

Saving Sexuality from Stigma: A Perception Study on LGBT Bullying in Korean International Schools

Grace Kim¹ and Bethany Stallings^{1#}

¹Yongsan International School of Seoul

#Advisor

ABSTRACT

Teens who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) often experience bullying and are at increased risk of suffering from mental health issues. Research, especially in the West, has shown that such bullying can decline if schools actively implement programs that raise awareness and educate students to promote a safer and more tolerant environment. However, in South Korea, schools currently either lack such programs or have ineffective programs. On the other hand, International Schools in Korea (ISK), which enroll more diverse students and teach western curricula, seem more liberal about LGBT issues, and tolerant towards such individuals. However, the fact that many ISK are affiliated with Christianity, and that Christian tenets are not entirely amicable towards LGBT individuals, raises an intriguing question: Despite Christian beliefs about LGBT individuals and the conservative attitude of Korea, have ISK actually created a culture that reflect the schools' stated policies of tolerance and inclusivity, or is there a disparity of opinions between LGBT students and staff that needs to be addressed? In order to find an answer, I conducted anonymous surveys and interviews with both students and staff from six different ISK. The results show that the opinions of the LGBT students differ in both experience and perception from those of the staff and non-LGBT students but are similar to those of non-LGBT students. Ultimately, by analyzing data from my study, I determined perceptions on LGBT in ISK and proposed necessary plans of action to increase support of LGBT in these communities.

Introduction

Although attitudes in many nations towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities have become more tolerant, if not accepting, many South Koreans retain a more conservative attitude and stigmatize those who identify as or appear LGBT. This stigma against LGBT individuals, especially teens, makes them more susceptible to the effects of bullying that often occurs in schools. Such effects are especially concerning, for experiencing bullying in adolescence can impair the teen's "physical, psychological, and social functioning" (Man et al., 2022); even worse, self-harm can ensue with potentially deadly consequences.

Although Korean schools have policies that address bullying, bullying is still inherent. Unlike many schools in the West that have implemented in-class and out-of-class programs to raise awareness and actively address bullying, Koreans often see many types of bullying as a fact of life and accept it to a surprisingly wide degree. One reason for this acceptance is that group harmony through conformity is the norm, so bullying those who do not conform is often deemed a necessary corrective action to bring the miscreant back in line. Furthermore, a strict age-based social hierarchy exists in Korea, and children are taught at an early age not only to respect anyone older, but also to address such a person with an honorific; in extreme cases, a person born even minutes earlier usually has seniority. Thus, students often must abide by the whims of not only upperclassmen, but also older students in the same grade. Consequently, behaviors that would be seen as hazing or bullying in the US are not viewed as such in Korea. For instance, Park Hanwool, a 17-year-old high-school student, suffered so much from bullying that he attempted suicide in front of the classmates who had bullied him and the teachers who had only stood by and watched the bullying take place (Lee, 2012).

On the other hand, international schools in Korea (ISK), schools that serve both non-native Koreans and foreigners and that primarily use English to teach a mixture of Korean and Western concepts, would be expected to be more tolerant than Korean schools. In fact, many ISK clearly stipulate a culture of inclusivity and have clear policies with specifics that state little to zero tolerance toward bullying (International Schools Database, n.d.). However, many ISK have a religious affiliation, and even those without have members and/or parent groups that have less tolerant views toward the LGBT community. Thus, many ISK shun the topic of LGBT or sexuality as a whole. Such action seems to make their claims of inclusion antithetical, seemingly perpetuating an environment un conducive to raising awareness and combating the prejudice against those identified or perceived as LGBT.

Literature Review

The Cause of Bullying

Research shows that the roots of bullying lie in perceived differences in appearance, behavior, beliefs, social hierarchy, and ability. Much of these differences come from a lack of awareness and a culture of animosity rooted in prejudice and ultra-conservative attitudes. Byongook Moon, Hye-Won Hwang, and John D. McCluskey analyzed the social behaviors of a panel of South Korean youth to determine the influence of this culture in inducing bullying. According to their analysis, “school-generated strains,” physical and emotional stress caused by discriminatory factors in school, play a significant role in increasing bullying rates. Students are also burdened by the excessive emphasis on individual success fueled by the competitive nature of Korean education and society; they are raised to want to not just be smart, but to be smarter than others, which inevitably develops a toxic environment. Teachers not only let this behavior develop, but also encourage it as part of their “role” as educators (Moon et al., 2011).

The Cost of Bullying

Researchers have shown that environments conducive to bullying have a wide effect that goes beyond the obvious physical signs caused by bullies. Richard C. Friedman, an academic psychiatrist, hypothesized and concluded, “Discrimination [creates] a stressful social environment that [leads] to mental health problems in people who belong to stigmatized minority groups” (Friedman, 1999). In his report, Friedman used statistical operations to correlate mental instability and psychopathology and ultimately determined that social factors highly influence how victims recover after being bullied. Throughout and after the recovery process, victims suffer from the trauma of alienation and often opt to withdraw from society; societal withdrawal is especially applicable to victimized youth who choose to drop out of school (Friedman, 1999). Friedman’s study, along with Moon, Hwang, and McCluskey’s study, indicates that correlating rates of bullying and stress reflect the growing detrimental effects on youth.

