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Intersectional Bullying, LGBT Youth and the Construction of Power

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Abstract**—**This paper explores the impact of intersectional bullying of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) youth from a multi-layered experience perspective within bullying incidents at school. Present inclusionary measures at school may not be designed as a continuous process of finding better methods for responding to diversity, rather remain 'fixed' as singular solutions applied universally. This paper argues recognizing education through a lens of inclusion begins to realize most educational systems are poorly equipped to handle diversity.

Keywords**—**Education, inclusion and exclusion, bullying, intersectional bullying, LGBT, power paradigms.

I. Introduction

WITH increased levels of anti-bullying policies introduced into schools across many European countries in attempts to redefine equitable spaces and inclusion for all students, bullying continues to remain widespread [1]. Although inclusionary policies are being enacted in light of such realizations, many countries and their schools continue tackling homophobic bullying. Upon request from the European Parliament, the Fundamental Rights Agency conducted a comparison study regarding homophobia across member nations. The study, released in 2009 [2], found Scandinavian countries tended to be more supportive of LGBT [3] rights (Holland, 82%; Sweden, 71%; Denmark, 69%), where southern and eastern European countries were on the other end of the scale (Cyprus, 14%; Latvia, 12%; Romania, 11%) [4], with these trends continuing even amidst growing awareness. An EU LGBT Survey, conducted by the European Union Agency of Fundamental Rights published in 2013 [5], examined broader national models as well as school spaces and student experiences that found a disconnect may exist between inclusion and anti-bullying policies and on-the-ground applications. According to Stonewall [6], an LGBT rights charity, homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying [7] is wide spread and is on the rise in UK schools with teachers reporting 45% of primary school students and 86% of secondary school students have experienced homophobic bullying [8]. An Italian study revealed participants reported widespread experiences of homophobia in school [9]. And SOS Homophobie [10], a French gay-rights monitoring organization, indicated homophobic language has become trivialized resulting in an increase in homophobic speech and bullying in all aspects of society, illustrating homophobic bullying cuts across general society and schools.

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It seems apparent something is missing between intent and implementation that continues to underpin ineffective anti-bullying and inclusion policy applications continuing to leave many LGBT young people oppressed.

Not only do many students remain victimized, homophobic bullying in general as a serious problem persists [11]. In the interest of young people's rights for full development, school systems have employed several school-based initiatives supporting children with the aim to transition them as effectively as possible from one phase to the next. As such, many aspects of childhood are being studied to inform, including homophobic bullying.

Although recognizing bullying as having detrimental affects upon students, Cooper et al. [12] remind us that not all bullying is addressed equally. Only recently has it been recognized that identity intersectionalities may be a contributing factor to the levels at which many LGBT young people are subject to bullying [13]. However, as yet, little research seems to be available.

In light of apparent continued antipathy toward LGBT individuals, this researcher was interested engaging directly with student experiences, from their point of view how anti-bullying policy was or was not working. Thus, the overarching research question was:

1) What are the school-based experiences of sexual minority youth?

Which identified a subsequent question:

2) How do different levels of power underpin homophobic bullying?

Theoretical Framework

In order for an action to qualify as homophobia, it must first meet certain evaluation criteria. Using Iris Young's 'Five faces of oppression' framework, oppressive homophobic bullying can be identified. According to Young [14], the five faces of oppression are exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence.

1) Exploitation: For example, LGBT rights exploited for political gain, with Russian President Vladimir Putin 'manipulation of LGBT rights to advance…foreign policy objectives in Eurasia' forcing LGBT advocates to adjust their strategies [15], using his anti-gay ideologies to further 'stir (global) populist sentiments.' Additionally, recently, the homosexual community was exploited to support an anti-Muslim agenda, using the June 2016 Orland, FL USA, gay nightclub shooting, drawing false parallels underpinning a certain agenda. It was understood the shooter may have been Muslim, and therefore his killing of 49 individuals became a narrative framed by

terrorism and gun violence, overshadowing the LGBT loss.
2) Marginalization: The LGBT community is treated peripherally, made marginal and denied degrees of power held by the dominant group, in this case, heterosexuals.
3) Powerlessness: Having less or no power. They are under-represented in governing bodies as such dominant discourse may compromise LGBT needs.
4) Cultural imperialism: Sexual politics and LGBT rights, and multiple formations of power and domination through heterosexual biases.
5) Violence: LGBT face bullying and experience threats and acts of violence through intimidation and homophobic bullying.

