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ABSTRACT

This paper presents data from the 2001 National School Climate Survey on school-related experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students. LGBT students described experiences of homophobic remarks; verbal, physical, and sexual harassment; and comfort within their schools. They described experiences with racial and sexual harassment and feeling unsafe because of sexual orientation, gender expression, religion, or disability and discussed school-based resources and supports. For many respondents, schools were an unsafe and dangerous place where homophobic remarks could frequently be heard, often by faculty and staff. Most respondents reported being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation or gender expression. A large number reported experiencing incidents of physical harassment, physical assault, and sexual harassment. Transgender students reported feeling particularly vulnerable because of their gender expression. Certain schools provided resources to improve LGBT students' quality of life. Many schools had gay-straight alliances, and LGBT people, history, and events were mentioned in classroom curricula. Nevertheless, the number of youth reporting acts of harassment and victimization far outweighed the number of youth reporting such resources. Results underscored the importance of asking youth about their experiences with all forms of prejudice. (Contains 68 figures and 2 tables.) (SM)

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GLSEN

The 2001 National School Climate Survey

The School Related Experiences of our Nations Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth

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The GLSEN 2001
National School Climate Survey:

The School-Related Experiences of Our Nation's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth

Joseph G. Kosciw, M.A., M.S. Ed.

MK Cullen
Public Policy Director

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PREFACE

It's likely that members of many school communities might tell you that anti-gay harassment is not a problem. They might say that there aren't LGBT students in their schools. They might argue that being called names is a normal part of adolescence. They might say that their own children haven't said anything about the problem, or that phrases like "that's so gay" can't hurt.

But these perceptions couldn't be more untrue. As the nearly 1,000 students from 48 states who took The National School Climate Survey told us when we revisited the study this year. They told us that their experiences were full of hurtful remarks: that 84% of them had heard anti-gay comments like "faggot" or "dyke" frequently or often; that over 90% of them had heard the phrase "that's so gay." And the experience can be exacerbated for young women and youth of color, who also experienced pervasive racism and sexism during their school days.

And they told us that this harassment and the overt violence that all too often accompanies it takes a toll on their ability to be a full participant in school life. Many fear for their safety. Some have skipped class, or entire days of school, because of it. However, if young people had in-school supports — such as gay-straight alliances or supportive teachers — the situation brightens dramatically.

GLSEN's National School Climate Survey is the only nationally represented study of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students' experiences in school. While we have learned much about school climate for those students, there is much left to learn. And there is much work to do to ensure that, for LGBT and all students, experiences like the ones documented here become the exception, not the rule.

Sincerely,

Kevin Jennings

Executive Director

INTRODUCTION

The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender[1] (LGBT) students in schools have been under-documented. For this reason, GLSEN conducted its first National School Climate Survey in 1999 to assess the experiences of LGBT youth with regard to experiences of school-based harassment and victimization, the frequency with which they heard homophobic language in their schools and their overall comfort in school. Results from this first survey documented how homophobic language was pervasive in our nation's schools, that harassment was not an uncommon experience for LGBT youth and that youth were often uncomfortable in their schools because of their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.[2]

GLSEN's National School Climate Survey is the only study to examine school-specific experiences of LGBT-identified youth nationally; there exists no other data with which to compare the prevalence of school-based harassment and assault of the youth in our study. Although the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) conducts the National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), a biennial school-based survey documenting the risk behaviors of our nation's high school students, the CDC does not ask questions about sexual orientation or gender identity or about LGBT-related harassment in school. Several states, however, conduct a state-level YRBS and have included questions pertaining to sexual orientation or lesbian/gay-related harassment.

The only nationally representative study on adolescents that includes information on same-sex romantic attraction is the 1995 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), a federally funded, longitudinal study of adolescent health. Recent findings from Add Health indicated that sexual minority youth (defined as those youth who reported same-sex attraction) were at greater risk for both being in fights that needed medical treatment and for witnessing violence.[3] Sexual minority youth also had a greater likelihood to perpetrate violence, which was, however, related to the increased likelihood of being a victim of violent attacks. The questions in the Add Health study about violence were not specifically about events in school. Although it is likely that many of these reports of violence were about school-related events, it is also possible that such events occurred outside of school. An additional set of findings from Add Health found that sexual minority youth often reported less positive attitudes about school and more school troubles.[4] These findings give some indication of the importance of having supportive faculty or staff in school for sexual minority youth – having positive feelings about teachers was related to having fewer school troubles.

1. "Transgender" is used to describe a wide range of identities and experiences including transsexual individuals, cross-dressers, intersexed individuals and individuals, regardless of sexual orientation, whose appearance or characteristics are perceived to be gender atypical. 2. "Gender identity" refers to a person's internal sense of being either male or female or something other than exclusively male or female. "Gender expression," on the other hand, refers to external characteristics and behaviors that are socially defined as masculine or feminine. 3. Russell, S. T., Franz, B. T. & Driscoll, A. K. (2001). Same-sex romantic attraction and experiences of violence in adolescence. American Journal of Public Health, 91, 903-906. 4. Russell, S. T., Seif, H. & Truong, N. L. (2001). School outcomes of sexual minority youth in the United States: evidence from a national study. Journal of Adolescence, 24, 111-127.

Given the limited attention paid by federal, state and local policy makers to LGBT youth and because GLSEN's fight to make all schools safe for LGBT students is an on-going one, it is important for us to keep informed on the experiences of LGBT students in their schools. For this reason, we conducted our second national survey – the 2001 National School Climate Survey. As with the 1999 survey, we asked LGBT youth about homophobic remarks in their schools, experiences of verbal, physical and sexual harassment and their comfort in school. In order to get a fuller picture of the lives of LGBT students in their schools, we also asked LGBT youth about experiences with race- and gender-based harassment and about feeling unsafe because of several personal characteristics, including sexual orientation, gender expression, religion and disability. Also, we thought it was important to understand how school-based resources and supports, such as having a gay-straight alliance, curricula that are inclusionary of the lives of LGBT persons or a supportive teacher or counselor, can improve the quality of school life for LGBT students. Thus, we also asked youth about such resources and supports in their schools.

METHODOLOGY

In order to establish a more representative sample of LGBT youth, we had two methods of obtaining participants. In the first, youth were contacted through community-based groups or service organizations serving LGBT youth. Fifty of such groups or organizations were randomly chosen from a master list of over 200. Each group was then invited to participate in the survey and surveys were then sent for the youth to complete. Of the original 50 groups, 35 were able to have youth complete the survey. A total of 358 surveys of LGBT youth in middle school or high school were completed through these community-based groups. Obtaining LGBT youth solely from community-based groups could potentially lead to a biased sample – youth participating in these organizations may be more "out" or more comfortable with their sexual orientation or their gender expression. Also, these groups more likely attract youth who are in close geographic vicinity and youth who live in an area without supports for LGBT youth would not be represented. For this reason, we also made the National School Climate Survey available on the Internet via GLSEN's website. Notices about our on-line survey were posted on LGBT youth-oriented listserves and electronic bulletin boards. Also, notices were emailed to GLSEN chapters and to youth advocacy organizations, such as Advocates for Youth and National Youth Advocacy Coalition. Through the on-line version, we obtained completed surveys from an additional 546 youth. Data collection through community-based groups occurred from the end of May to the middle of August 2001. Data collection through the on-line version occurred from June to the middle of August 2001.

A total of 904 lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender youth from 48 states and the District of Columbia completed the survey. (Youth who were not in a K-12 school during the 2000-2001 school year and heterosexual youth, except those identifying as transgender, were not included in the final total.) The demographics of the sample are shown in Table 1 and the reported

Table 1: Demographics of Survey Participants

Race/Ethnicity	White	71.9%	(N=628)
	African-American/Black	6.1%	(N=53)
	Latino/a	8.7%	(N=76)
	Asian/Pacific Islander	5.3%	(N=46)
	Native American	4.5%	(N=39)
	Multiracial	1.8%	(N=16)
	Other race/ethnicity	1.8%	(N=16)
Gender	Male	52.0%	(N=458)
	Female	43.7%	(N=385)
	Transgender	3.2%	(N=28)
	Other gender identities	1.1%	(N=10)
Sexual Orientation	Gay or Lesbian	60.6%	(N=534)
	Bisexual	32.5%	(N=286)
	Other sexual orientations	6.9%	(N=61)
Grade	6th grade	0.3%	(N=3)
	7th grade	1.6%	(N=14)
	8th grade	5.4%	(N=46)
	9th grade	18.0%	(N=155)
	10th grade	21.5%	(N=185)
	11th grade	28.3%	(N=243)
	12th grade	24.8%	(N=213)
	Average age = 16.4 years		
Region	Northeast	33.2%	(N=289)
	South	25.0%	(N=218)
	Midwest	19.4%	(N=169)
	West	22.4%	(N=195)

characteristics of the schools they attended are shown in Table 2. The majority of the youth identified as white or European-American (71.9%); slightly more than half identified as male and the majority identified as gay or lesbian. Over half of the sample reported being in 11th or 12th grade during the 2000-2001 school year.

Table 2: School Characteristics

K through 12 school	9.4%	(N=81)	**Grade Levels**
Elementary school	0.1%	(N=1)	
Lower school (elementary and middle school grades)	0.5%	(N=4)	
Middle school	5.4%	(N=47)	
Upper school (middle school and high school grades)	6.1%	(N=53)	
High school	78.5%	(N=680)	
Urban	26.2%	(N=226)	**Community Type**
Suburban	55.3%	(N=477)	
Rural	18.5%	(N=160)	
Public school	88.4%	(N=787)	**School Type**
Charter school	*12.5% of public school youth*	*(N=87)*	
Magnet school	*18.4% of public school youth*	*(N=132)*	
Religious-affiliated school	6.7%	(N=60)	
Other independent or private school	4.8%	(N=43)	

Figure 1

Frequency of Hearing "That's so gay" in School

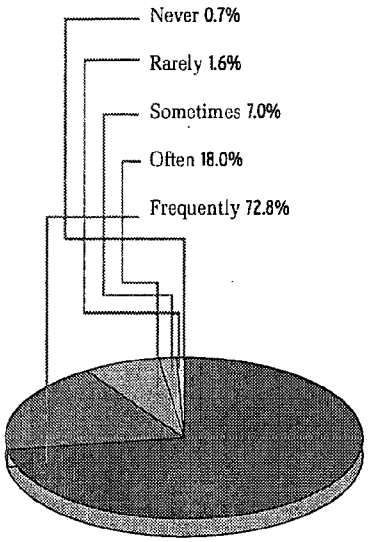
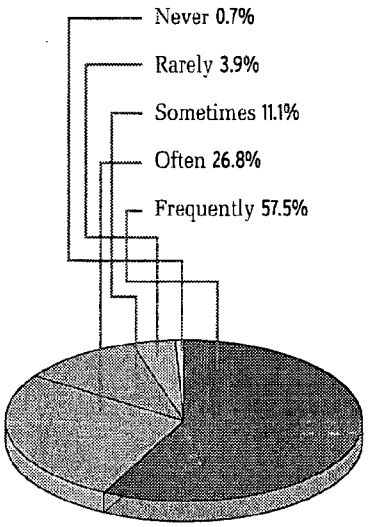


Figure 2

Frequency of Hearing Other Homophobic Remarks in School Such as "Fag" or "Dyke"



RESULTS

Biased Language in Schools[5]

GLSEN works toward creating safer schools, schools where hallways and classrooms are free from biased language. One aspect of school climate assessed in our 2001 survey was the frequency of biased language heard in schools and how students and faculty responded to the use of such language. In the 2001 NSCS, we asked youth how often they heard homophobic remarks (such as "that's so gay," "faggot" or "dyke"), racist remarks (such as "nigger" or "spic"), and sexist remarks (such as calling a girl a bitch or remarking that girls are inferior to boys). In addition to frequency, we also asked who were the perpetrators of such remarks, whether students and/or faculty, and whether anyone intervened when these remarks were made.

Homophobic Remarks

As with the 1999 NSCS, youth were asked about the frequency of hearing homophobic remarks, such as "faggot" or "dyke," in their school. However, in the 2001 survey, we also asked youth how often they had heard the expression "That's so gay" or "You're so gay" used in their school. In these expressions, the word "gay" is meant to convey something that is considered bad or valueless, as a synonym for "dumb" or "stupid." As shown in figures 1 and 2, 90.8% of the youth reported hearing the expression frequently or often and 84.3% reported hearing other homophobic remarks, such as "faggot" or "dyke," frequently or often.[6] Both types of homophobic remarks combined, 94% of youth reported having heard them frequently or often (see Figure 3).

Youth were also asked who made homophobic remarks – students and/or faculty/staff – and where they heard such remarks in school, such as in their classes, the hallways and the cafeteria.

- Almost all of youth reported hearing homophobic remarks from other students – 84.6% reported hearing such remarks often or frequently from other students (see Figure 4).
- Almost half of these youth (46.5%) reported that they heard homophobic remarks from most of the students at their school.
- About one-quarter of the youth (23.6%) reported hearing homophobic remarks from faculty or school staff at least some of the time (see Figure 5).
- As shown in Figure 6, youth reported frequently hearing homophobic remarks throughout their schools. Youth most frequently heard homophobic remarks in more open or less supervised areas of school, such as the hallways, the school grounds and in the cafeteria:

5. In this part of the survey, we asked youth about their experiences with hearing homophobic, sexist and racist remarks, in general, in their schools. Biased language directed towards an individual, such as homophobic remarks directed toward an LGBT person or racist remarks directed toward a person of color, would be considered an experience of verbal harassment. The experience of LGBT youth with regard to such verbal harassment is discussed later in this report.
6. Some LGBT youth themselves may use terms traditionally seen as homophobic, such as "faggot," among themselves. Similarly, racist terms may sometimes be among of youth of color and not have the same racist meaning as used by white youth. In this survey, we did not ask youth to differentiate these types of usage. However, given the questions were phrased about "homophobic remarks" or "racist remarks," we assume that the youth in our survey were reporting the frequency with which these terms were heard being used in an offensive manner.

- ❑ Hallways: 85.0% of youth reported "frequently" or "often"
- ❑ School Grounds: 73.1% of youth reported "frequently" or "often"
- ❑ Cafeteria: 73.0% of youth reported "frequently" or "often"

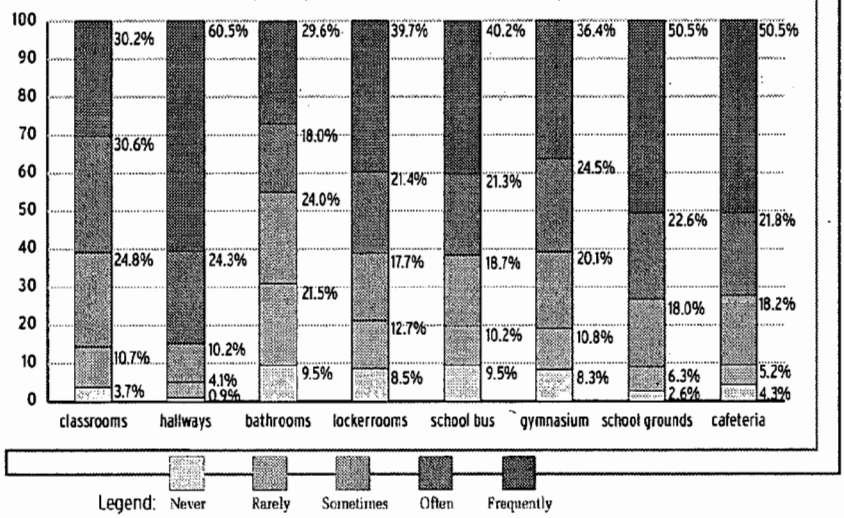
- Homophobic remarks are more commonly heard from students when faculty or school staff are not present. Only about one-third of the youth in our survey reported that faculty or staff were present most of the time or always when homophobic remarks were made.

- Incidents of homophobic remarks often go unchallenged (see Figure 7). Almost half of the youth reported that faculty or staff were either never present when such remarks were made or never intervened when present. Less than one-quarter of the youth reported that faculty or staff intervened always or most of the time.

- Other students were reportedly less likely than faculty to intervene when homophobic remarks were made (see Figure 8). Almost 90% of youth in our survey reported that other students never intervened or intervened only some of the time when homophobic remarks were made (89.6%).

Figure 6

Frequency of Homophobic Remarks by Location



Racist Remarks

The youth reported that it is not uncommon to hear racist language in school. Over a third of youth (35.1%) reported hearing racist remarks, such as "nigger" or "spic," in their schools frequently or often (see Figure 9).

