protections against homophobia had highly significant relationships with reduced likelihood of thinking about and actual self-harm, suicidal ideation, attempted suicide, increased feelings of safety at school,

students feeling good about their sexuality, and students overall view of their schools as being supportive (Jones & Hillier, 2012).

In terms of policies and practices, researchers at *GLSEN* indicated that 59.1% of LGBTQ students experienced some form of discriminatory policies and practices in school. Around 80% of LGBTQ students surveyed noted having a policy regarding bullying, harassment, and/or assault. However, only 13.5% of those policies were comprehensive for covering both sexual orientation and gender identity/expression categories (Kosciw et al., 2019). Students with comprehensive policies reported less anti-LGBTQ victimization and biased language, as well as a greater frequency of staff intervention pertaining to anti-LGBTQ comments. Students were also more likely to report incidents of harassment and assault to school staff and were more likely to rate school staff's response to such incidents as effective (Kosciw et al., 2019).

Pertaining to policies and practices, across GLSEN's four studies on LGBTQ+ youth of color's experiences in school, researchers noted that over half of students surveyed experienced some form of discrimination based on a lack of school policies and affirming practices. LGBTQ students of color who experienced both in-school and out-of-school discipline as well as contact with law enforcement displayed a lower likelihood in planning to pursue post-secondary education (with the exception of Native LGBTQ students) and lower GPAs when compared to queer students of color who experienced no forms of discipline (Truong et al., 2020a; Truong et al., 2020b; Zongrone et al., 2020a; Zongrone et al., 2020b).

In summary, the presence of affirming school-based policies and practices have been shown to have a positive effect upon sexual minority students. Researchers noted that inclusive policies and practices were related to decreased levels of suicidal ideation, harassment, drug use,

and school truancy (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009; Day, Ioverno, & Russell, 2019; Jones & Hillier, 2012; Kaczowski et al., 2022). The next section of the literature review will focus on the impact curriculum upon school climate for sexual minority students.

The Role of Curriculum on School Climate

An additional aspect of school climate that can have an impact upon sexual minority students is related to curriculum, which includes incorporating LGBTQ-issues and topics in the classroom as a means of promoting an inclusive environment (Leonardi & Staley, 2015). Learning about LGBT positive role models and historical events can serve as a way to increase student's level of engagement in their school community overall (Kosciw et al., 2019)

Researchers have similarly found that LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum is related to a number of outcomes for sexual minority students. Blake et al (2001) conducted an ANCOVA analysis of over 4,000 students and over 100 teachers. The researchers found that LGB youth in schools with gay-sensitive instruction reported a lower frequency of recent sex, less substance use before their last sexual encounter, and fewer sexual partners than did LGB youth in other schools. Seventy-seven percent of the participants were White and 4.2% identified as GLB (Blake et al., 2001). Snapp et al (2015) conducted multilevel analysis of data from 1232 LGBTQ and straight middle and high school California students. The researchers found that LGBTQ-inclusive curricula was associated with higher reports of safety at both the individual and school level and less bullying at the school level. Supportive curricula was also related to feeling safer as well as awareness of bullying at both individual and school levels. Sixty-six percent of participants were racial-ethnic minorities and 28.5% of students identified as LGBQ. Proulx et al (2018), analyzed data from over 40,000 individuals across 11 states who completed the Youth

Risk Behavior Survey in 2015, finding that students in states with a larger proportion of LGBTQ-inclusive sex education had lower chances of in-school victimization from other peers as well as lower levels of adverse mental health, including symptoms of depression and suicidal thoughts.

As it pertains to curriculum, Kosciw et al (2019) found that approximately one third of students had instruction on LGBTQ+ topics. Of those students who had LGBTQ+ topics covered, 48.8% of them said it was covered in a positive manner, while 41.5% of students reported that it was covered in a negative manner. Roughly 20% of students noted queer related topics were included in class readings or textbooks, while close to a quarter of LGBTQ students noted positive examples and representations in their health classes. Inclusive curriculum was related to greater feelings of school belonging (i.e., the degree to which students feel accepted at their school), greater student engagement, and greater acceptance of LGBTQ students (Kosciw et al., 2019).

Compared to students who did not have an inclusive school curriculum, LGBTQ students of color who had inclusive curriculum were less likely to feel unsafe due to their sexual orientation, were more likely to have fellow students be accepting of the queer community and felt greater levels of connection to their school (Truong et al., 2020a; Truong et al., 2020b; Zongrone et al., 2020a; Zongrone et al., 2020b). Except for Native LGBTQ students, LGBTQ students of color who had an inclusive curriculum were also less likely to feel unsafe because of their race/ethnicity, compared to those students who did not have an inclusive curriculum. However, researchers did not ask questions about other types of curricular inclusion (e.g.,

contents about people of color, history, and events) [Truong et al., 2020a; Truong et al., 2020b; Zongrone et al., 2020a; Zongrone et al., 2020b].

As it pertains to school curriculum, inclusive school curriculum can help promote an overall affirming school environment as well as increase students' level of engagement in the school system (Kosciw et al., 2019; Leonardi & Staley, 2015). Inclusive curricula was shown to be related to greater school safety, greater acceptance of LGBT students, less victimization, and lower chances of adverse mental health (e.g., depression), when compared to students in school settings without inclusive LGBT curriculum [Kosciw et al., 2019; Proulx et al., 2018; Snapp et al., 2015; Truong et al., 2020a; Truong et al., 2020b; Zongrone et al., 2020a; Zongrone et al., 2020b]. Unfortunately, due to various reasons, including individual and systemic biases, LGBT topics are not always taught in a positive manner (Kosciw et al., 2019) regardless of the aforementioned proven benefits of doing such. The final section of the literature review will focus on the impact extracurricular supports upon sexual minority students.

Gay-Straight Alliances Impact on Sexual Minority Students

Extracurricular support groups such as gay-straight alliances (GSAs), queer-straight alliances (QSAs), etc. have been shown to have a positive impact on students by creating a safe space for the LGBTQ community and their allies. For example, GSAs can provide a safe space for sexual minority youth to learn about queer appropriate sex education (Bodnar & Tornello, 2019). Similarly, Herdt et al (2006) collected qualitative data in 2001 and 2002, from two groups related to perceptions GSAs in Northern California. Participants included teachers, administrators, students, and their families and friends. Through examination of the qualitative

data, researchers concluded that GSAs are places for youth to turn to help with self-discovery and social change (Herdt et al., 2006).

Similarly, researchers conducted qualitative analysis with data from 14 participants (including 12 GSA student members, two high school principals, and two district administrators) finding that GSA activities empowered members to speak up regarding homophobic school practices, but did not succeed in disrupting the heteronormative school environment (Currie et al., 2012). Griffin et al (2004) conducted qualitative interviews with participants from 22 high schools with GSAs in Massachusetts. Researchers concluded that GSAs served certain roles in a school including to raise awareness, educate about LGBT issues in schools, and increase visibility on both an individual level and as part of broader school reform; provide a "safe" space for students; and provide counseling and support for students (Griffin et al., 2004). Lapointe (2014) conducted a qualitative analysis of five high school students from Canadian public schools (four heterosexual, one homosexual) who participated in GSAs. The researcher found that straight allies can use their privilege to address LGBTQ issues with other students. Involvement in the GSA helped participants learn to combat and interrogate LGBTQ stereotypes and HIV-related myths. Similarly, it helped participants engage in political discussion and queer discussion (Lapointe, 2014). However, Levesque (2019) conducted an ethnographic study of a large urban public high school's GSA. The researcher found that straight girls are applauded for their support and ally work while some LBQ women were disillusioned with straight girls participation, which can cause some students to abandon the GSA completely (Levesque, 2019). Students who attended schools with GSAs were more likely to agree that their schools are supportive of queer people compared to those students who didn't have one. GSAs were also

correlated with students being much more open about their sexual orientation or gender identity, while only being somewhat more likely to view their school as less homophobic (Taylor & Peter, 2011).

GSAs have also been linked to a number of outcomes for sexual minority students. Marx & Kettrey (2016) conducted a meta-analysis of 15 studies and found that GSA presence is significantly related to lower levels of self-report related to fear of safety, hearing homophobic remarks, and experiencing homophobic victimization. In terms of qualitative studies, Lee (2002), through triangulation of qualitative data from seven students found that GSAs positively impacted academic performance, sense of physical safety, an enhanced sense of belonging to the school community, personal relationships, comfort level with sexual orientation, and development of strategies to handle heterosexual assumptions regarding their sexuality.

Fetner & Elafros (2015) conducted retrospective qualitative analysis of 53 young adults, 35 of whom were White. Researchers found students (both at schools that had GSAs and those that did not have GSAs) experienced harassment about sexual minority students. However, students at schools with GSAs described more support from school staff (i.e., teachers and administrators) regarding LGBQ students than students who attended schools with no GSAs. Students who attended schools with GSAs also reported wider variety of friends across sexual identities while students at non-GSA schools felt more withdrawn and isolated (Fetner & Elafros, 2015).

As it pertains to quantitative research, Coulter et al (2016) analyzed survey data from over 50,000 adolescents and found that living in places with more affirmative school climates (i.e., percentages of schools with safe spaces and GSAs) was associated with fewer heavy

episodic drinking days for heterosexual, gay, lesbian, and students who are unsure of their sexual orientation. Walls et al (2001), through the use of chi-square analysis, found that queer GSA members had a significantly higher GPA compared to nonmembers. Demographic information of the 306 LGBTQ+ participants included 74% White participants (Walls et al., 2001). Day et al (2019), through multivariate regression, found that presence of GSAs were associated with higher perceptions of teacher and peer support as well as less bullying. Over 1,000 participants were included in the study, only 22% of participants were White, with 57% of participants identified as LGQ, and 43% of participants identifying as bisexual (Day et al., 2019).