Additionally, self-harm—a resort many adolescents turn to for emotional venting or suicidal intent—hints that victims also suffer from potential depression, anxiety, or more severe mental health problems (Gordon, 2021). A 2012 longitudinal study led by Helen L. Fisher, a professor at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience, showed that “exposure to frequent bullying predicted higher rates of self harm even after children’s pre-morbid emotional and behavioral problems, low IQ, and family environmental risks were taken into account.” Furthermore, they determined that victimized twins were more likely to self-harm than were their non-victimized twin siblings (Fisher et al., 2012). This demonstrates the significant harm that bullying can have, especially since the key variable in identical twins would likely be just the bullying.

Another study in 2012 has also shown a correlation between bullying and suicide. In a study conducted by Iris Wagman Borowsky, a professor of general pediatrics at the University of Minnesota, 38% out of the frequently bullied students in a 130,000-student pool reported attempted suicide. Since the study was conducted in 2012, the

number has worsened, and suicide rates among adolescents have gone up (Borowsky et al., 2012). The studies led by Fisher and Borowsky both contribute to reasons for the frequency of bullying, as well as the exacerbated effects of it.

Combating Bullying

Clearly, bullying has become a concern for society. Fortunately, awareness of such discrimination has increased, especially in the West, and cultivating safe, bullying-free learning environments and implementing “protective factors” to shield victims from extensive psychological damage is necessary and achievable (Man et al., 2022). In 2012, Dewey Cornell, Francis Huang, Anne Gregory, and Xitao Fan initiated a student-report system in state high schools to investigate the conditions, prevalence, and effects of bullying. Their study showed that as the student reports increased, the initially large numbers of bullied students gradually decreased. (Cornell et al., 2012). In addition, Xiaou Man, Jiatong Liu, and Zengxin Xue (2022) observed youth behavior to determine in what setting bullying and the following trauma could be reduced. By comparing students’ responses to their educational settings to those of an environmentally controlled educational setting, the researchers determined that a setting that promoted “self-efficacy, self-worth, and emotional belongingness” nurtured academic progress and social growth.

In contrast, a 2011 research study by Jina Yoon, Sheri Bauman, Taesan Choi, and Alisa S. Hutchinson showed that in many cases, teachers in Korean schools have exacerbated bullying by acting insufficiently to address it. Yoon, Bauman, Choi, and Hutchinson identified bullying as a concept dependent on not only the bully and the victim, but also the surrounding social environment in which typically teachers play a large role. In their factor analyses, the researchers distributed an online questionnaire that asked teachers in Korean schools to provide experiences with and solutions for different scenarios of bullying. The results showed that both school policies and programs against bullying might have little bearing on teachers actively dealing with bullying. Furthermore, teachers who had had anti-bullying training did not perform differently from teachers who had had no training. The teachers’ uncertainty about how to intervene outlined difficulties in executing plans for anti-bullying and highlighted how, without actual teacher investment, it would be impossible to execute plans for anti-bullying (Yoon et al., 2011). As such, their study revealed why it is necessary to extend plans against bullying to teachers as well.

A study in 2003, however, did propose a possible solution to the lack of teacher investment in dealing with bullying in Korea. Kwan-Chun Lee defined bullying as a physical or psychological, one-sided act of aggression and categorized the different types of bullying (physical assault, sexual harassment, threatening, and money extortion). He then observed the specifics of Korean bullying, *wang-tta*, in the form of ostracism and discrimination. With his observations, Lee (2003) determined that schools have three ways to deal with bullying: punishments with the Korean criminal justice system, consequences with the school’s education system, and appeals to natural “rehumanizing”. His study proposed a Christian educational approach for anti-bullying programs and safe school environments.

Gap and Purpose

Although pre-existing research provides a wealth of information about the effects of bullying and the methods to combat it, much of the research focuses on bullying in the West. Furthermore, the research that is Korea-specific either does not address sexual identity and orientation or lacks specific applicability to the many religiously affiliated schools known for their strict religious, often Christian, requirements. While this over-adherence to Christian values seems to contradict the very message of inclusivity to which most ISK follow, such adherence is often normalized. Even Lee, whose research does focus on the use of Christian education to address bullying, neglects to identify and discuss the problems that Christianity has had with those in the LGBT community. Furthermore, according to the 2015 national census, South Korea is a majority irreligious nation, and all forms of Christianity amount to less than 30% of the population. Thus, Christian tenets would not be accepted by the nation’s schools because doing so would impinge on religious freedoms. However, many ISK do use a Christian educational approach and would seem to be well-suited to test Lee’s proposal.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to address the gap by determining whether the students and the faculty in ISK believe that the policies their schools are pursuing are conducive to creating a safe environment for those who identify as LGBT. Identifying these opinions is significant because students who discover that they are LGBT may feel that the school environment is detrimental to their “coming out.” Thus, identifying a possible disparity between students’ perceptions and those of the faculty can assist ISK to adapt to the possible shortcoming posed by the schools’ current policies and allow for better approaches in promoting inclusivity.

Methodology and Exclusions

Study Design

The main objective of this study is to analyze student and faculty perspectives on the acceptance of sexual orientation and identity in ISK. Understanding these two perspectives is pivotal in establishing whether the current policies are adequate and whether students and faculty concur on the inclusivity of the schools’ environments. This determination is significant because a disparity between the opinions of the faculty and students, or even within those two populations, may show that the school policies against bullying and discrimination may not be effective in promoting a safe environment for those who are LGBT. Furthermore, knowledge of the opinions can create discourse on whether the current policies have any shortcomings, whether the schools’ cultures are actually tolerant, and, if needed, how to make the schools safer for and supportive of LGBT students. To collect the required perspectives, I conducted surveys and in-depth interviews among students and faculty of various ISK.

