



# The 2003 National School Climate Survey

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



A Report from the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network  
[www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)

# The 2003 National School Climate Survey

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

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The **Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network** is the leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students. Established nationally in 1995, GLSEN envisions a world in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

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## PREFACE

Freddie Fuentes, a student in the Morgan Hill Unified School District in California, endured years of abuse at school—and even ended up in the hospital after a group of students beat him while shouting “fag-got” in the presence of a school bus driver. Freddie was one of six students in his district who faced on-going harassment and violence on the basis of sexual orientation. Although these students sued their school district and won a landmark settlement, they should never have been made to suffer such brutality. Their stories of violence and neglect, sadly, are far from isolated incidents.

Violence, bias and harassment directed at LGBT students continue to be the rule—not the exception—in America’s schools. This stark fact is just one of the major findings from GLSEN’s 2003 National School Climate Survey. The bottom line remains that more than 4 out of 5 LGBT students reported being verbally harassed at school because of their sexual orientation, and more than 9 out of 10 reported hearing homophobic remarks such as “faggot,” “dyke” or “that’s so gay” frequently or often.

As the only national survey to document the experiences of LGBT students in America’s high schools, GLSEN’s National School Climate Survey fills a crucial void in our collective understanding of the contemporary high school experience. The results of our third biennial survey continue to track the basic and endemic problem of name-calling, harassment and violence directed at LGBT students, while offering new information about the impact of these experiences on academic performance and the effect of interventions designed to address the underlying problem.

This report demonstrates that such hostile school climates have a direct and measurable link to LGBT students’ ability to learn, adversely affecting their sense of belonging in school, their academic performance and their educational aspirations. For example, students who reported frequent harassment had GPA’s that were more than 10% lower than those who did not. Students who reported frequent verbal harassment were less likely than other students to say they plan to attend college.

Nevertheless, the ways in which some schools are beginning to respond to this endemic problem are beginning to make a difference. The results of the 2003 National School Climate Survey suggest that schools should strongly consider the following steps:

- Instituting policies that include “sexual orientation and gender identity” as protected classes along with existing categories such as race, religion, and ability, as such policies can dramatically reduce absenteeism among LGBT students



- Providing teacher trainings on how to support LGBT students, as building the skills of teachers in supporting LGBT students can help reduce rates of harassment and increase the future aspirations of LGBT students in terms of pursuing higher education
- Creating and supporting programs such as gay-straight alliances and other student clubs addressing LGBT issues, which can significantly increase students' sense of belonging at school and thereby their likelihood of attending and graduating from high school

Working together, we can all move this country toward a future where all schools are places where all students are free to learn, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin Jennings". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kevin Jennings  
Executive Director

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Given the limited attention paid by federal, state and local policy makers to LGBT youth and because GLSEN's work to make all schools safe for LGBT students is an on-going one, it is important for us to keep informed about the experiences of LGBT students in their schools. For this reason, we conducted our third national survey—the 2003 National School Climate Survey. As with the 2001 survey, we asked LGBT youth about biased language in their schools, feelings of comfort and safety in school, and experiences of verbal, physical and sexual harassment based on sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, race/ethnicity, disability and religion. We also asked those youth who reported incidents of harassment or assault whether they reported these events to school personnel or to family members and whether family members ever intervened with the school. In order to understand how school-based resources and supports can improve the quality of school life for LGBT students, we asked youth about such resources and supports in their schools, such as having gay-straight alliances (GSAs), curricula that are inclusive of LGBT issues or a supportive teacher or counselor. In the 2003 survey, we added questions about their academic achievement and educational goals so to examine how school climate and resources may affect them.

### Methodology

Participants were obtained 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, 38 were able to have youth complete the survey. A total of 308 surveys of LGBT youth in middle school or high school were completed through these community-based groups. The National School Climate Survey was also available on the Internet via GLSEN's website, and notices about our on-line survey were posted on LGBT youth-oriented listservs and electronic bulletin boards and emailed to GLSEN chapters and to youth advocacy organizations. Data collection occurred from the end of May to the end of August 2003.

A total of 887 lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender youth between the ages of 13 and 20 from 48 states and the District of Columbia completed the survey. (Youth who were not in a K–12 school during the 2002–2003 school year and heterosexual youth, except those identifying as transgender, were not included in the final total.) The majority of the youth identified as white or European-American (73.2%); about half identified as female and the majority identified as gay or lesbian. Over half of the sample reported being in 11th or 12th grade during the 2002–2003 school year.

## Major Findings

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### ***Biased Language in School***

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More than 90% of youth reported hearing homophobic remarks in their school frequently or often—remarks such as “fag” or “dyke” used in a derogatory manner or use of the word “gay” to mean something that is considered bad or valueless as in “that’s so gay,” just as one might use the words “dumb” or “stupid.” Almost all youth reported hearing homophobic remarks from other students—81.8% reported hearing such remarks often or frequently from other students. Over a third (40.5%) reported hearing these remarks from most of the students at their schools. Less than a quarter of the youth reported that faculty or staff intervened most or all of the time when present at the time such remarks were made.

Anecdotal reports suggest that most non-LGBT students and some school district officials and educational policymakers maintain that the expression “that’s so gay” does not directly denigrate gay or lesbian people and therefore should not be seen as harmful or offensive. However, the vast majority of youth reported that they were distressed to some degree when hearing the words “gay” or “queer” used in such a manner.

Although homophobic remarks were most commonly reported, racist, sexist remarks and negative remarks about gender expression were also heard very often in our nation’s schools. LGBT youth reported that other students more often made homophobic remarks whereas school faculty or staff more often made sexist remarks. Both faculty/staff and students reportedly intervened more often when racist remarks were made and least often when homophobic remarks and remarks about gender expression were made.

For most types of biased language remarks, there was a small but significant decrease in frequency between the 2001 and 2003 survey. The one exception was with hearing the expressions “that’s so gay” or “you’re so gay,” as the reported frequencies were not significantly different between years.

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### ***Feeling Safe in School***

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Three-quarters of youth reported that they felt unsafe in their schools due to one or more personal characteristics, most often due to their sexual orientation or their gender expression. Because of feeling unsafe in school, many youth reported missing classes or skipping entire days of school.

