

TEACHER'S AWARENESS, KNOWLEDGE, AND PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT-TO-  
STUDENT SEXUAL HARASSMENT OCCURRING  
IN THE EDUCATIONAL SETTING

By

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ABSTRACT

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Teacher's awareness, knowledge, and perceptions of student-to-student sexual harassment occurring in the educational setting.			
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The purpose of this study was to examine pre k-12 teacher perceptions, knowledge, and awareness of student-to-student sexual harassment occurring in the educational setting. A 10-item sexual harassment survey was administered into the mailboxes of all pre k-12 teachers in a small rural western school district in Wisconsin during the month of May, 2003.

The survey used in this study specifically focused on the following research questions: 1. Do teachers communicate an awareness of verbal, non-verbal, and physical sexual harassment in their classroom; 2. Are teachers aware of a written policy and procedure manual on sexual harassment in the school district of which they are employed; 3. Do teachers feel they are offered adequate awareness and/or prevention training by the school district regarding sexual harassment; 4. What do the teachers feel their role is in addressing sexual harassment with their students; 5. What are the teachers' perceptions and attitudes regarding sexual harassment

occurring in the school district of which they are employed; 6. What does Title IX mean to teachers; and 7. How does Title IX relate to sexual harassment?

The survey used in this study was created by the researcher, which included 10 items, nine of which required an “x” that best described the teacher’s thoughts/feelings on the area of sexual harassment. All nine items were in relation to questions 1-6 of the research questions. The tenth item was an open ended question for the teachers to briefly answer. This question addressed the issue related to question 7 of the research questions in this study.

Item frequencies and valid percentages are given for each question. Results of this study are presented in chapter four. The results from this study indicated that a majority of the teachers who participated in the study do communicate an awareness of verbal, non-verbal, and/or physical sexual harassment in their classroom and feel it is within their role and responsibility as a teacher not only to address the issue of sexual harassment with their students, but to take action to help stop and/or prevent incidents from occurring. Results also indicated that a majority of the teachers who participated in this study were aware of a policy and procedure manual regarding sexual harassment in their school district.

Half of the teachers who participated in this study were able to identify that they felt adequately trained by their school district regarding the awareness and/or prevention of sexual harassment and half were able to identify that they didn’t feel adequately trained. The information gathered in this study will hopefully result in teachers increasing their awareness about the issue of sexual harassment and to encourage the school district to take proactive measures to help prevent sexual harassment from occurring in their school.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Robert pinches Andrea's buttocks as she passes him in the hall at school, Mary gives John a "wedgie" in the school cafeteria, a group of boys yell "Look at that set of... "Breasts" as Sheila walks across the school grounds, David wears a shirt that has slang words about having sex on it, Matt was told by Gina that she would help him with his math homework if he would have sex with her, a group of girls pull down George's gym shorts outside the locker rooms, two boys sandwich Jane in the hallway at school while rubbing her breasts.

Sexual harassment is happening in the educational setting and has been an issue of concern for many years. Whether the acts of sexual harassment are verbal, non-verbal, or physical, they indeed are issues that are affecting the students' learning environment. In addition to the effect sexual harassment has on a student's learning environment, imagine the impact sexual harassment can have if these acts are reported to or witnessed by a teacher or other school personnel and no action is taken to ensure the safety, emotional, and physical well-being of the victim.

In one of the most extensive studies on student-to-student sexual harassment in U.S. schools, the American Association of University Women (AAUW, 1993) found that 85% of girls and 76% of boys reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment in school. In another study released by USA weekend magazine (1996), it was found that this hostile phenomenon of sexual harassment was lurking among students in school (Pera, 1996). The findings showed that 81% of girls and 76% of boys indicated that they had experienced some form of sexual harassment at school.

Many concerns arise when the issue of sexual harassment in education is addressed. One of these concerns include whether or not teachers and other school personnel are aware of their school having a policy on addressing and dealing with sexual harassment. Another concern is what role teachers have when it comes to the issue of sexual harassment and whether or not teachers are communicating the problem or offering awareness of sexual harassment in their classroom. Other concerns may include how knowledgeable teachers are of sexual harassment and Title IX of the Education Amendments. Students, teachers, and other school personnel need to understand what their role, rights, and responsibilities are when it comes to these issues. Understanding these roles, rights, and responsibilities may be an important factor in protecting the safety and well being of students in school and most of all, stopping sexual harassment from occurring in the educational setting.

Sexual harassment is illegal under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Title IX protects students from unlawful sexual harassment in all school programs and activities, whether they take place on school grounds, on the bus, or at other activities sponsored by the school regardless of being male or female (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Schools have an obligation and legal responsibility under Title IX to protect students from sexual harassment, including taking steps to prevent sexual harassment and to respond appropriately to sexual harassment when it occurs. This includes formulating policies on sexual harassment for school personnel to follow. Unfortunately, some schools allow the issue of sexual harassment to slide despite Title IX's regulations and do not have clear policies on dealing with sexual harassment (Williams, 1996). Although some progress has been made, violations of students' rights continue to scourge our schools (AAUW, 2001).

Acts of sexual harassment that are reported or witnessed by school personnel that are not acted on are an injustice to these students. The failure to protect these students may create a training ground for the cycle of discrimination and harassment. Girls and boys may be led to believe that they are on their own and that adults around them will not believe or help them, therefore, adults are essentially training them to accept the sexually harassing behavior inflicted on them (Stein, 1995). It is disturbing to think that the harassers may too be getting the wrong message and learning that they are free to continue this type of behavior.

Many times difficult issues arise from cases of sexual harassment that can be dealt with and prevented with the right amount of knowledge and background information (Flynn, 1997). Williams (1996) suggested that reasons for schools' failure to act on sexual harassment are many, with one being the lack of understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment and what their obligation as an employee of a federally funded school is to be able to address it. Acts of sexual harassment as indicated in the beginning of this introduction may be likely to continue if they are ignored or not reported.

The impact of sexual harassment can be significant to the student's ability to learn in school and may increase the drop out rate and the loss of trust in school officials. Students may feel inclined to become isolated, fearful of school, and even stop going to school. For these reasons, schools should not underestimate the significance sexual harassment has on the educational setting and should take measures to prevent sexual harassment from happening (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Many acts of sexual harassment occur under supervised conditions such as the hallways, the bus, the playground, and classrooms. Examining k-12 teacher perceptions and awareness of issues surrounding sexual harassment may give us an understanding of why this continues to be

an ongoing dilemma in our schools. This may be an essential component to providing a safe, equal, and appropriate education to all students. Results of this study will be used to increase teachers' awareness about the issue of sexual harassment, to encourage school districts to take proactive measures to prevent sexual harassment from happening in their schools, and to improve their sexual harassment policy and prevention curriculum.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this study was to examine pre k-12 teacher perceptions, knowledge, and awareness of student-to-student sexual harassment occurring in the educational setting. A 10-item survey was put into the mailboxes of all pre k-12 teachers in a small rural western school district in Wisconsin during the spring of 2003 (Appendix B).

### **Research Questions**

This study attempted to answer seven questions. They are:

1. Do teachers communicate an awareness of verbal, non-verbal, and/or physical sexual harassment in their classroom?
2. Are teachers aware of a written policy and procedure manual on sexual harassment in their school district?
3. Do teachers feel they are offered adequate awareness and/or prevention training by the school district of which they are employed regarding sexual harassment?
4. What do the teachers feel their role is in addressing sexual harassment with their students?
5. What are the teachers' perceptions and attitudes regarding sexual harassment occurring in the school district of which they are employed?
6. What does Title IX mean to teachers?