Heck et al (2013) conducted a retrospective study with145 LGBT college students (70% of whom were White), and found that attending a high school with a GSA was related to significantly more positive outcomes related to school experiences, psychological distress, and alcohol use. Worthen (2014), through the use of ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions, found that the presence of a GSA in high school is a positive predictor of supportive attitudes toward LGBT individuals. However, GSAs located in the southern U.S. were actually shown to have negative effects on attitudes toward LGB individuals in the same study (Worthen, 2014). Toomey et al (2011) also conducted a retrospective study on 245 LGBT young adults regarding their high school's GSA. The researchers found that presence, participation, and perceived effectiveness of a GSA to promote safety were differentially associated with well-being as a young adult, and in certain cases could buffer the association between school-based LGBT victimization and well-being. Fifty-one percent of the participants identified as Latino.

Poteat et al (2020), using multilevel structural equation models, found that among 580 LGBQ+ youth that, greater engagement in GSAs was predictive of increased perceived peer

validation, hope and self-efficacy to promote social justices. In those GSAs where members had more meetings and discussions surrounding mental health reported fewer mental health concerns. 68% of the participants included in the study were White (Poteat et al., 2020). Troung & Zongrone (2020) conducted hierarchical regression analysis on data from over 11,000 LGBQ+ middle and high school students, 66.8% of whom were White. Researchers found that participation in GSAs was related to greater school belonging (i.e., the degree to which students feel accepted at their school), but not associated with self-esteem or depression. Researchers also found that the association between GSA participation and sexual orientation based verbal harassment did not have differing outcomes associated with psychosocial indicators (self-esteem, depression, and school belonging) based on race/ethnicity (Troung & Zongrone, 2020).

Ioverno et al (2017) conducted a longitudinal study of 327 LGBQ students across two school years. The researchers found that sexual minority students who had GSAs or were members of GSAs in the prior year perceived their school to be more safe and reported less homophobic bullying in the subsequent school year. Also, having a school establish a GSA and students deciding to participate in the GSA in the first year were independently associated with higher levels of perceived safety during the next school year. Over 80% of the participants were racial-ethnic minorities (Ioverno et al., 2017). Toomey & Russell (2011) conducted regression models on 230 LGBQ middle and high schoolers, with over half of the participants being ethnically diverse. Researchers found that GSA-social justice related activities as well as the presence of GSAs were positively associated with school belonging and GPA. However, positive benefits dissipate with high levels of school victimization (Toomey & Russell, 2011).

Poteat et al (2012) found that students with GSAs in schools reported lower: truancy, suicide attempts, sexual behavior with casual partners, smoking, and drinking compared to students without GSAs. Baams & Russell (2012), using mixed logistic regression analyses, analyzed a questionnaire from middle and high schoolers in California. The racial composition of the sample was over 70% students of color. Results indicated students in schools with GSAs reported better mental health and school outcomes as well as lower substance use. Over the long term, GSAs were also related to better school functioning and mental health outcomes as well as lower lifetime smoking; pertaining to mental health and substance use these associations were not as strong for non-Hispanic White students. Similarly, positive school functioning associations were stronger for non-LGBTQ students (Baams & Russell, 2012). Researchers, utilizing data from the Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey (where over 60% of the participants were White) compared the safety of over 200 sexual minority adolescents, with and without support groups for LGB students findings that sexual minority adolescents in schools with queer support groups self-reported lower levels of victimization and suicide attempts compared to those without groups. (Goodenow et al., 2006).

In relation to extracurricular supports, sixty-one percent of students surveyed as part of the " 2019 National School Climate Survey" indicated having a GSA at their school; those students with a GSA at their school heard less anti-LGBTQ remarks, felt safer, experienced less victimization, felt more connected to their school, were able to identify more supportive staff, and had higher levels of peer acceptance compared to LGBTQ students with no GSA at their school (Kosciw et al., 2019). Examining extracurricular supports for LGBTQ students of color, researchers at *GLSEN* indicated that those students who had a GSA at their school felt more

connected and were less likely to feel unsafe due to their sexual orientation and gender expression, apart from Latinx and Black LGBTQ students. Ethnic/cultural clubs also had positive effects on LGBTQ students of color: AAPI and Black students felt safer pertaining to their race/ethnicity; AAPI and Native students felt higher levels of school belonging (Truong et al., 2020a; Truong et al., 2020b; Zongrone et al., 2020a; Zongrone et al., 2020b).

As the aforementioned research notes, extracurricular supports, such as gay-straight alliances (GSAs), provides a safe space for queer focused education (Bodnar & Tornello, 2019), giving students a place to discover themselves (Herdt et al., 2006), empowering students to advocate for themselves (Currie et al., 2012), as well as to raise awareness about LGBT issues (Griffin et al., 2004). GSAs in schools have been shown to be related to stronger levels of school safety, higher GPAs, lower feelings of isolation and other mental health concerns (e.g., fewer suicide attempts, greater overall well-being as an adult, and lower levels of alcohol and drug use) [Heck, Flentje, & Cochran, 2013; Lee, 2002; Marx & Kettrey, 2016; Poteat et al., 2012 Poteat et al., 2020; Toomey & Russell, 2011; Toomey et al., 2001; Walls et al., 2001]. Ethnic/cultural clubs have also been shown to be related to stronger feelings at their school for sexual minority students of color (Truong et al., 2020a; Truong et al., 2020b; Zongrone et al., 2020a; Zongrone et al., 2020b).

Gaps in the Literature Addressed by the Current Study

This study hopes to expand the literature on understanding the impact of school climate for sexual minority individuals by including participants that also identify as people of color. Based on the concept of intersectionality, as detailed in Chapter One, these participants often have much different lived experiences than White sexual minority students due to the

intersection of multiple marginalized identities. Using qualitative narrative methods, participants will also have the opportunity to describe in detail their experiences related to the K-12 school climate and what, if any, changes they would have liked to experience within that school climate pertaining to both their sexual minority and racial-ethnic identities. By detailing their lived experiences, participants will contribute important information for this research study that will help inform administrators and educators on how they can take action in making school settings more welcoming, affirming, and inclusive for all LGBTQ+ students.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this retrospective study is to understand 1) how sexual minority students of color experienced school climate 2) the effect those experiences had on them, and 3) what, if any, changes they would have made to their school climate. A narrative inquiry approach was used for this study because this method allows for the examination of "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.15). For narrative inquiry, the stories themselves are the data. The participants mirror their reflections of events and experiences, which allows the researcher to learn more about participants' culture, experiences, and identity (Butina, 2015; Müller, 2021). This research design will allow sexual minority students of color to detail their previous experiences associated with their school's climate.

Research Questions

1. Did sexual minority people of color experience any of the following factors during their K-12 education, in terms of both their sexual orientation and racial-ethnic identities?

    A. Supportive school staff

    B. A safe school environment and climate free from sexual orientation based and racially based bullying, harassment, and/or assault

    C. Inclusive policies and practices

D. Exposure to curriculum that was affirming of diverse sexual orientations and racial/ethnic backgrounds

E. Inclusive extracurricular activities

2. If sexual minority people of color did experience any of the above mentioned aspects of school climate, what was the impact on their school experience?

3. Based on the K-12 experiences of sexual minority people of color, what changes, if any, should be made to improve school climate for sexual minority students of color?

Participants

Eligibility criteria for participants included the following: 1) age eighteen to twenty-five years old; 2) the ability to read, comprehend, and speak English; 3) received a high school diploma from a school located in the U.S.; 4) identify as a racial-ethnic minority individual (e.g., anything other than White/Caucasian); 5) identify as a sexual minority individual (e.g., anything other than heterosexual).

Recruitment

In order to gather enough participants for this study, an initial IRB application was submitted and later amended (via details that follow). Firstly, an attempt was made to recruit participants from local LGBTQ+ community organizations located in Chicago, including the Center on Halsted, Howard Brown Health, Night Ministry, and The Illinois Safe School Alliance, among other agencies serving this population. After IRB approval, the researcher reached out to leaders of the community organizations to discuss the project, attain buy-in from those leaders, and send out a recruitment flyer to the members of each organization (See Appendix D). To further incentivize participation in the project, participants were to be offered a

$25 gift card following data collection. However, no participants were recruited through this initial process. Therefore, the researcher submitted an IRB amendment to allow graduate school psychology students at Loyola University Chicago to post the recruitment flyer on their social media accounts. When recruitment was still not at desired levels, the researcher submitted an additional IRB amendment to recruit from general community organizations across Chicago. As a result of the two additional IRB amendments, a total of eight participants were recruited for this study. All of the interviews took place via Zoom, and generally speaking, the interviews were an hour in length, while the shortest interview took around 40 minutes and the longest one took closer to 2 hours. Please refer to Appendix A for a copy of the interview protocol. Table 1 details participant demographic information.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Name	Sexual Orientation	Pronouns	Age	Race	Ethnicity	Type of School	Geographic Area	HS Grad Year
Jay	Queer	They/Them	25	Asian	Mexican/ Pilipino	Public	Urban	2016
Jasmine	Bisexual	Any	19	Asian-American	Pakistani	Public	Suburban	2021
Mia	Lesbian	They/Them	23	African American/ Asian-American	Black/ Chinese/ Vietnamese	Catholic	Suburban	2017
Willow	Asexual	She/Her	19	African American	Nigerian American	Public	Suburban	2022
Joy	Queer (only attracted to women)	They/Them	20	Asian/White	Taiwanese	Public	Suburban	2021
Jinks	Bisexual	He/Him	21	Asian	Indian	Private	Urban	2018
Max	Bisexual	He/Him	23	Asian	Asian-American	Private	Suburban	2018
Pearl	Lesbian	She/Her	24	Asian	Indian American	Public	Suburban	2017

Note. Names are pseudonyms.