Figure 3

Frequency of Hearing any Kind of Homophobic Remark

(combined hearing "that's so gay" and hearing other remarks)

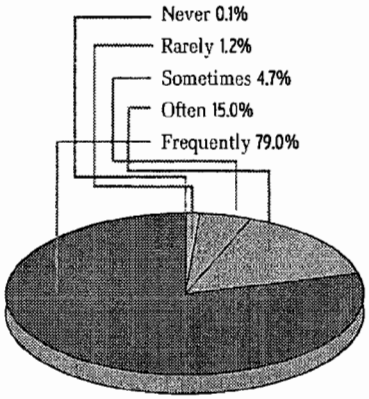


Figure 4

Frequency of Hearing Homophobic Remarks from Students

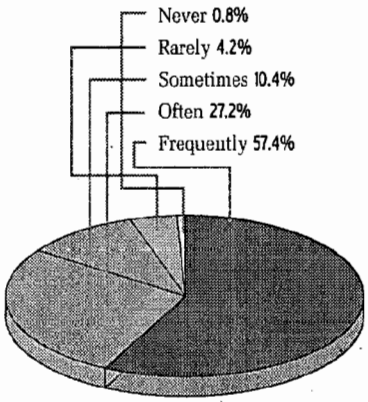


Figure 5

Frequency of Hearing Homophobic Remarks from Faculty

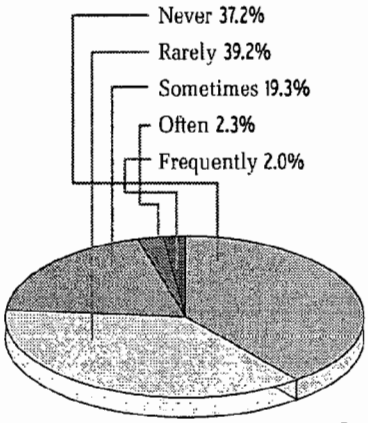


Figure 7

How often Faculty Intervene when Hearing Homophobic Remarks

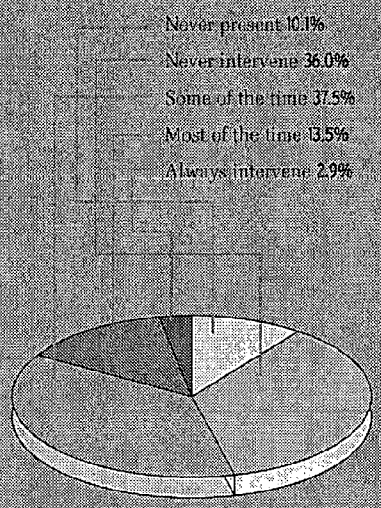


Figure 8

How often Students Intervene when Homophobic Remarks are Made

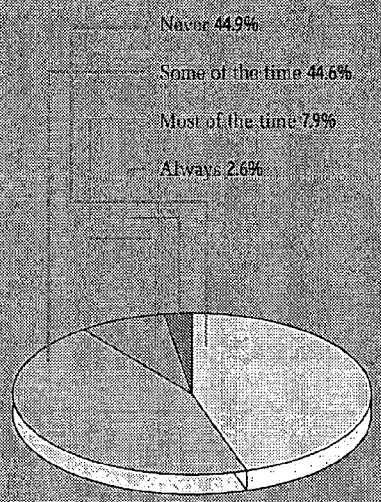


Figure 9

Frequency of Hearing Racist Remarks in School

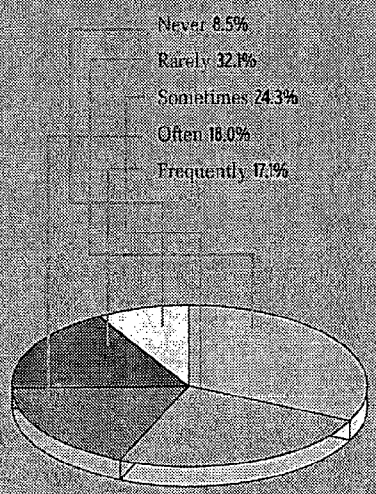


Figure 10

Frequency of Hearing Racist Remarks from Faculty

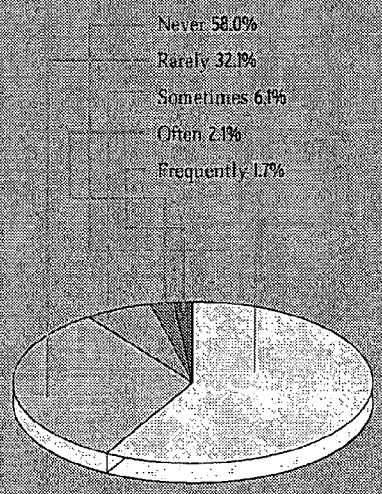
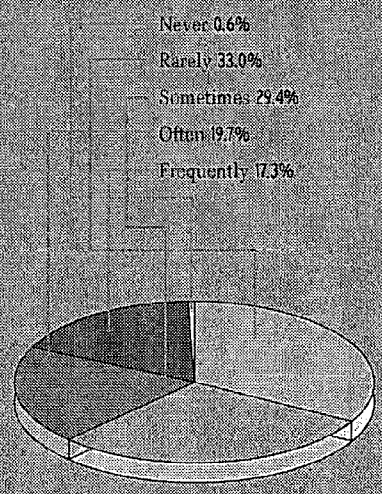


Figure 11

Frequency of Hearing Racist Remarks from Other Students



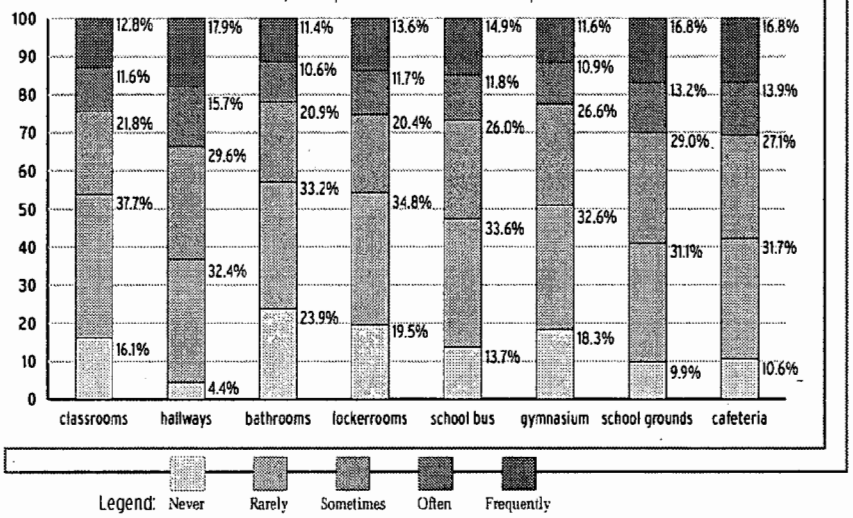
It appears that other students were the main perpetrators of racist remarks in school (see Figures 10 and 11). Whereas over a third of youth reported hearing racist remarks from other students either frequently or often (37%), only a very small percentage of youth reported such remarks frequently or often from faculty or staff at their schools (3.8%).

Racist remarks were often unprotested by other students – only 35% of the youth in our survey reported that other students intervened most of the time or always (see Figure 12). However, almost half of the youth reported that faculty or staff intervened (48.9%) either most of the time or always (see Figure 13).

As with homophobic remarks, it appears that racist remarks are more often made when faculty or school staff are not present. Racist remarks are more often heard in hallways, on school grounds or in the cafeteria – places that may be less supervised by staff (see Figure 14). Also, almost 20% of youth reported that faculty were never present when racist remarks were made (19.7%).

Figure 14

Frequency of Racist Remarks by Location



Sexist Remarks

We also asked youth how often they heard sexist remarks in their school, such as someone being called a "bitch" or comments about girls' bodies or talk of girls being inferior to boys. According to the youth, sexist remarks are also pervasive in their schools. The majority of youth (81.7%) reported hearing sexist remarks frequently or often (see Figure 15).

As with racist and homophobic remarks, sexist remarks were more commonly heard from other students. As shown in Figure 16, almost 80% reported hearing them frequently or often from other students (78.5%) and fewer than 5%

Figure 12

How often Students Intervene when Hearing Racist Remarks

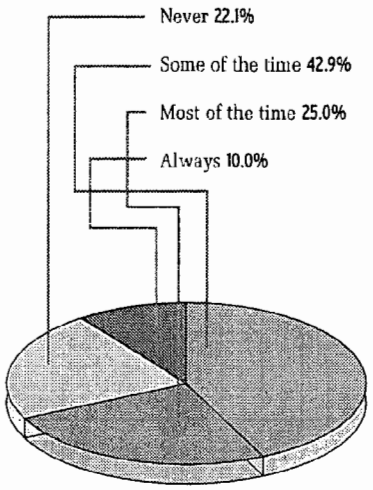


Figure 13

How often Faculty Intervene when Hearing Racist Remarks

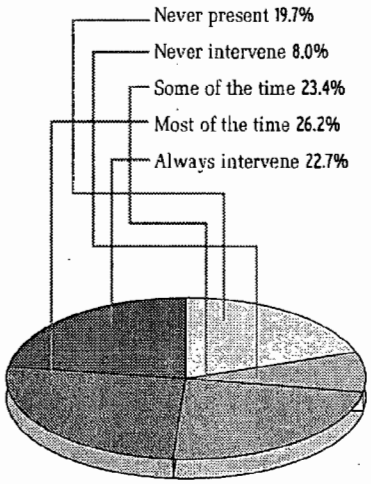


Figure 15

Frequency of Hearing Sexist Remarks in School

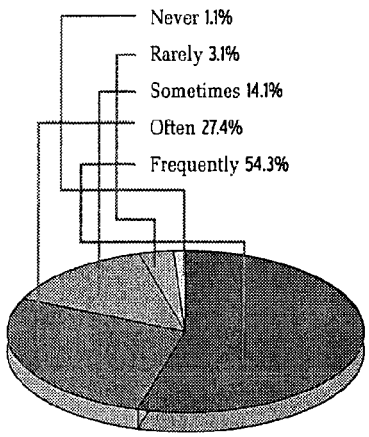


Figure 16

Frequency of Hearing Sexist Remarks from Other Students

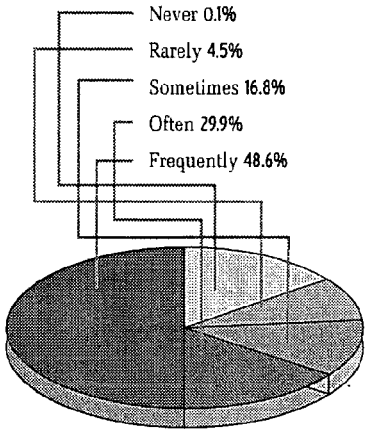


Figure 17

Frequency of Hearing Sexist Remarks from School Faculty or Staff

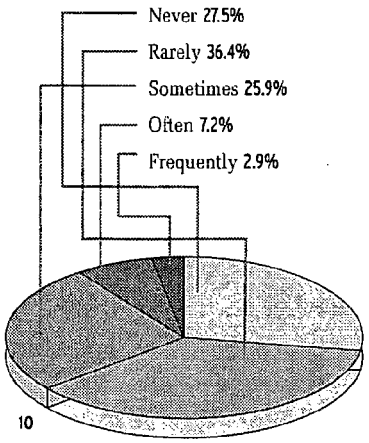
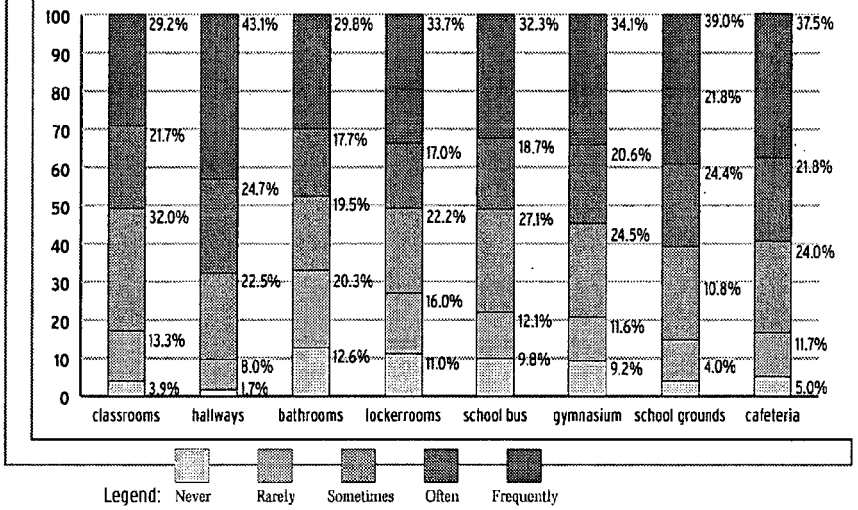


Figure 18

Frequency of Sexist Remarks by Location



reported that they never or rarely hear sexist remarks (4.6%). Almost half reported hearing sexist remarks from most of the students in their school (43.3%). Over one-third of youth (36.1%) also reported hearing sexist remarks from faculty or school staff at least sometimes with 10% of youth reporting that these comments came from faculty or staff frequently or often (see Figure 17).

As with reports of racist and homophobic language in schools, youth reported that sexist remarks were more often made when faculty or staff would likely be less present. Sexist remarks were more frequently heard in hallways, on school grounds and in the cafeteria. As shown in Figure 18, almost 70% of youth (67.8%) reported hearing sexist remarks in school hallways frequently or often and 60% (60.8%) reported hearing such remarks on school grounds frequently or often. It is important to note that even in parts of the school where sexist remarks are less common, sizeable numbers of youth still reported often hearing sexist remarks. For example, about half of the youth (50.9%) reported hearing sexist remarks in their classrooms often or frequently.

Perhaps because of where sexist remarks are made, 9.2% of youth reported that faculty or school staff were never present when hearing sexist remarks (see Figure 19). In addition to those youth who said faculty or staff were never present to intervene, 12% of youth reported that faculty/staff never intervened when they were present when sexist remarks were made. Thus, considering both groups of youth, almost a quarter of the youth reported faculty were either absent or inactive when it came to sexist remarks being made in school. Other students were reportedly less likely to intervene than the faculty/staff – three-quarters (76%) of the youth reported that other students either never intervened or intervened only some of the time (see Figure 20).

Differences Among Racism, Sexism and Homophobia

Racist, sexist and homophobic remarks all were common to our nation's schools, as reported by the LGBT youth in our survey. The frequency of homophobic remarks was higher than that of sexist remarks and racist remarks and the frequency of sexist remarks was higher than that of racist remarks. It is possible that school norms about using racist language were better than other types of remarks. However, it is also possible that homophobic or sexist remarks were more salient for the LGBT youth in this survey than were racist remarks and thus the youth were more attentive to or aware of them in their schools.

It is also interesting to note that youth were likelier to report that faculty or school staff were present when homophobic or sexist remarks were made than when racist remarks were made (see Figure 21). However, when faculty or staff were present, they were reported by the youth to have been less likely to intervene when homophobic remarks were made than when racist and sexist remarks were made. Again, it is possible that these reported differences are related to the difference in saliency of homophobia, sexism and racism for the LGBT youth in the sample. However, these differences may indicate differences in norms in our nation's schools with regard to biased language. Youth may believe that making racist remarks in front of school staff would be likelier to result in punishment as compared to making homophobic or sexist remarks. Faculty and staff may be likelier to intervene when racist remarks are made compared to sexist and homophobic remarks because of school policies or school norms or cultural norms around expressed tolerance for racism or because of personal beliefs with regard to racism.