## 7. How does Title IX relate to sexual harassment?

### **Definition of Terms**

This study includes three terms that need to be defined for clarity and understanding.

They are:

**Discrimination:** any action, policy, or practice, including bias, stereotyping, and harassment, which is detrimental to a person or group of persons based on sex, race, national origin, ancestry, creed, pregnancy, marital status, sexual orientation, learning disability, or physical, mental, and emotional well being (Ostertag, 1997).

**Student-to student sexual harassment:** when a student is subjected to unwelcome sexual conduct that is severe, persistent, or pervasive that it limits the student's ability to benefit from his or her learning environment (Chmielewski, 1997).

**Wedgie:** when a person's pants are pulled so high that they become uncomfortable in the groin area.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

This study includes three assumptions. It is assumed that there is a written policy in the school district that addresses the issue of sexual harassment and that teachers are aware of what role they have in addressing sexual harassment. It is assumed that teachers are communicating these issues in their classroom. It is assumed that all teachers are answering the questions in this study honestly.

This study includes three limitations. One limitation to this study would be that teachers are not given access to the policies and procedures on sexual harassment and have not had the proper training on addressing and dealing with sexual harassment. Another limitation is that only

a small rural school district in Wisconsin is being studied. Only one aspect of the school environment is being addressed in this study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of the Literature

#### **Introduction**

The focus of chapter two is to explore the issue of sexual harassment within the educational setting. This chapter will include a discussion of how student-to-student sexual harassment is defined in the literature, followed by incidents reported of sexual harassment in schools, the impact sexual harassment has on students in education, and the importance of communicating an awareness of sexual harassment in the classroom. In addition, this chapter will address the consequences of ignoring sexual harassment and the importance of Title IX in relation to sexual harassment. This chapter will conclude with how schools can prevent sexual harassment from occurring in the educational setting.

#### **Defining Sexual Harassment**

It is widely argued that problems in understanding and addressing sexual harassment stem from the lack of clear and concise definitions of sexual harassment. There is not one universally accepted definition of sexual harassment; therefore, contributing to the confusion and inconsistent range of behaviors that are labeled as sexual harassment. Some behaviors labeled as sexual harassment that are not, exist and are acted on, and other behaviors that clearly describe sexual harassment, are ignored or overlooked (Roscoe, Strouse, & Goodwin, 1994).

Williams and Brake (1998) defined sexual harassment as unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature that interferes unreasonably with a student's ability to learn, work, achieve, or participate in school activities. Similarly, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (n.d.), defined sexual harassment as unwelcome sexually harassing conduct that is severe, persistent, or pervasive that it affects a student's ability to participate in or benefit from an education program

or activity, or creates an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment. There are two components to these definitions, which are “unwelcome” and “behavior of a sexual nature.” According to Stein and Sjostrom (1994), behavior becomes “unwelcome” when the student who is being harassed feels like the conduct is offensive or undesirable and does not invite the sexual conduct. According to Shoop and Hayhow (1994) “behavior of a sexual nature” deals with any behavior that refers to sex, whether verbal, non-verbal, or physical.

There are two recognized forms of unlawful sexual harassment in education. The first form is known as quid pro quo harassment. Quid pro quo harassment occurs when a student has reason to believe that he or she must submit to unwelcome sexual conduct in order to participate in a school program or activity, as well as if a student has a reason to believe that the person in authority will make an educational decision based on whether or not the student submits to the unwelcome sexual conduct (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

The second form of sexual harassment is known as hostile environment. Hostile environment sexual harassment includes student-to-student sexual harassment and consists of unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature in the form of verbal, non-verbal, written, or physical conduct (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Stein and Sjostrom (1994) as well as the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (n.d.), both indicated that a school employee, another student, or even someone visiting school grounds could conduct hostile environment sexual harassment.

Examples of sexual conduct include insults or name-calling, jokes of a sexual nature, intimidation by words or actions, offensive touching, pressure for sexual activity, and sexual assault or rape (Williams & Brake, 1998). In addition, the following are more examples of sexual conduct: sexual advances, graffiti of a sexual nature, explicit drawings, pictures, or

written materials, and spreading rumors about or rating other students as to their sexual activity or performance (U.S. Department of Education, OCR, n.d.). Typically, in school settings, allegations of hostile environment sexual harassment between students are more common than allegations of quid pro quo harassment (Stein, 1999). For the purposes of this study, student-to-student sexual harassment in the form of hostile environment is the focus.

The National Education Association (n.d.a) suggested that a student's failure to complain about the sexual conduct does not always mean that it is not unwelcome. They suggested that the student who willingly participated in sexual conduct might in a subsequent occasion decide that the same conduct is unwelcome. The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (n.d.) suggested that a student might feel that objecting would only result in increasing the harassing conduct. They also suggested that the student might feel intimidated by the conduct or feel embarrassed, confused, or scared to say anything about the behavior conducted on him or her.

### **Incidents of Sexual Harassment in Schools**

The American Association of University Women (AAUW, 1993) conducted an extensive study on sexual harassment in America's schools. The study surveyed 1,632 boys and girls in grades 8-11 in 79 different public schools across the nation. The study found that 81% of girls and 76% of boys had experienced some form of sexual harassment at school. Of these combined percentages, 66% said they had been harassed at least once in the hall, 55% reported the classroom as the site of their harassment, 43% reported being harassed on school grounds (outside the building, other than the parking lot), 34% cited harassment in the cafeteria, and 23% reported being harassed in the school parking lot.

In addition to these findings, 76% of girls and 56% of boys reported experiencing sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or looks, 65% of girls and 42% of boys reported experiencing being touched, grabbed, or pinched in a sexual way, and 57% of girls and 36% of boys reported being intentionally brushed up against in a sexual way. This study revealed that over 20% of male and female students reported being flashed or mooned, had sexual rumors spread about them, had clothing pulled at in a sexual way, were shown or given sexual pictures, messages, or notes, were forced to kiss someone, called gay or lesbian, and had sexual messages or graffiti written about them on the walls of the school (AAUW, 1993).

A study done in Eau Claire North High School, a northwestern Wisconsin school district, revealed that sexual harassment indeed had occurred in the educational setting. Of the total male and female students surveyed, numbering 391, 45.8% of the females and 25.3% of the males reported experiencing some form of non-physical sexual harassment. This study concluded that the most common forms of non-physical sexual harassment included comments, looks, gestures, or jokes. Almost 25% of the total males and females surveyed felt that they had been physically sexually harassed. The most common form of this type of harassment was being touched, grabbed, or pinched in a sexual manner (Ostertag, 1997).

A new study conducted by the American Association of University Women (2001) investigated secondary school students' experiences of sexual harassment. A report known as *Hostile hallways: bullying, teasing, and sexual harassment in schools* commissioned by the AAUW (2001), revisited issues originally researched in the 1993 study known as *Hostile hallways: The AAUW survey on sexual harassment in America's schools*. The study included all the bullying, teasing, and touching that sexual harassment entails and compared situations with the similar study done eight years ago. Topics in the survey included students' knowledge and

awareness of sexual harassment, personal experiences with sexual harassment in their school lives, and the emotional and behavioral impact of these experiences. They found that there was still a widespread occurrence of sexual harassment in our nation's schools. The results looked the same in many aspects with only one difference. That difference was that students were more likely to say that they were aware of their schools having a policy on sexual harassment and were aware that the school hands out literature on sexual harassment. This study reaffirms that sexual harassment in school life has broad consequences on both girls' and boys' education (AAUW, 2001).