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### ***Experiences of Harassment and Assault in School***

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The majority of LGBT youth in our survey reported at least some experience of verbal harassment because of their sexual orientation with almost a quarter of the youth reporting that such harassment

happened frequently. The majority of youth also reported verbal harassment because of their gender expression with over 10% stating that it occurred frequently. Over a third of the youth also reported some experience of physical harassment in the past year because of their sexual orientation and more than a quarter of the youth reported that they had experienced physical harassment because of their gender expression. Although incidents of physical assault were less common, nearly 20% of youth reported some incident of physical assault in the past year because of their sexual orientation and over 10% of youth reported having been assaulted because of their gender expression. Most youth reported having been sexually harassed during the past school year, with the frequency being higher for lesbian or bisexual female youth and transgender youth.

In addition to any experiences of harassment or assault, over a third of youth reported that they had been the target of mean rumors or lies about them in their school and over half reported that their personal property had been deliberately damaged or stolen in the past year with just over 10% stating that it happened frequently or often.

In comparing the 2001 and 2003 surveys on the incidence of harassment and assault, there was a small but significant decrease in the percentage of youth who felt unsafe in their schools because of their sexual orientation. There were no significant differences in reported frequencies of verbal harassment, but small decreases in physical harassment and assault because of one's sexual orientation.

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### ***Reporting of School-Based Victimization Events to Faculty/Staff and Family Members***

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Youth were somewhat more likely to have reported an incident of harassment or assault to teachers or school staff than to family members, yet almost half of those who had experienced harassment or assault in the past year never reported the incidents to anyone. Over half of the youth reported never telling their parents or guardians when they had been harassed or assaulted in school. Even when told about these events, family members do not always intervene on behalf of the student—20% of youth reported that their parents or guardians had not intervened with school personnel after learning about an incident of harassment or assault.

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### ***Academic Achievement and College Aspirations for LGBT Youth***

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In the 2003 survey, we asked youth about their academic achievement as well as their aspirations for post-secondary education in order to examine further the relationship between school safety and achievement. LGBT youth were twice as likely to report that they were not planning on college (either finishing only their high school degree or dropping out of school) than respondents from a national sample of high school students from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). However, LGBT youth in our sample

were somewhat more likely to plan on pursuing a postgraduate degree (e.g., Master's degree, JD, MD, PhD) than in the NCES sample. The higher number of LGBT youth not planning on continuing their education may be related to their being victimized in school—youth who reported verbal harassment because of their sexual orientation at least some of the time were twice as likely to report they did not plan to attend college than youth who reported never or rarely experiencing such harassment.

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### ***LGBT Resources and Supports in School***

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**School Policies about Harassment and Assault.** Having a policy or procedure for reporting incidents of harassment in school is an important tool for making schools safer for all students. When such policies exist and are enforced, schools are sending a message to the student population that victimizing behaviors will not be tolerated. Although the majority of the youth reported that their schools did have a policy, a large number of youth reported that they did not know whether their schools had a policy or not.

**Resources and Curricula.** Many youth reported that they did not have access to LGBT-related resources in their schools. About half of the youth reported having GSAs at their school, having Internet access to LGBT community sites or having LGBT resources in their libraries. Far fewer students reported having inclusionary textbooks used in their classes or reported that LGBT issues were ever addressed or discussed in their classes.

**School Personnel.** The vast majority of youth reported that they knew of a teacher or other school staff person who was supportive of LGBT students at their schools. Nearly half of the youth reported that they knew of a teacher or other staff person at their schools who was open about being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. However, only about half said that they would be comfortable talking to one of their teachers or to the school counselor or school psychologist about LGBT issues. Less than half of the youth said that they would be comfortable talking with their principal about LGBT issues and even fewer reported that they would be comfortable talking with their school librarian or nurse.

**Comparison between GLSEN's 2001 and 2003 surveys.** There were several significant increases and a few decreases in available resources from 2001 to 2003:

- Fewer youth reported having Internet access to LGBT community resources and fewer youth reported having LGBT resources in their libraries.
- Almost twice as many youth in 2003 reported that their schools had GSAs.
- There was a small increase in the percentage of youth who reported having at least one teacher or staff person at school

who was supportive of LGBT youth and in the percentage of youth who reported having at least one openly LGBT teacher or staff person at school.

- There was also an increase in the percentage of youth who were comfortable talking to teachers, principals and/or school counselor abouts LGBT issues.

**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:

- Being in a school lacking a policy about harassment was significantly related to missing more classes or days of school because of feeling unsafe.
- Youth whose schools had GSAs were less likely to have reported feeling unsafe in their schools.
- Youth who said that they had supportive or openly LGBT faculty or staff were more likely to have felt a sense of belonging in their schools.
- Having more supportive faculty or staff in school was associated with a greater likelihood of reporting incidents of harassment or assault to school officials.
- Youth who were open about their sexual orientation in schools were twice as likely to report a sense of belonging in school than youth who were not “out” to anyone at school.

## Conclusions

The results from this 2003 National School Climate Survey echo the findings from our prior surveys—for many of our nation’s LGBT youth, school can be an unsafe and even dangerous place. The majority of the LGBT youth in our study heard homophobic remarks frequently, felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation and reported being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation or their gender expression. A large number of youth also reported experiencing incidents of physical harassment, physical assault, sexual harassment and deliberate damage to personal property. The findings from this survey also demonstrate that transgender students feel particularly vulnerable because of their gender expression.

In reviewing changes between the 2001 and 2003 surveys regarding homophobic remarks and victimization events related to sexual orientation, there were small but significant decreases in the more serious, rarer events of physical harassment and physical assault, but not with the less serious, more common events of verbal harassment and use of the expression “that’s so gay.” Verbal harassment and expressions such as “that’s so gay” may be considered to be more benign, such as

“kids being kids,” and not necessary to address. Thus, more education may be needed at the school or district level about the negative effect that these less serious events may have on LGBT students.

GLSEN’s 2003 National School Climate Survey has also documented that some schools are providing resources that can improve the quality of life for LGBT students. However, the number of youth reporting such resources is far outweighed by the number of youth reporting acts of harassment and victimization. Nevertheless, the positive changes between 2001 and 2003 regarding school resources, such as increases in GSAs or supportive teachers/staff, were greater than the positive changes regarding harassment and assault, such as decreases in physical harassment and assault related to sexual orientation. The greater changes in resources for students may be, in part, a result of GLSEN’s efforts over the past two years and it may take more time for these changes to “trickle down” to the student level, particularly with anti-LGBT student attitudes and behaviors. These findings highlight the importance of tracking changes in school climate and the experiences of LGBT youth over time. They also underscore the importance of promoting attitude change at the student level in addition to providing school supports and resources for LGBT students.