To gain an understanding of student perceptions on LGBT issues, I asked high school-aged students in six government-approved ISK to complete a survey with questions ranging from their perception of sexual orientation and identity to opinions about their schools’ level of tolerance of those who identify as LGBT. Because some ISK are too well known and often presumed to be included in any survey involving international students, the ISK were randomly chosen from a pool based on certain criteria, such as student population, reputation, religious status, and location in Seoul, to ensure anonymity.

In accordance with their school’s religious status, students were labeled with either Christian Affiliated (CA) or Unaffiliated (UA), and a number between 1 to 6; the numbers were chosen at random. Demographic data was recorded via 5-point multiple-choice questions, and student perceptions of this issue were ascertained through statements measured via a Likert scale (“strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly disagree”); all questions were approved by the International Review Board (IRB) to ensure ethicality. Ultimately, this survey was used to determine schools’ accommodations for sexual minority groups, the general environment when it comes to LGBT, and responses to bullying both related and unrelated to LGBT.

I also conducted interviews with faculty from the six international schools. I chose teachers and administrators based on their roles in student interactions, curricula, and policymaking. I asked whether any LGBT bullying had taken place in their schools, whether they thought their policies against such bullying were adequate, and whether their school’s values created a safe environment for LGBT individuals. In addition, I asked whether they were trained to deal with situations related to sexual orientation or identity conflicts and whether they were permitted to openly discuss sexuality-based subjects. The interview allowed me to gain the faculty’s perception about not only how they feel about LGBT issues, but also how they view their school’s response toward the LGBT.

Details about Chosen ISK

CA-1

- American college preparatory curriculum (AP or IB)
- Accredited by educational organization(s) and Christian organization(s)
- Has a mixture of Korean and foreign staff in an equal split
- Multiple nationalities (30-60) represented
- Class size range: 20-30

CA-2

- American college preparatory curriculum (AP or IB)
- Accredited by educational organization(s) and Christian organization(s)
- Has a mixture of Korean and foreign staff with the majority leaning towards foreigners
- Multiple nationalities (30-60) represented
- Class size range: 8-30

UA-3

- American college preparatory curriculum (AP or IB)
- Accredited by educational organization(s)
- Has a mixture of Korean and foreign staff with the majority leaning towards Koreans
- Multiple nationalities (10-29) represented
- Class size range: 10-20

UA-4

- American college preparatory curriculum (AP or IB)
- Accredited by educational organization(s)
- Has a mixture of Korean and foreign staff with the majority leaning towards Koreans
- Multiple nationalities (30-60) represented
- Class size range: 20-30

UA-5

- American college preparatory curriculum (AP or IB)
- Accredited by educational organization(s)
- Has a mixture of Korean and foreign staff with the majority leaning towards foreigners
- Multiple nationalities (30-60) represented
- Class size range: 15-25

UA-6

- Accredited by educational organization(s)
- Has a mixture of Korean and foreign staff with the majority leaning towards Koreans
- Multiple nationalities (10-29) represented
- Class size range: 8-25

*All information taken from schools' official websites

Results

Survey

The six schools were tagged by their religious affiliation and identification number. Out of the participants, 47.37% attend Christianity-affiliated schools and 52.63% attend religiously unaffiliated schools. Of the six schools, UA-3 was the only school without LGBT-identifying individuals; the other schools all included varying amounts of participants identifying as either bisexual, homosexual, or transgender. Percentage distributions from the Likert scale data were used to determine how the LGBT participants and non-LGBT participants differed in their perspectives.

Demographics and Key (Survey)

Likert Scale Key

	CA-1	CA-2	UA-3	UA-4	UA-5	UA-6		
Percentage of LGBT participants (by school)	5.3%	25%	N/A	28.6%	30%	25%	SA	Strongly Agree
	Christianity Affiliated (CA)		Unaffiliated (UA)				N	Neutral
Percentage of LGBT participants (by religious affiliation)	10.1%		23.3%				D	Disagree
							SD	Strongly Disagree

*School did not have any LGBT participants

**Calculated in reverse; Strongly Disagree = 5, Disagree = 4, etc.)

*****Bold** indicates largest percentage

Q1. Students in my school are accepting of sexual minority groups.

This question identified how the participants felt about how tolerant their peers were. The percentage distribution indicates that throughout all six schools, a majority of non-LGBT students believed that their peers were either impartial or partially to very accepting of sexual minority groups. The results for the LGBT students were similar except in school CA-1 (UA-3 did not have any student identify as LGBT). CA-1 was also the only school that had non-LGBT participants Strongly Disagree (5.6%) with the statement that their schools' students are accepting of sexual minority groups.

Table 1.1: LGBT Participants

CA-1	CA-2	UA-3	UA-4	UA-5	UA-6
SA = 0.0% A = 0.0% N = 0.0% D = 0.0% SD = 100%	SA = 50.0% A = 0.0% N = 50.0% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%	N/A*	SA = 0.0% A = 0.0% N = 100.0% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 0.0% A = 100.0% N = 0.0% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 0.0% A = 0.0% N = 100.0% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%

Table 1.2: Non-LGBT Participants

SA = 16.7% A = 44.4% N = 33.3% D = 0.0% SD = 5.6%	SA = 16.7% A = 16.7% N = 66.7% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 20.0% A = 40.0% N = 40.0% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 0.0% A = 20.0% N = 60.0% D = 20.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 57.1% A = 14.3% N = 14.3% D = 14.3% SD = 0.0%	SA = 16.7% A = 16.7% N = 66.7% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%
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Q2. My school will support my gender choices and sexual orientation, regardless of what those may be.