### **The Impact of Sexual Harassment in Education**

Sexual harassment has a negative impact on students' emotional and educational lives. Sexual harassment typically obtains under duress, high costs from its victims and students are often quite aware of the feelings that harassment brings out in them as they make choices throughout their lifetime (National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education, 2002).

Peer sexual harassment affects the school performance of students who are victims of such behavior, which may lead to high rates of truancy. Peer sexual harassment may have a detrimental impact on the victim's ability to achieve in school (Kopels & Dupper, 1999). Victims of sexual harassment are controlled out of shame, anger, and fear, as well as feeling helpless and isolated. Many students are afraid to speak up and may not report what is happening to them in fear that more harassment will occur (Lengel, 1997).

Beginning at an early age and lasting throughout adulthood, females who complain or object to sexual harassing behaviors are often silenced, ridiculed, or excluded. For example, females who respond negatively to being sexually harassed may be accused of not being able to take a joke or for being overly sensitive (Wellesley College Center for Research on Women,

1993). During the middle school years, both boys and girls are likely to adopt peer norms at whatever price to gain acceptance, which may hold many ramifications in regards to their emotional and educational well being (Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, 1993).

The toll students suffer from their exposure to derogatory language is profound. Derogatory language is where most harassing behavior starts and perpetrators who aren't confronted begin to believe that these behaviors can be taken to the next level and so forth (Wessler, 2000/2001). Many remember learning the slang, "sticks and stones may break your bones, but words can never hurt you." Students may understand that sticks and stones may indeed break your bones, but do not understand that words may break your soul. Too many students lose hope, give up, drop out of school, lose faith, and lose confidence in them selves. Unfortunately, some students don't survive due to being a victim of words or actions of a derogatory nature (Wessler, 2000/2001).

The American Association for University Women (2001) revealed that sexual harassment has a significant impact on the learning environment of both boys and girls. They found that 33% of girls and 12% of boys reported not wanting to go to school, 32% of girls and 13% of boys reported not wanting to participate in class, 28% of girls and 13% of boys reported that it was difficult to pay attention in school, and 24% of girls and 7% of boys reported cutting class or staying home from school resulting from being a victim of sexual harassment.

Additional to the educational impact that sexual harassment has, the emotional impact can be just as significant. The AAUW (1993) indicated that of the surveyed male and female students, 64% of girls and 36% of boys felt embarrassed, 52% of girls and 21% of boys felt self-conscious, 39% of girls and 18% of boys felt afraid or scared, and 30% of girls and 12% of boys felt unsure of whether they could ever have a happy romantic relationship.

Students who experience sexual harassment typically change their attitudes about school, about their classmates, and about themselves. Victims may feel threatened, ridiculed, or degraded by their peers, which can turn into a sense of helplessness and a lowered self-esteem (Shoop & Hayhow, 1994). Additional to the emotional and educational impact that sexual harassment has on students, The National Education Association (n.d.b) suggested that sexual harassment may have significant physical effects on victims of sexual harassment such as nausea, headaches, sleeplessness, ulcers, or even high-blood pressure.

Shoop and Hayhow (1994) suggested that if it is hard for one to imagine what sexual harassment is like and what the huge concern is, yet they encourage you to try and consider for a moment what it would be like to have sexual comments consistently made to you while just simply trying to get to class, finish your work day, or accomplish daily routines. They encourage you to stop and think how would you feel if you knew that a loved one was feeling incompetent and less worthy resulting from persistent sexual harassment on an everyday basis? They also encourage you to imagine for a moment how you would feel if someone you knew felt consistent anger, humiliation, and shame for reasons that many don't understand because they have never experienced this type of harassment. Although we all wish sexual harassment was not a serious problem, it is indeed occurring almost every day in most elementary and secondary school in our nation (Shoop & Hayhow, 1994).

### **The Importance of Addressing Sexual Harassment**

Communicating the issue of sexual harassment is an important step to improving the learning environment for all students. An important part of preventing sexual harassment is offering education on sexual harassment and ensuring that both boys and girls are being treated fairly in the classroom (Williams & Brake, 1998). In addition, Williams and Brake (1998)

suggested that spending time discussing sexual harassment with students in regards to what it is, how it makes people feel, and what the consequences are, are key concepts to improving the hostile environment that sexual harassment creates in schools. The educators' failure to address sexual harassment with their students sends a powerful message that this type of behavior is acceptable and need not be taken seriously, which is not the lessons schools should be conveying to their students (Williams, 1996).

Lengel (1997) suggested that teachers ask themselves if they have ever heard a student being teased by others about his or her body, overheard a sexual rumor about a girl, over heard a girl being called a "slut" or a "whore," over heard a boy being called a "fag," over heard a coach tell a player that he "runs like a girl," seen sexual graffiti, confiscated a sexual drawing or obscene note, seen groups of students leer at an attractive student walking by, or have over heard students talking about other students in a sexual way. In addition, Lengel (1997) suggested teachers ask themselves what they have done about these incidents. Have they spoken up, have they ignored these incidents, and/or have they ever tolerated this type of behavior? Many responsibilities rest with the individual teachers. Victims of sexual harassment need to know that they can trust teachers to put their foot down and act on these incidents in order to feel protected in school. In addition, students need opportunities to discuss sexual equality and to learn about mutually respectful behaviors between the sexes. They need to understand what constitutes sexual harassment and how it can affect victims' future abilities and potentials (Lengel, 1997).

While school efforts to distribute information to students on sexual harassment have increased along with student's knowledge of sexual harassment, students' unwillingness to come forward to report incidents of sexual harassment indicates that schools can do more, including

teaching the awareness inside the classroom additional to distributing information to the students (AAUW, 2001).

Schools may well be the training grounds for domestic violence through the practice of and permission given to the public performance of sexual harassment. Even though interventions are sought to curb this behavior, gender violence is often overlooked. When gender violence is acknowledged, staffs of crisis centers and battered women's shelters are often asked to come make presentations to the students. Even though these present new opportunities for the students, a gap exists between what these agencies know and do, and what the school staff retains and how teaches communicate this to the students afterwards (Stein, 2001).

According to Brandenburg (1997) education on sexual harassment is the ultimate, long-term solution. Teachable moments through the curriculum by using age-appropriate classroom lessons on sexual harassment help to communicate the issue with all students in school and ensures that addressing the issue is being accomplished (Stein, 1995). It takes a thorough, long-term action plan and a solid communication with all teachers, students, parents, and other community members to address and deal with sexual harassment in the school (Flynn, 1997). Higginson (1993) suggested that teachers who are in fear of bringing up risky topics with students should get support from other school personnel. She also suggested that leaving the topic of sexual harassment up to others, assuming they will cover it with the students, is not a way to create job security for yourself; therefore, get support and "go for it." "Our task, as educators, is to help students grow their seeds of courage and empathy to maturity and to the point where they will rely on their own courage, resiliency, and good will to say "no" to bias, disrespect, and violence" (Wessler, 2000/2001, p. 33).

## **The Consequences of Ignoring Sexual Harassment**

Harassing behavior, if ignored and not reported, is likely to continue and become worse rather than go away. The issue of sexual harassment should not be underestimated, as the impact it entails on the students' educational environment is severely affected. Schools should not excuse the harassment with the attitude that it is common behavior among school life. Ignoring sexual harassment can damage the school's reputation, not to mention land the school in court fighting legal ramifications (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Ignoring sexual harassment, along with the indifferent attitudes of school personnel that "boys will be boys" or "it is no big deal," contributes to the surge of peer sexual harassment lawsuits filed by parents and students against school districts (Kopels & Dupper, 1999). Savage (1999) suggested that schools are liable for deliberate indifferent attitudes to student-to-student sexual harassment and that if they look the other way, they pay. Savage (1999) also suggested that the Supreme Court may be conservative on many issues, but not on sexual harassment.