Figure 19

How often Faculty Intervene when Hearing Sexist Remarks

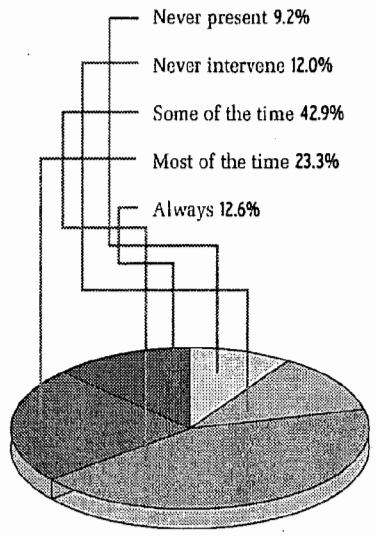


Figure 20

How Often other Students Intervene when Hearing Sexist Remarks

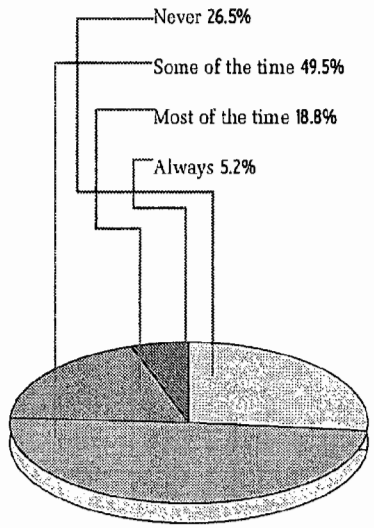
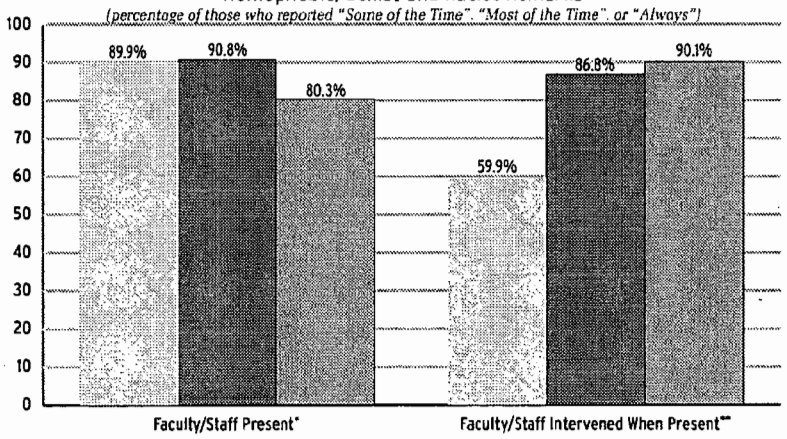


Figure 21

Presence of and Intervention by Faculty/Staff Regarding Homophobic, Sexist and Racist Remarks

(percentage of those who reported "Some of the Time", "Most of the Time", or "Always")



* The "homophobic remarks" ans "sexist remarks" groups were significantly higher than the "racist remarks" group but not different from one another. $p<.05$

** All three groups were significantly different. $p<.05$

Legend: Homophobic Sexist Racist

Figure 23

Frequency of Missing Classes in the Past Month Because of Feeling Unsafe

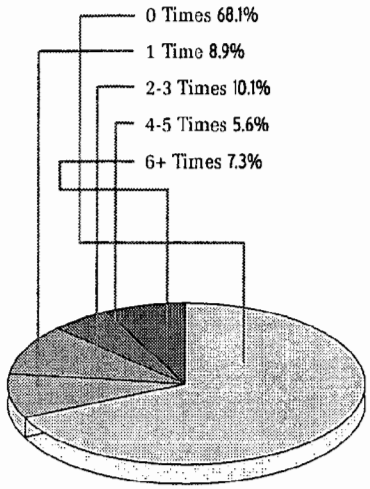
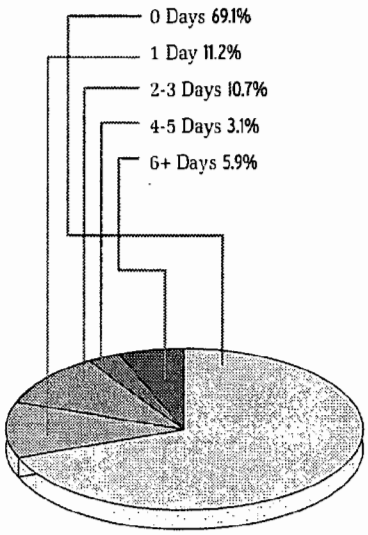


Figure 24

Frequency of Missing Days of School in the Past Month Because of Feeling Unsafe



Overall Safety in School

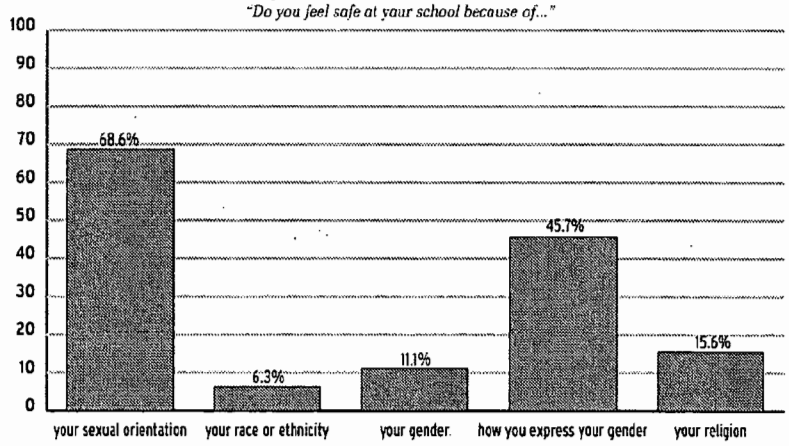
Hearing homophobic, racist or sexist remarks in school, regardless of whether these remarks are aimed at any particular student, can create a hostile environment for the students. LGBT youth may feel unsafe in their school particularly because of their sexual orientation or their gender expression. As with other youth, LGBT youth may also feel unsafe in their schools for other personal characteristics, such as their race or ethnicity. To assess overall feelings of safety in school, we asked the youth whether they felt unsafe because of their sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, race/ethnicity, religion or because of an actual or perceived disability. As shown in Figure 22, youth most commonly reported that they felt unsafe in their school because of their sexual orientation or their gender expression; with over two-thirds of youth (68.6%) reporting that they felt unsafe in their school because of their sexual orientation and almost half reporting that they felt unsafe because of their gender expression (45.7%).[7] As also shown in Figure 22, over 10% of youth reported feeling unsafe because of their religion and because of their gender. Less than one-quarter of all youth in the survey consistently reported that they felt safe in their school with regard to all of the characteristics mentioned (20.7%).

For LGBT youth, feeling that school is a hostile or unsafe place may interfere with their ability to learn. We asked youth in our survey how many times they had missed a class or missed a full day of school in the past month because they felt uncomfortable or unsafe in school. As shown in Figures 23 and 24, 31.9% of youth had skipped a class at least once in the past month and 30.8% had missed at least one entire day of school in the past month because they had felt unsafe. These findings are consistent with those from the 1999 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey that found 19.1% of sexual minority students (those who identified themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual and/or

Figure 22

Percentage of Youth Who Felt Unsafe at School

"Do you feel safe at your school because of..."



7. Percentages of youth reporting "yes" to each of the five categories were significantly different from one another. 8. Findings from the 1999 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey are available from the Massachusetts Department of Education: http://www.doe.mass.edu/lss/yrbs99. 9. More information on this program is also available from the Massachusetts Department of Education: http://www.doe.mass.edu/lss/program/sscn.html.

had a history of same-sex sexual contact) did not go to school at least once in the preceding month because they felt unsafe compared to 5.6% of other students.[8] The percentage from the Massachusetts study was lower than that in the our national study and may be because of the statewide attention paid to creating safe schools for LGBT students through the Massachusetts Safe Schools Program for Gay and Lesbian Students.[9]

Experiences of Harassment and Assault in School

Prior research has shown that verbal harassment can quickly turn into physical harassment and assault in some school environments. A recent report from Human Rights Watch, the largest human rights organization in the country, found that nearly all of the 140 LGBT youth interviewed reported incidents of verbal or other non-physical harassment in school because of their real or perceived sexual orientation and, when left unchecked, such incidents of harassment often escalated into more serious forms of victimization, such as physical harassment and abuse.[10] In order to understand why many LGBT youth feel unsafe in their schools and to document the incidence of harassment and violence toward LGBT youth in schools, we asked the LGBT youth in our survey about their experiences with harassment and assault in school.

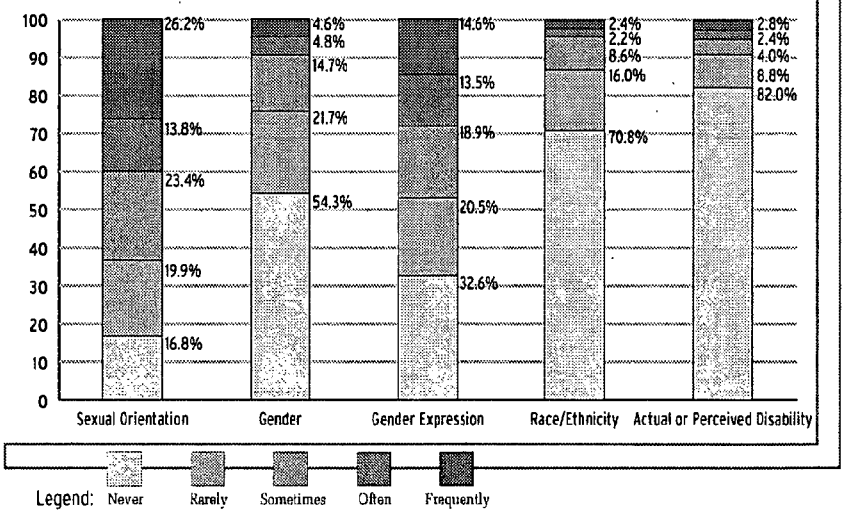
We asked the youth in our survey how frequently in the past school year had they been verbally and physically harassed, physically assaulted or sexually harassed. Additionally, youth were asked whether they thought such harassment or assault was related to their sexual orientation, their gender, how they express their gender, their race or ethnicity and because of an actual or perceived disability. Youth were asked whether such incidents happened "frequently," "often," "sometimes," "rarely" or "never."

Verbal Harassment

Youth were asked whether they had experienced verbal harassment (being called names, being threatened, etc.) in the past school year because of their sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, race/ethnicity or a real or perceived disability. Figure 25 illustrates the youth responses regarding verbal harassment in school. The majority of LGBT youth in our survey reported at least some experience of verbal harassment because of their sexual orientation[11] and over one-quarter of the youth (26.2%)

Figure 25

Frequency of Verbal Harassment in the Past School Year



10. Human Rights Watch (2001). Hatred in the Hallways: Violence and Discrimination Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Students in U.S. Schools. New York: Human Rights Watch. 11. Participants who indicated that harassment or assault had occurred "rarely," "sometimes," "often" and "frequently" were considered to have experienced it at least once in the past school year.

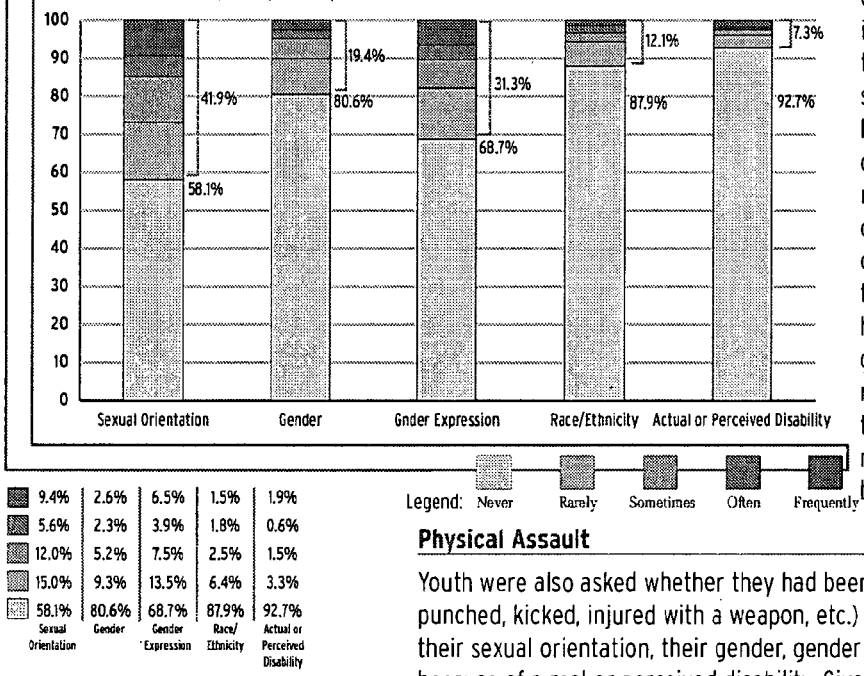
reported that such harassment happened frequently. The majority also reported verbal harassment because of their gender expression with over 10% reporting that it occurred frequently. Also, almost half of the youth also reported verbal harassment because of their gender.

Physical Harassment

Youth were asked whether they had been physically harassed (being shoved, pushed, etc.) in the past school year because of their sexual orientation, their gender, gender expression, race/ethnicity or because of a real or perceived disability. As illustrated in Figure 26, over one-third of the youth reported at least some experience of physical harassment because of their sexual orientation and almost 10% reported that such harassment occurred frequently. Also, about one-third of youth reported that they had experienced physical harassment because of their gender expression and about 20% reported that it was because of their gender. Over 10% of youth reported physical harassment because of their race or ethnicity.

Figure 26

Frequency of Physical Harassment in the Past School Year



Physical Assault

Youth were also asked whether they had been physically assaulted (being punched, kicked, injured with a weapon, etc.) in the past school year because of their sexual orientation, their gender, gender expression, race/ethnicity or because of a real or perceived disability. Given the extreme nature of physical assault, it is not surprising that fewer youth reported being assaulted in school than reported being verbally or physically harassed. Nevertheless, over 20% of youth reported some incident of physical assault in the past year because of their sexual orientation, with over 5% reporting that it happened frequently or often, and over 10% of youth reported having been assaulted because of their gender expression (see Figure 27).

Sexual Harassment

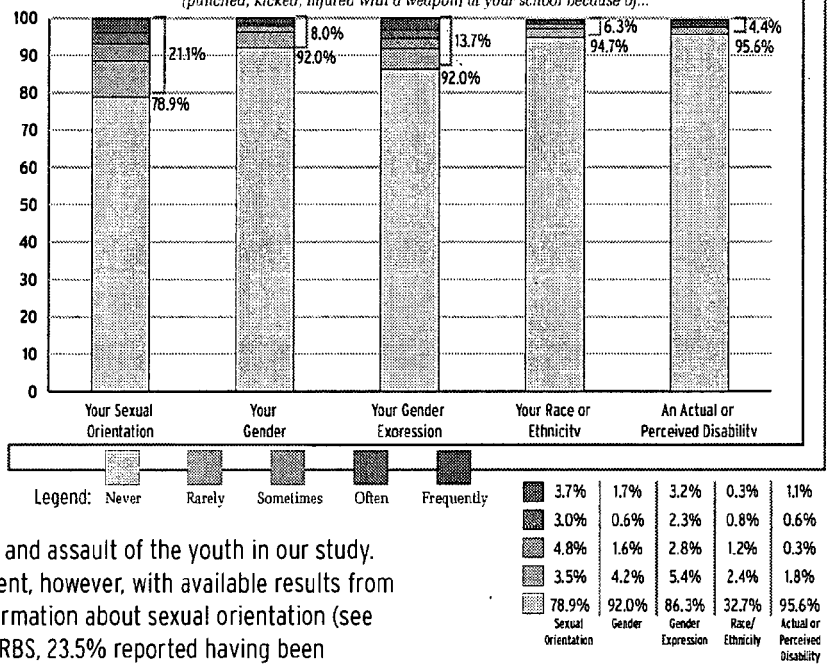
Another important finding from the Human Rights Watch report was the sexual nature of harassment of LGBT youth in school, particularly experienced by lesbian and bisexual young women and transgender youth. In GLSEN's 2001 National School Climate Survey, youth were asked how often they had been sexually harassed at their school, such as sexual remarks made toward them or someone touching them inappropriately. As shown in Figure 28, almost two-

thirds of youth (65.4%) reported having been sexually harassed during the past school year. The frequency of sexual harassment was higher for female and transgender youth in the sample: 74.2% of female youth and 73.7% of transgender youth reported being sexually harassed during the past school year compared to 57.8% of male youth.

Figure 27

Frequency of Physical Assault in the Past Year

"In the past year, how often have you been physically assaulted (punched, kicked, injured with a weapon) at your school because of..."

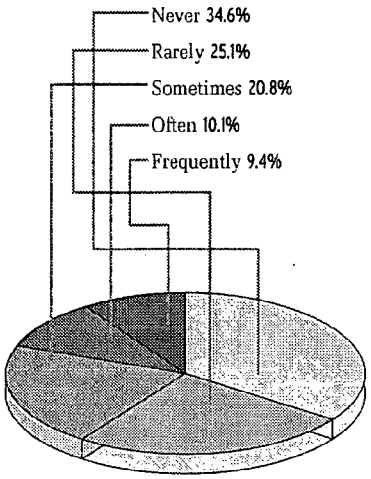


Comparisons with Population Based Studies

As GLSEN's National School Climate Survey is the only study to examine the school-related experiences of LGBT-identified youth nationally, there exists no other data with which to compare the prevalence of harassment and assault of the youth in our study. Results from the 2001 NSCS are consistent, however, with available results from those state or local YRBSs that ask information about sexual orientation (see Figure 29). In the 1999 Massachusetts YRBS, 23.5% reported having been threatened or injured with a weapon compared to 21.1% of youth in the NSCS who reported having been physically assaulted, which includes being injured with a weapon.[12] In the 1999 Seattle YRBS, 41% of gay, lesbian or bisexual students reported that they had been harassed or attacked because of their sexual orientation compared to 41.9% of youth in the NSCS who reported having been physically harassed.[13] It is important to note that direct comparisons are difficult to make because all three studies ask about harassment and victimization in slightly different ways. However, the comparative results give us some indication that youth in GLSEN's national survey were reporting similar experiences to those youth in Massachusetts and in Seattle.

Figure 28

Frequency of Sexual Harassment in the Past Year



Other population-based studies that ask about sexual harassment examine differences by gender but not by sexual orientation. In the Seattle YRBS, 48% of high school girls and 20% of high school boys reported offensive sexual comments made to them at or on the way to or from school (see Figure 30). In a 2001 national study of high school students, from the AAUW Educational Foundation,[14] 48% of girls and 34% of boys reported that they had been the target of sexual comments, jokes, gestures or looks. The findings from our 2001 study may reflect a higher incidence of sexual harassment experienced by LGBT students compared to the experiences of the general population of youth. It is also important to note that none of the aforementioned studies specifically include youth who identify as transgender.[15] Also, none ask about harassment related to gender identity or expression.