Data Collection

For the purpose of this study, a semi-structured narrative interview process was utilized to seek participant responses associated with perceptions of the impact that their K-12 school climate had upon them. The researcher individually interviewed each participant. Participants were given the option to participate in interviews either face-to-face or through an online video conferencing platform (i.e., Zoom). However, all interviews were completed using Zoom. Before the interview commenced, demographic information was collected from each participant. Each

participant was also assigned a number, in lieu of their full name, in order to maintain confidentiality. According to Müller (2021), narrative interviews have three general types of questions: narrative prompts, immanent follow-up questions, and examnent follow-up questions. Moreover, narrative prompts should be non-suggestive open-ended questions, as they allow participants to tell stories in a narrative flow. Based on the initial answer from narrative prompts, immanent questions are then asked. Immanent questions are open-ended follow up questions that probe deeper into the answers from the narrative prompts. Finally, examnent questions are follow-up questions for researchers to introduce their own topics or points that have yet to be discussed (Müller, 2021).

Data Analysis

There are many ways to analyze narrative data. For this study, the researcher used a categorical data analysis process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this form of analysis, stories are broken up into categories. Through categorical analysis, units of data (i.e., categories) arise from the stories conveyed. They are compared with other participant categories to identify recurring similarities across the data. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This process allowed the researcher to determine any patterns that arose across the participant experiences as sexual minority students of color, pertaining to their perceptions of K-12 school climate. There are some general steps to narrative categorical analysis that include: organization and preparation of data, coding of the data, creating categories, and data interpretation. First, the interviews were transcribed using the Artificial Intelligence transcription service from Rev.com. Once the interviews were transcribed, all audio and text files were downloaded and deleted from the Rev.com website. The transcripts were then transferred into Microsoft Word documents. The researcher removed and de-identified

any identifying information (e.g., names, places, locations) from the transcripts. A first-year doctoral student from Loyola University Chicago's school psychology program was recruited to assist in coding the transcripts. The lead researcher and first-year doctoral student coded each transcript. The process of open coding occurred as the lead researcher and first-year doctoral student read through the transcripts (at first individually), and identified words, ideas, and patterns in the data that could help answer each of the research questions. To reduce misinterpretation of data, the lead researcher and first-year doctoral student attempted to solicit feedback from the interviewees to confirm if the interpretation of codes matched with participants' intended meaning. This occurred after the process of open coding. The research team then met to compare their independent codes. At this point they calculated interrater agreement, wherein the lead researcher and first year doctoral student assessed which codes they had agreed upon (Gisev et al., 2013). Agreement was calculated through agreements on codes being divided by the total number of both code agreements and disagreements (Campbell et al., 2013). The lead researcher and first-year doctoral student's interrater agreement during this first round of coding was 86%. Following this, the lead researcher and first-year doctoral student created a master list of the codes, reviewed the transcripts again, and participated in axial coding -- grouping open codes. The research used the axial codes to help create categories. Once agreement on categories was achieved, the researcher and graduate student went through the master list of codes and assigned them to certain categories. Interrater agreement was once again calculated, similar to the previous process. For this final round of coding, the interrater agreement was 76%. At this point, the lead researcher and first-year doctoral student then went through all the codes where there was disagreement. For each code they disagreed on, they had

to come to a consensus on whether to include the code, and in which category would the code fall under, or to remove the code completely from their lists. The final step, data interpretation, is a fluid process that can take place both during and after the coding and category stages. Data interpretation was intended to identify comprehensive theories and themes that will provide insight on participant experiences with specific aspects of K-12 school climate (Butina, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Validity

Multiple steps were taken to ensure the study's validity and trustworthiness. The first step toward ensuring validity relates to respondent validation, which is also known as member checks. Respondent validation is the process of garnering feedback from study participants on preliminary findings from the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As the data for this study are personal narratives, it is necessary for researchers to accurately comprehend the meaning of the stories being told to them. Consulting with the interviewees following initial coding to confirm researchers' interpretation of their stories assisted in building validity for the study. However, only two participants responded to the email request for member checks (i.e., Mia & Jasmine) [See Appendix E]. Interrater agreement was also used in the study to build trustworthiness. As mentioned previously, interrater agreement occurs when two researchers analyze the data and determine codes (Gisev et al., 2013). Two separate people analyzed the data, first independently, and then met to determine reliability of initial analysis. This process occurred once again when determining final categories and codes. This helped to ensure that the data being presented was not from the viewpoint of solely one individual (Gisev et al., 2013).

As mentioned previously, the lead researcher wanted to focus on the intersectionality of multiple marginalized identities. The lead researcher who conducted the interviews and analyzed the data did not share all of the same identities of the participants. The lead researcher identifies as a White, gay, cis gender male. None of the participants identified their racial identity as White. Therefore, the primary researcher participated in the practice of reflexivity. Reflexivity takes place when the researcher examines the contextually intersecting relationship with themselves and the participants they are interviewing, this includes identities such as race and sexual orientation (Dodgson, 2019). Part of reflexivity includes examining the power differential as well as what, if any, shared experiences may exist between researchers and participants (Dodgson, 2019). When examining differences in identity, it is crucial to examine one's unconscious biases (e.g., racism and homophobia) as this could lead researchers to prioritize data that confirms their implicit and explicit perceptions of other people (Dodgson, 2019). Reflexivity occurs throughout the whole research process and requires constant self-monitoring (Dodgson, 2019). A description of reflexivity practices will be included in the discussion section (Chapter Five).

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Chapter three detailed the process by which participants were recruited, data was collected, and analyzed. This chapter details the four main themes that participants shared including: 1) staff biases and the need for explicit practices, 2) clubs and community, 3) more inclusive curriculum and 4) bullying, microaggressions, and resiliency. The following sections of this chapter will provide detailed results of each of the four main themes of this study.

Staff Biases & The Need for Explicit Practices

The first category that emerged from the interviews related to the participants feeling mistreated by their schools' staff and in order to address that mistreatment participants had made specific recommendations for what they would have liked to see in their schools. In terms of feeling marginalized by school staff, 88% of the participants (n = 7) described feeling mistreated by school staff due to their racial-ethnic identity and/or sexual orientation. Several examples of these responses include:

> **Jasmine:** In terms of school staff being kind of understanding, there were some scenarios in which it was, you know, maybe the way that I presented was a little uncomfortable for them because it's not what they're used to. You know, they're not used to seeing like a very outwardly queer, um, even if I'm not saying I'm outwardly queer, it's like deducible, um, you know, a person of color whose very comfortable talking about like their religion and like their relationship with that. So I think to that extent, it made a lot of my white teachers uncomfortable but not to the point of them saying anything that was outwardly like discriminatory.

Jay: but I'm just thinking about like the lack of staff members that were people of color and were LGBTQ accepting or at least were very explicit in being so, not having that was harmful in that like I, it sent that message of like, oh, you can't be both

Jinks: ...but like sometimes when you report something again and again, the staff, you know, they just started to ignore me because of my racial identity.

Joy: Yeah, I think just the general mindset of the staff in my school district K through 12 was if you see it, don't say anything. I think I mentioned this in the beginning about people in middle school going crazy with the racial slurs and actually every kind of slur and teachers seeing it, observing it, you know, hearing it and just not doing anything. That was really frustrating.

Max: It's just that they behaved differently towards people of my community and they behaved differently towards heterosexuals.

Mia: I very strongly remember what we read, I forgot the name of the book, but we read like a very historic book written by a black author. And I remember my teacher who was a white Catholic man saying he read the book to us And it had a lot of racial slurs in it, like the N word and all kinds of words that they used back then. And he said to us, like, for the purpose of the book, for the purpose of learning, he's going to say every word in the book and not bleep out anything…

Willow: So the staff, I feel like, especially in my younger years, I had to play too much to like a quiet kind of stereotype because I didn't wanna be that one person that's kind of there with like, the aggressive stereotype.

In order to feel safer at school, almost every participant made some recommendation that they believe school staff should implement. Fifty percent of participants (n = 4) detailed how they wished teachers were required to take ongoing trainings and that there were more resources related to the LGBTQ community and/or people of color. Examples from several participant response follow:

Max: I think even the professors should be made to know certain things about LGBTQ community because that they, they were, they were, because during my time I saw there

were a lot of professors who didn't have proper knowledge who just thought LGBTQ people, just as one type of people, because in that, there are different types of sexual orientation as well.

Jasmine: Yeah. Um, I would definitely like to see more resources for us like more openness with the school to recognize that there are people who are gay and there are people who aren't white and maybe they need help. It's like, oh, you're either gay or you're a person of color or you're white. like you can't be all of them, you can't be like a whole bunch of different things, and so when you were like very outward about who you were as a person, it was kind of like mind blowing to them almost, and that was visible in like the lack of like, resources specific to queer people of color.

Jay: …then even just generally like incorporating more information about LGBTQ people of color. I think just adding that instead of putting the responsibility on the student definitely would've given me the message of like, oh, there are staff members that are accepting and are willing to talk about this and it is important and definitely would've been helpful.

Mia: Something that I like that teachers have done in the past, not in K through 12, what in college was, you know, we started the class for the year and then they had us write down our name, our pronouns, what we prefer to be called, fun facts about us… and there are too many stories of students feeling ostracized or maybe taking some kind of further action where, you know, they don't know if someone's looking out for them or that someone cares about them… Maybe they don't realize students are going through something, but there needs to be training where they are at least made aware of the things that students could be going through.

A quarter of the participants (n = 2) also expressed how they wished school staff could implement more mental health resources in school:

Jay: Like my one thought is like increasing mental health resources for students could also help with the bullying. Just 'cause that was definitely not a thing in elementary school; and then I think we had, like, we had counselors in high school.

Pearl: Yeah, there should be confidentiality and privacy should be there in schools if someone is revealing their gender or doing something… and also supportive counseling and mental health services should be there.

Finally, 38% (n = 3) of participants detailed how school staff should create and implement explicit anti-bullying/ anti-discrimination policies in schools:

> **Jay:** It's like my one thought is like anti-bullying campaigns, especially among staff, 'cause then they're the ones who have the power to actually stop bullying if they could… I think when creating policies I'm thinking policies specifically and like rules, specifically, like getting student input would be really important. Like students are the ones that are the discrimination, the bullying and the harassments. And while staff can also definitely experience that, like I'm thinking among students, like getting their input on how these are worded and like what can be done moving forward.