Incidents of sexual harassment are often witnessed by adults. Students who are targets of sexual harassment expect the adults to follow through on these violations. Adults who do not name this type of behavior as sexual harassment are leaving these victims feeling alone and abandoned (Stein, 1995). Additionally, when school authorities are told of an alleged incident or who witness an incident and don't intervene or report the incident may be encouraging a continued pattern of violence in relationships. This encouragement goes beyond those directly involved and also conveys a message to other bystanders that they may be the next to be harassed and no one will do anything to prevent it (Stein, 1995). As long as sexual harassing behaviors are tolerated in the educational environment, they will never stop (Lengel, 1997).

Sexual harassment has to be seen within the context of school safety because acts of sexual harassment cause students to feel afraid to go to school. School safety is more than metal detectors, backpack searches, and locker searches. Sexual harassment interferes with everything a school is supposed to do for students, including making it a friendly place to learn, socialize, make friends, and trust adults (Sexual harassment erodes..., n.d.).

## **Title IX**

Over the last thirty years, laws have been created and have played a major role in allowing sexual harassment to be viewed, addressed, and dealt with as illegal activity in the educational setting. One important step taken as a legal sanction was Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972.

Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in education. It established that no person shall be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination on the basis of sex under any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. Sexual harassment of students in school is a form of sex discrimination covered by Title IX (Equal Rights Advocates, 2003). Title IX is essentially a contract between the federal government and educational institutions that receive federal funding. Sexual harassment as a form of sex discrimination is often overlooked when it comes to Title IX (Marczely, 1999).

In 1999, the U.S. Supreme Court held in the case of *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education* that schools that receive federal funding might be liable for damages under Title IX for discrimination in the form of student-to-student sexual harassment as long as the harasser is under the school's disciplinary authority (Equal Rights Advocates, 2003). This case involved a fifth-grade female student who had her breasts and genitals touched several times by another

fifth-grade male student in front of a teacher during class. Comments were also made by this male student to this female student such as, “I want to get in bed with you” and “I want to feel your boobs.” This behavior was directed toward the fifth-grade girl on eight separate instances of sexual harassment, six of which occurred in the classroom in front of the same teacher. The victim also reported these incidents to the teacher. After several complaints by the students and the mother, the school district failed to remedy the situation and in consequence, was held liable under Title IX (Equal Rights Advocates, 2003). Situations such as this cannot be overlooked, as consequences are much harsher to face. This decision makes it clear that schools have a legal responsibility to take steps to prevent and respond to sexual harassment incidents that occur in the educational setting.

Complaints of sexual harassment constitute 63% of non-sports related Title IX complaints filed with the Office of Civil Rights. Seventy percent of Title IX complaints involving sexual harassment occur in elementary and secondary schools (National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education, 2002).

In addition to Title IX prohibiting sex discrimination in schools, including sexual harassment, Title IX also requires schools to have a policy and grievance procedure against sexual harassment. Title IX also requires schools to make efforts to ensure that students, parents, and staff members are aware of every aspect of these policies. Students and parents have the right to ask if they have a policy in place and remind schools that they are required by law to have these policies in place (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Although the U.S. Supreme Court and some lower courts have started to recognize some basis for holding districts liable for student-to-student sexual harassment, lawsuits are inadequate to use as a primary intervention to sexual harassment. Lawsuits and the awareness of Title IX's

legal requirements are essentially meant to reduce the cases of sexual harassment in the court system and increase ways that schools are dealing with and addressing sexual harassment, which will in effect, reduce the occurrences of sexual harassment in education (Kopels & Dupper, 1999).

### **Preventing Sexual Harassment in the Educational Setting**

A fundamental part of preventing sexual harassment in education includes providing a comfortable environment where students feel safe to talk to adults and encompass a sense that adults will take their complaints seriously (Woods, 2001/2002).

To prevent the occurrences of student-to-student sexual harassment in education, interventions should be proactive and comprehensive in terms of focusing on eliminating factors that create hostile environments (Kopels & Dupper, 1999).

Preventing sexual harassment should include maintaining an environment that encourages appropriate and respectful behaviors, cooperative interactions among students, non-sexist curriculum and teaching methods, staff modeling of non-sexist behaviors, and clear indications that sexual harassment will not be tolerated (Shoop & Hayhow, 1994; Brandenburg, 1997; Schwartz, 2000).

Williams and Brake (1998) suggested that involving the entire school community is a good place to start in preventing sexual harassment. They also suggested that a good place to start is by making a user-friendly sexual harassment policy that includes a statement of goals for the school, explains clearly what sexual harassment is, provides examples of sexual harassment, assures confidentiality as much as possible, strongly prohibits retaliation, lists possible punishments, explains complaint processes, identifies rights and other remedies, protects the

rights of all persons involved, and lists resources for all persons. They felt that schools should make sure that the policy is well publicized as these are all key components to preventing sexual harassment.

Lengel (1997) suggested that a good place to start to prevent sexual harassment is to read some of the research on sexual harassment. Requesting workshops on sexual harassment as well as requesting professional training development in-services can help teachers eliminate unintended bias and maintain a level of professionalism that schools need to help prevent sexual harassment from occurring in their school. Lengel (1997) also suggested that schools well publicize their policy and procedures of sexual harassment so that all students, parents, and personnel can view it at any time. In addition to publicizing the school policy on sexual harassment, include it in the student handbook upon orientation. Finally, teachers can organize student assemblies on sexual harassment and establish peer support groups for victims (Lengel, 1997). Although the guidance department may offer such groups and other information on sexual harassment, including this into the classroom only increases the chance that students will really start to understand it. It really becomes a whole school effort to begin to prevent sexual harassment.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

#### **Introduction**

The contents of chapter three includes a description of the how the subjects were selected for this study, as well as a description of the population used in this study, followed by a detailed description of the instrument used for this study, and a description of how the data was collected and analyzed. This chapter will conclude with the limitations apparent in the methodology of this study.

#### **Subject Selection and Description**

The subjects of this study were the entire pre k-12 teaching staff of a small rural western school district in Wisconsin, numbering 86. Surveys were distributed to all 86 teachers and the sample for this study included those teachers of the 86 surveyed that sent the survey back through the mail. During the time period that the survey was administered, the school district being studied employed two pre-kindergarten teachers, two kindergarten teachers, three first grade teachers, three second grade teachers, three third grade teachers, four fourth grade teachers, four fifth grade teachers, five special education teachers at the elementary level, three sixth grade teachers, one seventh grade teacher, eight seventh/eighth grade teachers, four special education teachers at the middle school level, six special education teachers at the high school level, and thirty-three high school teachers who teach a range of classes including social studies, technical education. French, music, gifted and talented, speech/journalism, art, science, business education, math, business, Spanish, physical education, family and consumer science education, English, and English as a second language. This information was obtained from the schools web page under staff information.