12. Findings from the 1999 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey are available from the Massachusetts Department of Education: http://www.doe.mass.edu/lss/yrbs99. 13. The Seattle study reported percentage of reported harassment for homosexual students (49%) and for bisexual students (39%). The 41.0% reported in this report is an extrapolation of those two percentages based on the size of each group. Information about the Seattle Teen Health Survey, can be received from: Pamela Hillard, Health Education Program Manager (CDC Grant Manager), Seattle Public Schools, Comprehensive Health, Mail Stop AD-524, Building 100, Room 107, 1330 North 90th Street, Seattle, Washington 98103 or e-mail: phillard@cks.ssd.k12.wa.us. 14. AAUW Educational Foundation (2001). Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing and Sexual Harassment in School. Washington, DC. For information on this report, visit www.aauw.org. 15. The surveys only allowed youth to identify as male or female. It is very possible that transgender youth were included in the sample but no allowances were made for them to identify as such.

Figure 29

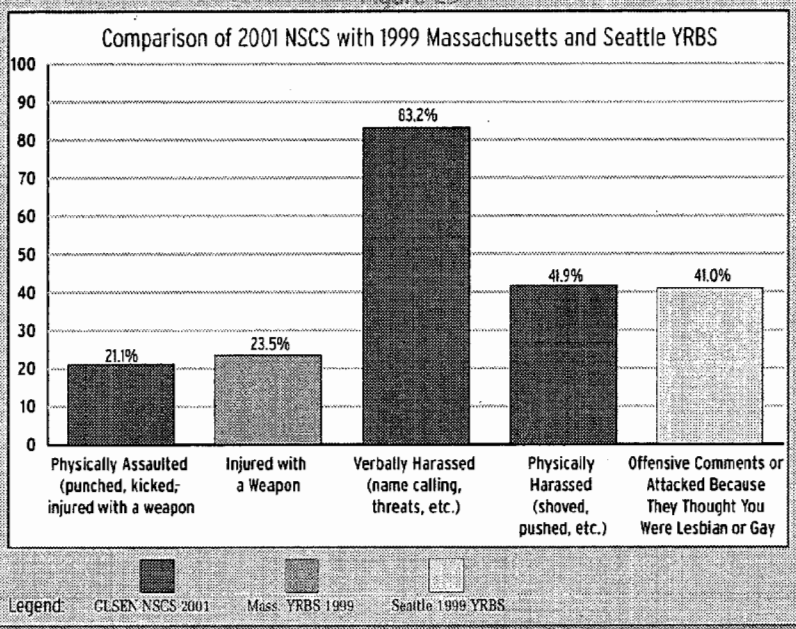


Figure 30

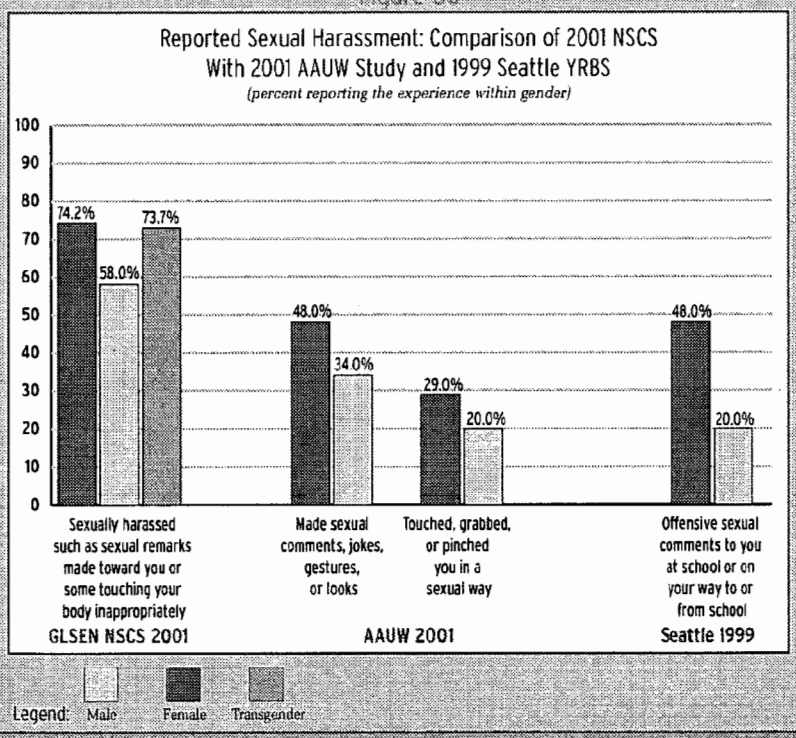


Figure 31

Comfort in Attending School Dance or Prom

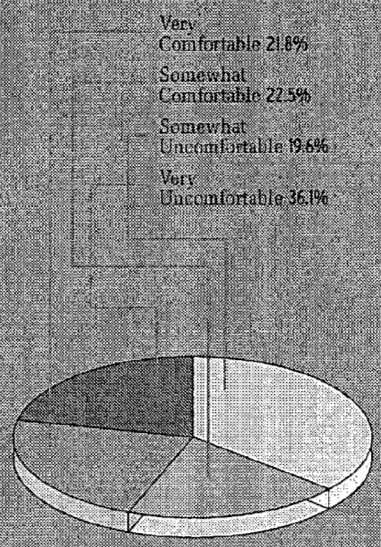
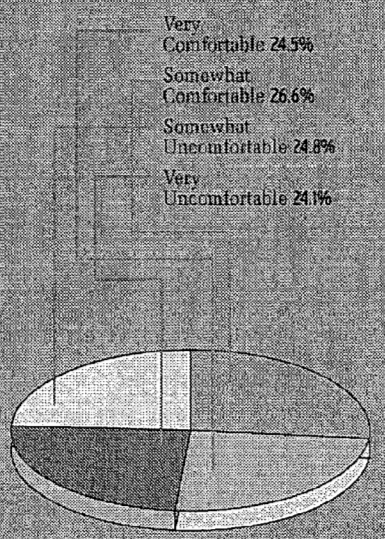


Figure 32

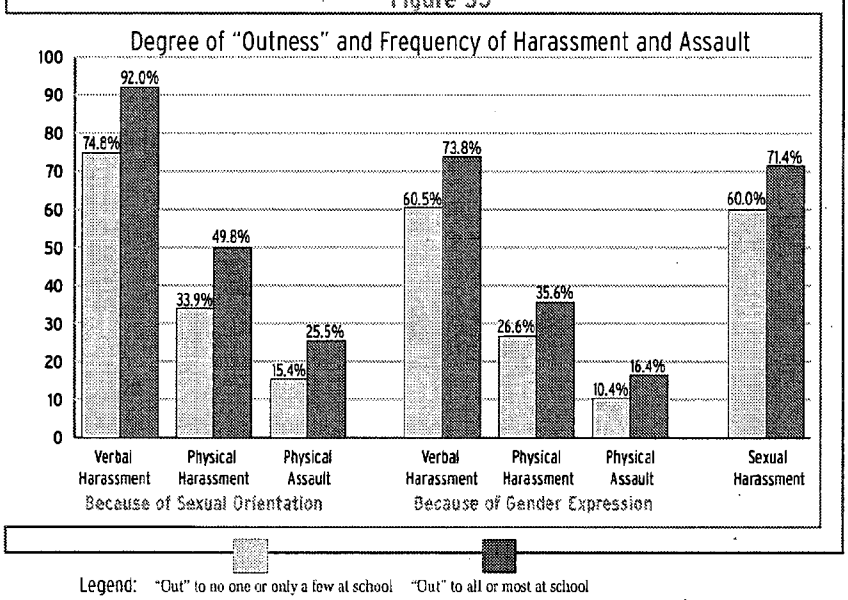
Comfort in Raising LGBT Issues in Class



Participation in School Events

Even when youth feel safe from physical harm in their school, they may not be comfortable with openly acknowledging that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender and may not be able to participate as fully in school as other youth do. For example, less than half of the LGBT youth in our survey reported they would be comfortable going to a school dance or the prom with a date of the same gender (see Figure 31) and only half reported that they would be comfortable raising LGBT issues in the classroom (see Figure 32). Some LGBT youth may also feel that they cannot acknowledge their sexual orientation or gender identity for safety reasons. Those youth who were not open about their sexual orientation were less likely to report harassment and assault because of their sexual orientation and less likely to report incidents of sexual harassment (see Figure 33). Thus, for many LGBT youth, being open and honest about their identity may pose greater risk for harm in school.

Figure 33



Legend: "Out" to no one or only a few at school "Out" to all or most at school

Demographic Comparisons on School Safety, Harassment and Assault

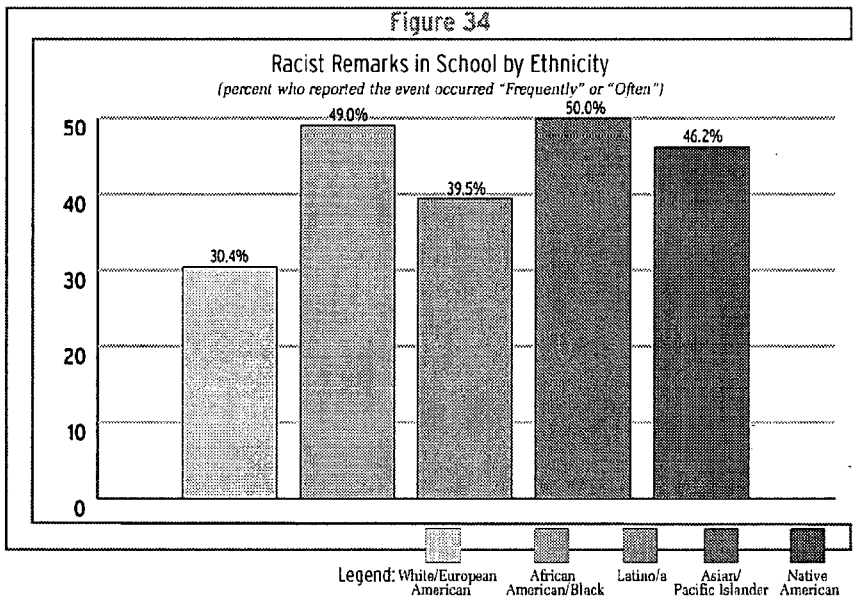
GLSEN's mission is to make all schools safe for all students. As discussed above, many LGBT youth frequently hear racist and sexist remarks in school in addition to homophobic remarks. Some LGBT youth feel unsafe in their school or become the targets of harassment because of their sexual orientation or gender expression, but also because of their race/ethnicity or their gender. Thus, we examined whether there were demographic differences in the experience of school climate.

Comparisons by Race/Ethnicity[16]

Overall, the experiences of white LGBT youth and LGBT youth of color were similar with regard to homophobic remarks and harassment and assault related to sexual orientation and gender expression. Perhaps not surprisingly, the experiences of youth of color were quite different from white youth with regard to racism, racist remarks and race-based harassment and assault.

Racist Remarks in School. Youth of color reported hearing racist remarks more often than did white youth:

- 44.7% of youth of color overall heard racist remarks often or frequently in their schools compared to 30.4% of white youth
- 25.2% of youth of color reported hearing racist remarks from most of the students in their school compared to 12% of white youth.



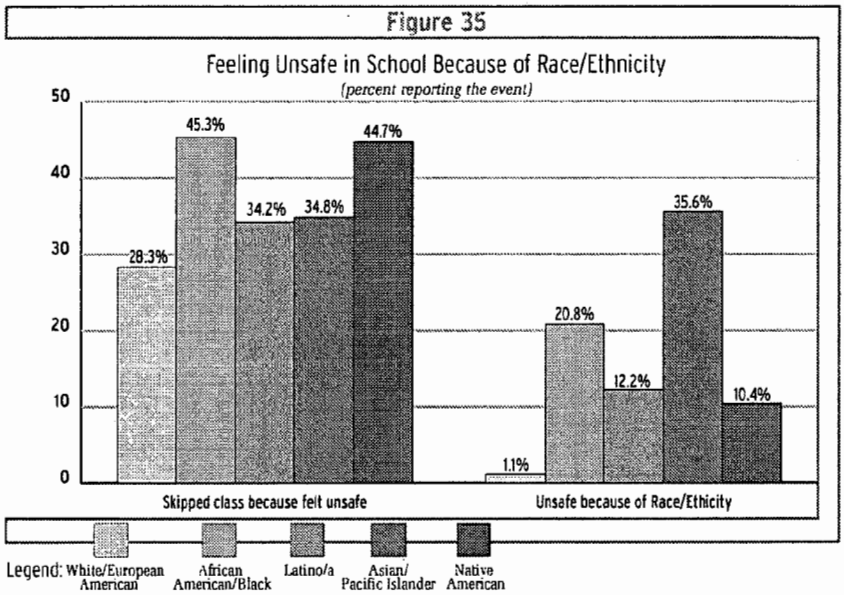
The average frequency of hearing racist remarks for white youth was significantly lower than that of African American/Black youth, Latino/a youth and Asian/Pacific Islander youth (see Figure 34). Although the frequency for white or European American youth was also lower than Native American youth, this difference was not statistically significant,[17] which may be due to the smaller sample size of the Native American group.[18] There were no significant differences among the youth of color groups in our study with regard to the frequency of hearing racist remarks in their schools.

Feeling Safe in School. Youth of color were likelier to have reported missing a class because of feeling unsafe in the preceding month: 38.8% of youth of color reported having missed at least one class in the preceding month because they felt unsafe compared to 28.5% of white/European American youth. In examining specific differences among racial/ethnic groups, African American youth and Native American youth were more likely to have missed class because of feeling unsafe than white youth (see Figure 35). African American were also more likely than Latino/a youth to have reported missing a class for safety reasons. (No other group differences were statistically significant.)

Youth of color were also likelier than white youth to report feeling unsafe in their school because of their race or ethnicity–18.9% of youth of color compared

16. Comparisons regarding racial/ethnic groups were among the White/European American, African American/Black, Latino/a, Asian/Pacific Islander and Native American groups. The remaining two groups, Other and Multiracial, included only a small number of youth and were excluded from these comparative analysis for statistical reasons. 17. "Statistically significant" means that we cannot be certain that the difference is a true difference and not due to simple random chance. 18.It is statistically more difficult to detect a significant difference between groups when the groups are smaller. Although the White/European American group was quite large, in our sample the Native American group was small.

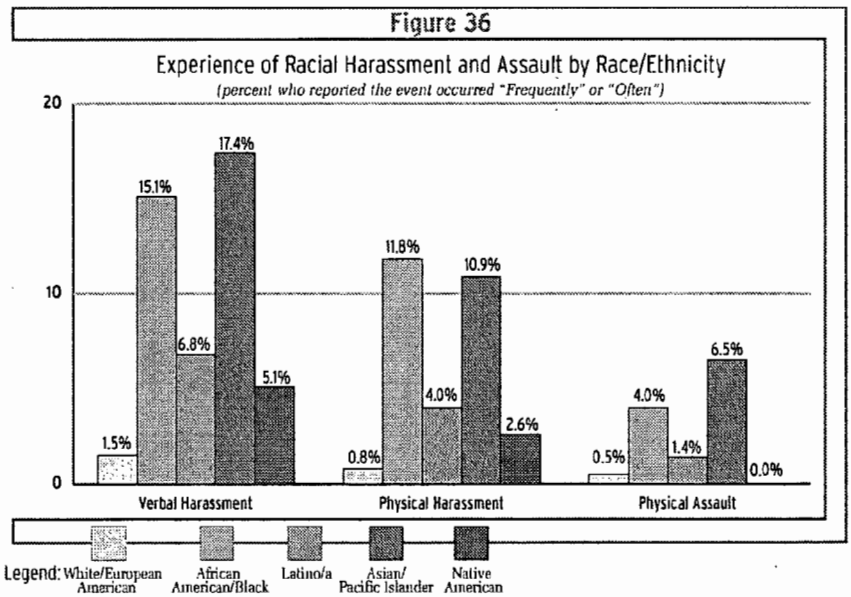
to 1.1% of white youth. The percentages of each ethnic/racial groups were significantly different from one another on this question, with the exception of the comparison between the Latino/a and Native American youth. As shown in Figure 35, the percentages of the Latino/a group who felt unsafe was close to the percentage of Native American youth who felt unsafe – 12.2% and 10.4% respectively. The largest percentage of youth who reported feeling unsafe because of race/ethnicity was among the Asian/Pacific Islander group (35.6%) followed by the African American group (20.8%).



Harassment and Assault. Youth of color reported higher incidence of verbal harassment, physical harassment and physical assault because of their race or ethnicity than white youth:

- 54.3% of youth of color reported having been verbally harassed in school in the past year because of their race or ethnicity compared to 18.4% of white youth
- 22.3% of youth of color reported having been physically harassed in school in the past year because of their race/ethnicity compared to 7.6% of white youth
- 10.8% of youth of color reported having been physically assaulted in school in the past year because of their race/ethnicity compared to 2.4% of white youth.