Although there were increases in many LGBT-related resources from 2001 to 2003, there were two important and troubling decreases as they may be related to changes in federal legislation regarding school resources. First, fewer youth in 2003 reported that they had access to LGBT-related Internet resources than youth in 2001 which may be a direct result of new federal legislation requiring many schools to use Internet filtering software on school computers. Second, fewer youth in 2003 reported that their schools libraries had books or other resources that contained information about LGBT people, history or events which may be related to decreases in education budgets nationwide and the lack of direct federal funding for school libraries. The decline in the availability of Internet and library resources and the role that federal legislation has likely played in the decline highlights the importance of advocating for inclusionary school resources at the federal level.

Results from the 2003 National School Climate Survey also indicate the importance of advocating for state and local policies that protect LGBT youth in school. Youth who reported that their schools had a policy or procedure for reporting harassment were less likely to miss school and more likely to report incidents of harassment or assault to faculty or school staff. The results also suggest that individual schools and local school districts that have protective policies may not be adequately educating their students about them.

The GLSEN surveys highlight the need for more inclusive research on youth. Population-based studies, such as the CDC’s Youth Risk Behavior Survey, must include questions about sexual orientation and gender identity and expression because youth who do not identify as

LGBT but who may be LGBT or may later identify as LGBT may be impossible to reach through other means. In addition, 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 with regard to enforcement. Further, some local policymakers and legislators may believe that the experiences of LGBT youth in their state or their locality are more positive than what is depicted in our national study, so it is important to conduct representative studies at the state or local level.

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





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## INTRODUCTION

The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender<sup>1</sup> (LGBT) students in schools have been under-documented. For this reason, GLSEN conducted its first National School Climate Survey (NSCS) 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.<sup>2</sup>

In our 2001 national survey, we took a broader look at school climate. We asked youth not only about experiences related to their sexual orientation but also experiences related to their race/ethnicity, gender, gender expression and disability. In addition, we asked youth about school resources and supports regarding LGBT issues, such as LGBT topics included in classroom curricula and library resources, about the presence of supportive faculty or staff, and about their level of comfort discussing LGBT issues with school faculty and staff. The results from this 2001 National School Climate Survey echoed the findings from our 1999 survey—for many of our nation's LGBT youth, school can be an unsafe and even dangerous place. The majority of the youth in our 2001 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 demonstrated that transgender students felt particularly vulnerable because of their gender expression.

GLSEN's National School Climate Survey is the only study to examine school-specific experiences of LGBT-identified youth nationally. Although the Centers for Disease Control 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 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), a federally funded, longitudinal study of adolescent health.<sup>3</sup> Recent findings from

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 More information about this study is available on-line from the Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: <http://www.cpc.unc.edu/projects/addhealth>.

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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.

Given the limited attention paid by federal, state and local policy makers to LGBT youth and because GLSEN's work to make all schools safe for LGBT students is an on-going one, it is important for us to keep informed about the experiences of LGBT students in their schools. For this reason, we conducted our third national survey—the 2003 National School Climate Survey. As with the 2001 survey, we asked LGBT youth about biased language in their schools, feelings of comfort and safety in school, experiences of verbal, physical and sexual harassment based on sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, race/ethnicity, disability and religion. We also asked those youth who reported incidents of harassment or assault whether they reported these events to school personnel or to family members and whether family members ever intervened with the school. In order to understand how school-based resources and supports can improve the quality of school life for LGBT students, we asked youth about such resources and supports in their schools, such as having gay-straight alliances (GSAs), curricula that are inclusive of the lives of LGBT persons or a supportive teacher or counselor. In the 2003 survey, we added questions about their academic achievement and educational goals so to examine how school climate and resources may affect them.

4 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.

5 Russell, S. T., Serif, 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.

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## METHODOLOGY

We used two methods of obtaining participants in order to create a more representative sample of LGBT youth. In the first, youth were obtained 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, 38 were able to have youth complete the survey. A total of 308 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 therefore youth who live in areas 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 listservs and electronic bulletin boards. Notices were also 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 579 youth. Data collection through community-based groups occurred from the end of May to the end of August 2003. Data collection through the on-line version occurred from June through August 2003.

A total of 887 lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender youth between the ages of 13 and 20, from 48 states and the District of Columbia, completed the survey. (Youth who were not in a K–12 school during the 2002–2003 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 characteristics of the schools they attended are shown in Table 2. The majority of the youth identified as white or European-American (73.2%); about half identified as female and the majority identified as gay or lesbian. Over half of the sample reported being in 11th or 12th grade during the 2002–2003 school year.

**Table 1: Demographics of Survey Participants**

**Race/Ethnicity**

White	73.2%	(N=644)
African-American/Black	5.6%	(N=49)
Latino/a	11.8%	(N=104)
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.7%	(N=24)
Native American	3.0%	(N=26)
Other race/ethnicity	0.6%	(N=5)
Multiracial	3.1%	(N=28)

**Gender**

Male	41.7%	(N=370)
Female	49.3%	(N=437)
Transgender	6.2%	(N=55)
Other gender identities	2.8%	(N=25)

**Sexual Orientation**

Gay or Lesbian	61.6%	(N=546)
Bisexual	26.9%	(N=239)
Other sexual orientations	11.5%	(N=102)

**Grade**

6th Grade	0.1%	(N=1)
7th Grade	0.8%	(N=7)
8th Grade	3.2%	(N=28)
9th Grade	12.7%	(N=111)
10th Grade	22.3%	(N=196)
11th grade	31.6%	(N=277)
12th grade	29.3%	(N=257)

Average age = 16.6 years

**Region**

Northeast (CT, DC, DE, ME, MD, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT)	29.5%	(N=260)
South (AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, TX, VA, WV)	18.7%	(N=167)
Midwest (IL, IN, IA, KS, MI, MN, MO, NE, ND, OH, OK, SD, WI, WY)	30.3%	(N=255)
West (AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NV, NM, OR, UT, WA)	21.5%	(N=199)

**Table 2: School Characteristics**

**Grade Levels**

K through 12 school	6.5%	(N=58)
Lower school (elementary and middle school grades)	0.2%	(N=2)
Middle school	2.7%	(N=24)
Upper school (middle school and high school grades)	6.4%	(N=57)
High school	84.1%	(N=746)

**Community Type**

Large City	16.0%	(N=129)
Mid-size City	16.3%	(N=131)
Suburban—Large City	37.4%	(N=301)
Suburban—Mid-size	11.9%	(N=96)
Small City or Town	6.0%	(N=48)
Rural	12.4%	(N=100)