## **Instrumentation**

The researcher developed the survey used in this study. The survey questions were influenced by current research reviewed by this author. The 10-item survey consists of nine questions by which the subject marks an “x” next to the statement that best answers the question. The tenth question is an open-ended question for the subject to briefly answer. These questions attempted to determine what perceptions, awareness, and knowledge k-12 teachers have about student-to-student sexual harassment occurring in the educational setting. Question one asked research participants if they are aware of a sexual harassment policy and procedure manual in the school district in which they are employed. Question two asked research participants if they feel that they have had adequate awareness and/or prevention training regarding sexual harassment by the school district in which they are employed. Question three asked research participants if they communicate an awareness of verbal, non-verbal, and/or physical sexual harassment in their classrooms. Also asked in question three is what type of sexual harassment is communicated to students and how often it is communicated in the classroom. Question four asked the research participants what they felt their role was in addressing sexual harassment with their students. Question five asked the research participants about what they felt their responsibility was in stopping and/or reporting sexual harassment as they witness occurrences. Question six asked the research participants about their attitudes regarding the issue of sexual harassment. Question seven asked the research participants about their perceptions of adult supervision in regards to sexual harassment and how it relates to the amount of sexual harassment occurring. Question eight asked the research participants about their perceptions of stopping and/or preventing sexual harassment from occurring in the school district in which they are employed. Question nine

asked the research participants about what Title IX is and question ten asked how Title IX relates to sexual harassment.

The researcher printed surveys out in three different colors to represent each grade level. The colors blue and green were used to represent the elementary level. The colors pink and cream were used to represent the middle school level, and the color yellow was used to represent the high school level.

### **Data Collection**

On May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2003, the researcher distributed the surveys into all 86 pre k-12 teachers' mailboxes in a rural western school district in Wisconsin with permission from the administration. Those choosing to participate did on a voluntary basis and were allowed to choose not to complete the survey. The surveys were self addressed to the researcher and stamped so that if they chose to complete the survey, they could conveniently return the survey through the mail. The teachers were given until May 19, 2003 to return the survey. A week extension was given to all teachers to return the surveys. This was done via e-mail to all the teachers in the district.

There were 51 surveys returned. At the elementary level, 19 out of 22 surveys administered were returned. At the middle school level, 18 out of 25 surveys administered were returned and at the high school level, 14 out of the 39 surveys administered were returned. Some of the surveys returned indicated that multiple grade levels were taught by certain participants. The statistical information on the breakdown of participants who returned the survey and what grade level taught is included in the demographical information section of chapter four.

**Data Analysis**

The subjects for this study were the entire pre k-12 teaching staff in the school district under study, numbering 86. Upon collecting the data, the researcher gave the surveys to her thesis advisor for analysis. All appropriate descriptive statistics were run on the data. The valid percent and frequency responses for each question were calculated based on how many participants answered the questions. This is illustrated more specifically in chapter four. For the calculation of the descriptive statistics, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences was used to calculate frequency counts and percentages for the multiple answer survey questions.

**Limitations**

This study may have factors that are considered limitations. Possible limitations to the collection of the research data includes that there is no way to determine the accuracy of truthfulness of the participants' responses, the sample group was small, therefore, limiting the generalizability of the findings, the surveys returned was dependent on teacher's willingness to participate, and there are no measures of validity or reliability since the survey was designed specifically for this study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Analysis of Results

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the results of a sexual harassment survey taken by pre k-12 teachers in a small rural western school district in Wisconsin. This chapter includes a description of the data collected and the statistical information of the results.

#### **Demographic Information**

A sexual harassment survey was administered on May 6, 2003 to each of 86 pre k-12 teachers in a small rural western school district in Wisconsin. There were 51 surveys returned. This constituted a 59% return rate.

Table 1 indicates the number of teachers and what grade level was taught by each of these teachers at the time of the study.

Table 1: Number of teacher participants and grade level taught

<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Number of Teachers</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Number of Teachers</b>
Pre-K	2	5-6	1
Pre-K & 9-12	1	5-7	1
K-12	1	5-8	1
K-8	2	5-12	1
K	2	6	2
1	3	7	1
2	3	8	1
3	3	7-8	5
K-3	1	7-12	1
4	1	9-12	10
K-4	3	not indicated	2
5	4		

Results indicated in Table 1 show that the number of participants who responded to the survey was evenly spread between the elementary level (k-4), the middle school level (5-8), and the high school level (9-12).

### Item Analysis

The analysis of the data collected found that the subjects who participated in this study responded to the sexual harassment questions on the survey in the following way.

Question 1: “Are you, the teacher, aware of a written policy and procedure manual on sexual harassment in the school district of which you are employed?” The results are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Teachers’ awareness of a policy and procedure manual

	Frequency	Valid Percent
No, I am not aware of a written policy and procedure manual on sexual harassment.	7	13.7
Yes, I am aware of a written policy and procedure manual on sexual harassment.	44	86.3

Question 2: “Do you, the teacher, feel that you have had adequate awareness and/or prevention training regarding sexual harassment by the school district of which you are employed?” The results are listed in Table 3.

Table 3: Teachers’ feelings about adequate training on sexual harassment given

	Frequency	Valid Percent
No, I feel I have not been adequately trained on the awareness and/or prevention regarding sexual harassment.	25	49
Yes, I feel I have been adequately trained on the awareness and/or prevention regarding sexual harassment.	26	51

Question 3: “Do you, the teacher communicate an awareness of verbal, non-verbal, and/or physical sexual harassment in your classroom?” The results are listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Communication of sexual harassment in the classroom

	Frequency	Valid Percent
No, I do not communicate an awareness of verbal, non-verbal, and/or physical sexual harassment in my classroom.	14	27.5
Yes, I do communicate an awareness of verbal, non-verbal, and/or physical sexual harassment in my classroom.	37	72.5

If the participants answered yes to question number three, they were to indicate which type of sexual harassment they communicate in their classroom. They were to check all that applied. The results are located in Tables 5, 6, and 7. Verbal abuse was indicated most often (n=34).

Table 5: Amount of verbal sexual harassment communicated

Verbal	Frequency	Valid Percent
Yes	34	66.7
No	3	5.9

Table 6: Amount of non verbal sexual harassment communicated

Non-verbal	Frequency	Valid Percent
Yes	22	43.1
No	15	29.4

Table 7: Amount of physical sexual harassment communicated

Physical	Frequency	Valid Percent
Yes	29	56.9
No	8	15.7

If the participants answered yes to question number three, they were to also indicate how often they communicated the issue of sexual harassment in their classroom. The results are located in Table 8.

Table 8: How often sexual harassment is communicated in the classroom

	Frequency	Valid Percent
One time per year	8	15.7
two times per year	6	11.8
more than twice per year	9	17.6
other	12	23.5
Didn't indicate	16	31.4

Question 4: “Which statement best describes your thoughts/feelings about your role in addressing sexual harassment with your students?” The results are listed in Table 9.

Table 9: Teachers’ role in addressing sexual harassment

	Frequency	Valid Percent
I do not feel it is within my role as a teacher to address the issue of sexual harassment to my students and I do not address the issue with my students.	3	5.9
I do not feel it is within my role as a teacher to address sexual harassment to my students, yet I do address the issue with my students.	0	0.0
I feel it is within my role as a teacher to address the issue of sexual harassment with my students and I do communicate the issue with my students.	38	74.5
I feel it is within my role as a teacher to address the issue of sexual harassment with my students, but I do not communicate the issue with my students.	9	17.6
Didn't indicate	1	2.0

Question 5: “Which statement best describes your thoughts/feelings about your responsibility in stopping and/or reporting sexual harassment?” The results are listed in Table 10.

Table 10: Teachers’ responsibility to stop/report sexual harassment incidents

	Frequency	Valid Percent
I feel it is not my responsibility to stop and/or report incidents of sexual harassment if I witness an incident.	1	2.0
I feel it is my responsibility to stop and/or report incidents of sexual harassment if I witness an incident.	50	98.0

Question 6: “Which statement best describes your attitude regarding sexual harassment?”

The results are listed in Table 11.