This question focused on the school and whether or not students believed that their schools would support students' sexual orientation and identification. For LGBT students, CA-1 was the only school whose LGBT participants Strongly Disagreed with the statement that their school would support their choices. For the other schools with LGBT-identifying students, participants indicated that their views were between Neutral at worst and Strongly Agree at best. In contrast, for non-LGBT students, there was a larger range of answers.

Table 2.1: LGBT Participants

CA-1	CA-2	UA-3	UA-4	UA-5	UA-6
SA = 0.0% A = 0.0% N = 0.0% D = 0.0% SD = 100%	SA = 100.0% A = 0.0% N = 00.0% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%	N/A*	SA = 0.0% A = 0.0% N = 100.0% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 0.0% A = 66.7.0% N = 33.3.0% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 50.0% A = 50.0% N = 0.0% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%

Table 2.2: Non-LGBT Participants

SA = 0.0% A = 16.7% N = 27.8% D = 33.3% SD = 22.2%	SA = 37.5% A = 25.0% N = 37.5% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 0.0% A = 0.0% N = 40.0% D = 60.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 0.0% A = 60.0% N = 40.0% D = 00.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 28.6% A = 28.6% N = 42.9% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 0.0% A = 16.7% N = 33.3% D = 16.7.0% SD = 33.3%
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Q3. Teachers in my school are accepting of sexual minority groups.

This question showed the largest range of results for LGBT participants, and the most consistent one for non-LGBT participants. For example, UA-5 had an even split between LGBT-identifying participants who Strongly Agree, Agree, and are Neutral to the idea that the teachers in their school are accepting of sexual minority groups. LGBT participants from CA-2, UA-4, and UA-6, indicated mixed feelings between a certain degree of agreement and disagreement, while all participants from CA-1 indicated to Strongly Disagree with the statement. For non-LGBT students, however, all schools except UA-3 showed that the majority of participants Strongly Agreed with the statement. While CA-2, UA-5, and UA-6 had similar results between the two groups of participants, CA-1 and UA-4 displayed clear discrepancies between the two populations.

Table 3.1: LGBT Participants

CA-1	CA-2	UA-3	UA-4	UA-5	UA-6
SA = 0.0% A = 0.0% N = 0.0% D = 0.0% SD = 100.0%	SA = 50.0% A = 0.0% N = 0.0% D = 50.0% SD = 0.0%	N/A*	SA = 0.0% A = 0.0% N = 0.0% D = 100.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 33.3% A = 33.3% N = 33.3% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 0.0% A = 50.0% N = 0.0% D = 50.0% SD = 0.0%

Table 3.2: Non-LGBT Participants

SA = 83.3% A = 5.6% N = 0.0% D = 11.1% SD = 0.0%	SA = 75.0% A = 0.0% N = 0.0% D = 25.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 0.0% A = 20.0% N = 40.0% D = 40.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 80.0% A = 20.0% N = 0.0% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 77.8% A = 22.2% N = 0.0% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 50.0% A = 25.0% N = 0.0% D = 25.0% SD = 0.0%
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Q4. Homosexuality is, in part, a mental illness.

This question, by far, showed the most common pattern between the majority percentages of LGBT participants, non-LGBT participants, and schools overall except. All LGBT participants in CA-1, CA-2, and UA-4 Strongly Disagreed to the statement that homosexuality was a mental illness, and UA-5 and UA-6 Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed with 66.7% and 50.0% respectively. Similarly with non-LGBT participants, all schools had a majority of their responses in the Disagree to Strongly Disagree side, except for UA-6 which had a fifty-fifty split between Agree and Disagree. However, there were participants who believed that homosexuality is a mental illness; 5.6% of the CA-1 non-LGBT participants Strongly Agreed with the statement that homosexuality is, in part, a mental illness.

Table 4.1: LGBT Participants

CA-1	CA-2	UA-3	UA-4	UA-5	UA-6
SA = 0.0% A = 0.0% N = 0.0% D = 0.0% SD = 100.0%	SA = 0.0% A = 0.0% N = 0.0% D = 100.0% SD = 0.0%	N/A*	SA = 0.0% A = 0.0% N = 0.0% D = 0.0% SD = 100.0%	SA = 0.0% A = 0.0% N = 0.0% D = 66.7% SD = 33.3%	SA = 0.0% A = 12.5% N = 0.0% D = 37.5% SD = 50.0%

Table 4.2: Non-LGBT Participants

SA = 5.6% A = 5.6% N = 5.6% D = 33.3% SD = 50.0%	SA = 0.0% A = 0.0% N = 0.0% D = 62.5% SD = 37.5%	SA = 0.0% A = 0.0% N = 20.0% D = 60.0% SD = 20.0%	SA = 0.0% A = 20.0% N = 20.0% D = 40.0% SD = 20.0%	SA = 0.0% A = 11.1% N = 22.2% D = 22.2% SD = 44.4%	SA = 0.0% A = 50.0% N = 0.0% D = 0.0% SD = 50.0%
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Q5. Homosexuals are usually identifiable by their behaviors or mannerisms.

This last question focused on the mannerisms of homosexuals or LGBT-identifying people, and whether or not these mannerisms can contribute to identification. This question was asked because the results determined whether or not participants believed they could possibly identify LGBT based on their appearances or behaviors, implying that the people they perceive as LGBT could be treated differently based on their perception. Result-wise, the LGBT participants showed more diverse, yet extreme results. In other words, for CA-1, CA-2, UA-4, and UA-6, 100% of participants from each school chose Disagree, Neutral, Disagree, and Neutral respectively. UA-5 had a split between Agree and Disagree, with two thirds and one third of the population in each. On the other hand, all non-LGBT participants except for 11.1% of CA-1 selected either Neutral or Agree to the fact that homosexuals are usually identifiable by their behaviors or mannerisms.