As shown in Figure 36, African American and Asian/Pacific Islander youth reported the highest frequencies of racially motivated verbal harassment, followed by Latino/a youth. White and Native American youth reported the lowest frequencies of verbal harassment.



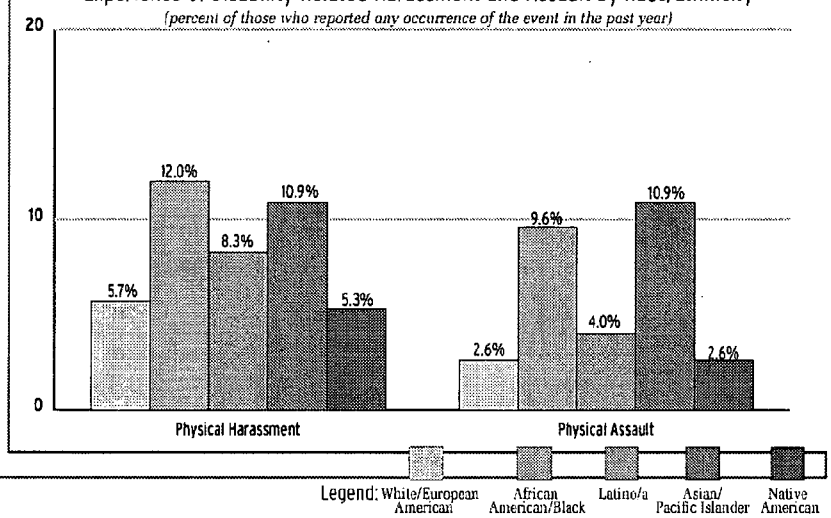
Regarding physical harassment, African American youth, Latino/a youth and Asian/Pacific Islander youth reported higher frequencies than white youth and Native American youth. Regarding physical assault, African American and Asian/Pacific Islander youth reported higher levels than did youth from the other racial/ethnic groups.

Actual or Perceived Disability. In addition to experiences with racism or racially based harassment and assault, youth of color also reported a slightly higher incidence of harassment because of a disability or because someone thought they had a disability. However, in examining specific group differences, we found that African American and Asian/Pacific Islander youth had a somewhat higher frequency of disability-related physical harassment and assault than white youth (see Figure 37). Because we did not ask youth about having a disability, we cannot discern whether these differences are related to differences in the incidence of disability across the ethnic/racial groups of LGBT youth. Also, because the question asked about actual or perceived disability, it is possible that other students may be likelier to believe that African American and Asian/Pacific Islander youth have a disability regardless of actual disability status.

Figure 37

Experience of Disability Related Harassment and Assault by Race/Ethnicity

(percent of those who reported any occurrence of the event in the past year)



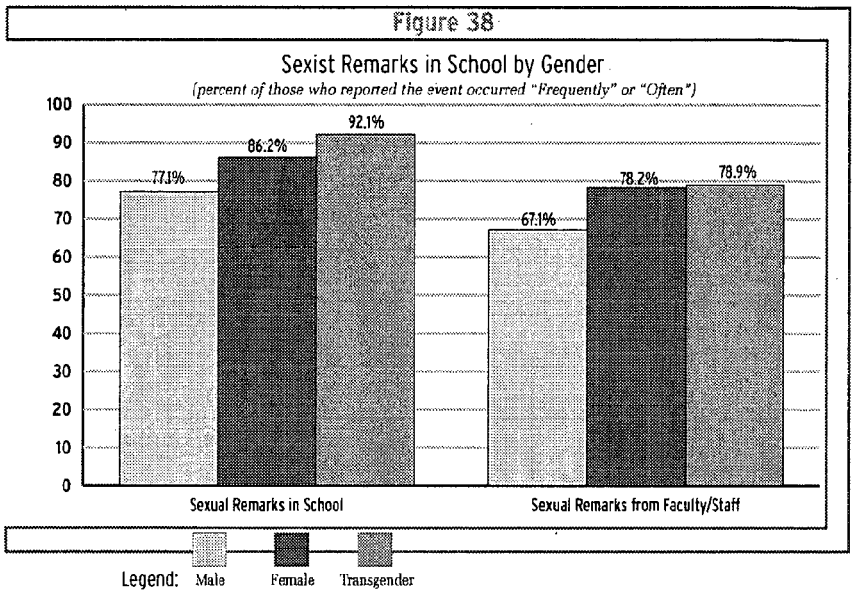
Comparisons by Gender[19]

Overall, the experiences of all youth in our sample, regardless of gender, were similar with regard to frequency of hearing homophobic and racist remarks. Also, there were no gender differences with regard to missing classes or school because of feeling unsafe. Gender was, however, a factor in the frequency of hearing sexist remarks, experiences with feeling safe in school and with experiences of harassment and assault in school.

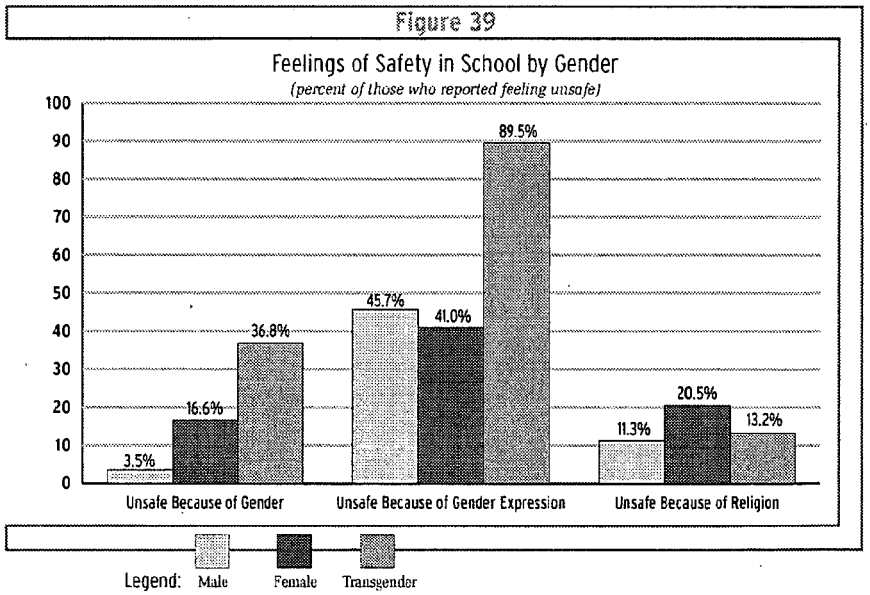
Sexist Remarks. The vast majority of all youth, regardless of gender, frequently or often heard sexist remarks in their schools. Transgender and female youth reported significantly higher frequencies than did male youth: 86.2% of women and 92.1% of transgender heard sexist remarks often or frequently compared to 77.1% of men (see Figure 38). Although there were no differences among the gender groups with regard to frequency of sexist remarks heard from students or the proportion of the student body reported to have made sexist remarks,

19. It is important to note that the number of transgender youth in the sample was very small and much smaller than the number of males and females. Because of this, one must exert caution in interpreting group differences and must pay attention to those instances when it is noted in the text that there are statistically significant differences.

there was a significant difference by gender in the frequency of hearing sexist remarks from school faculty or staff. As also shown in Figure 38, more female youth and more transgender youth reported hearing sexist remarks from faculty or staff than did male youth.

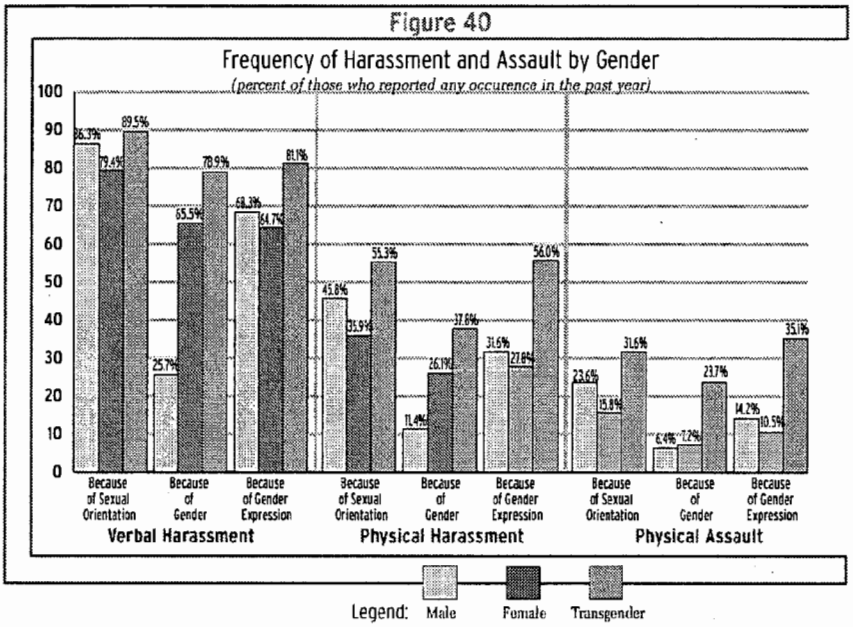


Feeling Unsafe in School. Although there were no gender differences with regard to feeling unsafe in school because of one's sexual orientation or one's race, there were differences in feeling unsafe in school because of one's gender, gender expression and religion (see Figure 39). The percentage of transgender youth who reported feeling unsafe in their school because of their gender was significantly higher than for females and males and the percentage of females who reported feeling unsafe because of their gender was significantly higher than males – 36.6% of transgender, 16.6% of females and 3.5% of males. Transgender youth were also significantly more likely to report feeling unsafe in school because of their gender expression – almost all of the transgender youth reported feeling unsafe in school because of their gender expression (89.5%) compared to less than half of males and females. Although less than one quarter of all youth reported feeling unsafe in school because of their religion, female youth were more likely to report feeling unsafe in school because of religion than were male or transgender youth.



Even with these differences across gender groups in feeling unsafe, no group was more or less likely to have reported missing classes or entire days of school because of feeling unsafe.

Harassment and Assault. There were significant differences by gender in reported experiences of verbal and physical harassment and physical assault because of sexual orientation, gender and gender expression (see Figure 40). Transgender youth tended to report higher frequencies of harassment and assault overall; males tended to report higher frequencies of harassment and assault related to their sexual orientation, and females tended to report higher frequencies of harassment related to their gender:



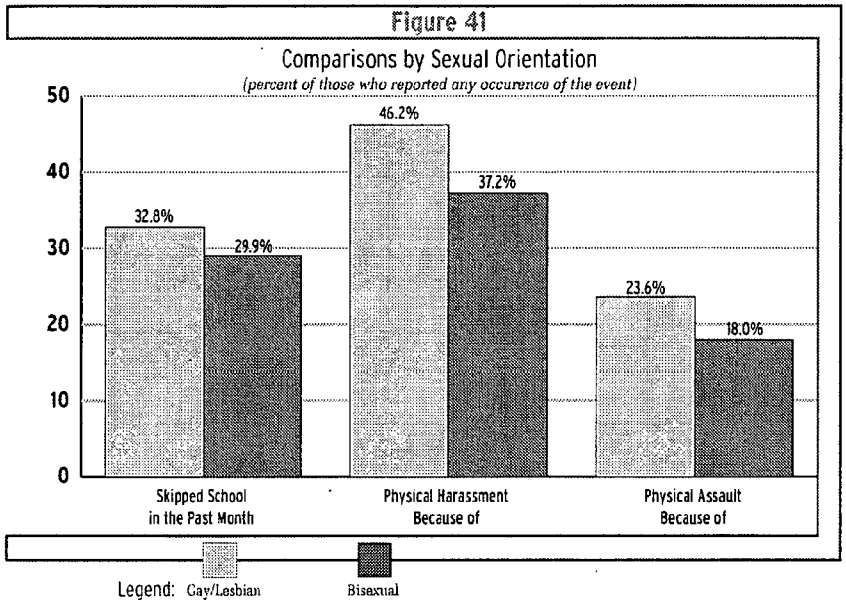
- Male and transgender youth were more likely to report verbal and physical harassment related to their sexual orientation than were female youth.
- Female and transgender youth were more likely to report verbal and physical harassment related to their gender than male youth and transgender youth were more likely to report such harassment than were female youth.
- Transgender youth were significantly more likely to report verbal and physical harassment related to their gender expression than were male or female youth.
- Male youth were somewhat likelier to report physical assault related to their sexual orientation than were female or transgender youth.
- Transgender youth were likelier to report physical assault related to their gender and their gender expression than were male or female youth.

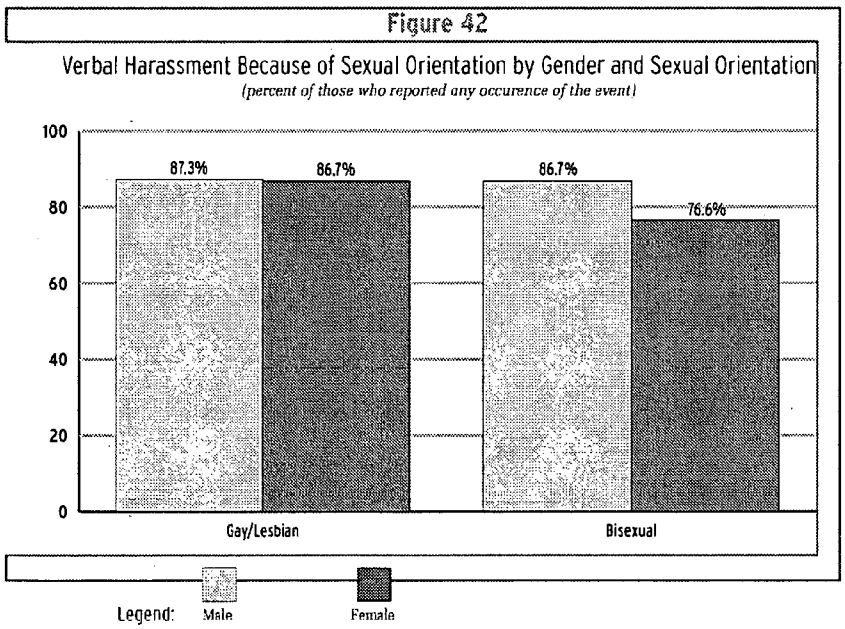
Sexual Harassment. Female youth were also more likely to reported sexual harassment, such as sexually suggestive comments made to them or being touched inappropriately, than were male youth. Whereas about half of males (57.8%) reported some experience of sexual harassment in school in the past year, about three-quarters of females (74.1%) reported sexual harassment.

Comparisons by Sexual Orientation

For the most part, those youth who identified as gay or lesbian were similar to those youth who identified as bisexual with regard to feeling safe in school and experiences with harassment and assault in school. As shown in Figure 41, gay and lesbian youth were somewhat likelier than bisexual youth to have reported missing full days of school because they felt unsafe. Gay and lesbian youth were also somewhat likelier to report physical harassment and physical assault

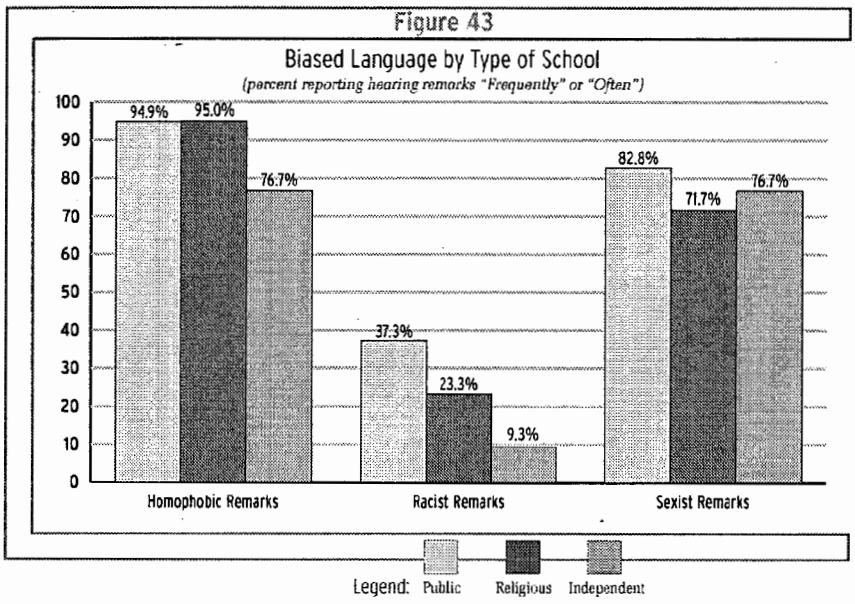
that was related to their sexual orientation. With regard to verbal harassment, differences by sexual orientation were also related to gender (see Figure 42). Among males, there were no significant differences between those who identified as gay and those who identified as bisexual with regard to reporting homophobic verbal harassment. Among females, however, those who identified as lesbian were likelier to report verbal harassment related to their sexual orientation than were those who identified as bisexual.