II. Defining Intersectionality

School based bullying creates particular challenges for students and teachers alike. Teachers are charged with classroom management, and students are charged with learning. This assumed relationship may be disrupted when bullying takes place in the classroom. Further disruptions may occur when a pupil is victimized by intersectional bullying increasing marginalization, especially when not all identities based bullying is addressed. But it is not only different identities or statuses that can define intersectionality in bullying.

Intersectionality was first coined by Crenshaw [16] in 1989 as a theory addressing the intersections of identities and oppressions. To engage with bullying at another level, Elamé [17] defined discriminatory bullying as a form of direct or indirect victimization linked to a particular socially constructed identity such as homosexuality or race. Intersectional bullying can therefore be defined as being victimized for several identities [13], [18]. For example, a child who is experiencing homophobic bullying may also be bullied for their race, thus being bullied for multiple socially constructed classifications. Intersectional bullying can, therefore, be considered layers of victimization, and intersectionality examines how these different identities, or layers, interact. We add that a sequence of events, or layering of events as another form of intersectional bullying. Intersectionality is not only about examining discrimination of multiple identities, but also multiple levels of power as a series of connecting events within bullying incidents. Therefore, intersectional bullying may not only occur due to the construction of social identities as classifications, but also from the construction of power paradigms creating the incidents that support the classifications.

Interrogating events that create the power structures within the traditional application of identity, intersectional bullying as another layer to the intersectionality paradigm, extends contemporary knowledge about how to define multi-identity based bullying. Through the intersectionality of power paradigms, each marginalizing in a unique way occurring within the same bullying incident maintains inequalities that continue to undermine inclusion, perpetuating normative power structures. Identifying when a student is bullied by another student and then further marginalized through the use of institutional measure of classroom management is an opportunity to theorize identity, victimization and the multiple forms of intersectional oppressions. Thus, intersectional bullying contemplated through several lenses, considering the power structures that support systems of stratification, may assist in recognizing multiple levels of marginalization of non-normative identities.

Proposing that intersectional bullying can take on different forms through different power systems of oppression, this paper explores intersectionality of power within incidents of LGBT oppression. The literature on intersectional bullying in school is limited, with little emphasis on LGBT young people's personal point of view, instead bullying incidents and young people's experiences are interrogated with adult-centric considerations. Thus, this paper attempts to illustrate through pupils' personal narratives as part of a larger research project, the impact of intersectionality as power structures within a single bullying incident.

III. Expanding upon Intersectional Bullying

Intersectionality as a theory addresses socially constructed intersecting identities such as gender and race as tools to subjugate, which grew out of feminist sensibilities interrogating power structures. Intersectionality can therefore, be referred to as the understanding of particular types of intersecting oppressions. Intersectionality first brought notice that a race analysis should be included in feminist debates as it was a woman's gender and race that contributed to her experiences. Today it has expanded to include other identities such as sexual orientation and class and can be applied beyond a strictly feminist discourse. Garnett et *al* [13] support this expanded applicability, pointing to bullying as experienced by adolescents may not be considered multilaterally, and that little is known about 'the intersection of multiple attributes of discrimination' at this age, underpinning 'intersectionality' as a term with many applications are not yet all fully interrogated.

Peer-based victimization is widely researched, and the emotional, psychological and academic implications are both vast and generally agreed upon [19]-[22]. However, Haines-Saah et al. [23] remind us that although much research has focused on adolescent bullying, there seems to lack a consensus of what interventions might best addressing these issues (p. 2). Schools have employed varying systems of discipline and techniques with which to address bullying. Some work and others do not. Espelage et al. [24], who examined the role of school culture and promoting bullying, found a school environment was instrumental in promoting or discouraging bullying. Additionally, the study found when a school did not have positive measures to combat homophobic name-calling and sexual harassment, seemed to be influential in an unhealthy culture. Schools that promoted gender equality showed significant lower levels of homophobic bullying and general peer victimization.