> **Joy:** I think in terms of , what I'd like to see change is like instituting policies about, you know, discrimination, hate speech between students, so that way teachers can actually interfere. Obviously there's cameras in the school, if someone reports something happening and says like, oh, this teacher was here and didn't do anything, then there should be consequences for that, you know?

> **Pearl:** Like there should be non or anti-bullying policies that should be there. If it'll be there, then it'll be helpful to not even LGBTQ, but also to other people who are just bullying to… I'll also say that there are non-discrimination policies that no one can discriminate against. This girl is lesbian or this guy is gay, or like, or this person is bisexual or, you know…

Summary

Overall, participants detailed that they felt being treated differently by the staff from their schools. To help address some of these staff biases, participants detailed wanting staff to go through professional development for working with sexual minority students of color. However, fewer participants explicitly stated the desire for staff to implement more mental health resources, as well as create, implement anti-bullying/anti-discrimination policies.

Clubs & Community

The second theme that emerged during the participant interviews had to do with how students viewed their schools' extracurricular groups (e.g., Gay-Straight Alliances [GSAs],

Queer Straight Alliances [QSAs], forensic clubs, etc.) and how the participants were able to form their own sense of community. For example, 38% of participants (n = 3) identified that LGBTQ support groups were a benefit for them at their school.

> **Jay:** Yeah, I think definitely having QSAs was a huge help. That was one of the first organizations I joined in high school. And like since my high school was, uh, very racially diverse, like seeing other people of color who were LGBTQ in the club was really helpful for me at the time.
>
> **Pearl:** Yeah. The clubs made me, I'll say the overall experience, clubs made me feel like I'm in a home. There were people who were very nice and kind towards me, and they were non-discriminating and they were very chill
>
> **Max:** There was a LGBTQ+ support group which, you know, consisted of community building, had advocacy and support, then they provided resources on campus, and the resources were related to some sexual health, then violence prevention and, um, education as well. They had their own library of more than, I guess, 2000 books, and there were a lot of videos. So yeah, this did really help a lot…

However, a quarter of participants (n = 2) identified that while their school had LGBTQ support clubs, (whether diverse or not), they felt as if it reinforced the idea that their queer and racial-ethnic identities were separate.

> **Jay:** So definitely remember joining the QSA in high school from the very beginning. Also joined the Latino Association at my high school. I don't remember what they were exactly called but I joined them, which I was thinking back on. I don't know if the idea of them being two separate clubs also gave me the idea of like, oh, these are two separate identities and they cannot be the same thing… It's like, looking back, I think of a lot about the anxiety that I held that I had in joining these clubs. It's like, since they were separate clubs, like I think about my identities of as an LGBTQ person of color separately
>
> **Joy:** It's like, I would like to see a lot of, a lot more Pan City kind of, um, centric clubs because it could, I mean, at least in my high school, because it was really isolating for me… It kinda just led to my experience of isolation and like, there was like that couple bright spots, but, you know, it's mostly just like isolation. The feeling that like people

> don't really care about what I have to say or my struggle or the struggle of like, people who look like me

Thirty-eight percent (n = 3) of participants detailed that they didn't have specific clubs related to their sexual orientation and/or racial-ethnic identity. However, whether it be through other clubs, or just the friends they naturally made, they seemed to gravitate towards other members of their sexual and/or racial-ethnic identity.

> **Mia:** For forensics, it kind of turned out where a lot of the, a lot of the LGBT students would do forensics, and that's not something that I joined it thinking. I started freshman year, I didn't know much about it. My friends were doing it, so I wanted to, but since it was more like a, well, not since, but it was more like acting and speeches and things like that, being creative. So I found that a lot of the students that did it were LGBT. And of course, this was freshman year before I knew that I was anything but straight. I was able to find a community there. We spent a lot of time together practicing going to tournaments with people from other schools. And eventually as time went on, it became like, oh, this is the gay thing.

> **Jasmine:** I kind of talked about it earlier, but in the clubs I was a part of like creative writing and national or honor society. Like most of the people that were in those clubs were already people that were queer or people of color, or both, obviously not everyone, but like most of the people there were like some sort of marginalized identity and there was a sense of like, understanding that came with that.

> **Joy:** Yeah, I felt like it was a little bit easier with my sexuality since I accidentally surrounded myself with a bunch of gay people when I was in elementary school.

Summary

There was some variation between how students viewed LGBTQ support groups. Pearl and Max found them to be a very helpful part of their school experience, while Joy and Jay felt that having LGBTQ support groups and groups for specific racial-ethnic identities be separate, helped to reinforce the idea that you can't share both identities. Finally, although many participants did not have specific clubs related to their sexual orientation and/or racial-ethnic

identities they were able to form a sense of community with other individuals who share similar identities, whether through other clubs, or just in the general friendships they made.

More Inclusive Curriculum

The third theme gathered from the participant interviews related to a desire for a more inclusive curriculum in their school settings. Initially, a quarter of participants (n =2) were surprised to learn that there would be any mention of queer health in their health/sex education courses.

> **Jasmine:** The extent of like sex education that we had, you know, which it was good that we had sex education in the first place. I know a lot of places don't have that. Um, but I remember it was listed that we would be talking about queer issues and that I was like so excited. I'm like, oh my god, we have a month to talk about sex and we're gonna talk about like, queer sex.

> **Willow:** Weirdly, my school was very pro, they were very pro sexual health, right? So, which was, you know, I'm not complaining about that…

However, when it came time to actually talk about queer health 38% of participants (n = 3) were underwhelmed with the actual content being talked about.

> **Jasmine:** Oh, yeah. HIV exists, use a condom. And that was the extent of like queer sex education, which is problematic on so many levels.

> **Joy:** The sex education we had was like, not like abstinence only, even though they're like, even though they're just like, abstinence is the best way to go, but we're gonna teach you how to put on a condom anyways.

> **Willow:** I would love it if they include, like, any kind of asexual, demi sexual education into the education, into the curriculum, but I really don't know how that would work when it doesn't come from somebody who's asexual.

When it comes to the more general curriculum, 63% of participants (n = 5) reported that they felt as if they weren’t represented.

Jasmine: In terms of curriculum, like I was able to take certain classes that I know a lot of people wouldn't have been able to take, but I think that even within those classes, it was a very Eurocentric point of view, you know? I refused to take AP euro instead, in high school, even though like all my friends were taking it. 'cause I was like, I refuse to learn about European history again.

Jay: But in terms of things like LGBTQ history and then especially like LGBTQ history with people of color, like the only, I can't really think of anything that professors or like, not professors, but like staff had put in their curriculum specifically. I do remember in high school I was taking, I think it was American history and one of our projects was to create posters for a social cause that we cared a lot about. And then that was leading up to 2016 for sure. My poster was on like gay marriage and wanting to legalize gay marriage, and so I think it was more of myself bringing that into the classes and the projects that I was doing and not necessarily them being like, let's talk about, Marsha P Johnson, let's talk about Sylvia Rivera. Like, let's talk about these amazing people and history and what's happening now into our curriculum.

Joy: Because like, it was in, and Asian Americans were not mentioned. Latinos were not mentioned. Any indigenous people not mentioned. It was like the civil rights movement, which of course, center around people, generally black people, people of color, like advocating for, civil liberties, you know, for themselves, instead of the thought that they put out into the world and the entire public, you know, like no mention of W.E.B. Du Bois, you know, like no mention of any sort of revolutionary thinker in American history that was not white.

Pearl: …the LGBTQ community or topic wasn't included in our school, so they should be included. Also, there should be workshops, like workshops should be there. It should, it's lacking in our curriculum, so I think it should be added in that.

Willow: So when it comes to LGBTQ community, when it comes to LGBTQ history, they don't even teach it.

A quarter of participants (n = 2) also detailed how this lack of inclusive curriculum made them as if they didn’t matter.

Mia: So things that were hurtful, I think, like I mentioned before, basically teaching curriculums as if it's the only way and that's the truth. And honestly, someone who doesn't know or who didn't know as much as me might not even know that there are other

> options or Yeah. Other people out there. So, um, I don't, I don't think it was helpful that they said everything was black and white, the truth, without considering how other people felt.
>
> **Joy:** It's like, why is the white, why is the white person always centered? And that, like it didn't make me angry, but it makes me angry now, because it reinforced the idea that I, again, don't matter, like it reinforced the idea that had been drilled into my brain since I was a kid, being an Asian person. It's like, keep your head low. Okay. Be quiet, stay calm, model minority. You know? It's like I wasn't supposed to accomplish anything out of the ordinary, but at the same time be like, you know, super high achieving and stuff like that.

Given that a non-inclusive curriculum can reinforce the notion that sexual minority students of color don't matter, 25% of participants (n = 2) specifically advocated that there be appropriate and representative conversations and topics shared for LGBTQ people of color.

> **Joy:** Just include the contributions of people of color as well. In terms of literature, like English classes and stuff like that. I'd like to see more books written by people of color or centering non-white people. In terms of health, I would like there to be maybe even like a quarter of the reproductive unit, to be centered around queer health.
>
> **Jay:** I guess more student directed learning and then even just generally like incorporating more information about LGBTQ people of color. I think just adding that instead of putting the responsibility on the student definitely would've given me the message of like, oh, there are staff members that are willing to talk about this and it is important and definitely would've been helpful.

Summary

For the most part, participants detailed that there was little to no mention or discussion of topics related to sexual minority students of color in their general curriculum. If there was any discussion, it was extremely minimal, and in some cases problematic. This lack of representation in what the participants were being taught led to some of them feeling like they didn't matter. Participants also detailed that there should be explicit discussions and lessons regarding LGBTQ people of color and their contributions.