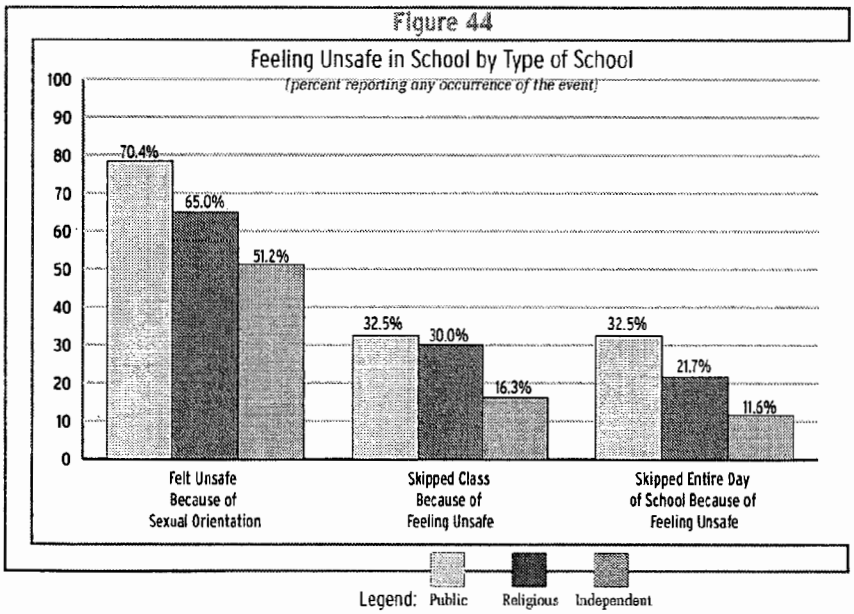




Comparisons by School Type

The majority of youth in our survey attended public schools, as do the majority of all youth nationwide. Nevertheless, we were interested in whether youth from public schools reported different experiences with biased language and victimization in schools than did youth from religious-affiliated schools or non-religious private or independent schools. With regard to biased language in school, youth from public schools tended to report higher frequencies of homophobic, racist and sexist language than youth from other schools (see Figure 43). Youth from public and religious schools were similar in their reports of hearing homophobic remarks – 95% of each reported hearing homophobic remarks frequently or often – and youth from these two types of school reported hearing these remarks significantly more often than youth from independent schools. With regard to the frequency of hearing racist remarks, youth from public schools again reported the highest frequency (37.3% reported frequently or often) followed by youth from religious schools (23.3% reported frequently or often). Youth from independent schools were again significantly lower than the other two groups. The majority of youth in all three school groups reported hearing sexist remarks frequently or often. Youth from religious schools, however, reported a slightly lower frequency of sexist remarks than youth from public schools.[20]

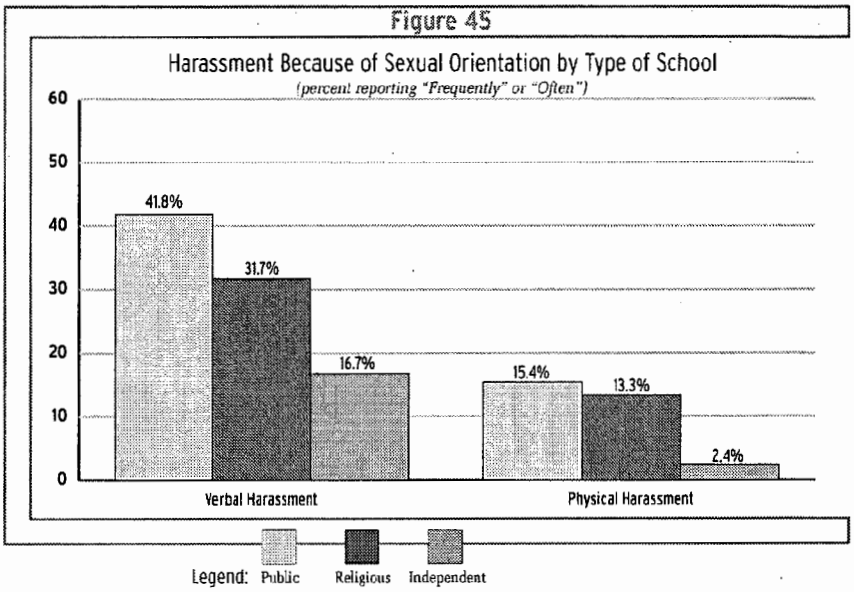




Youth from public schools were likelier than those from independent schools to report feeling unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation – about 70% of public school youth reported feeling unsafe compared to about half of independent

20. Youth from independent schools were not significantly different from either of the other two groups.

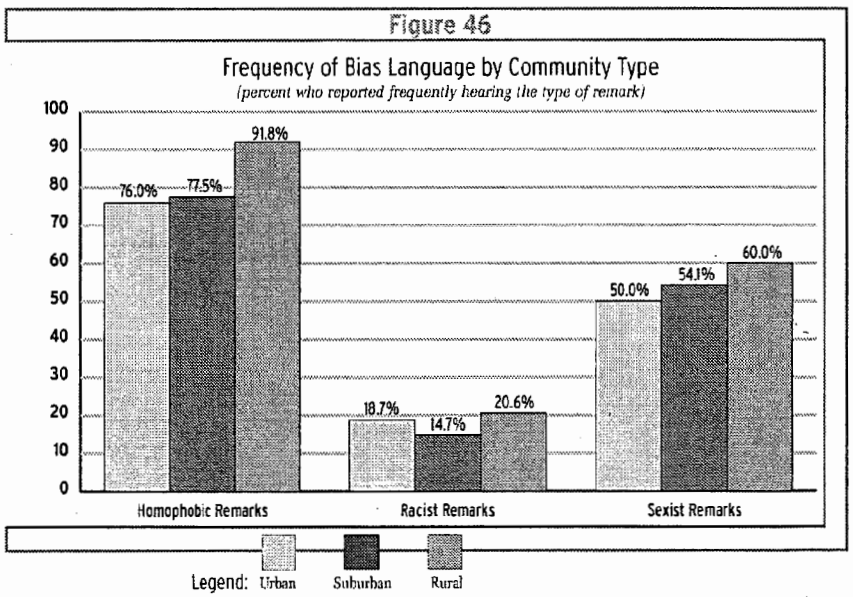
school youth (see Figure 44). Youth from public schools and from religious schools were likelier to report having missed classes or entire days of school because they felt unsafe.[21]



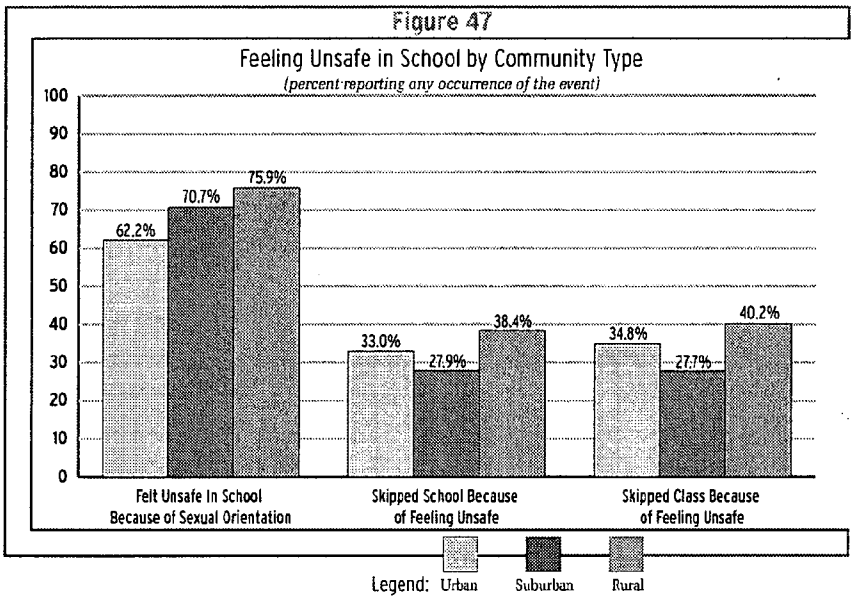
There were also differences in the experience of harassment by school type. Public school youth reported higher frequencies of both verbal and physical harassment in school because of their sexual orientation than did independent school youth. As shown in Figure 45, the percent of public school youth reporting verbal harassment frequently or often was more than two times larger than the percent of independent school youth (41.8% versus 16.7%) and the percent of public school youth reporting physical harassment frequently or often was almost eight times larger than the percent of independent school youth (15.4% versus 2.4%). For both types of harassment, the frequency of harassment reported by religious school youth was not significantly different from the other two groups.

Comparisons by Community Type

We were interested in whether youth in our survey reported different experiences based on the type of community in which their school was located – urban, suburban or rural communities. Youth from rural schools reported hearing more homophobic remarks in their schools than did youth from urban or suburban schools – over 90% of youth from rural schools reported hearing homophobic remarks frequently compared to about 75% of youth from urban and from suburban schools. Youth from rural schools were also more likely to hear racist remarks in their schools

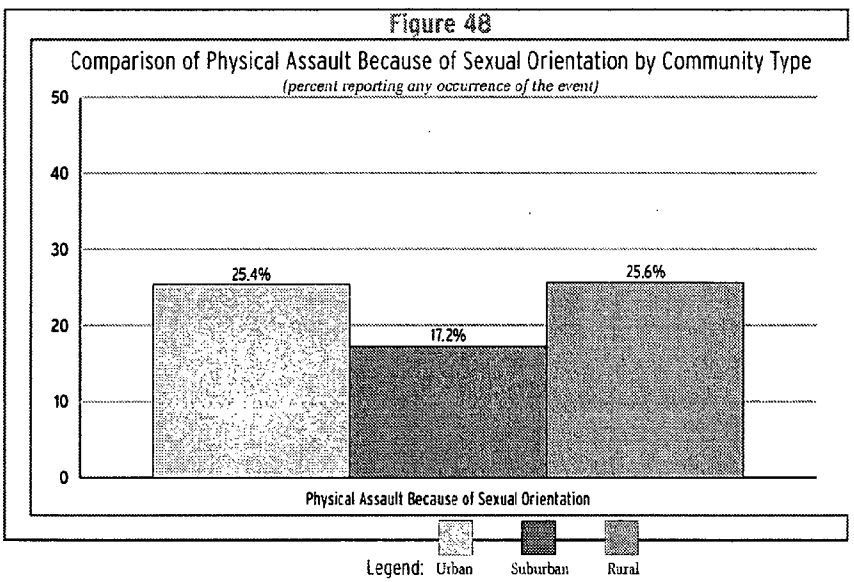


21. There was no significant difference between public school and religious school youth.



than youth from suburban schools.[22] With regard to hearing sexist remarks in school, the pattern was similar to that of hearing homophobic remarks. Youth from rural schools reported a higher frequency than other youth–60% of youth from rural schools reported frequently hearing sexist remarks compared to 50% from urban schools and 54% from suburban schools. (The difference in percentages between urban and suburban schools was not significant).

Youth from rural schools were also most likely to report feeling unsafe in their school because of their sexual orientation than youth in urban schools – 75.9% of youth from rural schools and 70.7% of youth from suburban schools compared to 62.2% of youth from urban schools (see Figure 47). Youth from suburban schools were also likelier to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation than youth in urban schools. Perhaps because so many youth from rural schools reported feeling unsafe, they were also likelier to report having missed classes or entire days of school because of feeling unsafe than were youth from suburban schools. Youth from urban schools and from rural schools were likelier than youth from suburban schools to have reported skipping classes or days of school because of feeling unsafe in school (see also Figure 47).



The only difference by community type on the experience of harassment or assault in school was with physical assault because of one's sexual orientation. As shown in Figure 48, youth from suburban schools were somewhat less likely to report such assault than were youth from urban or rural schools – about 17% of youth from suburban schools reported physical assault having occurred frequently or often in the past school year compared to about 25% of youth from the other two community types.

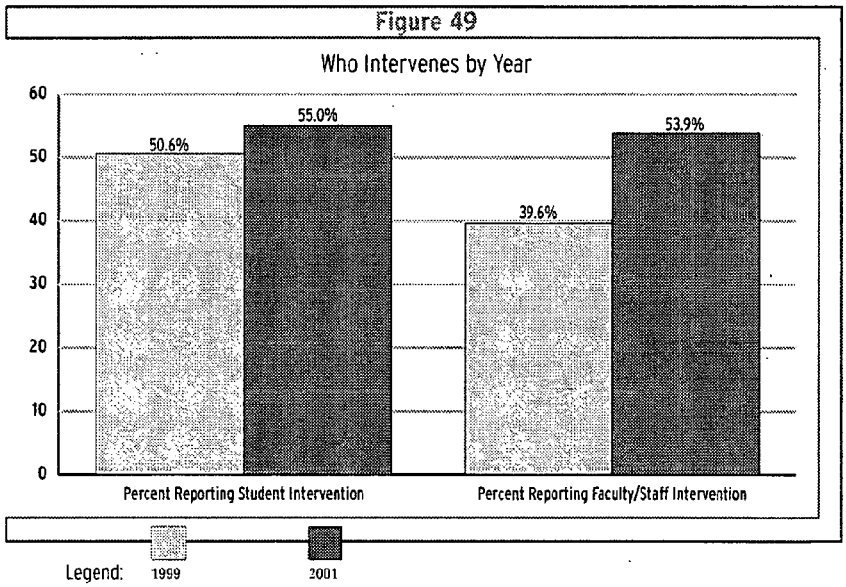
22. Youth from urban schools were not significantly different from the other two groups with regard to the frequency of hearing racist remarks.

For the youth from rural schools, the above findings are consistent. These youth were more likely to have reported homophobic and racist remarks, feeling unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation and incidents of physical assault because of their sexual orientation. It is consistent, then, that they were also likelier to miss school because of feeling unsafe. Although youth from urban schools were less likely than youth from suburban schools to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation, they were more likely to have reported missing classes or entire days of school because of feeling unsafe. This finding may be related to the normative level of threat in school – what feels unsafe for youth in a suburban school may not result in feeling the need to skip a class or a day of school whereas what feels unsafe for youth in an urban school may. In fact, as discussed above, youth from suburban schools reported a lower frequency of physical assault because of sexual orientation than urban youth. However, it is also possible that youth in urban schools may find it easier to skip school or class than youth in suburban schools.

Comparison of the 1999 and 2001 Surveys Regarding School Safety, Harassment and Assault

The ultimate goal of GLSEN's work is to create more accepting and safer environments for all students, including LGBT students, in our nation's schools. As more schools institute GSAs and more school districts develop and implement inclusionary protective policies and teacher training programs, we would hope to see a decrease in the incidence of biased language and in the reports of harassment and victimization taking place in our nation's schools. Since 1999, over 300 GSAs have been created across the country (over 1000 GSAs in all)[23] and a record number of states have introduced inclusionary safe schools legislation including major state leaders like New York, Texas and Florida. In 1999, California, one of the largest states in the country (with over 7 million), school-age children, passed statewide safe schools legislation. To gain some understanding of whether there has been improvement in school climate for LGBT youth in middle and high schools, we compared the results of our 2001 with those from our 1999 survey. In both surveys, the vast majority of youth reported hearing homophobic remarks in their school – only 2% of the youth in 1999 and less than 1% of the youth in 2001 reported having never heard homophobic remarks in school. In both years, many youth

Figure 49



23. These figures are based on the number of GSA's that have registered with GLSEN's Student Organizing Department. Thus, there may be many more GSA's that have been created since 1999 that have not registered with GLSEN.

Figure 50

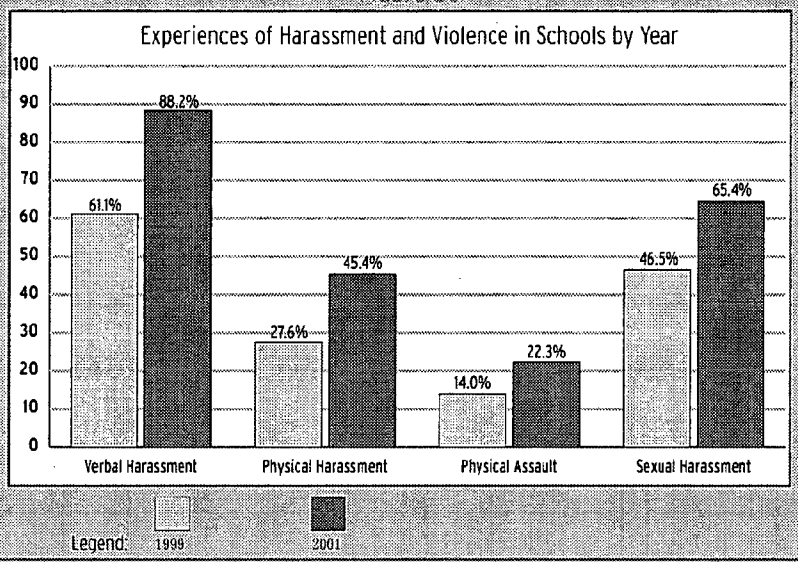


Figure 51

Intersection of Racism and Homophobia: Verbal Harassment Experiences of Youth of Color

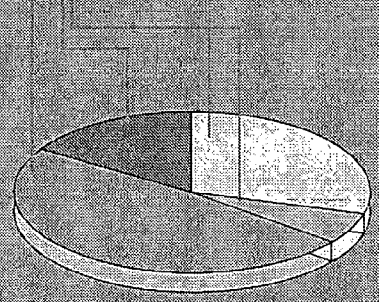


Figure 52

Intersection of Racism and Homophobia: Physical Harassment Experiences of Youth of Color

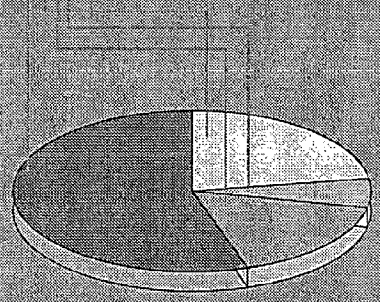
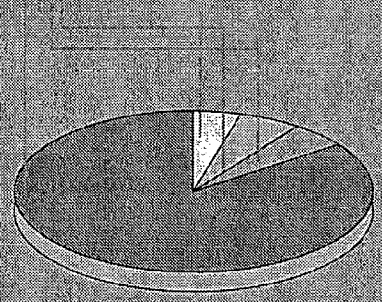


Figure 53

Intersection of Racism and Homophobia: Physical Assault Experiences of Youth of Color



reported that no one ever intervened when such remarks were made. However, this percentage was lower for youth in the more recent survey – 24.7% of the youth in 2001 reported that no one ever intervened when homophobic remarks were made compared to 39.2% in 1999.[24] The increase in reported intervention is likely due to an increase in reported intervention by school faculty and staff. Although the percentage of youth who reported that other students intervened when homophobic remarks remarks were made was similar in both years, the percentage of youth who reported that faculty intervened significantly increased from 1999 to 2001 – from 39.6% to 53.9% (see Figure 49).