**School Type**

Public school	93.5%	(N=827)
<i>Charter school</i>	9.1% of public school youth	(N=70)
<i>Magnet school</i>	17.5% of public school youth	(N=139)
Religious-affiliated school	3.1%	(N=27)
Other independent or private school	3.4%	(N=30)

## RESULTS

### Biased Language in Schools<sup>6</sup>

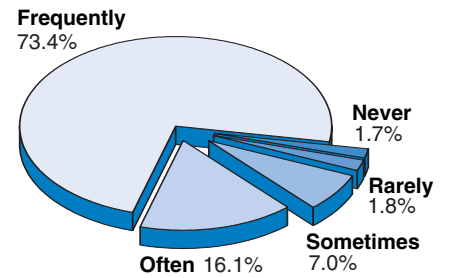
GLSEN works to create safer schools, schools where hallways and classrooms are free from biased language. One aspect of school climate assessed in our 2001 and 2003 surveys was the frequency of biased language heard in schools and how students and faculty addressed such language. As in the 2001 survey, youth were asked how often they had 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 the 2003 survey, we also wanted to determine whether comments were made in school about how students express their gender. These comments may be different from other kinds of homophobic remarks because they may be made about someone who may or may not be known or perceived to be gay or lesbian. Such comments would contribute to a hostile school climate for some LGBT youth. Therefore, we asked youth how frequently they heard negative comments about someone not acting in traditionally gender-conforming ways (i.e., not “masculine” enough or not “feminine” enough). In addition to the frequency of hearing biased language, we also asked whether the perpetrators of such remarks were students and/or faculty, and whether anyone intervened when these remarks were made.

### Homophobic Remarks

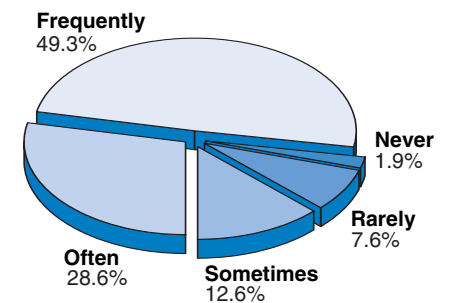
As with the 1999 NSCS, youth were asked about the frequency of hearing homophobic remarks, such as “faggot” or “dyke,” in their schools. However, in the 2001 and 2003 surveys, we also asked youth how often they had heard the expression “That’s so gay” or “You’re so gay” used in their schools. In these expressions, the word “gay” is used to mean something that is considered bad or valueless just as one might use the words “dumb” or “stupid.” As shown in Figures 1 and 2, 89.5% of the youth reported hearing expressions such as “that’s so gay” frequently or often and 77.9% reported hearing other homophobic remarks, such as “faggot” or “dyke,” frequently or often<sup>7</sup>. Considering both types of homophobic remarks, 91.5% of youth reported having heard them frequently or often (see Figure 3).

Youth were also asked whether homophobic remarks were made by students, faculty/staff or both:

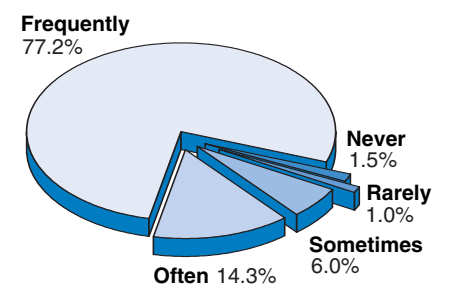
**Figure 1. Frequency of Hearing “That’s So Gay” in School**



**Figure 2. Frequency of Hearing Other Homophobic Remarks in School (such as “fag” or “dyke”)**



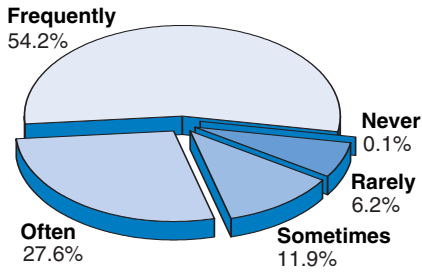
**Figure 3. Frequency of Hearing Any Kind of Homophobic Remark (combined hearing “that’s so gay” and other kinds of remarks)**



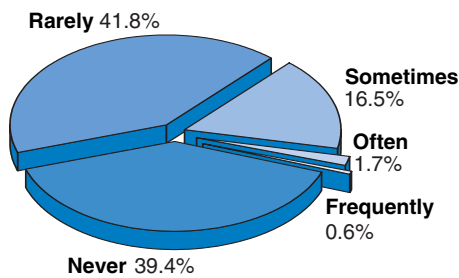
<sup>6</sup> In this part of the survey, we asked youth about their experiences with hearing biased language, in general, in their schools. Biased language directed towards an individual, such as homophobic remarks directed toward an LGBT person or racist remarks directed toward a person of color, would be considered an experience of verbal harassment. The experience of LGBT youth with regard to such verbal harassment is discussed later in this report.

<sup>7</sup> Some LGBT youth may use terms traditionally seen as homophobic, such as “faggot,” among themselves. Similarly, racist terms may sometimes be used among youth of color and not have the same racist meaning or negative intent as when used by white youth. In the 2001 survey, we did not ask youth to differentiate these types of usage. In the 2003 survey, youth were asked the frequency of biased language used “in a derogatory manner” in an attempt to establish negative use of biased language.

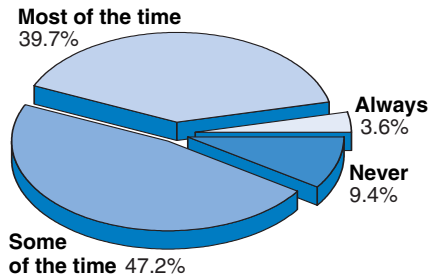
**Figure 4. Frequency of Hearing Homophobic Remarks from Other Students**



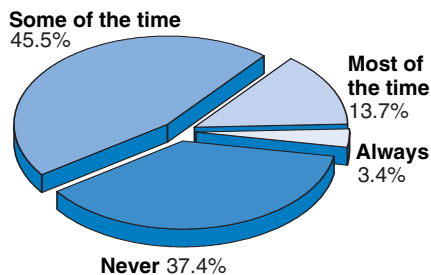
**Figure 5. Frequency of Hearing Homophobic Remarks from Faculty**