Bullying, Microaggressions, & Resiliency

The final theme that the lead researcher gathered from the participant interviews focused the relationships that the interviewees had with other students at their schools, and the effects that those relationships had on them. For example, 38% of the participants (n = 3) detailed that they weren't outwardly bullied by peers at their schools, but they detailed experiences where they felt like they either had to hide who they were or heard jokes made about them due their sexual orientation and/or racial-ethnic identity.

> **Jasmine:** Um, so I wouldn't say that I was outwardly like bullied, but, you know, looking back at the way people treated me growing up, I think I was very naive and oblivious to how people were like, you know, there were some things that people said that were like backhanded or the way people like, you know, um, like, oh, let's pretend to flirt with her, you know, she's like the, you know what I mean?
>
> **Jay:** I remember being pretty vocal about like LGBTQ rights at the least, if not my own LGBTQ identity… and then I think like in terms of high school, I don't think I ever experienced outright bullying from anyone. Um, just 'cause I think a lot of my own experiences in elementary school shied me away from wanting to date people. So I didn't really date anyone in high school, at least not anyone at the school and I didn't really tell other people about a person that I was dating at the time.
>
> **Willow:** I had to keep, like, I kept it a secret for my whole, so, you know, it wasn't so much as bullying, but just like this constant pressure and anxiety to like fit in this box, fit in it, or just, you know… not so much bullying, just that anxiety.

Half of the participants (n = 4), however, did report that they experienced verbal and/or emotional bullying at school, when explicitly asked to tell the researcher about their experiences with bullying due to their sexual orientation and racial-ethnic identity.

> **Jay:** Yeah. Uh, a lot of it was like verbal. Um, I think a lot of just like, oh, at the time, like I identified, um, as a girl. So like, you're a girl, you shouldn't be dating a girl. And um, like, why do you think gay marriage is okay? It's not okay. And um, so like a lot of those verbal kinds of things around that...

> **Jinks:** Actually, I would not say that like there was physical harassment, but verbal harassment, uh, verbal, you know, verbal harassment goes on.
>
> **Joy:** Um, it was mostly verbal, um, people just making fun of my appearance… like even, no, whenever I had a girlfriend and like, we would like hold hands in the hallway, they'd be like, kiss. Even if it was like me, like walking with a close friend, just like walking closer than usually would with like any other person, you know, they'd be like, kiss, hold hands, hug, whatever, make out. Um, like man, it was really dehumanizing.
>
> **Joy:** Yeah, I feel like there was like a massive separation between me and the white queer students. It's like, they would say stuff that was probably unintentionally harmful, but when I was like saying like, Hey, you know, that's not something that's cool to say. They're just like, you know, they kind of like push back against it.
>
> **Max:** Well, I would be lying if I say there was no bullying. I think there was, you know, just that it wasn't physical, but yeah, there was a lot of emotional and verbal bullying as well, because, the moment the people came to know about the sexual orientation of mine so people started maintaining distance in high school.

Thirty-eight percent of participants (n = 3) detailed some of the specific verbal microaggressions, or everyday slights, putdowns, invalidations, etc., that they experienced from their peers whether intentional or not (Sue et al., 2007).

> **Jasmine:** Um, I think that when people, um, 'cause it's all rooted in ignorance, you know, there was a lot of, I would get asked a lot of questions, like, um, I was literally asked one time like, oh, like when I told people I had been to Pakistan, they're like, oh, did you see any terrorists there? And all of it was rooted in ignorance and just genuinely not knowing what other countries were or what other like, um, lifestyles were like.
>
> **Joy:** It was like, oh, okay. So the white girls think it's okay to like fetishize Asian people, and so I am scared that they're gonna do it to me. And they did do it to me. Um, so that was kind of like, not bullying, but it also was not comfortable at all… just like, even my hair was like a topic of interest. Of course, I dye it now, but like, it was like, it was really dark. Uh, well, it is really dark naturally, and it's definitely got like the Asian texture and people would make fun of my hair, um, because it was like a little bit frizzy at times, you know, like got greasy fast. So if I forgot to wash my hair last night, they'd be like, Ugh.

> **Mia:** And so that, like, some jokes were like, oh, well, Mia's good at math because, um, because they're Asian or because they're Chinese, you know? Um, and back then I didn't think, like, I didn't feel bad about anything. I was just like, you know, I am good at math. I didn't see it as bullying. I didn't see it as anything wrong. I was just like, you're right. I am good at math, but because I'm, it's not because I'm Asian that I'm good. I studied, you know a lot of that stuff did come naturally to me, but I didn't think that was because I was Asian. I think it's just my intuition, so that was one thing. Yeah. So there was that. And the other one that I can think of was around the time in middle school, that song Black and Yellow came out.. But there was like one other, well, first of all, my school was pretty much all white and there were rarely any other students, but one of my classmates who's black would not like every time she saw me, but like a couple times she'd be like, ah, black and yellow.

When explicitly asked about what effects bullying had on them, a quarter of participants (n = 2) described how they started to feel socially isolated and depressed.

> **Jay:** …and then, um, like social isolation was a huge thing I remember

> **Pearl:** But now when they, when they came to know that I'm lesbian, like girls, mostly the girls, girls were like, oh, she's a lesbian. I should stay away from her… so after then I just got into so much depression because no one, literally no one at that time could help me out because there was no friends… once I thought that I should end my life, I tried to commit suicide.

Conversely, when asked the same question, 38% of participants (n = 3) described how the bullying either caused them to develop healthy coping skills or had an unintended positive effect on them later in life:

> **Jasmine:** … I feel a lot of empathy for the person that I used to be and a lot of love for my past self. Um, which has helped, helped me become more accepting to this self if anything helped me become more, like more of myself, if that makes sense.

> **Jinks:** Um, it had some negative effects initially, but as I said, like, uh, I do meditation and gyming a lot, so when I go to gym sessions, it makes me, it makes me feel stronger and it helps me to focus on myself.

> **Max:** It did have a great impact, but still, as I said earlier I was built strong and mentally, I thought of new ways to keep my mind busy, to keep energizing myself, to make sure that I release this anger in some positive way. So I started going to the gym, you know, lifting weights, just trying to channel those energies into the right direction.

Summary

Most of the participants detailed that at a minimum they didn't always feel safe at their school due to their queer and/or racial-ethnic identities, whether they were outwardly bullied or not. However, half of the participants did describe verbal/and or emotional bullying, with some participants giving explicit examples of some of the verbal microaggressions they experienced. For some participants, the bullying had harmful effects on their mental health, while others were forced to develop coping and adaptation skills.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine whether sexual minority students of color viewed their school climate as helpful, perceptions of the effects that their school climate had on them, and any recommendations they had for schools moving forward. Overall, the participants identified that they did not experience a helpful school climate, many participants shared that their lack of an inclusive school climate made them feel that they, and their experiences, didn't matter in the educational setting, and they noted many changes they would like to see implemented by their former schools. However, there was some variability in the answers participants gave in terms of the intersection of their racial-ethnic and queer identities.

1. Did sexual minority people of color experience any of the following factors during their K-12 education, in terms of both their queer and racial-ethnic identities?

A. Supportive school staff

Generally speaking, the participants of this study felt that most of their school staff were not supportive of them based on their minoritized identities. Jasmine and Jay were two participants who mentioned that the intersection of their queer and racial-ethnic identities either led teachers to appear uncomfortable around them or the lack of representation/explicit support from school staff conveyed the harmful message that students cannot be both sexual minority and racial-ethnic minority individuals. However, there was a higher frequency of responses

related to either participants' sexual orientation status or their racial-ethnic identities. Max had mentioned that school staff behaved differently towards him due to his sexual orientation. Jinks, Joy, Mia, and Willow had detailed specific experiences with school staff perpetuating harm as it relates to their racial-ethnic identities, whether that be explicitly using racist terms, observing students using racist terminology and not intervening, or creating a climate where the participant changed their behaviors since they didn't want to be viewed as an aggressive stereotype.

1. Did sexual minority people of color experience any of the following factors during their K-12 education, in terms of both their queer and racial-ethnic identities?

B. A safe school environment and climate free from sexual orientation based and racially based bullying, harassment, and/or assault

While there were variations in responses, no participant described a school environment that was free from sexual orientation and/or racially based bullying, harassment, and/or assault. However, the stories that most of the participants detailed, were not intersectional, in the sense that the experience dealt with either their racial-ethnic identity *or* their queer identities. Jasmine, Jay, and Willow felt as though they weren't outwardly bullied, but that they had to hide who they were in terms of their sexual orientation in order to fit in or that jokes would be made based on one of their minoritized identities. Most of the participants, however, did detail that there were specific incidents where they were bullied, harassed, and/or assaulted, (usually verbally or emotionally). Joy detailed viewing peers telling other students in same sex relationships to kiss, in a taunting manner. Joy was also the only participant who detailed bullying from an intersectional perspective, stating that sometimes they felt a separation between white queer peers because they had to defend their racial-ethnic identity as well. There were also multiple

racial-ethnic based verbal microaggressions, such as Jasmine being asked if she saw any "terrorists when visiting middle eastern countries" or relating Mia's high academic skills specifically to their minority status as an individual "who is part Asian".

1. Did sexual minority people of color experience any of the following factors during their K-12 education, in terms of both their queer and racial-ethnic identities?

C. Inclusive policies and practices

Out of all of the five sections related to school climate that were discussed with study participants, the area of policies and practices seemed to have the least amount of responses and data. One of the reasons for this was that participants, such as Joy and Mia, were not sure of any explicit policies or practices that their school had to protect students based on their racial-ethnic and/or queer identities. Max was the only participant who detailed that that he had an explicit anti-bullying policy stating:

> **Max:** Yes, there was this anti-bullying policy. It was helpful because most students I would say, who sort of, because of the fear of the policy, they didn't do harm to much people belonging to our community.