Victimization is extended when it is considered beyond peer-based bullying and regards institutional measures that are

ineffective and may increase marginalization. Therefore, a sequence of events within such bullying patterns as another form of intersectional bullying beginning with peer-victimization followed by ineffective institutional measures considers expanding the definition of intersectional bullying. This paper highlights this extended form of bullying, expanding the definition of intersectional bullying, adding sequence of events intersectional bullying (SEIB) as no less oppressive.

IV. Current Study

This examination was set within a larger research project considering bullying experiences of LGBT young people at school, with two key elements considered to address proposed research questions:

1) To understand educational issues: anti-bullying policy interpretation and application at school level; and
2) To consider effectiveness of institutional practices used to address homophobic bullying.

An example of SEIB, after being bullied for one or more statuses, a young man, 'J', who identified as gay, was victimized through systemic exploitation. The bulling incident occurred in class with another boy addressing 'J' suggesting Hitler had the right idea about homosexuals. Not only did 'J' feel threatened and violated, the bullying incident was disrupting classroom learning and coursework as the bullier continued to taunt 'J'. The teacher took institutional measures separating the students moving 'J' to the back of the classroom to restore order. Creating noise by moving chairs and his things further disrupted; 'J' was embarrassed as most students looked, pointed and giggled at him. 'J' believed the teacher did not seem to address the bully beyond a 'do not do that' type statement, leaving all the attention directed at him. He attempted to speak up, but was silenced and advised to cease disrupting. He felt isolated firstly for being bullied by a peer than through measures utilized by the teacher to resolve the situation, followed by further taunting by others in the class, and lastly the level at which he was silenced. 'J' indicated later that 'teachers don't know what's going on so they see only one thing and don't care about finding out what happened'.

Applying Young's 'Five Faces of Oppression' Framework

How power intersects with identities in 'J's' incident along a single trajectory analyzed through the *five faces of oppression*:

1) Exploitation: Institutional discrimination. The type of school institutional measures utilized by the teacher separating the boys to address a bullying incident, marginalized 'J' by ignoring the basis of the bullying as homophobic, thereby erasing his identity by not identifying the incident as homophobic.
2) Marginalization: He was marginalized being moved to the back of the class. He was not only socially on the margin but now physically as well. All negative emphasis placed upon the victim decreased his power, further marginalizing him.
3) Powerlessness: The victim was powerless within the bullying incident; power being transferred from the bully to the teacher through the use of institutional measures further disempowered him.
4) Cultural imperialism: The incident was homophobic yet was addressed only as a bullying incident, with homosexuality having little relevance in a heterosexual, imperial narrative.
5) Violence: 'J' was threatened by the Hitler comment.

Considering bullying incidents through Young's theory, begins to realize inclusionary measures may not be designed as a fluid process, and finding better methods for responding to diversity and bullying, rather than as 'fixed', one-size-fits-all solutions applied universally, is necessary. This fatalistic discourse underscores attitudes that nothing can be done, and unless critically assessed, may further undermine student's needs.

V. Method

As an empirical study drawing upon youth-group based research, young people's accounts of school-based bullying were examined. Unable to answer research questions solely through either qualitative or quantitative methods, a mixed-method model was utilized. Referencing Tashakkori [25] models, a sequential design where the second collection cycle was based on the first, was used. Multiple methods such as observations, field notes, and semi-structured interviews, was followed by surveys and questionnaires, from which narratives of pupil's lives were created as a lens through which to explore their experiences revealing indicators of intersectional bullying that may otherwise not have been measured directly. The LGBT young people's narratives illustrated a series of bullying episodes beginning with peer-based homophobic and sexist victimization, followed by a series of events that further victimized, such as the teacher's attempts with intervention perpetuated the victimization through the use of ineffectual institutional measures.

TABLE I
Gender Perception Differences on Bullying

In-school bullying as experienced by gender	Girls	Boys
Felt safe at school	X	
Did not feel safe at school		X
Experienced less homophobic bullying	X	
Experienced more homophobic bullying		X
Felt bullied by teachers	X	
Felt less bullied by teachers		X
Felt bullying incident was resolved by teacher or school administration	X	
Did not feel bullying incident was resolved by teacher or administration		X

Eighteen participants included nine females, five males, one transgender female and three transgender males participated in in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Eight participants completed surveys, seventeen completed sex-role stereotyping inventory pointing to the social construction of classifications as a point of bullying origin as well as having participated in

discussions and eighteen filled out a questionnaire. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, followed by a review of transcripts notating codes. First-level codes were subsequently organized into categories, with a theoretical perspective used as a final review to identify relationships. Surveys and the questionnaire were coded to identify categories and relationships between themes. Through several gender survey's, four young people revealed androgynous traits (one gender female and three gender male); eleven young people revealed feminine traits (seven gender female and four gender male), and six revealed masculine traits (one gender female and five gender male).