**Figure 6. How Often Faculty Were Present When Homophobic Remarks Were Made**



**Figure 7. How Often Faculty Intervened When Hearing Homophobic Remarks**

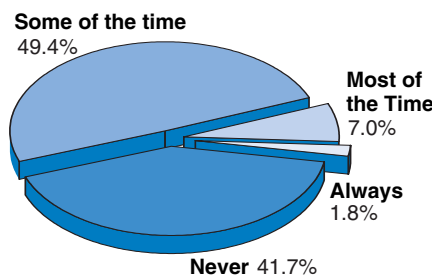


- Almost all youth reported hearing homophobic remarks from other students—81.8% reported hearing such remarks often or frequently from other students (see Figure 4).
- Almost half of these youth (47.5%) reported that they heard homophobic remarks from some of the students and over a third (40.5%) reported hearing these remarks from most of the students at their schools.
- The majority of youth reported never or rarely hearing homophobic remarks from school faculty or staff. However, almost 20% of the youth (18.8%) reported hearing homophobic remarks from faculty or school staff at least some of the time (see Figure 5).
- Almost half of the youth in our survey reported that faculty or staff were present most of the time or always when homophobic remarks were made (see Figure 6).

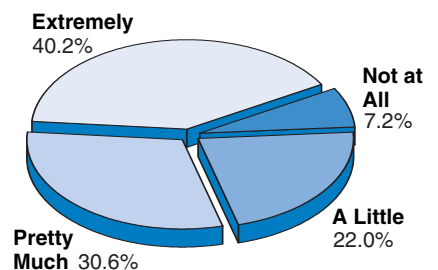
Incidents of homophobic remarks often go unchallenged. Less than a quarter of the youth reported that faculty or staff intervened most or all of the time when present when such remarks were made (see Figure 7). Other students were reportedly less likely than faculty to intervene when homophobic remarks were made. As shown in Figure 8, almost all of the youth in our survey reported that other students never intervened or intervened only some of the time when homophobic remarks were made (91.1%).

Anecdotal reports suggest that most non-LGBT students and some school district officials and educational policymakers maintain that the expression “that’s so gay” does not directly denigrate gay or lesbian people and therefore should not be seen as harmful or offensive. For this reason, in the 2003 survey, we asked those youth who heard this expression used in their schools the degree to which hearing such expressions bothered or distressed them. As shown in Figure 9, the vast majority of youth reported that they were distressed to some degree when hearing the words “gay” or “queer” used in a derogatory way (such as “that’s so gay”). Only about a quarter of the youth reported that hearing such expressions bothered or distressed them only a little or not at all.

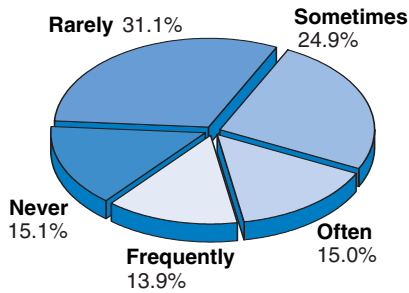
**Figure 8. How Often Students Intervened When Hearing Homophobic Remarks**



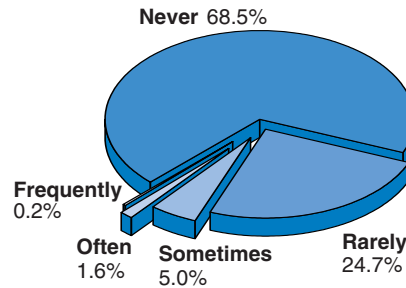
**Figure 9. How Bothered or Distressed as a Result of Hearing Words Like “Gay” or “Queer” Used in a Derogatory Way (e.g., “That class was so gay”)**



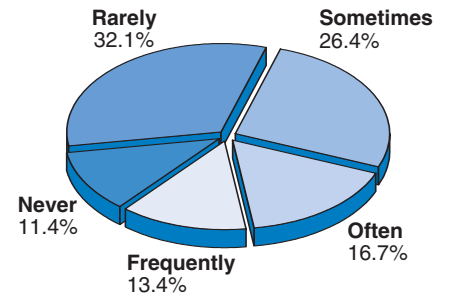
**Figure 10. Frequency of Hearing Racist Remarks in School**



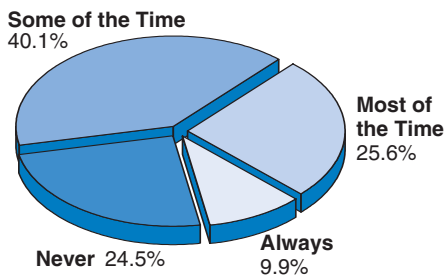
**Figure 11. Frequency of Hearing Racist Remarks from Faculty**



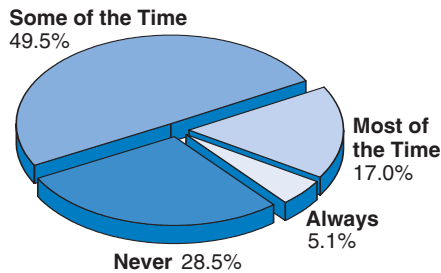
**Figure 12. Frequency of Hearing Racist Remarks from Other Students**



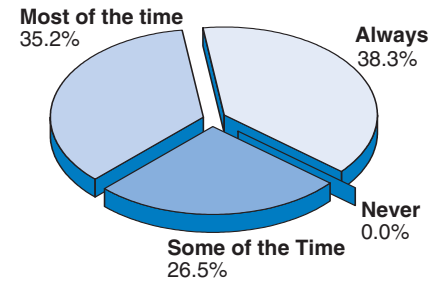
**Figure 13. How Often Students Intervened When Hearing Racist Remarks**



**Figure 14. How Often Faculty Were Present When Racist Remarks Were Made**



**Figure 15. How Often Faculty Intervened When Hearing Racist Remarks**



## **Racist Remarks**

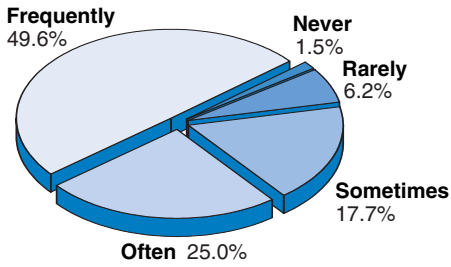
The youth reported that it is not uncommon to hear racist language in school. Over a quarter of youth (28.9%) reported hearing racist remarks, such as “nigger” or “spic,” in their schools frequently or often (see Figure 10).