Table 11: Teachers’ attitudes toward sexual harassment

	Frequency	Valid Percent
I feel it is normal male/female behavior to explore their emerging sexuality.	3	5.9
I feel that sexual harassment is just a part of school life and that it is not possible to eliminate the behavior	0	0.0
I feel that sexual harassing behavior is inappropriate for any age level.	47	92.2
Didn't indicate	1	2.0

Question 7: “Which of the following statements best describes your thoughts/feelings about your perceptions of adult supervision in regards to sexual harassment?” The results are listed in Table 12.

Table 12: Teachers’ thoughts/feelings toward adult supervision

	Frequency	Valid Percent
I feel that increased adult supervision would dramatically decrease incidents of sexual harassment.	22	43.1
I feel that increased adult supervision would prevent incidents of sexual harassment.	17	33.3
I feel that increased adult supervision would have no effect on incidents of incidents of sexual harassment.	12	23.5

Question 8 “Which of the following statements best describe your thoughts/feelings about perceptions of stopping and/or preventing sexual harassment from occurring in the school district of which you are employed?” The results are listed in Table 13.

Table 13: Teacher’s thoughts/feelings about stopping/preventing sexual harassment

	Frequency	Valid Percent
I feel that there is not much more that can be done to stop and/or prevent sexual harassment from occurring.	6	11.8
I feel that there needs to be more awareness and/or prevention training for the students regarding sexual harassment.	40	78.4
didn't indicate	5	9.8

Question 9: “Which of the following statements best describes what Title IX means to you?” The results are listed in Table 14.

Table 14: Title IX

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Title IX prohibits sex discrimination in athletics only within schools receiving federal aid.	6	11.8
Title IX prohibits sex discrimination in all schools receiving federal aid. This applies to all school sponsored activities, including field trips, extracurricular programs, athletics, and bus transportation.	34	66.7
didn't indicate	11	21.6

Question 10: “Explain how Title IX relates to sexual harassment?” There were various answers. Thirty-five of the participants answered the question, while sixteen of the participants left it blank. The following representative samples of responses were selected randomly and are as follows:

- “I am very aware of our district policy, but I am not of Title IX, so I don’t feel I can answer #9 and #10.”
- “You cannot discriminate against anyone based on sex, including sexual harassment.”
- “It doesn’t. Discrimination and harassment are two different and separate issues. One can discriminate without any involved harassment.”
- “I don’t believe it addresses harassment, only discrimination.”
- “All students should be treated fairly and prosecuted equally with regards to harassment in the schools.”
- “Teachers and administrators need to remember that sexual harassment is not okay-ever-whether it happens in the classroom or at a sporting event. Schools must take the responsibility to make all classroom and school sponsored activities safer from sexual harassment.”

- “Title IX was intended to offer girls equal access to athletic programs. Instead, as it has been implemented, it restricts access of boys to athletic programs.”
- “Title IX says females and males should have the same opportunities as each other; fair and equal opportunities without regards to the sex of the individual.”
- “Title IX brings awareness and law to discrimination. I am not sure that Title IX relates directly to sexual harassment at all. It’s about equality, not harassment.”
- “The primary impression regarding Title IX is to create opportunities for all and doesn’t directly affect harassment issues.”
- “Our school district has a very well written three page document on harassment. It includes a mission statement, definitions, prohibition, applicability, and procedures to follow, but I have never heard of Title IX.”
- “Some team sports and physical education environments are co-ed and can be situations where sexual harassment occurs. As team sports are eliminated because of Title IX, women’s teams and women could be subjects of harassment.”
- “Title IX prohibits sexual harassment in any form among adults, adults and children, and between children within a school district.”
- “I don’t spend a lot of time thinking about Title IX and its wording. My third graders are very young and I teach them about respect for everyone, and awareness. I hope this helps.”
- “Schools that allow sexual harassment to go unchallenged are not living up to the intent of Title IX.”
- “Title IX levels the playing field for males and females; it offers equal access to opportunities to participate in athletics to both males and a female so that neither gender

is able to experience a power position or a submissive position with regard to the other as is the case with sexual harassment.”

- “I understand Title IX is the “gender-equality” law. Since sexual harassment is often a way of keeping women from achieving equal considerations, I feel that Title IX definitely helps women by prohibiting discrimination based on gender.”
- “I am unaware of the exact wording of Title IX, but since It prohibits sex discrimination, I assume sexual harassment would be included.”
- “I am not sure-I thought Title IX was a money (aid) program for kids who come from families not making much money.”

### **Research Questions**

This study was intended to answer seven research questions. Research question number one asked, “Do teachers communicate an awareness of verbal, non-verbal, and/or physical sexual harassment in their classroom?” Survey question number three was asked in attempt to answer this research question. Results indicated that 72.5% (n=37) of the participants indicated that they do communicate an awareness, while 27.5% (n=14) indicated they do not communicate an awareness of sexual harassment in their classroom. Of the 37 participants who responded yes, 34 indicated they communicated verbal sexual harassment, while 3 indicated that they do not communicate that type, 22 participants indicated they communicated non verbal sexual harassment, while 15 indicated that they do not communicate that type, and 29 participants indicated they communicated physical sexual harassment, while 8 do not communicate that type. Out of the 37 participants who indicated they communicated some type of sexual harassment in the classroom, 21 indicated they communicated all three.

How often sexual harassment was communicated to the students by the participants varied. Over 15% (n=8) of the participants indicated they communicated this issue one time per year, 56.9% (n=29) indicated they communicated this issue two times per year, 17.6% (n=9) indicated they communicated the issue more than two times per year, while 31.4% (n=16) didn't indicate how often. Of these 37 participants, 12 responded to the "other/please specify" section. There were various responses to this section. The representative samples of responses are listed in no particular order and are as follows.

- "It varies depending on the particular students in a given year."
- "When necessary."
- "When witnessed or brought up by students."
- "When applicable."
- "Weekly."
- "Depends on the group you have that year – 2 times one year, last year, not at all."
- "Annually as part of the curriculum."
- "When the need arises."

Research question number two of the study asked, "Are teachers aware of a written policy and procedure manual on sexual harassment in their school district?" Survey question number one was an attempt to answer this research question. Results indicated that 86.3% (n=44) of the participants indicated they were aware of a written policy and procedure manual on sexual harassment, while 13.7% (n=7) indicated that they were not aware of a policy and procedure manual on sexual harassment.

Research question number three of the study asked, "Do teachers feel they are offered adequate awareness and/or prevention training by the school district of which they are employed

regarding sexual harassment?” Survey question number two was an attempt to answer this research question. Results indicated that 51% (n=26) of the participants felt that they were adequately trained, while 49% (n=25) indicated they did not feel adequately trained regarding the awareness and/or prevention of sexual harassment.

Research question number four of the study asked, “What do the teachers feel their role is in addressing sexual harassment with their students?” Survey questions four and five were an attempt to answer this research question. Results indicated that 5.9% (n=3) of the participants felt it is not within their role; therefore they do not address it with their students, 74.5% (n=38) of the participants indicated that it is within their role; therefore they do address it with their students, and 17.5% (n=9) of the participants indicated that they felt it is within their role; however do not address it with their students. One participant did not indicate any thoughts/feelings on the question. Out of the 51 participants, 98% (n=50) indicated that they felt it is their responsibility to stop and/or report sexual harassment, while 2% (n=1) indicated that it is not the teachers responsibility.