However, participants such as Jasmine, Joy, and Pearl, did state that they would like to see explicit anti-discrimination and anti-bullying policies that protect both racial-ethnic and queer identities. Over half of the participants detailed that they wished schools could implement and provide more mental health services for sexual minority students of color and that teachers should participate in some sort of professional development to be able to better support students in their schools.

1. Did sexual minority people of color experience any of the following factors during their K-12 education, in terms of both their queer and racial-ethnic identities?

D. Exposure to curriculum that was affirming of diverse sexual orientations and racial/ethnic backgrounds

Participants overwhelmingly detailed that the curriculum they experienced in their K-12 schooling was not representative of their sexual or racial identities. Jay explicitly stated that there was no representation in terms of LGBTQ+ people of color in their history class. In terms of a racially and ethnically diverse curriculum, Jasmine and Joy detailed how their curricula was very White and Eurocentric, especially when it came to topics related to history and the civil rights era. Specifically related to curricula that represented queer topics, Pearl and Willow described how there was no mention in any of their classes or assignments.

1. Did sexual minority people of color experience any of the following factors during their K-12 education, in terms of both their queer and racial-ethnic identities?

E. Inclusive extracurricular activities

There was some variation in participant responses related to inclusive extracurricular activities. Pearl and Max identified that their schools Queer Straight Alliance (QSA) was beneficial to them, whether it be due to the diverse array of people who were members of the club or the information and resources that were provided. Jay and Joy detailed that their schools had separate clubs relating to their racial/ethnic and queer identities, and the fact that the clubs were separate reinforced some of the anxiety and isolation they were feeling about their intersecting identities. Finally, even if participants didn't have clubs specifically devoted to racial/ethnic and/or queer identities they naturally became friends with other queer students. There is research to provide some support for this idea. Although one study particularly focused

on gay men, researchers found that they quickly can become connected with other gay men, even before they disclosed their sexual orientation (Davis & Mehta, 2022).

2. If sexual minority people of color did experience any of the above mentioned aspects of school climate, what was the impact on their school experience?

With few exceptions, participants detailed that the aspects of school climate they experienced were not affirming nor inclusive. As mentioned earlier, Pear and Max identified that the QSA's at their schools were beneficial to them, Pearl specifically described that experience as feeling like she had a home at her school. When it came to curriculum, Mia said that it was hurtful for their curriculum to be non-inclusive, while Joy says they felt angry when they thought about the fact their White centered curriculum reinforced the idea that they didn't matter. As it pertains to bullying, harassment, and assault Jay and Pearl stated that their experiences led them to feel depressed and socially isolated, which aligns with data identified from previous research (Truong et al., 2020a; Truong et al., 2020b; Zongrone et al., 2020a; Zongrone et al., 2020b).

3. Based on the K-12 experiences of sexual minority people of color, what changes, if any, should be made to improve school climate for sexual minority students of color?

As previously mentioned, participants stated that schools should implement explicit policy protections for sexual minority students of color. Teachers should also partake in some sort of ongoing professional development working with diverse populations and participants also wished for more mental health supports in schools. In addition to those changes, participants also stated that they would have hoped for more appropriate and representative conversations around topics surrounding LGBTQ+ people of color in their school's curriculum.

Moving Forward

Overall, participants detailed that schools can be an unsafe place for both sexual minority students and students of color. They detailed how their curricula was non-inclusive, how they felt unsafe in schools being peers and teachers, and how the schools' policies and practices did not protect them. Specifically looking at queer identities, Kosciw et al (2019) detailed how school staff and peers could perpetuate harm to queer students and identified that there was a lack of policies and practices to protect them. Echoing similar sentiments, however, through the lens of racial identity, Kohli et al., (2017) detailed some of the harm that is done to students of color in the education setting, whether it be through lack of inclusive curriculum or explicit forms of racism. In terms of the current study, the participants, (having both sexual minority and racial-ethnic minority identities), corroborated the notion that they didn't feel their school environments were supportive, again echoing lack of explicitly supportive staff, policies, and practices, in addition to victimization from peers. As it pertains to extracurricular supports, there was some variation in the responses. However, there also appears to be variation in the literature as well. There were participants who detailed that extracurricular clubs, specifically QSAs, were helpful in their school experience. Many studies have shown this to be the case for LGBTQ+ students (Blake et al., 2001; Proulx et al., 2015; Snapp et al., 2015). However, a quarter of participants detailed that having two separate clubs, one for racial-ethnic identities and one for queer-identities, helped to reinforce ideas that the two identities couldn't exist together. Although that study focused specifically on Latinx students, the researchers did find that the presence of an ethnic-cultural club was related to greater feelings of safety for students in terms of both their race/ethnicity and sexual orientation (Zongrone et al., 2020). While other research found that GSAs can primarily cater to White students, thus creating barriers or limited space for students

of color (Herdt et al., 2006; McCready, 2010; Ocampo & Soodjinda, 2015; Poteat et al., 2009). As noted previously, most of the research on school climate for LGBTQ+ students is comprised of predominantly White participants. Through this study, participant responses indicated that the variation shown in previous literature also applied to their own experiences with regard extracurricular supports as sexual minority students of color. As stated earlier, there were participants who detailed that they felt supported by their extracurricular clubs while other participants noted that the extracurricular supports helped to reinforce the notion that their identities are separate and cannot exist together.

The changes that participants would like to see to their school climate include a more inclusive curriculum, professional development for teachers, more mental health support, and explicit policy protections. As mentioned in Chapter Two, having inclusive curriculum and explicit policy protections was related to greater feelings of school safety for LGBTQ+ students (Jones & Hillier, 2012; Kosciw et al., 2019). Similarly, schools that provided spaces for students to talk about sexual minority issues, made referrals for counseling services, and participated in professional development saw lower suicide related behaviors as well as lower chances of being threatened as sexual minority youth (Kaczowski et al., 2022). Participant responses from this study indicated that some of the aspects of school climate that have a positive impact on white LGBTQ+ students, may also be beneficial for sexual minority students of color.

Reflexivity

One of the means of increasing validity for this study was that I (the lead researcher) would participate in some form of reflexivity, given the power differentials between myself as a cisgender White gay man and the participants of the study who were sexual minority students of

color. After each interview, and after coding each individual's transcripts (both times), I did some journaling to be constantly reflecting upon how my own potential biases may be playing a role on how I could be conducting interviews and analyzing the data. The main theme that emerged for me was how different my school climate experiences were from the participants that were interviewed. Being a White cisgender male, I can be fairly certain that any negative interactions with school staff or peers were not a result of my identities, I could always see myself represented in the curriculum, and explicit policy protections were not something I ever once thought about during my K-12 experience. I did not fully come to terms with my sexual orientation until the end of my high school years. As I was so close to graduating, it felt like it didn't matter, which could also be due to the fact that my primary identities (race, gender) insulated my more marginalized identity (sexual orientation). Recognizing the difference between my participant experiences and my own, I tried my best to be faithful to their stories in the data analysis, and to ensure that any notions I had of previous school experiences did not alter the many stories shared with me.

It was also important for me to reflect on my positionality while creating this study. As a school psychology doctoral student my training has largely focused on interventions and how to support students academically, behaviorally, and social-emotionally. I think that training is evident in some of the facets of my research design. The overwhelming majority of my literature review focuses on how school climate affects students social-emotionally. The idea of asking participants what recommendations they have for improving school climate was so future researchers and school staff could have ideas on how to improve school climate, and thus hopefully improve said outcomes for students. Even the way interview questions were created,

comes from a counseling-oriented lens. I have been trained to ask questions as openly as possible, in the hopes to elicit as broad a response as possible for my clients, or in this case participants. This most likely had a role in my choosing of a narrative style of interview questions.

Limitations & Future Directions

The goal of this research study was to examine school climate for sexual minority students from a more intersectional perspective related to race and ethnicity. However, in reviewing most of the data it seems participants shared stories relating to *either* their racial-ethnic identity or their sexual orientation, but not the intersection of the two. There could be a few reasons for that, the first being that the interview protocol was designed to be open ended to allow participants to share the stories that they found the most salient, and maybe those are the stories they remember best. Going along with the openness of the questions, as the lead researcher I could have tried rewording questions or probing more to focus on an intersectional lens. For example, I might have asked: "I hear you sharing this experience about racially based bullying, were there any examples of bullying based on both your queer and racial-ethnic identities?" When asked about the effects their school climate experiences had on them, I had expected there to be more concrete answers, such as increased levels of depression, feeling less connected to school, etc. Although there was a little bit of that, such as when Pearl talked about bullying leading to her feeling depressed, the openness of the questions, as well as the way I asked the questions, may have not been the best format for getting those sorts of responses; a quantitative research design, such as the univariate and bivariate design Gorse et al (2021) used to find that certain groups of Asian American LGBTQ+ students experienced greater

victimization than White LGBTQ+ students, might have been more beneficial in seeking those types of concrete results. Finally, although the purpose of reflexivity was to try and reduce bias, it cannot be ignored that the study was developed by a White cisgender gay man, and that the intersection of the participants identities are more minoritized than that of the lead researcher. Therefore, there could be unknown or unintended flaws in the design of the study as it pertains to looking at the intersection of racial-ethnic and sexual orientation identities.

There were also some limitations as it relates to intersectionality. As noted in chapter one, "…intersectionality conceptualizes social categories as interacting with and co-constituting one another to create unique social locations that vary according to time and place." (Havinsky, 2014, p. 9). While this study attempted to look at the intersection of racial-ethnic and sexual minority identities in the United States, those two identities are not the only ones that can shape people's experiences. For example, Joy had detailed during their interview how their gender identity also impacted their school experiences, stating:

> I'd have my dead name on the attendance sheet because apparently they couldn't figure out how to change it. It wasn't necessarily that the staff were unsupportive for the most part. It's mostly that like, either they weren't trying or they didn't know.