Table 5.1: LGBT Participants

CA-1	CA-2	UA-3	UA-4	UA-5	UA-6
SA = 0.0% A = 0.0% N = 0.0% D = 100.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 0.0% A = 0.0% N = 100.0% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%	N/A*	SA = 0.0% A = 0.0% N = 0.0% D = 100.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 0.0% A = 66.7% N = 0.0% D = 33.3% SD = 0.0%	SA = 0.0% A = 0.0% N = 100.0% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%

Table 5.1: Non-LGBT Participants

SA = 5.6% A = 44.4% N = 38.9% D = 11.1% SD = 0.0%	SA = 0.0% A = 37.5% N = 62.5% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 20.0% A = 20.0% N = 60.0% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 0.0% A = 40.0% N = 60.0% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 0.0% A = 44.4% N = 22.2% D = 33.3% SD = 0.0%	SA = 0.0% A = 37.5% N = 62.5% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%
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Interview Summary

Table 6.1: Interviewee A, Anonymous High School Administrator

- Has received training by school's parent organization on how to deal with discrimination in all forms, even under the basis of sexual orientation.
- Believes that providing the framework for an "inclusive environment" should be the main goal of the school.
- Believes the school's faith makes administration be more careful when it comes to implementing rules for or against LGBT but emphasizes that faith does not justify discrimination.
- Mentioned that the Korean government does have a certain say in the school's ability to explicitly discuss sensitive topics including LGBT.
- Is aware of LGBT-identifying students in current school (Korea).

Table 6.2: Interviewee B, Anonymous High School Counselor

- Encountered a student in his previous school (Singapore) who was biologically a different gender from his self-identified gender.
- Is aware of LGBT-identifying students in current school (Korea).
- Led counselor meetings to come up with a statement of philosophy on how to handle LGBT cases.
- Believes that there is certain Biblical justification to a lack of regulations on LGBT in a Christian school but does not believe that Christianity serves as an excuse for any form of discrimination.

Table 6.3: Interviewee C, Anonymous High School Counselor

- Is aware of LGBT identifying students and teachers and his school.
- Leads projects related to anti-discrimination throughout high school but has never focused on LGBT specifically.
- Is open to the idea of presenting on LGBT should there be a need but is wary of approaching it too openly due to criticism from the conservative Korean community.
- Believes that though there has never really been a need for gender or sexuality-based guidelines, his school is currently lacking in an adequate plan should there be any issues.

Table 6.4: Interviewee D, Anonymous High School Teacher

- Has witnessed some general cases of bullying, but no LGBT-based bullying.
- Has not received training for how to deal with LGBT or any issues that arise from LGBT.
- Follows the Bible in that he believes that being a member of the LGBT community or being homosexual in general is a sin.
- Believes that discrimination should not be allowed, but also believes that direct discrimination rarely occurs in classroom settings.
- Believes to not have the liberty to state whether what his school is doing for the LGBT community is sufficient for inclusivity.

Analysis

Survey Analysis

Although the survey includes results from both LGBT and non-LGBT students, the responses of the LGBT students have been prioritized because those students' opinions are the direct results of the experiences they've had first-hand. The responses of the non-LGBT students are significant, but those non-LGBT responses are mostly what the non-LGBT students assume the LGBT to have experienced.

The survey results show that misconceptions may have shaped LGBT and non-LGBT students' perceptions of their peers. Tables 4.1, 4.2, 5.1, and 5.2 show that misconceptions about LGBT exist in all schools. Homosexuality was demedicalized by the American Psychiatric Association the 1970s and the stereotyping of LGBT has been considered inaccurate, or possibly even homophobic, since then as well (American Psychological Association, 2021).

LGBT Participants (**Table 4.1**) re: Q4. Homosexuality is, in part, a mental illness.

CA-1	CA-2	UA-3	UA-4	UA-5	UA-6
SA = 0.0%	SA = 0.0%	N/A*	SA = 0.0%	SA = 0.0%	SA = 0.0%
A = 0.0%	A = 0.0%		A = 0.0%	A = 0.0%	A = 12.5%
N = 0.0%	N = 0.0%		N = 0.0%	N = 0.0%	N = 0.0%
D = 0.0%	D = 100.0%		D = 0.0%	D = 66.7%	D = 37.5%
SD = 100.0%	SD = 0.0%		SD = 100.0%	SD = 33.3%	SD = 50.0%

Non-LGBT participants (**Table 4.2**) re: Q4. Homosexuality is, in part, a mental illness.

SA = 5.6%	SA = 0.0%	SA = 0.0%	SA = 0.0%	SA = 0.0%	SA = 0.0%
A = 5.6%	A = 0.0%	A = 0.0%	A = 20.0%	A = 11.1%	A = 50.0%
N = 5.6%	N = 0.0%	N = 20.0%	N = 20.0%	N = 22.2%	N = 0.0%
D = 33.3%	D = 62.5%	D = 60.0%	D = 40.0%	D = 22.2%	D = 0.0%
SD = 50.0%	SD = 37.5%	SD = 20.0%	SD = 20.0%	SD = 44.4%	SD = 50.0%

LGBT Participants (**Table 5.1**) re: Q5. Homosexuals are...identifiable by their behaviors...