Youth in the recent survey reported a greater frequency of harassment or violence at their school related to their sexual orientation or gender expression than did youth in the 1999 survey. As shown in Figure 50, more youth in 2001 reported experiences of verbal harassment, physical harassment and physical assault in school related to their sexual orientation or gender expression in the past year. More youth in the recent survey also reported having experienced sexual harassment in the past year.

Intersection of Race, Gender and Sexual Orientation

In addition to examining differences based on youth demographics, it is also important to examine how the intersection of race, gender and sexual orientation is pertinent with regard to school-based harassment. LGBT youth of color may experience victimization in school based on their sexual orientation and/or their race/ethnicity; lesbian and bisexual female youth may experience victimization based on gender and/or sexual orientation, and lesbian and bisexual female youth of color may experience victimization based on race and/or gender and/or sexual orientation.

Experiences of LGBT Youth of Color

As shown in Figure 51, almost half (48.3%) of the youth of color in our survey reported that they had experienced verbal harassment in school based on both their sexual orientation and their race/ethnicity. Although the majority of youth of color reported no incidents of physical harassment based on their sexual orientation or their race/ethnicity (55%), more youth of color reported physical harassment in school based on their sexual orientation alone than either harassment based on their race/ethnicity alone or based on both their race/ethnicity and sexual orientation (see Figure 52). As with physical harassment, the majority of youth of color reported no experiences of physical assault based on either their race/ethnicity or sexual orientation. Of those who did report such assault, the proportions of youth who reported assault based on sexual orientation alone, assault based on race/ethnicity alone or assault based on both were similar (see Figure 53).

Experiences of Lesbian and Bisexual Female Youth

As shown in Figure 54, the majority of female youth in our survey reported

24. In 2001, youth were asked separate questions about the intervention of faculty/staff and that of students. In 1999, this differentiation was not made. Thus, to make an adequate comparison between the two years, we compared only the youth who reported that no one ever intervened. The percentage of youth in 2001 who reported that students never intervened and that faculty were either never present when homophobic remarks were made or were present and never intervened was compared to the percentage of youth in 1999 who reported that no one intervened when such remarks were made. The difference in percentages was statistically significant.

Figure 54
Intersection of Sexism and Homophobia: Verbal Harassment Experiences of Female Youth

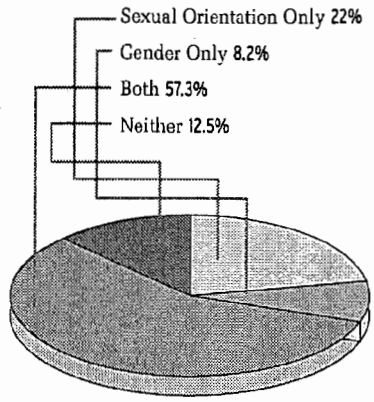


Figure 55
Intersection of Sexism and Homophobia: Physical Harassment Experiences of Female Youth

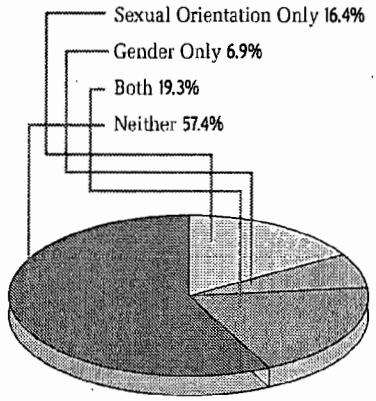


Figure 56
Intersection of Sexism and Homophobia: Physical Assault Experiences of Female Youth

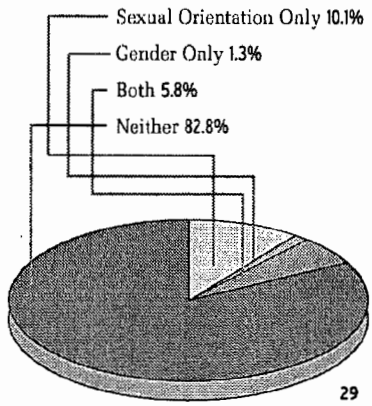


Figure 57

Intersection of Racism, Sexism and Homophobia: Verbal Harassment Experiences of Female Youth of Color

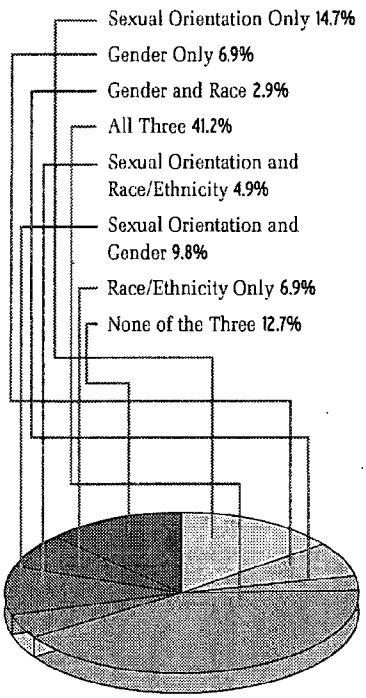
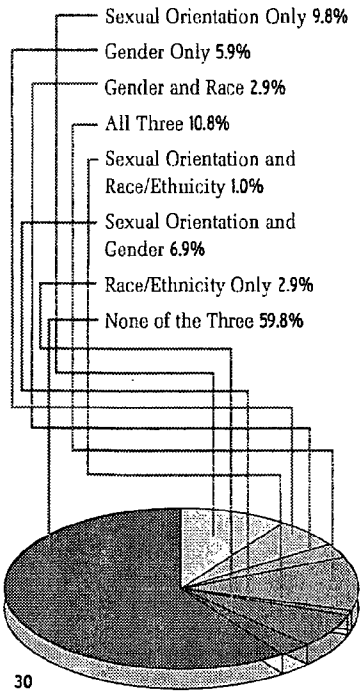


Figure 58

Intersection of Sexism and Homophobia: Physical Harassment Experiences of Female Youth of Color



verbal harassment based on both their gender and their sexual orientation. The majority of female youth reported no incidents of physical harassment in school based on their gender or their sexual orientation (see Figure 55). However, youth who reported such incidents of physical harassment were likelier to report that they were based on either their sexual orientation alone or based on both their sexual orientation and their gender. As with physical harassment, the majority of female youth reported no experiences of physical assault based on gender or sexual orientation. Of those who did, more reported assault due to sexual orientation alone (see Figure 56).

Experiences of Lesbian and Bisexual Female Youth of Color

As shown in Figure 57, the largest number of female youth of color reported verbal harassment based on all three personal characteristics – race/ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation. Although the majority of these youth reported no incidents of physical harassment or physical assault, about 10% of the female youth of color reported having experienced physical harassment and over 5% reported having experienced physical assault because of their race/ethnicity, their gender and their sexual orientation (see Figures 58 and 59).

These results highlight the importance of understanding the diversity in experiences of LGBT youth. When discussing the experiences of lesbian and bisexual female youth, one must consider both experiences related to gender and to sexual orientation; when discussing the experiences of LGBT youth of color, one must consider their experiences related to race/ethnicity and to sexual orientation, and when discussing the experiences of lesbian and bisexual female youth of color, one must consider race/ethnicity and gender as well as sexual orientation. In our survey, we cannot know how youth with multiple identities make sense of harassment and assault that they experiences. Perhaps, in certain circumstances, a youth can make a determination about the cause of an attack by the characteristics of the attack. The words used in an incident of verbal harassment, for example, may explain the underlying motivation of the perpetrator – racist language used in a verbal attack may lead the young person to determine that the experience was due to race/ethnicity or homophobic language may lead the young person to determine that the experience was due to sexual orientation. For other youth, their reports of harassment and assault may be related to their own unique sense of their multiple identities – a Native American gay male youth, for example, may attribute all incidents of harassment directed toward him to both his being Native American and being gay. We cannot assume that the experience of multiple identities is merely additive – experiences being African American plus those of being female plus those of being lesbian would not necessarily equal the entire experience of an African American lesbian, for example. Little is known in the social science literature about how LGBT individuals with multiple identities, such as being African American and lesbian, experience this multiplicity.[25] More research is needed on LGBT youth that is cognizant of the intersections of race/ethnicity,

25. A full discussion of the intersections of race/ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation exceeds the scope of this report. For more information on these issues, there are several books that GLSEN recommends and that are available from the GLSEN Bookstore, including: Kumashiro, K. K. (Ed). (2001). Troubling Intersections of Race and Sexuality: Queer Students of Color and Anti-Oppressive Education. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., and Adams, M., Bloomenfeld, W. J., Castañeda, R., Hackman, H. W. Peters, M. & Zúñiga, X. (Eds.). (2000). Readings for Diversity and Social Justice: An Anthology on Racism, Anti-Semitism, Sexism, Heterosexism, Ableism, and Classism. New York: Routledge. The full listing of books available on-line through GLSEN's website: www.glsen.org.

gender and sexual orientation and that explores how LGBT youth understand and experience these intersections of identity.

LGBT Resources and Supports in School

Another important dimension of school climate for LGBT youth is the availability of positive resources about LGBT-related issues and supportive faculty or staff. Thus, we asked the youth in our survey about certain school supports, such as having a gay-straight alliance, having a teacher or school staff person who is supportive of LGBT youth, and having LGBT people, history or events discussed as part of the classroom curriculum.

Resources and Curricula

One-quarter of the youth (25.1%) reported that LGBT issues were taught in some of their classes. History/social studies, English and health classes were mentioned most often as having included information on LGBT people, history or events – over half of the youth who reported that LGBT issues were taught mentioned history or social studies and over a third reported these issues being taught in their health or English classes (see Figure 60). In addition to those classes about which we specifically asked, several youth also reported that LGBT issues were taught in psychology, sociology and religion classes. Most of these youth (79.1%) reported that the representations of LGBT topics were either somewhat positive or very positive (see Figure 61).

Few of the youth reported that they had access to LGBT-related resources in their school, specifically, information of LGBT people, history or events in their textbooks, books or other resources in the school library that contained information about LGBT people, history or events, or having a gay-straight alliance or another type of club that addresses LGBT student issues. As shown in Figure 62, fewer than a third of youth reported having a GSA in their school or having inclusionary textbooks used in their classes and slightly more than a third reported having LGBT resources in their library or having Internet access to LGBT community sites. It is important to note that having such resources available in school is an extremely important step toward having a more inclusive school climate. It is also important to note, however, that having such resources in school does not necessarily mean that all the LGBT students in the school feel as if they truly have access to such resources. Some LGBT youth

Figure 59

Intersection of Racism, Sexism and Homophobia: Physical Assault Experiences of Female Youth of Color

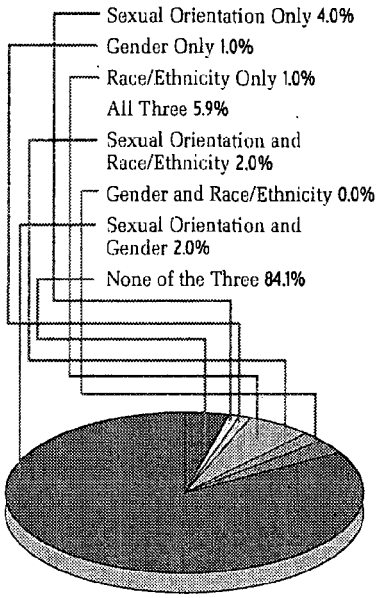


Figure 60

Classes in which LGBT-Related Topics were Taught

(percent of only youth reporting that LGBT issues were taught)

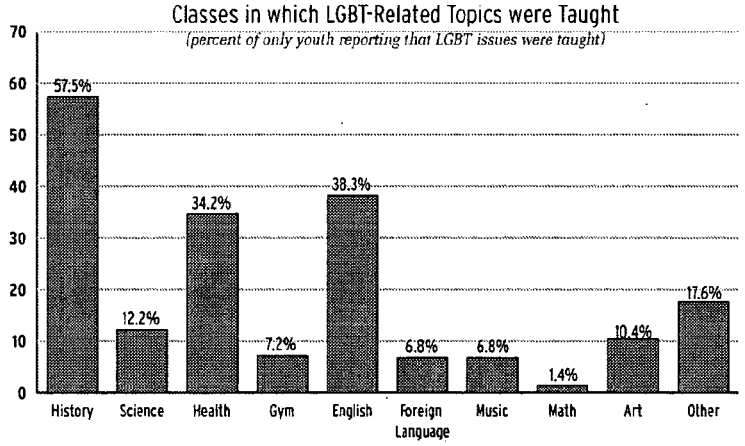


Figure 61

Quality of Portrayal of LGBT Issues when Taught

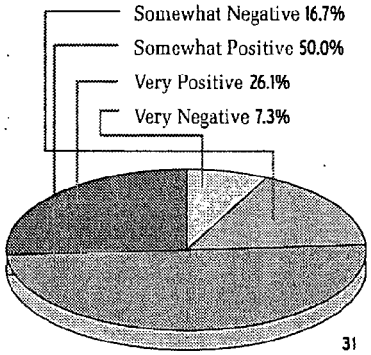
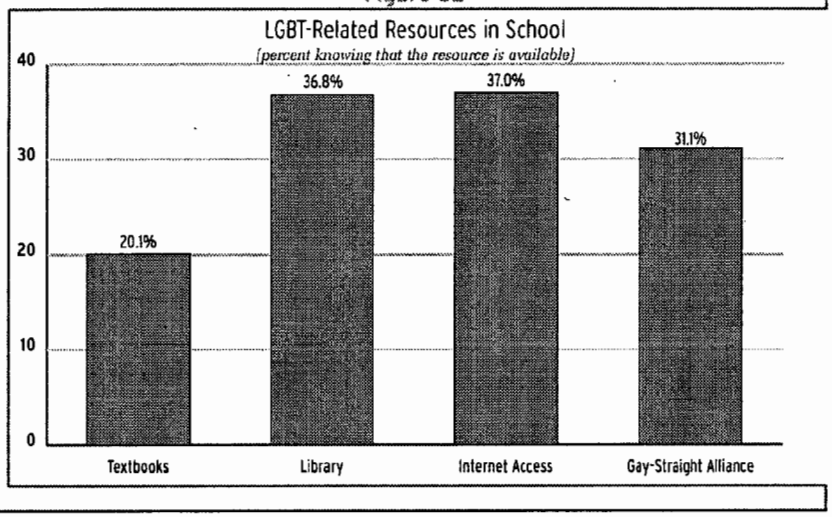


Figure 62



may not feel comfortable using the school Internet to access LGBT sites or check out or even read LGBT-related resources from the library. For example, almost a quarter of the youth who had GSAs in their school reported that they never or rarely attended the meetings (see Figure 63).

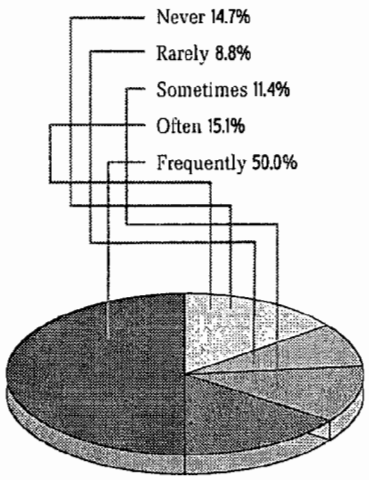
School Personnel

More than half of the youth (60.3%) reported that they knew of a teacher or other school staff person who was supportive of LGBT students at their school. About one-quarter of the youth (26.3%) reported that they knew of a teacher or other staff person at their school who was open about being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

We asked the youth in the survey how comfortable they would be talking to certain school personnel about LGBT issues. As shown in Figure 64, about half of the youth said that they would be comfortable talking to one of their teachers or to the school counselor or school psychologist about LGBT issues. Fewer youth, about a third, said that they would be comfortable talking with their school principal about LGBT issues and with the school nurse.