Research question number five of the study asked, “What are the teachers’ perceptions and attitudes regarding sexual harassment occurring in the school district of which they are employed?” Survey questions six, seven, and eight were an attempt to answer this research question. Results indicated that 5.9% (n=3) of the participants felt that sexual harassment is a normal male/female behavior to explore their emerging sexuality, while 92.2% (n=47) indicated that they felt sexual harassing behavior is inappropriate for any age level. None of the participants indicated that they felt sexual harassment is just part of school life and that it is not possible to eliminate the behavior. Over 43 % (n=22) of the participants indicated that they felt increased adult supervision would dramatically decrease incidents of sexual harassment, 33.3%

(n=17) indicated they felt that increased adult supervision would prevent incidents of sexual harassment, and 23.5% (n=12) indicated they felt that adult supervision would have no effect on incidents of sexual harassment occurring in the educational setting. Almost 12% (n=6) of the participants indicated that they felt there is not much more that can be done to stop and/or prevent sexual harassment from occurring, while 78.4% (n=40) indicated that they felt there needs to be more awareness and/or prevention training for students regarding sexual harassment. Just under 10% (n=5) of the participants did not respond to the question.

Research question number six of the study asked, “What does Title IX mean to teachers?” Almost 12% (n=6) of the participants indicated that Title IX prohibited sex discrimination in athletics only within schools receiving federal aid, while 66.7% (n=34) indicated that Title IX prohibited sex discrimination in all schools receiving federal aid including school sponsored activities, field trips, extracurricular programs, athletics, and bus transportation. Over 21% (n=11) of the participants did not respond to the question.

Research question number ten of the study asked, “How is Title IX related to sexual harassment?” Thirty-three participants answered the question, while 18 left it blank. Results varied and are listed in no particular order under the item analysis section of this chapter. Answers indicated to the researcher that a small percentage felt that Title IX did not include the issue of sexual harassment. A larger percentage indicated various responses that were all related in some way to Title IX.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

#### **Introduction**

Chapter five will include a discussion of the results of this study and how those results compare and contrast to the literature on sexual harassment in the educational setting as discussed in chapter two, followed by a summation of the results and general conclusions. This chapter will conclude with the researcher's recommendations related to this study for future research.

#### **Discussion**

This study involved an examination of pre k-12 teacher perceptions, knowledge, and awareness of student-to-student sexual harassment occurring in the educational setting. The teacher participants responded to questions regarding their awareness of a policy and procedure manual in the district in which they are employed, their feelings on getting adequate training on sexual harassment, their role in addressing sexual harassment, how important it is to communicate sexual harassment in their classroom including what kind and how often, their thoughts/feelings on preventing and reporting sexual harassment, their attitudes toward sexual harassment as well as attitudes toward adult supervision in regards to preventing sexual harassment, and finally, their knowledge of Title IX and how it pertains to sexual harassment. Overall, the study yielded positive results.

Results from question number eight of the survey concur with what Williams and Brake (1998) and the AAUW (2001) say in the literature. Williams and Brake (1998) suggested that an important part of preventing sexual harassment is offering education and ensuring that students are being treated fairly in the classroom. Similarly, the AAUW (2001) suggested that although

efforts to educate students on sexual harassment has improved, the unwillingness of some students to come forward to report incidents of sexual harassment indicated that more can be done to educate students. Of the 51 teacher participants, over 78% (n=40) felt that their needs to be more awareness and/or prevention training for the students regarding sexual harassment. Williams and Brake (1998) also suggested that communicating the issue of sexual harassment is an important step to improving the learning environment for all students. The results of the three part question in question number three of the survey about communicating sexual harassment in the classroom yielded positive results. Over 72% of the participants responded that they do communicate an awareness of verbal, non-verbal, and/or physical sexual harassment in the classroom. Verbal abuse was indicated most often (n=34). Teachers concurred that communication is important and that it is within their role to address sexual harassment to their students. While 72.5% indicated that they communicate sexual harassment in the classroom, 74.5% indicated in question number four of the survey that this is also part of their role as a teacher.

Results from question number six of the survey concur with what the U.S. Department of Education say in the literature. The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (n.d.) suggested that schools should not excuse the sexual harassment with the attitude that it is common behavior among school life. In regards to the teacher's attitude toward sexual harassment in the educational setting, 92.2% of the teacher participants responded that sexual harassing behavior is inappropriate for any age level. None of the teacher participants responded to sexual harassment being just a part of school life.

Results from question number five and question number seven of the survey concur with what Stein (1995) says in the literature. Stein (1995) suggested that incidents of sexual

harassment are often witnessed by adults and adults are often the ones who need to follow through on reporting these incidents. In regards to adult supervision, results to question number seven of the survey positively indicated that 43.3% of the teachers felt adult supervision would dramatically decrease incidents of sexual harassment, while 33.3% of teachers felt adult supervision would in deed prevent incidents of sexual harassment from occurring. Results to question number five of the survey positively indicated that 98% of teachers felt it is their responsibility to stop and/or report incidents of sexual harassment.

From the literature, Williams and Brake (1998) placed considerable importance of having a user-friendly policy and procedure manual for teachers including all the key components of preventing and reporting sexual harassment. The teachers who responded to the survey indicated in question number one that 86% were aware of a policy and procedure manual on sexual harassment in their district. In addition, Lengel (1997) suggested that not only should schools publicize their policies and procedures on sexual harassment, workshops and in-services can increase teacher's knowledge on sexual harassment and help teachers maintain a level of professionalism that schools need to help prevent sexual harassment from occurring in the educational setting. In response to question number two of the survey regarding training, just under half (n=25) of the participants felt they were not adequately trained on sexual harassment, while just over half (n=26) felt they were adequately trained.

The results from question number nine of the survey concur with what the literature says in reference to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Title IX is often associated with athletics only because it includes that no person shall be excluded from participation in, denied benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination on the basis of sex under any educational program or activity, therefore, often associated with athletic participation. Sexual harassment of students

in school is a form of sex discrimination covered by Title IX as well (Equal Rights Advocates, 2003). Results indicated that of the 51 teacher participants in the study, 66.7% (n=34) indicated that Title IX prohibits sex discrimination in all school sponsored activities, including field trips, extracurricular programs, athletics, and bus transportation in schools that receive federal aid. When participants were asked to respond to how Title IX relates to sexual harassment in question number ten of the survey, a majority of the participants responded that Title IX dealt with equality between males and females; however, many felt Title IX was not all that familiar to them. These responses concur to the what Marczely (1999) says in the literature in regards to sexual harassment as a form of sex discrimination is often overlooked when it comes to Title IX.

### **Conclusions**

Overall, the results of this study reinforced important facts about sexual harassment in concurrence with the literature in regards to how important teachers are when it comes to the awareness, knowledge, and perceptions of sexual harassment in the educational setting. This study yielded positive results that in many ways show that teachers are a key person when it comes to communicating, preventing, and reporting sexual harassment. Based on the results of the survey, it is noted that the awareness of a written policy and procedure manual in the district is high, the amount of communication of sexual harassment in the classroom is high, and the overall attitude of the teachers in terms of their role and responsibility toward sexual harassment is high. Based on themes through the written responses to question number ten of the survey, the teachers' awareness of Title IX is moderate and the teachers' feelings in regards to adequate training of sexual harassment are moderate as well.

Even though the sample was small, the study is a useful means for teachers to communicate their perspectives on sexual harassment in regards to the educational setting. A

limited population was represented in this study. Others may hold views that are similar or different from this population.

### **Recommendations for schools**

Based on the data gathered from this study, the following recommendations have been made for teachers and school districts:

1. Train all school staff about sexual harassment including definitions of sexual harassment, rights and responsibilities of the teachers and other school staff as well as school itself, procedures to be followed, and prevention efforts to reduce sexual harassment.
2. Continue to communicate sexual harassment with students in the classroom.
3. Revise or revisit the school policy and procedure manual to update knowledge on sexual harassment.
4. The implications of Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 should be reviewed by all school staff to increase knowledge of it's relation to sexual harassment.