CA-1	CA-2	UA-3	UA-4	UA-5	UA-6
SA = 0.0%	SA = 0.0%	N/A*	SA = 0.0%	SA = 0.0%	SA = 0.0%
A = 0.0%	A = 0.0%		A = 0.0%	A = 66.7%	A = 0.0%
N = 0.0%	N = 100.0%		N = 0.0%	N = 0.0%	N = 100.0%
D = 100.0%	D = 0.0%		D = 100.0%	D = 33.3%	D = 0.0%
SD = 0.0%	SD = 0.0%		SD = 0.0%	SD = 0.0%	SD = 0.0%

Non-LGBT participants (**Table 5.2**) re: Q5. Homosexuals are...identifiable by their behaviors...

SA = 5.6%	SA = 0.0%	SA = 20.0%	SA = 0.0%	SA = 0.0%	SA = 0.0%
A = 44.4%	A = 37.5%	A = 20.0%	A = 40.0%	A = 44.4%	A = 37.5%
N = 38.9%	N = 62.5%	N = 60.0%	N = 60.0%	N = 22.2%	N = 62.5%
D = 11.1%	D = 0.0%	D = 0.0%	D = 0.0%	D = 33.3%	D = 0.0%
SD = 0.0%	SD = 0.0%	SD = 0.0%	SD = 0.0%	SD = 0.0%	SD = 0.0%

The fact that some LGBT students also accept such misconceptions (Tables 4.1 and 5.1) shows that the stigma of being LGBT is likely endemic. The characteristics of the ISK may have influenced how their students have perceived certain aspects of LGBT; these results also imply that some factor, be it religious, administrative, or otherwise, negatively influences students into believing certain fallacies. This finding overlaps with Amanda Klysing, Anna Lindqvist, and Fredrik Björklund’s research on how stereotypes, gender, and sexual orientation relate to each other. As their research shows, such stereotyping can often lead to real discrimination as people are reduced to caricatures to fit the image of the stereotype (Klysing et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, the LGBT students at most schools did not view their peers negatively. Yet only CA-2 and UA-5 (Table 1.1) showed any positivity about peer acceptance. More telling is the non-LGBT students’ negative perspective (CA-1, UA-4, and UA-5) on peer acceptance (Table 1.2) since the data suggests that even they recognize that bigotry exists among their non-LGBT peers.

LGBT Participants (**Table 1.1**) re: Q1. Students in my school are accepting of sexual minority groups.

CA-1	CA-2	UA-3	UA-4	UA-5	UA-6
SA = 0.0%	SA = 50.0%	N/A*	SA = 0.0%	SA = 0.0%	SA = 0.0%
A = 0.0%	A = 0.0%		A = 0.0%	A = 100.0%	A = 0.0%
N = 0.0%	N = 50.0%		N = 100.0%	N = 0.0%	N = 100.0%
D = 0.0%	D = 0.0%		D = 0.0%	D = 0.0%	D = 0.0%
SD = 100%	SD = 0.0%		SD = 0.0%	SD = 0.0%	SD = 0.0%

Non-LGBT participants (**Table 1.2**) re: Q1. Students in my school are accepting of sexual minority groups.

SA = 16.7%	SA = 16.7%	SA = 20.0%	SA = 0.0%	SA = 57.1%	SA = 16.7%
A = 44.4%	A = 16.7%	A = 40.0%	A = 20.0%	A = 14.3%	A = 16.7%
N = 33.3%	N = 66.7%	N = 40.0%	N = 60.0%	N = 14.3%	N = 66.7%
D = 0.0%	D = 0.0%	D = 0.0%	D = 20.0%	D = 14.3%	D = 0.0%
SD = 5.6%	SD = 0.0%	SD = 0.0%	SD = 0.0%	SD = 0.0%	SD = 0.0%

The roots of this bigotry may be diverse and beyond the scope of this study. What is peculiar, though, is the rather large discrepancy in the results of question 1 between the LGBT and non-LGBT students (Tables 1.1 and 1.2). With the exception of CA-2 and UA-5, only the non-LGBT students responded positively. Furthermore, CA-1 has the largest difference. Such discrepancy may be the result of LGBT students believing that their peers are bigoted, most non-LGBT students believing themselves to be tolerant and thus blind to their bigotry, a combination of the two, or

some other factor that makes LGBT students in CA-1 believe their peers to be intolerant (although religious beliefs of students could be a factor, many students did not indicate their religious affiliation on the survey).

Regardless of the discrepancies, the likelihood that LGBT youth’s mental health is compromised because of the perceived hostile school environment. Environmental intolerance can develop anxiety, a concerning outcome considering research has shown that such anxiety can have detrimental effects on mental health (Mulvey et al., 2015). Furthermore, research by Kelly Lynn Mulvey, Michael T. Rizzo, and Melanie Killen also show that such intolerance, especially from a young age often leads to bullying. Gender stereotyping during adolescence becomes entrenched by adulthood and could become a form of stress for those outside of the heteronormative sexualities during developmental stages.

Although religious beliefs, or the lack thereof, may have affected LGBT students’ perception of the school and faculty, the results seem counterintuitive. Without religious constraints, non-Christian schools recorded no negative responses to question 2 from LGBT students (Table 2.1). However, the same table shows that LGBT students at CA-2, a Christian affiliated school, responded the most positively. LGBT students at CA-1, on the other hand, were at the opposite extreme.

LGBT Participants (**Table 2.1**) re: Q2. My school will support my gender choices...