Therefore, researchers studying similar topics and diverse communities should not only continue to examine the impact of school climate, yet also other identities as well, including gender identity, religion, socioeconomic status, etc., to further diversify the scope of school climate, research and scholarship in order to further support making schools more affirming and equitable for all students. It is also imperative that researchers examine school climate across different school settings. For example, participants like Mia, who attended a Catholic school, may not have a GSA or QSA, therefore it is important to also examine school climate across public

schools, private schools, religious schools, etc. in order to further understand the differences effects school climate can have across different school settings. Finally, one of the unique aspects of this study, in relation to the limited intersectionality, was that even though only two marginalized identities were being examined, there was an evident pattern of students detailing how the school climate lacked support for both those identities together, making participants feel as if they could only be a racial-ethnic minority *or* a sexual minority, but not both. As researchers continue examining school climate from a more intersectional lens, it is important to examine if schools are, and how they can be, supportive of students given all their identities.

APPENDIX A:

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Researcher and Interviewer: Brandon Westerman

Interviewee Number:_____
Pseudonym:_____
Sexual Orientation:_____
Pronouns:_____
Age:_____Race:_____ Ethnicity:_____
Type of school (e.g., public, private, parochial) _____
Type of area where school is located: Rural, Suburban, Urban
Year of Graduation:_____

Interview

Date:_____ Time:_____ Location:_____

PROTOCOL QUESTIONS

School Staff

1. Tell me about your experiences with school staff (e.g., what actions or speech did they use to show how they felt about LGBTQ+ individuals and people of color) as a…. (Ex: Black gay man)
    1. What effect, if any, do you think those experiences had on you?
        1. Which experiences with school staff *were helpful* as a sexual minority student of color?
        2. Which experiences with school staff *were harmful* as a sexual minority student of color?
        3. Any additional thoughts or comments about your school's staff in relation to the effect it had on you? For example, did you previously think an experience was helpful but now see it as harmful? Was there an experience that was both helpful and harmful at the same time?
    2. What aspects of school staff's roles and responsibilities, as a sexual minority student of color, would you like to see *continue*?
    3. What aspects of the school staff's roles and responsibilities, as a sexual minority student of color, would you like to see *change*?
    4. Any additional general thoughts or comments about your school's staff from the perspective of a sexual minority student of color?

Bullying, Harassment, & Assault

1. Tell me about your experiences with school safety (e.g., physical verbal, emotional, etc. bullying and assault), if any, in school as a…. (Ex: Black gay man)
    1. What effect, if any, do you think those experiences had on you?
    2. Pertaining to the school climate surrounding race and anti-LGBTQ victimization, what are some things you would like to see *continue*?
    3. Pertaining to the school climate surrounding race and anti-LGBTQ victimization, what are some things you would like to see *changed*?
    4. Any additional general thoughts or comments about your experiences with victimization from the perspective of a sexual minority student of color

Curriculum

1. Tell me about your experiences with your school's curriculum (e.g., how LGBTQ+ topics and topics related to people of color were discussed in class) as a…. (Ex: Black gay man)
    1. Did your school include curriculum pertaining to both sexual orientation and race/ethnicity? If so, what was it (e.g., readings, movies, assignments)?
    2. What effect, if any, do you think the curriculum had on you?
        1. In what ways was the curriculum *helpful* to you as a sexual minority student of color?
        2. In what ways was the curriculum *harmful* to you as a sexual minority student of color?
        3. Any additional thoughts or comments about your school's curriculum in relation to the effect it had on you? For example, did you previously think an experience was helpful but now see it as harmful? Was there an experience that was both helpful and harmful at the same time?
    3. What aspects of the school curriculum, as a sexual minority student of color, would you like to see *continue*?
    4. What aspects of the school curriculum, as a sexual minority student of color, would you like to see *change*?
    5. Any additional general thoughts or comments about your school's curriculum from the perspective of a sexual minority student of color?

Extracurricular Supports

1. Tell me about your experiences with your school's extracurricular clubs/activities (e.g., GSAs, ethnic/cultural clubs) as a…. (Ex: Black gay man)
    1. Did your school have extracurricular clubs/activities pertaining to both sexual orientation and race/ethnicity? If so, what were they?

2. What effect, if any, do you think the extracurricular clubs/activities had on you?
    1. In what ways were the extracurricular clubs/activities *helpful* to you as a sexual minority student of color?
    2. In what ways were the extracurricular clubs/activities *harmful* to you as a sexual minority student of color?
    3. Any additional thoughts or comments about your school's extracurricular supports in relation to the effect it had on you? For example, did you previously think an experience was helpful but now see it as harmful? Was there an experience that was both helpful and harmful at the same time?
3. What aspects of the school's extracurricular clubs/activities, as a sexual minority student of color, would you like to see *continue*?
4. What aspects of the school's extracurricular clubs/activities, as a sexual minority student of color, would you like to see *change*?
5. Any additional general thoughts or comments about your school's extracurricular clubs/activities from the perspective of a sexual minority student of color?

Policies & Practices

1. Tell me about your experiences with your school's policies and practices (e.g., anti-bullying policies and safe spaces) as a…. (Ex: Black gay man)
    1. Did your school have policies and practices pertaining to both sexual orientation and race/ethnicity? If so, what were they?
    2. What effect, if any, do you think the policies and practices had on you?
        1. In what ways were the policies and practices *helpful* to you as a sexual minority student of color?
        2. In what ways were the policies and practices *harmful* to you as a sexual minority student of color?
        3. Any additional thoughts or comments about your school's policies and practices in relation to the effect it had on you? For example, did you previously think an experience was helpful but now see it as harmful? Was there an experience that was both helpful and harmful at the same time?
    3. What aspects of the school's policies and practices, as a sexual minority student of color, would you like to see *continue*?
    4. What aspects of the school's policies and practices, as a sexual minority student of color, would you like to see *change*?
    5. Any additional general thoughts or comments about your school's policies and practices from the perspective of a sexual minority student of color?

Additional Areas

Researchers have found that the previous five areas are important for White sexual minority students. Given that you are a sexual minority individual of color, are there any other areas of school climate that you believe had an effect on you?

1. Tell me about your experiences with your school's XXXX as a…. (Ex: Black gay man)
    1. Did your school have XXXX pertaining to both sexual orientation and race/ethnicity? If so, what were they?
    2. What effect, if any, do you think the policies and practices had on you?
        1. In what ways were the XXXX *helpful* to you as a sexual minority student of color?
        2. In what ways were the XXXX *harmful* to you as a sexual minority student of color?
        3. Any additional thoughts or comments about your school's XXXX in relation to the effect it had on you? For example, did you previously think an experience was helpful but now see it as harmful? Was there an experience that was both helpful and harmful at the same time?
    3. What aspects of the school's XXXX, as a sexual minority student of color, would you like to see *continue*?
    4. What aspects of the school's XXXX, as a sexual minority student of color, would you like to see *change*?
    5. Any additional general thoughts or comments about your school's XXXX from the perspective of a sexual minority student of color?

APPENDIX B:

CONSENT FORM - IN PERSON

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

(General)

Project Title: Experiences of school climate among sexual minority students of color

Researcher: Brandon Westerman

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Markeda Newell

Introduction:
You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Brandon Westerman for a dissertation, under the supervision of Dr. Markeda Newell in the Department of Education at Loyola University Chicago.

Read this form carefully and ask questions you have before deciding to participate in the study.

Purpose:
The purpose of this study is to better understand your experience with school climate as it pertains to both your sexual minority and racial-ethnic identities as well as the effect those experiences had on you. You will also be provided with the opportunity to share any recommendations you have for improving school climate. Hearing your stories and learning about your experiences will help schools to create a more inclusive environment.

You were selected as a possible participant because you self-identified your racial-ethnic identity as anything other than White or Caucasian. You also self-identified your sexual orientation as anything other heterosexual. You also identified that you are fluent in English, between the ages of 18-25, and have completed your K-12 education at a U.S. school. No other variables will be considered for recruitment of this study. Individuals of any gender identity, religion, immigration status, socioeconomic status, etc. are encouraged to participate.

You are not eligible to participate in this study if you meet the following criteria:

1. You self-identify your racial-ethnic identity as White or Caucasian.

2. You self-identify your sexual orientation as heterosexual.

3. You are not fluent in English.

4. You are younger than 18 years of age or older than 25 years of age.

5. You did not complete your K-12 education in the U.S.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to:
• Provide basic demographic information about yourself (e.g., age, gender identity, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity) through a brief demographic questionnaire. This will be completed at the beginning of the interview.
• Participate in an individual interview about your experiences with school climate as it pertains to your sexual minority and racial-ethnic identities. The interview will be conducted in a private location of your preference, either in-person or through a video conferencing platform (e.g., Zoom or Google Meets). The interview will be audio-taped and will last no more than sixty minutes. If you decide that you do not want to be audio-taped and still choose to participate in the study, you will respond to interview questions read to you by the interviewer. The interviewer will type your responses on a blank interview protocol that will contain only your participant number.
• Participate in a "member check" following the completion of the interview. Within a month following the interview, the interviewer will contact you to summarize your responses and to confirm that he is accurately representing the experiences and stories you shared during the interview. This will take no longer than sixty minutes and will be completed over the phone or in-person at a private location.

Risks/Benefits:
There are minimal foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation. One potential risk would be the confidentiality of your responses. During the interview, you may voluntarily or inadvertently reveal information pertaining to personal life not specified in the interview questions. To minimize the confidentiality risk, you will be assigned a participant number that will be used instead of your name. A second potential risk is that during the interview, you may discuss personal experiences, feelings, beliefs, or recollections, which may cause emotional discomfort. To minimize the potential risk that you will experience distress during the interview, the lead researcher will discontinue the interview and contact the faculty sponsor of the project, who is a trained psychologist, to assist in debriefing and making any necessary referrals for follow-up care (e.g., counseling, mental health services).