### **Recommendations for future research**

Based on the data gathered from this study, the following recommendations have been made for future research in the area of sexual harassment:

1. Because of the societal implications and the effects that sexual harassment have on the educational setting, future research on the topic and it's relation to education should be conducted.
2. Modifications should be made to the survey to allow the teachers more opportunity to explain their answers
3. A comparative study could be conducted on how students feel about support by the school and/or teachers in regards to sexual harassment in the educational setting.

4. This study could be replicated to yield generalizable results. A larger sample from the population could be used. This may yield different and possibly stronger results than in this study.

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## APPENDIX A

## Principal's Permission

Consent for Study Participation

I am a graduate student in the School Counseling Program at the University of Wisconsin-Stout conducting student research on sexual harassment in education. The purpose of this research is to examine K-12 teacher perceptions, knowledge, and awareness of student-to-student sexual harassment occurring in the educational setting. The entire K-12 teaching staff at Somerset School District has an opportunity to participate in this study. I am requesting permission to distribute the sexual harassment survey to the teachers in their mailboxes at the school in which they are employed in May of 2003. I understand that the researcher will not release any of the data with Somerset School District as the identifiable school district under study. I would like you to read this consent for participation and sign below indicating that you are giving me the requested permission and also that you understand the risks, benefits, and rights of the teachers participating in the study. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact myself, Kristin Boileau at 715-247-4273 or Katherine Navarre, the research advisor, at 715-232-2569. Questions about the rights of research subjects can be addressed to Sue Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 11 Harvey Hall, Menomonie, WI, 54751, phone: 715-232-1126

Risks

There is no risk to any of the teachers by participating in this study.

Benefits

The results of this study may benefit the teachers in the future by increasing their awareness about the issue of sexual harassment in education.

Confidentiality of Responses

The responses to the survey used in this study are strictly confidential. Only the primary researcher and her advisor will have access to the confidential raw data. The researcher will destroy the returned surveys after the data analysis is completed. The data will be reported as group results and not as individual responses. Somerset School District will not be identified in any way, shape, or form in the results of the study.

Right to Withdraw or Decline to Participate

In the voluntary nature of this study, the teachers may choose not to participate in the study without any adverse consequences. Should any teacher choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, he/she may do so.

-----Sign below-----

I have read and understand the above description, including potential risks, benefits, and rights of the teachers as participants in this study. I hereby give my informed consent to allow Kristin Boileau to distribute surveys to the K-12 teaching staff in their mailboxes at Somerset School District in May of 2003.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### Sexual Harassment Survey

Through this survey, I am attempting to examine K-12 teachers' awareness, knowledge, and perceptions of student-to-student sexual harassment occurring in the educational setting. All teachers in the school district of which you are employed will be given a chance to be in this study. Your participation is voluntary. All of your responses will be used for research purposes only and with your cooperation, I can look for ways that may improve the social and learning environment for all students.

### Informed Consent

I understand that by returning this survey, I am giving my informed consent as a participating volunteer in this study. I understand the basic nature of the study and agree that any potential risks are exceedingly small. I also understand the potential benefits that might be realized from the successful completion of this study. I am aware that the information is being sought in a specific manner so that only minimal identifiers are necessary and so that confidentiality is guaranteed. I am aware that the researcher will not release individual responses and will report the results as group data. I am aware that Somerset School District will not be identified as the school district under study. I realize that I have the right to refuse participation and that my rights will be respected with no coercion or prejudice.

NOTE: Questions or concerns about the research study should be addressed to Kristin Boileau, the researcher, at 715-247-4273 or Katherine Navarre, the research advisor, at 715-232-2569. Questions about the rights of research subjects can be addressed to Sue Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 11 Harvey Hall, Menomonie, WI, 54751, phone: 715-232-1126

## Sexual Harassment Survey

Thank you for your time and honesty in filling out this survey. Please **DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ON THIS SURVEY**

**PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN THIS SURVEY BY MAY 19, 2003**

**Circle all that apply to you:**

Grade level you teach:      K      1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8  
    9      10      11      12

**Please mark an "X" next to the following statement that best describes your thoughts/feelings of each item asked.**

1. Are you, the teacher, aware of a written policy and procedure manual on sexual harassment in the school district of which you are employed?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I am aware of a written policy and procedure manual on sexual harassment.

\_\_\_\_\_ No, I am not aware of a written policy and procedure manual on sexual harassment.

2. Do you, the teacher, feel that you have had adequate awareness and/or prevention training regarding sexual harassment by the school district of which you are employed?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I feel I have been adequately trained on the awareness and/or prevention regarding sexual harassment.

\_\_\_\_\_ No, I feel I have not been adequately trained on the awareness and/or prevention regarding sexual harassment.

3. Do you, the teacher, communicate an awareness of verbal, non-verbal, and/or physical sexual harassment in your classroom(s)?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I do communicate an awareness of verbal, non-verbal, and/or physical sexual harassment in my classroom(s).

\_\_\_\_\_ No, I do not communicate an awareness of verbal, non-verbal, and/or physical sexual harassment in my classroom(s).

If you answered "Yes", please respond to the following questions, if you answered "No", please move on to question #4.

Which type of sexual harassment do you address with the students in your classroom(s)?  
 (Please mark all that apply)

Verbal     Non-verbal     Physical

How often do you address the type(s) of sexual harassment you indicated above?

One time per school year                       Two times per school year  
 More than two times per school year     Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

4. Which statement best describes your thoughts/feelings about your role in addressing sexual harassment with your students?

I do not feel it is within my role as a teacher to address the issue of sexual harassment to my students and I do not address the issue with my students.

I do not feel it is within my role as a teacher to address sexual harassment to my students, yet I do address the issue with my students.

I feel it is within my role as a teacher to address the issue of sexual harassment with my students and I do communicate the issue with my students.

I feel it is within my role as a teacher to address the issue of sexual harassment with my students, but I do not communicate the issue with my students.

5. Which statement best describes your thoughts/feelings about your responsibility in stopping and/or reporting sexual harassment? (Please mark all that apply)

I feel it is not my responsibility to stop and/or report incidents of sexual harassment if I witness an incident.

I feel it is my responsibility to stop and/or report incidents of sexual harassment if I witness an incident.

6. Which statement best describes your attitude regarding the issue of sexual harassment?

I feel it is normal male/female behavior to explore their emerging sexuality.

I feel that sexual harassment is just a part of school life and that it is not possible to eliminate the behavior.

I feel that sexual harassing behavior is inappropriate for any age level.

7. Which of the following statements best describe your thoughts/feelings about your perceptions of adult supervision in regards to sexual harassment?

I feel that increased adult supervision would dramatically decrease incidents of sexual harassment.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel that increased adult supervision would prevent incidents of sexual harassment.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel that increased adult supervision would have no effect on incidents of sexual harassment occurring.

8. Which of the following statements best describe your thoughts/feelings about perceptions of stopping and/or preventing sexual harassment from occurring in the school district of which you are employed?

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel that there is not much more that can be done to stop and/or prevent sexual harassment from occurring.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel that there needs to be more awareness and/or prevention training for the students regarding sexual harassment.

9. Which one of the following statements best describe what Title IX means to you?

\_\_\_\_\_ Title IX prohibits sex discrimination in athletics only within schools receiving federal aid.

\_\_\_\_\_ Title IX prohibits sex discrimination in all schools receiving federal aid. This applies to all school sponsored activities, including field trips, extracurricular programs, athletics, and bus transportation.

**Please briefly answer the following question:**

10. Explain how Title IX relates to sexual harassment?

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**Thank you for filling this out completely.**