CA-1	CA-2	UA-3	UA-4	UA-5	UA-6
SA = 0.0%	SA = 100.0%	N/A*	SA = 0.0%	SA = 0.0%	SA = 50.0%
A = 0.0%	A = 0.0%		A = 0.0%	A = 66.7.0%	A = 50.0%
N = 0.0%	N = 00.0%		N = 100.0%	N = 33.3.0%	N = 0.0%
D = 0.0%	D = 0.0%		D = 0.0%	D = 0.0%	D = 0.0%
SD = 100%	SD = 0.0%		SD = 0.0%	SD = 0.0%	SD = 0.0%

Non-LGBT participants (**Table 2.2**) re: Q2. My school will support my gender choices...

SA = 0.0%	SA = 37.5%	SA = 0.0%	SA = 0.0%	SA = 28.6%	SA = 0.0%
A = 16.7%	A = 25.0%	A = 0.0%	A = 60.0%	A = 28.6%	A = 16.7%
N = 27.8%	N = 37.5%	N = 40.0%	N = 40.0%	N = 42.9%	N = 33.3%
D = 33.3%	D = 0.0%	D = 60.0%	D = 00.0%	D = 0.0%	D = 16.7.0%
SD = 22.2%	SD = 0.0%	SD = 0.0%	SD = 0.0%	SD = 0.0%	SD = 33.3%

Such differences in the two Christian schools could be the result of the diversity of the faculty (CA-2 has a majority foreign faculty, whereas CA-1 does not) or a more tolerant interpretation of Christian ideals. Research has demonstrated that Christianity and LGBT have incongruencies, but some research has also shown that Christianity can be tolerant or even accepting of LGBT. These discrepancies are supported in psychiatrists David M. Barnes and Ilan H. Meyer’s research, which revealed that some religious denominations condemn homosexual behavior while others support all sexual orientations and identities as LGBT has no association to anti-religious values.

However, at nearly all schools, LGBT students’ perceptions of teachers differ from those of their schools (table 3.1). Some of the negativity towards teachers’ tolerance (Tables 3.1 and 3.2) could be related to how students feel about their peers’ tolerance (Tables 1.1 and 1.2).

LGBT Participants (**Table 3.1**) re: Q3. Teachers in my school are accepting of sexual minority groups.

CA-1	CA-2	UA-3	UA-4	UA-5	UA-6
SA = 0.0% A = 0.0% N = 0.0% D = 0.0% SD = 100.0%	SA = 50.0% A = 0.0% N = 0.0% D = 50.0% SD = 0.0%	N/A*	SA = 0.0% A = 0.0% N = 0.0% D = 100.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 33.3% A = 33.3% N = 33.3% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 0.0% A = 50.0% N = 0.0% D = 50.0% SD = 0.0%

Non-LGBT participants (**Table 3.2**) re: Q3. Teachers in my school are accepting of sexual minority groups.

SA = 83.3% A = 5.6% N = 0.0% D = 11.1% SD = 0.0%	SA = 75.0% A = 0.0% N = 0.0% D = 25.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 0.0% A = 20.0% N = 40.0% D = 40.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 80.0% A = 20.0% N = 0.0% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 77.8% A = 22.2% N = 0.0% D = 0.0% SD = 0.0%	SA = 50.0% A = 25.0% N = 0.0% D = 25.0% SD = 0.0%
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As research demonstrated, teachers' prevention of and intervention of bullying may not have any correlation to the policies of and programs at school (Yoon et al., 2011). Inaction or ineffective action by some teachers who either witness a bullying incident or gain awareness of incidents of bullying would likely create an environment that some students perceive as being unsafe. Additionally, the difference in the responses to questions 2 and 3 by LGBT students at CA-2 (the response about the school was 100% strongly agreed, while that about the teachers was split) may be due to individual teachers' interpretation of and adherence to Christian tenets. A strict adherent would likely be viewed with some negativity by some LGBT students.

UA-5 is the only school that is consistent in having no negative response for questions 2 and 3 by both LGBT and non-LGBT students (Tables 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, and 3.2). This consistency could be due to the school having both a majority of foreign faculty and no religious requirement for the teachers. Furthermore, the school may have incorporated teacher involvement or other programs that have left a majority positive impression on the students.

Overall, knowledge of the ISK and student responses to the survey reveal that acts that can be regarded as bullying continue even in light of stringent policies against bullying, and that there are multiple factors that play into both discrimination and perception. Generally, many responses indicate that students are unsure, or neutral, about their schools, but the population that does indicate a negative or positive side suggests discrepancies marking a lack of inclusivity or provision for sexual minorities. In fact, many students' casual acceptance of what they consider "just teasing" or "just joking" seems indicative of what may be a larger problem: a possible false sense of security that comes from claims and policies of inclusiveness versus the potential harsh reality of discrimination and indignity that LGBT students face in an increasingly hostile environment. Certain participants' perceptions may have been swayed by the lack of concrete evidence for actions against LGBT and further molded by the lack of awareness due to school ignorance.