It appears that other students were the main perpetrators of racist remarks in school (see Figures 11 and 12). Whereas over a quarter of youth reported hearing racist remarks from other students either frequently or often (30.1%), only a very small percentage of youth reported such remarks frequently or often from faculty or staff at their schools (1.8%).

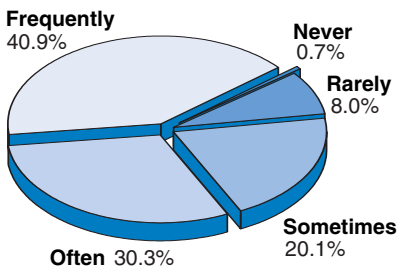
As with homophobic remarks, racist remarks often went unprotected by other students. Only about a third (35.5%) of the youth in our survey reported that other students intervened most of the time or always (see Figure 13). However, in contrast with homophobic remarks, racist remarks were often made when faculty or staff were not present. As shown in Figure 14, less than a quarter of youth reported that faculty or staff were present most of the time or always. However, when faculty or staff were present, they most often intervened—almost three-quarters of the youth reported that faculty or staff intervened (73.5%) either most of the time or always (see Figure 15).



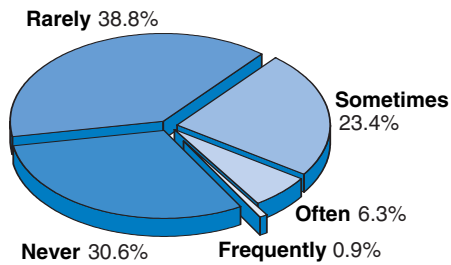
**Figure 16. Frequency of Hearing Sexist Remarks in School**



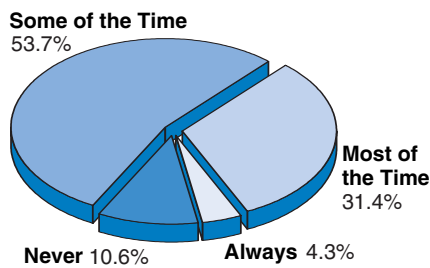
**Figure 17. Frequency of Hearing Sexist Remarks from Other Students**



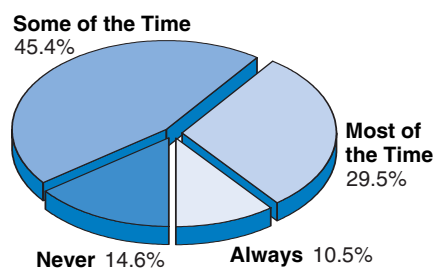
**Figure 18. Frequency of Hearing Sexist Remarks from Faculty**



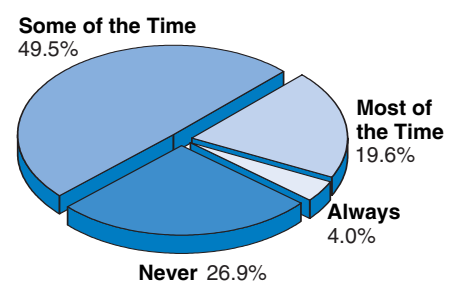
**Figure 19. How Often Faculty Were Present When Sexist Remarks Were Made**



**Figure 20. How Often Faculty Intervened When Hearing Sexist Remarks**



**Figure 21. How Often Students Intervened When Hearing Sexist Remarks**



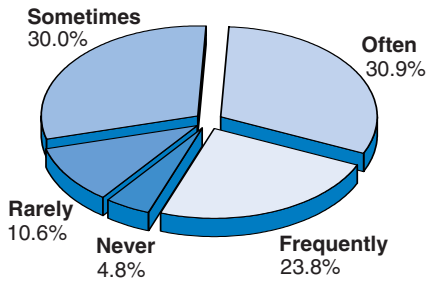
## Sexist Remarks

We also asked youth how often they heard sexist remarks in their school, such as someone being called a “bitch,” comments about girls’ bodies or talk of girls being inferior to boys. According to the youth, sexist remarks were also pervasive in their schools. The majority of youth (74.6%) reported hearing sexist remarks frequently or often (see Figure 16).

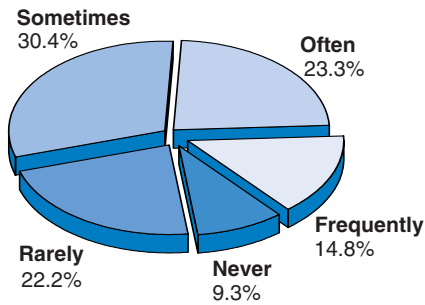
As with racist and homophobic remarks, sexist remarks were more commonly heard from other students. As shown in Figure 17, about 70% of youth reported hearing them frequently or often from other students and fewer than 10% reported that they never or rarely heard sexist remarks (8.7%). Almost half reported hearing sexist remarks from most of the students in their schools (40.7%). Regarding faculty and staff, almost one-third of youth (30.6%) also reported hearing sexist remarks from them at least some of the time with 7.2% of youth reporting that these comments were heard frequently or often (see Figure 18).

In contrast to racist remarks, sexist remarks appeared to be made more often in the presence of faculty or staff with only a small percentage of youth (10.6%) reporting that faculty or school staff were never present (see Figure 19). However, when faculty or staff were present, the majority of youth reported that they intervened at least some of the time (see Figure 20). Faculty/staff were reportedly more likely to intervene than were other students—40.0% of youth reported that faculty/staff intervened when sexist remarks were made always or most of the time compared to 23.6% of youth who reported intervention by other students (see Figures 20 and 21).