VI. Findings

The face-to-face 45-60 minute semi-structured interviews utilized questions that focused on key information and opinions that surfaced in earlier data gathering phases about respondents homophobic bullying and peer-victimization experiences at school, interrogating in part their understanding of their school's anti-bullying policies and intervention procedures. The interview also identified gender biases, and how LGBT youth interpret or internalize normative gender roles and associated bullying. The bullying survey identified participants understanding of different types of victimizations. The questionnaire highlighted nuances of bullying, designed to identify perceptions of severity and levels of bullying.

Findings suggested not everything that is bullying was recognized as such, and institutional paradigms meant to support tended instead to victimize. It was also determined gender played a role in the perception of bullying both directed at themselves as well at others. This perception of bullying severity also had an impact on classroom interactions that may or may not have required teacher intervention. Results suggested male gender portrayal of normative roles played a larger part in the severity of bullying than with female normative roles.

Evidence revealed sequences of power-based, sequence of events intersectional bullying originating from (1) peer-victimization, (2) from a teacher and the measures they used to address the bullying, to (3) the teacher's perception of student's voice and not recognizing social structures that oppressed. Conversations with teachers revealed the following sentiments:

- Teacher: A student voice was not about empowerment, rather "it's a stick to hit the teacher."
- The teacher responded to bullying as a one-off situation, "getting to the bottom" of a bullying incident meant more work for the teacher, additionally indicating "there are enough accountability issues to address." The educational system is channelling how to deliver a curriculum, and in teachers' opinions, with little or no space, felt a student voice was disruptive.

VII. Discussion

Results consistently indicated boys tended to struggle more with normative gender expectations and homophobic bullying in their social and school spaces than girls. The study revealed girls were more resigned to accepting homophobic bullying, and unless overly hostile or violent, tended to brush off the experience. Whereas boys seemed less able to cope with being subjected to homophobia believing their gender identity was called into question. Male youths seemed to promote heteronormative male ideals, regardless of their gender expressions. It seemed they made a concerted effort to perform as a heterosexual male regardless of how they defined and expressed their sexuality. Such suggests homophobic bullying aimed at boys may have at some level, a different impact creating additional conflict for those deprived of traditional male power. Also, girls seemed to have internalized traditional weaker feminine positioning underpinning their attitudes toward bullying and seemed more used to oppression. These findings revealed the complexity of gender identity with which several boys struggled, and deeper implications of being a target of homophobic bullying. This also suggests the complexity of power-based sequence of events intersectional bullying.

Although this study presented transferable and generalizable applications, was conducted as a localized study in England. Utilizing questionnaires and surveys suggests reproducibility to support continued reliability of results, maintaining the ability to determine extraneous variables and applicability to other situations. There were however, weaknesses to the parameters in which the questionnaire/ survey data was gathered as respondents may have read things differently, and answers to questionnaires were subjective with little to gauge respondent truthfulness. Additionally, the questionnaire could have supported researcher assumptions. Future study might consider a subsequent source of gender perception measurement to address potential consistency concerns.

VIII. Conclusion

There were several problems identified with this research: (1) School-based anti-bullying policy may often be ineffective, which is more understood. However, what seemed less understood was the role (2) power-based sequence of events intersectional bullying played. Not only identifying how power intersected with statuses affecting bullying was missing, understanding how gender intersected with homophobic bullying and power-based sequence of events intersectionality was also missing.

Recognizing intersectionality both in terms of socially constructed statuses, and how power-based paradigms intersect with identities is important, as present school-based anti-bullying policy application approaches are more often ineffective. A system that is underpinned by the child as the problem rather than the education system itself accentuates the need to extrapolate the definitions of bullying to include power-based sequence of events intersectional bullying and requires interrogation of the policies that are meant to protect.

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