Interview Analysis

Many pertinent questions remain unanswered because of student confidentiality rules. However, answers to questions that referred to the interviewee's own opinions showed that the interviewees acknowledged that their schools are currently lacking in regulations that provide for the LGBT community. Off-the-cuff responses by the interviewees

suggest that some incidents of bullying may not have been addressed sufficiently. All admitted that they have known students identifying as LGBT, and a majority of those interviewed have also admitted that they have yet to see their schools actively build upon inclusivity for those students. This inadequacy reflects what Yoon et al. and James O'Higgins-Norman found in their research on regulations against LGBT bullying in schools; when teachers do not engage properly with new adaptations, schools and teachers alike are unable to properly help sexual minorities. Furthermore, when asked about how their school's faith plays a role in its school guidelines, interviewees A, B, and D demonstrate that even faculty who are required to be Christian can interpret the Bible in widely different ways. Interviewees A and B indicated that their faith alone could not justify whether or not homosexuality, or being a part of the LGBT community, is a sin whereas interviewee D indicated that being LGBT is a sin. Regardless, all three interviewees recognized that even under Christianity, discrimination against LGBT could not be justified, thus opening the possibility that external factors cause bullying in Christian-affiliated schools.

Additionally, interviewees A and C mentioned another external factor that may influence the schools' decisions: the Korean government. The ISK in this study, being located within Seoul and monitored to a degree by the Korean government, are required to adhere to government regulations. Interviewees A and C acknowledged that because of these regulations, their school must take caution when addressing issues deemed sensitive by the government; as such, there is a possibility that following national guidelines, which are likely based on more conservative ideologies than those that make up the various ISK, could be a restrictive factor for schools trying to promote a safer, more inclusive environment.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that LGBT students' opinions can differ not only from non-LGBT students, but also from those of faculty, policymakers, teachers, and administrators. This disparity in perceptions indicates that LGBT intolerance, discrimination, or bullying may permeate ISK if not dealt with effectively. Furthermore, interviews and short answer survey questions indicate that Christian ideals can vary in individual interpretation; as such, this research disagrees with prior research that proposed Christian ideals as a part of a solution to bullying. In addition, the survey also showed that some students may be misinformed about homosexuality and so believe it to be a mental illness. Such a misconception may be an indication that ISK should consider effective ways to educate students with valid information to dispel such incorrect information. Such programs may also be needed for teachers since some may not have a personal stake in LGBT issues. However, the results also reinforce prior research about the limited effectiveness anti-bullying policies and programs have when investment by the teachers is low and a culture of prejudice remains in the school populace. Thus, any policy and program changes or additions require careful planning and involvement of the faculty in order to create a truly inclusive environment.

Limitations

Although religion in Korea is diverse, most ISK are affiliated with Christianity, if they have a religious affiliation. Thus, the scope of this research did not include ISK of other religious affiliations, such as Islam and Judaism, primarily because such schools in Korea did not meet the required criteria, such as the number of students and /or the existence of a secondary school. Furthermore, the perspectives of those who were of non-Christian faiths were indeterminable because most surveys returned by students were marked by an omission of religious affiliation and because most ISK require their faculty to be Christian.

Another limitation was the inability of the faculty to either participate or respond to the interviews. In some cases, faculty members were unable to schedule meeting times, but in most cases, members could not answer questions about bullying, especially about cases involving students, because of student confidentiality. The varying degrees of freedom of speech on this issue, depending on the school, affected not only the detail of faculty responses and limited

parts of the analyses on schools, but also the participation of some faculty, citing student confidentiality requirements, who declined interview requests outright.

The varying degrees of Westernization in school communities were also a limitation in this study. Although all of the chosen schools are formally recognized as international schools by the Korean government, the choices of the individual school's board or administrators, such as what curricula to adopt, who to hire, and who to admit, can vary significantly. In addition, changes resulting from Korea's national elections can also affect the course that ISK plot. Similarly, students' exposure to western culture or other external factors cannot be controlled due to the anonymous nature of the surveys, as well as the general openness of the survey to the international school community in Korea.

Furthermore, this study was not designed to suggest methods to alleviate any discrepancies between students' opinions and those of the faculty. Nor was this study intended to determine policy. Instead, the study was intentionally limited in scope to determine whether the ISK philosophy created an environment in which the students and faculty agreed. Seeing whether there was an agreement helps determine the degree to which the school provided for the students, in a bullying and inclusivity sense, which was a critical part of the study.

Areas for Future Research

The small scope of this research opens the possibility for a much larger study that could bring in information on external factors that drive LGBT-related bullying. Firstly, broadening the range of participants in surveys and interviews could help track additional perspectives that were not incorporated into this study. Including parents, administrative staff, and the board of trustees, could allow for a clearer picture of the reasons behind decisions that have caused some large discrepancies in how students feel about their schools' tolerance and acceptance. This expansion could also be applied to schools in general; this study focused on six international schools in Seoul, South Korea, but future studies could expand the scope to include both general and international schools outside of this region. Furthermore, factors other than religious affiliations could be used to differentiate between different groups. For example, while class size was not a considered factor in this study due to the smaller sample size and limited time frame, a study that considers the number of students, and thus personalness of classes, could help narrow down another potential catalyst of LGBT inclusion or exclusion.

Secondly, a future study could work with the selected schools to observe specific areas prone to incidents of bullying or areas high in traffic. This plan could be incorporated through additional closed-circuit television systems (CCTVs), or a school task force that monitors selected areas for instances of bullying that may otherwise go unnoticed or unreported. Thirdly, a more long-term study could be developed to track students' opinions, as well as those of the faculty and administrative staff, as students move through different levels of education. Instead of strictly looking at high school students, looking at how students' perceptions of LGBT-bullying change as students go through their first year of middle school, their first year of high school, and their last year of high school could reveal a larger trend of development when it comes to bullying and sexual orientation and identification. Such a study can also reveal if enacted policies can change the established perceptions in a school perceived as discriminatory or maintain an accepting environment in a school already perceived as inclusive.

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