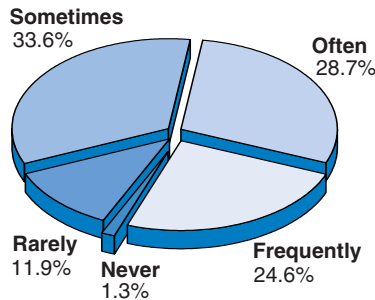
**Figure 22. Frequency of Hearing Comments about Students Not Acting “Masculine” Enough**



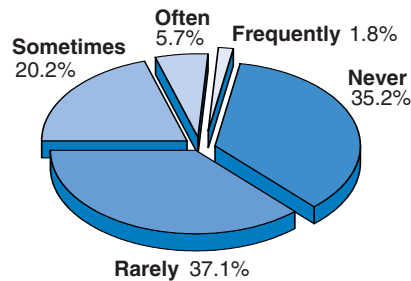
**Figure 23. Frequency of Hearing Comments about Students Not Acting “Feminine” Enough**



**Figure 24. Frequency of Hearing Comments about Gender Expression from Other Students**



**Figure 25. Frequency of Hearing Comments about Gender Expression from Faculty**

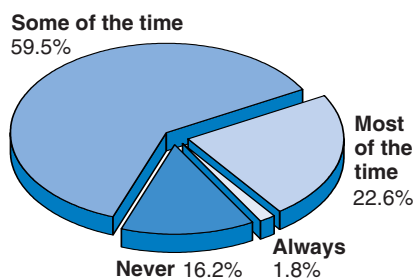


### **Negative Remarks about Gender Expression**

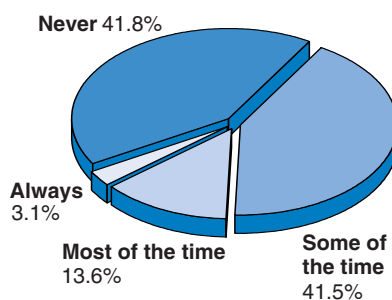
In the 2003 survey, we asked youth how often they heard remarks about students not acting in traditionally gender-specified ways, i.e., not acting “masculine” or “feminine” enough. Youth more frequently reported hearing comments about masculinity than about femininity in their schools. Whereas over half of the youth (54.7%) reported frequently or often hearing comments about students not acting “masculine” enough in their schools, just over a third of youth (38.1%) reported frequently or often hearing comments about students not acting “feminine” enough (see Figures 22 and 23).

As with other types of biased language, youth were much more likely to report negative remarks about gender expression from other students than from faculty—over half of youth (53.3%) reported hearing such remarks often or frequently from other students compared to less than 10% (7.5%) of youth who reported such remarks often or frequently from faculty or staff (see Figures 24 and 25). Almost a quarter reported hearing negative remarks about gender expression from most of the students in their schools (23.4%).

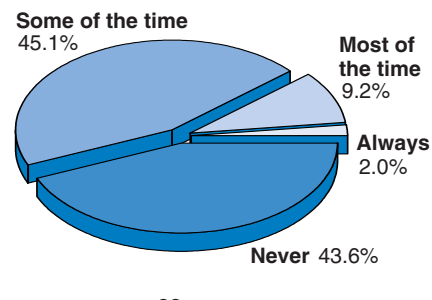
**Figure 26. How Often Faculty Were Present When Comments about Gender Expression Were Made**



**Figure 27. How Often Faculty Intervened When Hearing Comments about Gender Expression**



**Figure 28. How Often Students Intervened When Hearing Comments about Gender Expression**



As with homophobic and sexist remarks, only a small percentage of youth (16.2%) reported that faculty or school staff were never present when hearing remarks about students' gender expression (see Figure 26). However, over a third of youth (41.8%) reported that faculty/staff never intervened when they were present when these remarks were made. Unlike other forms of biased language where faculty or staff were more likely to intervene than students, there was no significant difference between the frequency of faculty/staff involvement and of student involvement—16.7% of youth reported that faculty/staff intervened always or most of the time when remarks about gender expression were made compared to 11.2% who reported intervention by other students (see Figures 27 and 28).

### ***Differences Among Biased Language Use***

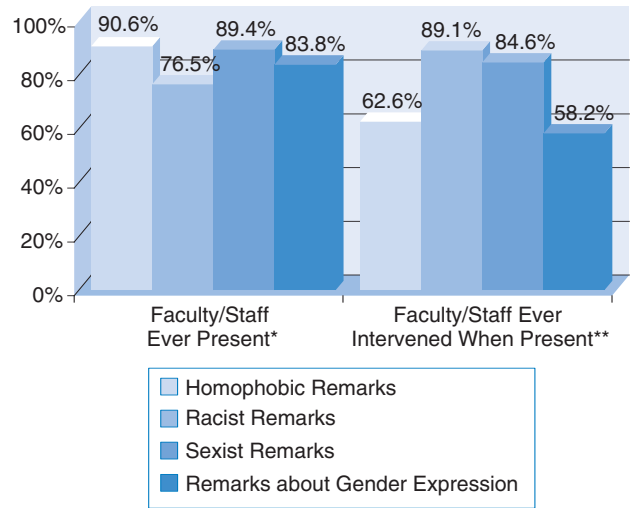
Racist, sexist and homophobic remarks and negative remarks about gender expression were all common to our nation's schools, as reported by the LGBT youth in our survey. The largest percentage of youth reported homophobic remarks, followed by sexist remarks, remarks about masculinity, remarks about femininity and lastly racist remarks. It is possible that there are more embedded school norms that limit the use of racist language as compared to other types of remarks. However, it is also possible that homophobic or sexist remarks were more salient for the LGBT youth in this survey resulting in the youth being more attentive to or aware of them in their schools. Results from the survey also indicate that norms about biased language may be different for students than for faculty or staff. With regard to biased language heard from faculty or staff, the largest percentage of youth reported sexist remarks, followed by remarks about gender expression, homophobic remarks and lastly racist remarks. It may be that faculty or staff are aware that using words like "faggot" or "nigger" are inappropriate but are less aware of the inappropriateness of making comments about a girl's body, that girls are inferior to boys in some way, or that a boy should act more "masculine."

It is important to highlight that more youth reported comments about students not acting "masculine" enough than about students not acting

“feminine” enough. This finding may point to possible differences in societal expectations regarding appropriate masculine and feminine behavior for men and women, respectively.

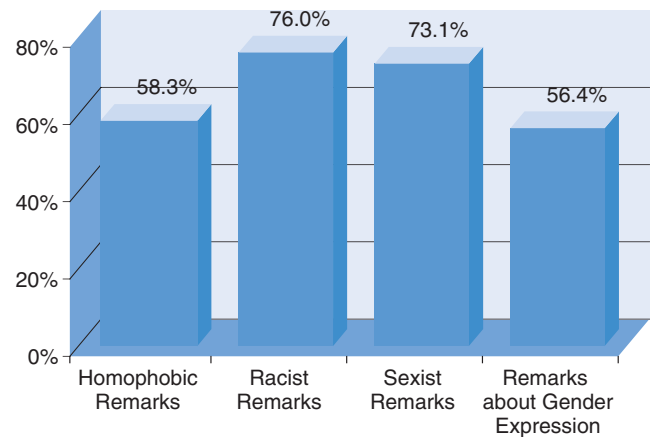
There were also significant differences among the types of biased language remarks with regard to the presence of faculty or staff and the likelihood of anyone in school intervening when remarks were made. Youth reported that faculty or school staff were more often present when homophobic or sexist remarks were made than when racist remarks were made (see Figure 29). However, youth reported that faculty/staff and students intervened least often when homophobic remarks and remarks about gender expression were made (see Figures 29 and 30). Again, it is possible that these reported differences were related to varying levels of saliency regarding homophobia, sexism and racism for the LGBT youth in the sample. However, these differences may also be an indication of differing norms in our nation’s schools with regard to types of 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 other kinds of biased language remarks. Faculty and staff may be likelier to intervene when racist remarks are made compared to sexist and homophobic remarks because of school or cultural norms or school policies about expressed tolerance for racism or because of personal beliefs with regard to racism. Faculty and students alike may not understand the negative effect of commenting on someone’s gender expression or not deem it problematic enough to warrant intervention.