Figure 63

Frequency of Attending GSA Meetings in School

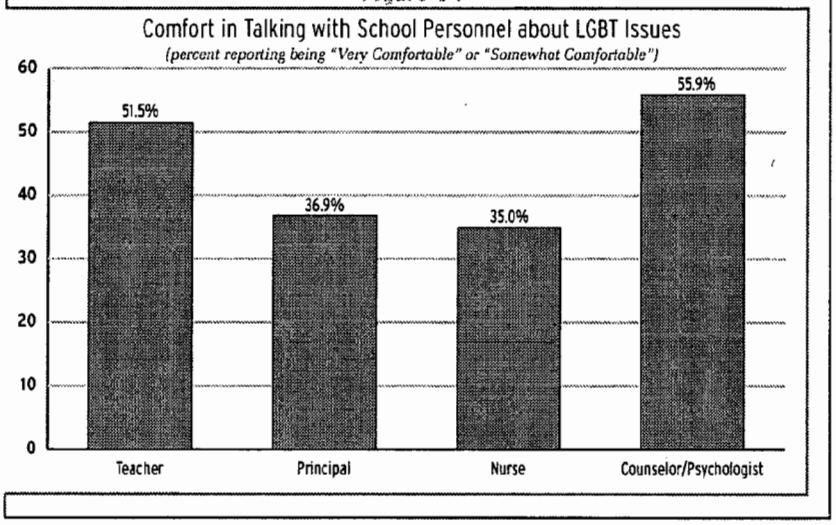


Comparison of School Resources and Supports by School and Community Type

Given that we found differing experiences of the LGBT youth in our survey based on the type of school they attend and the type of community their school was in, we thought it also important to examine whether there were differences in school-based resources regarding these factors. Overall, youth in rural schools were the least likely to report that LGBT-related resources were available in their schools. As shown in Figure 65, youth in rural schools were less likely to report there being a GSA in their school, that LGBT people, history and events are taught in any class, that LGBT resources are available in the library and that they had access to LGBT Internet sites on school computers. With regard to faculty and staff supports, youth from rural schools were less likely to report having a school staff person who was supportive of LGBT students and were also less likely to report having an "out" LGBT faculty or staff member at their school (see Figure 66). Although these youth did not differ from youth from urban or suburban schools on their comfort with talking to the school principal or school nurse about LGBT issues, they were significantly less comfortable talking to a teacher or the school counselor or psychologist than other youth.

In examining differences by the type of school the youth attended, we found that youth from non-religious, private or independent schools were consistently more likely to report LGBT-related resources in their schools. As shown in Figure 67, youth from independent schools were likelier to report having a GSA in their school, were likelier to be taught about LGBT topics in class, were likelier to report that their library had LGBT resources or book and were likelier to report having access to LGBT Internet sites from school computers. Youth from religious schools were least likely to report having a GSA in their school, having LGBT resources in the school library and having Internet access to LGBT sites in school. With regard to faculty and staff supports, youth from independent schools were more likely to report being comfortable talking to any of the school staff (see Figure 68). Also, youth from religious schools were least likely to be comfortable talking to school staff than youth from public schools and private schools.[26]

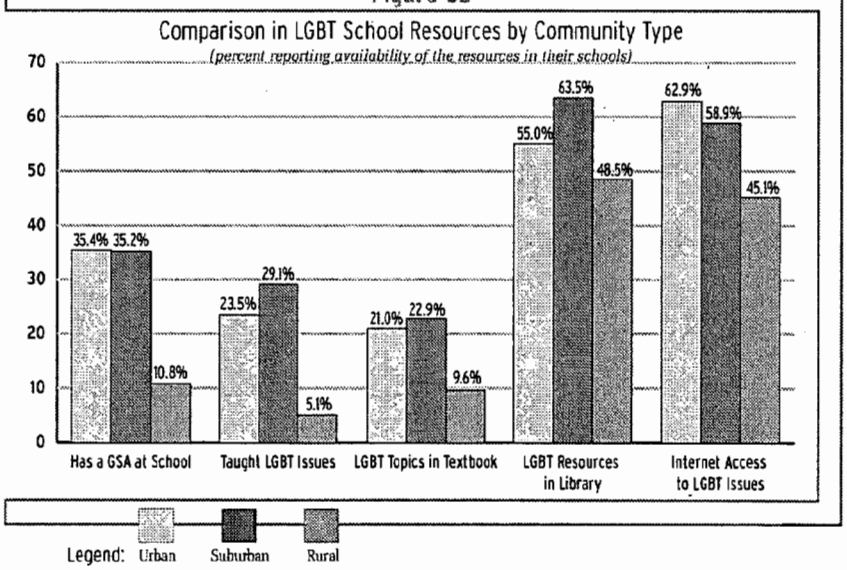
Figure 64



Utility of School Resources and Supports

In addition to documenting whether or not schools have institutional supports for LGBT youth, such as supportive faculty, inclusionary curricula or gay-straight alliances, it is also important to examine how such institutional supports may benefit the LGBT students in the schools. Given that GLSEN's National School Climate Survey was cross-sectional[27] in design, we cannot make true determinations about effectiveness of these supports. We can examine, however, whether there were relationships between the youth reports on the availability of institutional supports and youth reports of feeling safe at school and attitudes toward school.

Figure 65



26. Youth from religious schools were less likely than other youth to be comfortable talking with a teacher, the principal and the school nurse. Youth from religious schools were not significantly more likely than youth from public schools to be comfortable with the school counselor or psychologist. 27. "Cross-sectional" means that data is only from one point in time. To examine outcome effectiveness, one would typically need multiple time points (longitudinal data) to assess whether something has an effect. With cross-sectional data, one can only examine relationships between variables but cannot determine causality. With the NSCS data, we compared youth who reported having institutional supports at school and youth who reported not having such supports on certain outcomes such as safety in school and attitudes toward school. But with those comparisons that were statistically significant, we can make statements about relationships but not about causality. For example, we can state that youth who reported having a GSA in their school were likelier to report feeling safe in school (or that youth who reported feeling safe in school were likelier to report having a GSA), but we cannot state that having a GSA caused them to feel safer in school. Of course, it is quite possible that such a causal relationship exists, but we would need longitudinal data to make such a determination.

Figure 66

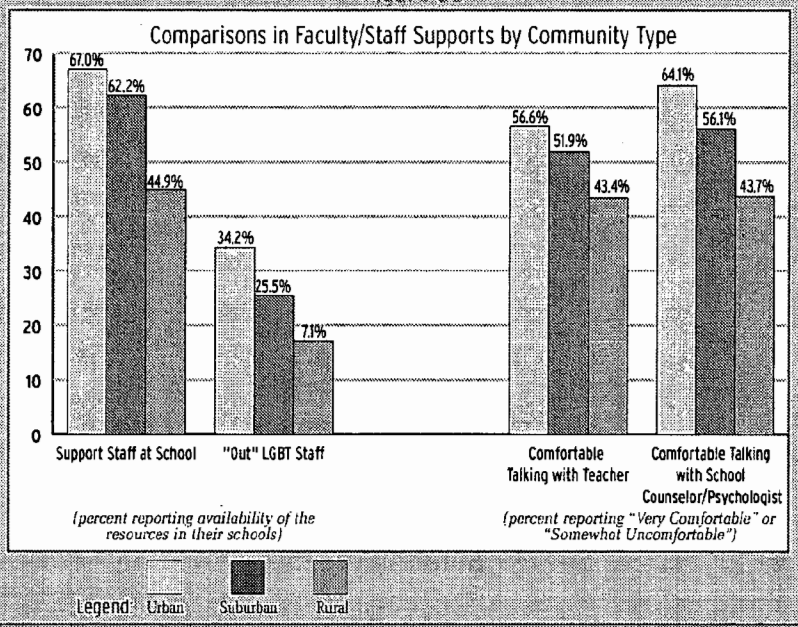
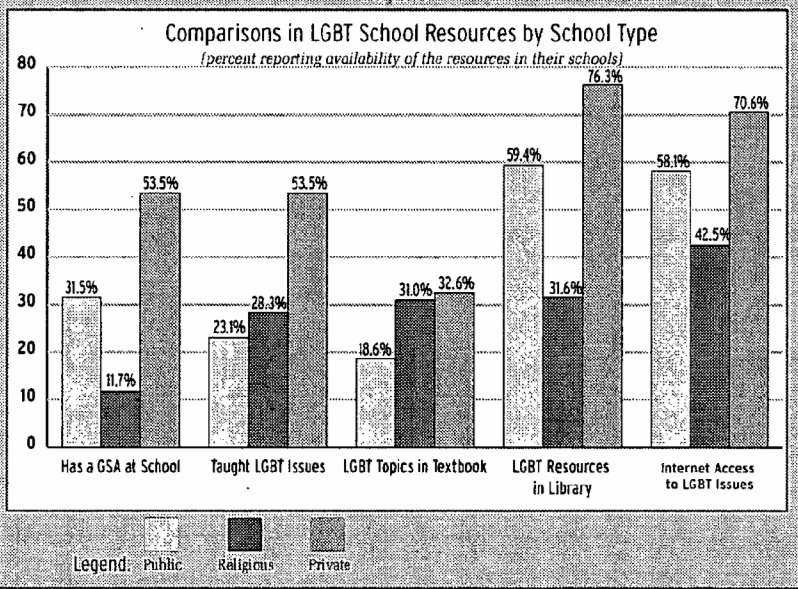


Figure 67



There is some evidence that shows a relationship between certain school supports and the quality of the school experience for LGBT youth. Youth whose schools had GSAs were less likely to have reported feeling unsafe in their schools:

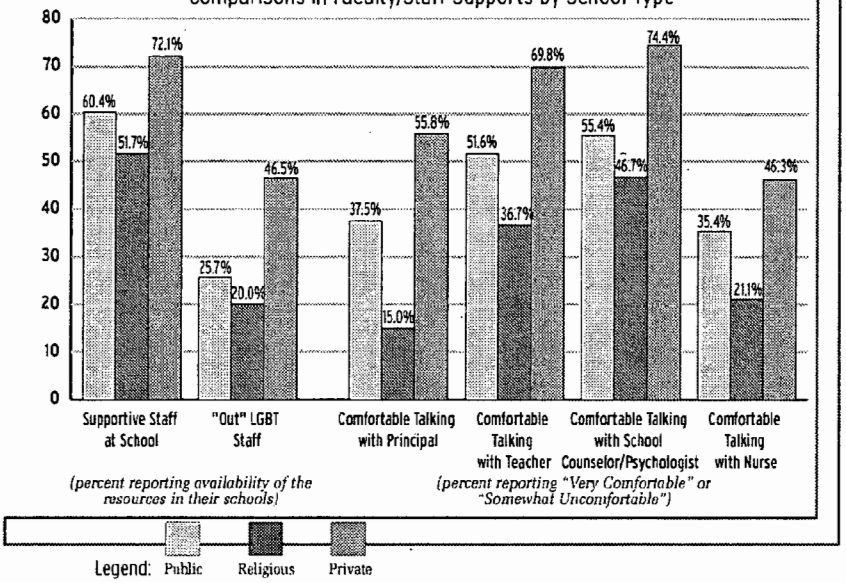
- 62.9% of youth from schools with GSAs reported feeling unsafe because of their sexual orientation compared to 72% of youth from schools without GSAs.

Youth who said that they had a supportive or open LGBT faculty or staff were likelier to feel as if they belong in their school:

- 35.1% of youth who had a supportive teacher or staff person felt as if they belonged at their school compared to 25.6% of those youth who did not have a supportive teacher or school staff person.
- 38.5% of youth who had an "out" LGBT teacher or school staff person in their schools felt as if they belonged at their school compared to 28.7% of youth who did not have an "out" teacher or staff person.

Figure 68

Comparisons in Faculty/Staff Supports by School Type



CONCLUSION

Although creating a true nationally representative sample of LGBT youth (or even adults) would be difficult, we believe that the methods of our survey approximate a representative sample of LGBT youth. Nevertheless, it is important to note that our sample is representative only of youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender and who have some connection to the LGBT community (either through their local youth organization or through the Internet). Thus, we cannot make determinations from our data about the experiences of youth who may be having same-sex sexual activity or be experiencing same-sex attractions but who do not identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Such youth may have different experiences than youth who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual and they certainly may be more isolated and have less access to community-based supports (i.e., youth who do not identify as LGBT may not be aware of supports for LGBT youth and, even if they are aware, they may not be comfortable using such supports). Similarly, not all youth whose gender identity or gender expression go beyond cultural norms may experience themselves as or identify as transgender and may not have even the resources to understand what being transgender means. Our data may likely not reflect the experiences of these youth who also may be more isolated without the same access to resources as the transgender youth in our survey. For this reason, population-based studies, such as the YRBS, must include questions about sexual orientation and gender identity and expression because youth who do not openly identify as LGBT but who may be LGBT or may later identify as LGBT may be impossible to reach through other means.

The results from this 2001 National School Climate Survey nevertheless echo the findings from our 1999 survey – for many of our nation's LGBT youth, school can be an unsafe and even dangerous place. School is where homophobic remarks can be frequently heard, often by faculty and staff. The majority of the youth in our survey reported being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation or their gender expression and a large number of youth reported experiencing incidents of physical harassment, physical assault and sexual harassment. The findings from this survey also demonstrate that transgender students feel particularly vulnerable because of their gender expression.

GLSEN's 2001 National School Climate Survey has also documented that certain schools are providing resources that can improve the quality of life for LGBT students. Many of the youth reported that their schools have gay-straight alliances and that LGBT people, history and events are being mentioned in classroom curricula. Nevertheless, the number of youth reporting such resources is far outweighed by the number of youth reporting acts of harassment and victimization.

Results from our survey also underscore the importance of asking youth about their experiences with other forms of prejudice, in particular, racism and sexism. It is impossible to truly understand the experience of LGBT youth of color and lesbian and bisexual female youth without also understanding their experiences of their own identities and of their experience of multiple forms of prejudice. Future research that examines youth experiences in school, particularly experiences of harassment and assault, such as the Youth Risk Behavior Surveys or the AAUW study "Hostile Hallways", must include information about sexual orientation (same-sex sexual behavior as well as lesbian, gay or bisexual identity) and gender identity/expression, in addition to information about gender and race/ethnicity. Future research on LGBT youth, on the other hand, must also include information about experiences related to race/ethnicity and gender.

Our hope in conducting the National School Climate Survey is that national, state and local activists will use these statistics to show policy-makers, legislators and local school administrators that many LGBT youth are targeted for harassment and assault because of their sexual orientation or their gender identity or expression and that laws and policies must be enacted and enforced that would make all schools safer for LGBT youth. Although the youth represented in our results come from communities across the country, our survey results provide what we believe to be a fairly accurate picture of the experiences of LGBT youth nationwide and one that is applicable to most states and localities. However, states and localities vary with regard to legislation and policies that are in place to protect LGBT students and even among states and localities with inclusive legislation and policies, there may likely be differences among them with regard to the enforcement. Differences in laws and policies and their enforcement could affect the school climate for LGBT youth. Also, some local policy-makers and legislators may believe that the experiences of LGBT youth in their state or their locality is more positive than what is depicted in our national study. Therefore, it is sometimes important to conduct representative studies at the state or local level and we have adapted our National School Climate Survey into a version that is appropriate to be used at the local level – the GLSEN Local School Climate Survey.[28] As with our national survey, the local versions assess not only experiences related to sexual orientation and gender identity/expression but also related to race/ethnicity and gender. There also may be professional researchers in a local area who are conducting research on the experiences of LGBT and the results of their research may be useful for local activism and lobbying. These researchers may also be willing to help a local GSA or GLSEN chapter in conducting the Local School Climate Survey. The Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies (IGLSS) is committed to connecting scholars with the people who need access to

28. There are two versions of the Local School Climate Survey – the school-based version and the community-based version. The former version is appropriate when assessing school climate in a single school, e.g., a GSA wants to assess the climate in their particular school. The latter version is appropriate when assessing multiple schools or assessing the experiences of LGBT youth in a particular city or town. Both versions and their accompanying instructions are available on the GLSEN website: www.glsen.org

research findings and has created a directory of experts working in policy-related areas of interest to the LGBT community in general. This directory, the Gay Directory of Authoritative Studies (GayDAR), is available from the IGLSS website (www.iglss.org).

Perhaps the most important conclusion that can be gleaned from our survey is that not only does more research need to be done documenting the school-related experiences of LGBT youth, but that more work needs to be done in our nation's schools to create safer climates for all students, including LGBT youth. Given the evidence that incidents of harassment and assault are not uncommon to LGBT youth in their schools, local community leaders, GLSEN chapter members, teachers, parents and GSA members need to work within their schools and their school districts to insure that all students are taught with respect and have access to a quality education.

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