Potential Counseling/Mental Health Resources Include:

1. Center on Halstead – Behavioral Health Resources: Phone 773-472-6469 ext 460, or email behavioralhealth@centeronhalsted.org. Website: https://www.centeronhalsted.org/behavioralhealth.html

2. The Family Institute at Nothwestern University: Phone 847-733-4300. Website: https://www.family-institute.org/therapy-programs/lgbtq

3. Depth Counseling: LGBTQ+ Affirming Psychotherapy in Chicago: Phone 312-675-4689. Website: https://depthcounseling.org/lgbtq

There are no direct benefits to you for your participation, however it is anticipated that the results of this research study may potentially help other sexual minority students of color by providing information to schools that can be used to improve students' experiences.

Compensation
For participating in this study, you will receive a $25 gift card. The gift card will be provided to you upon the completion of the interview session.

Confidentiality
Any information that is obtained during this study, including any information that can identify you, will be kept confidential. Confidentiality will be maintained using participant identification numbers during data collection and analysis, and pseudonyms will be used in the written results of the study. The audiotape electronic files will be stored in a password-protected file. All transcripts, which will have no identifying information, will be stored in a locked file cabinet that only the lead researcher, secondary coders, and the faculty sponsor will have access to. The audiotapes will be destroyed immediately after they are transcribed. The transcripts will be destroyed two years after the completion of the study.
Please initial below if you are willing to have this interview audio recorded. You may still participate in this study if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

_____ I do not want to have this interview recorded.

_____ I am willing to have this interview recorded.

Voluntary Participation:
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to

withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

Contacts and Questions:
If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Brandon Westerman at bwesterman@luc.edu (lead researcher) or Dr. Markeda Newell at mnewell2@luc.edu (faculty sponsor).

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Statement of Consent:

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study**.** You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature **Date**

_____

Print Name

_____ _____

Researcher's Signature **Date**

_____

Print Name

Revision Date: 02/08/2023

APPENDIX C:

CONSENT FORM – ELECTRONIC

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

(Electronic)

Project Title: Experiences of school climate among sexual minority students of color

Researcher: Brandon Westerman

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Markeda Newell

Introduction:
You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Brandon Westerman for a dissertation, under the supervision of Dr. Markeda Newell in the Department of Education at Loyola University Chicago.

Read this form carefully and ask questions you have before deciding to participate in the study.

Purpose:
The purpose of this study is to better understand your experience with school climate as it pertains to both your sexual minority and racial-ethnic identities as well as the effect those experiences had on you. You will also be provided with the opportunity to share any recommendations you have for improving school climate. Hearing your stories and learning about your experiences will help schools to create a more inclusive environment.

You were selected as a possible participant because you self-identified your racial-ethnic identity as anything other than White or Caucasian. You also self-identified your sexual orientation as anything other heterosexual. You also identified that you are fluent in English, between the ages of 18-25, and have completed your K-12 education at a U.S. school. No other variables will be considered for recruitment of this study. Individuals of any gender identity, religion, immigration status, socioeconomic status, etc. are encouraged to participate.

You are not eligible to participate in this study if you meet the following criteria:

1. You self-identify your racial-ethnic identity as White or Caucasian.

2. You self-identify your sexual orientation as heterosexual.

3. You are not fluent in English.

4. You are younger than 18 years of age or older than 25 years of age.

5. You did not complete your K-12 education in the U.S.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to:
• Provide basic demographic information about yourself (e.g., age, gender identity, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity) through a brief demographic questionnaire. This will be completed at the beginning of the interview.
• Participate in an individual interview about your experiences with school climate as it pertains to your sexual minority and racial-ethnic identities. The interview will be conducted in a private location of your preference, either in-person or through a video conferencing platform (e.g., Zoom or Google Meets). The interview will be audio-taped and will last no more than sixty minutes. If you decide that you do not want to be audio-taped and still choose to participate in the study, you will respond to interview questions read to you by the interviewer. The interviewer will type your responses on a blank interview protocol that will contain only your participant number.
• Participate in a "member check" following the completion of the interview. Within a month following the interview, the interviewer will contact you to summarize your responses and to confirm that he is accurately representing the experiences and stories you shared during the interview. This will take no longer than sixty minutes and will be completed over the phone or in-person at a private location.

Risks/Benefits:
There are minimal foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation. One potential risk would be the confidentiality of your responses. During the interview, you may voluntarily or inadvertently reveal information pertaining to personal life not specified in the interview questions. To minimize the confidentiality risk, you will be assigned a participant number that will be used instead of your name. A second potential risk is that during the interview, you may discuss personal experiences, feelings, beliefs, or recollections, which may cause emotional discomfort. To minimize the potential risk that you will experience distress during the interview, the lead researcher will discontinue the interview and contact the faculty sponsor of the project, who is a trained psychologist, to assist in debriefing and making any necessary referrals for follow-up care (e.g., counseling, mental health services).

Potential Counseling/Mental Health Resources Include:

1. Center on Halstead – Behavioral Health Resources: Phone 773-472-6469 ext 460, or email behavioralhealth@centeronhalsted.org. Website: https://www.centeronhalsted.org/behavioralhealth.html
2. The Family Institute at Nothwestern University: Phone 847-733-4300. Website: https://www.family-institute.org/therapy-programs/lgbtq
3. Depth Counseling: LGBTQ+ Affirming Psychotherapy in Chicago: Phone 312-675-4689. Website: https://depthcounseling.org/lgbtq

There are no direct benefits to you for your participation, however it is anticipated that the results of this research study may potentially help other sexual minority students of color by providing information to schools that can be used to improve students' experiences.

Compensation
For participating in this study, you will receive a $25 gift card. The gift card will be provided to you upon the completion of the interview session.

Confidentiality
Any information that is obtained during this study, including any information that can identify you, will be kept confidential. Confidentiality will be maintained using participant identification numbers during data collection and analysis, and pseudonyms will be used in the written results of the study. The audiotape electronic files will be stored in a password-protected file. All transcripts, which will have no identifying information, will be stored in a locked file cabinet that only the lead researcher, secondary coders, and the faculty sponsor will have access to. The audiotapes will be destroyed immediately after they are transcribed. The transcripts will be destroyed two years after the completion of the study. Please initial below if you are willing to have this interview audio recorded. You may still participate in this study if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

_____ I do not want to have this interview recorded.

_____ I am willing to have this interview recorded.

Voluntary Participation:
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

Contacts and Questions:
If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Brandon Westerman at bwesterman@luc.edu (lead researcher) or Dr. Markeda Newell at mnewell2@luc.edu (faculty sponsor).

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Statement of Consent:

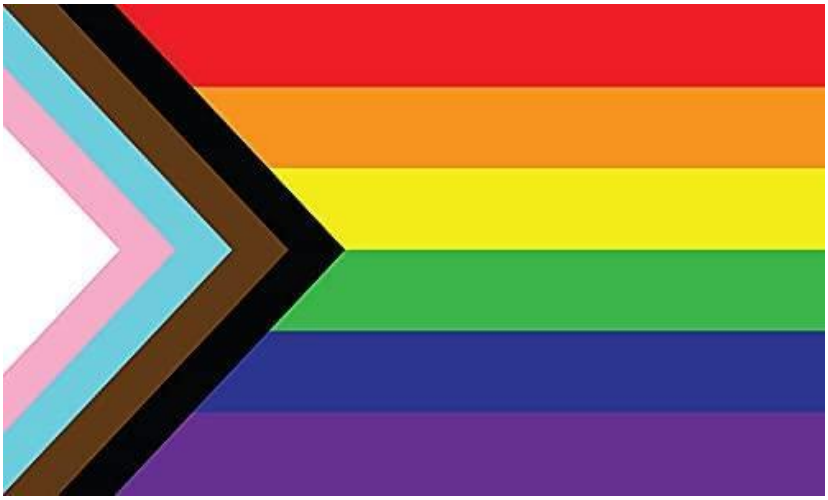
By advancing you indicate that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. You may save or print a copy of this form to keep for your records.

APPENDIX D:

RECRUITMENT FLIER

Experiences of School Climate among Sexual Minority Students of Color

- Do you self-identify your racial-ethnic identity as anything other than White or Caucasian?
- Do you self-identify your sexual orientation as anything other than heterosexual?
- Are you between the ages of 18-25?
- Are you fluent in English?
- Did you complete your K-12 education at a U.S. School?



A doctoral student in the school psychology program at Loyola University Chicago is interested in hearing about your school experiences.

- Participation would involve one interview (no longer than 60 minutes) and one follow-up meeting (either by phone or in person).
- Participants will be provided a $25 gift card, via email, following the interview.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact Brandon Westerman at bwesterman@luc.edu or 872-246-1233.

Individuals of any gender identity, religion, SES, immigration status, etc. are encouraged to participate!

**** You are not eligible to participate in this study if you meet the following criteria: 1) You self-identify your racial-ethnic identity as White or Caucasian. 2) You self-identify your sexual orientation as heterosexual. 3) You are not fluent in English. 4) You are younger than 18 years of age or older than 25 years of age. 5) You did not complete your K-12 education in the U.S.****

APPENDIX E:

MEMBER CHECK EMAIL

Hi XX,

I hope everything is going well with you! I have now completed the first round of coding all of my participants' interviews for my dissertation study. As I had mentioned when we first met, I was hoping to do just a quick check-in, by phone or Zoom, to see if my representation of your interview aligns with what you intended to say. I know we did ours quite some time ago, but if you're still interested in doing this, please send me your availability for the near future to potentially talk.

Thanks again for everything and I hope to hear from you soon!

Sincerely,

Brandon Westerman, M.Ed.

School Psychology Doctoral Student

Loyola University Chicago

Pronouns: he/him/his

REFERENCE LIST

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VITA

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While at Loyola, Brandon did extensive practicum work providing psychological services to students in school districts and community mental health settings around the Chicagoland area. He is currently completing his pre-doctoral internship at Virginia Beach City Public Schools in Virginia Beach, VA. Following the completion of internship, Brandon will move to Warwick, RI to pursue a post-doctoral clinical fellowship at Ascend Behavioral Center.