**Figure 29. Presence of and Intervention by Faculty/Staff Regarding Biased Language** (percent of those who reported “Some of the time,” “Most of the time,” or “Always”)



\* All percentages were significantly different from one another except the percentages for “Homophobic Remarks” and “Sexist Remarks”.  
 \*\* All percentages were significantly different from one another except the percentages for “Homophobic Remarks” and “Remarks about Gender Expression.”

**Figure 30. Intervention by Other Students Regarding Biased Language\*** (percent of those who reported “Some of the time,” “Most of the time,” or “Always”)

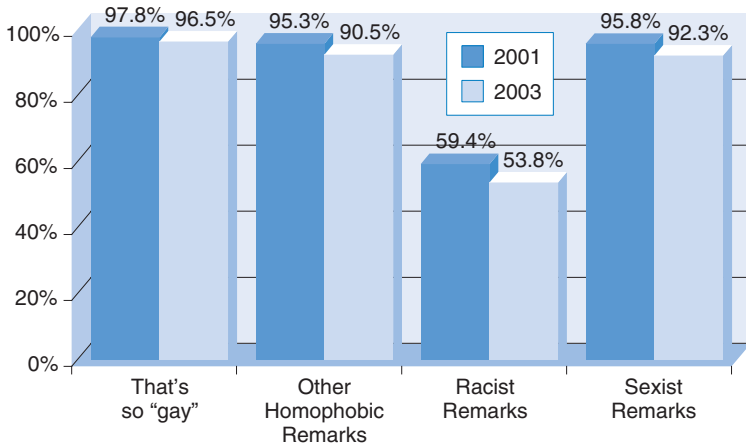


\* The percentages for “Homophobic Remarks” and “Remarks about Gender Expression” were significantly lower than the percentages for “Racist Remarks” and “Sexist Remarks.”

## Comparison Between GLSEN's 2001 and 2003 Surveys<sup>8</sup>

For most types of biased language remarks, there was a small but significant decrease in frequency between the 2001 and 2003 samples (Figure 31). The one exception was with hearing expressions such as “that’s so gay” or “you’re so gay,” as the reported frequencies were not significantly different between the samples.

**Figure 31. Comparison of 2001 and 2003 NSCS: Biased Language in School**  
(percent reporting “Sometimes,” “Often” or “Frequently”)

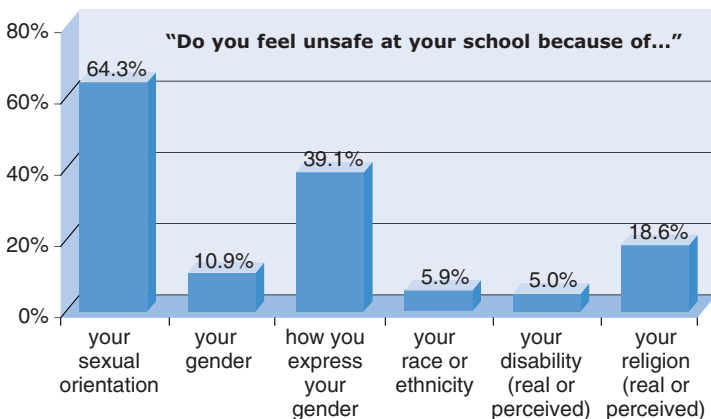


Although there was a small decrease in the frequency of hearing homophobic remarks in school between the 2001 and 2003 surveys, there was a slight increase in the reported frequency of faculty or staff being present when homophobic remarks were made. In 2001, 34.5% of youth reported that a faculty or staff member was present most of the time or always when homophobic remarks were made compared to 43.3% of youth in 2003. Even with this increased presence of faculty or staff, there were no differences in the reported level of intervention by students or staff with regard to homophobic remarks.

## Overall Safety in School

Although LGBT youth may feel particularly unsafe because of their sexual orientation or gender expression, they may also feel unsafe in their schools because of other personal characteristics, such as their race/ethnicity or religion. Thus, 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, because of an actual or perceived disability and/or because of their religion or the religion they are presumed to be.

**Figure 32. Percentage of Youth Who Feel Unsafe at Their School**



Three-quarters (75.1%) of youth reported that they felt unsafe in their schools due to one or more personal characteristics. As shown in Figure 32, youth most commonly reported that they felt unsafe in their schools because of their sexual orientation or their gender expression—almost two-thirds of youth (64.3%) reported that they felt unsafe in their schools because of their sexual orientation and over one-third reported that they felt unsafe because of their gender expression (39.1%).<sup>9</sup> As also shown in Figure 32, over 10% of youth reported feeling unsafe because of their religion or because of their gender.

<sup>8</sup> In 2001, youth were not asked questions about negative remarks related to gender expression. Therefore, comparisons cannot be made between surveys.

<sup>9</sup> Percentages of youth reporting “yes” to each of the six categories were significantly different from one another, with the exception of feeling unsafe because of one’s race/ethnicity and feeling unsafe because of one’s real or perceived disability.

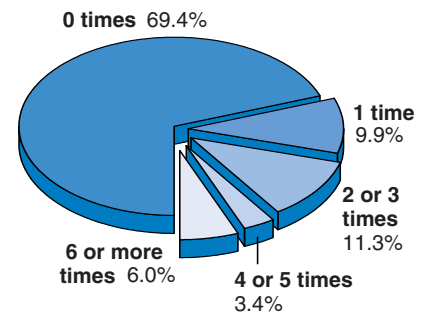
For LGBT youth, feeling that school is a hostile or unsafe place may interfere with their ability to learn. We asked youth in our survey how many times they had missed a class or missed a full day of school in the past month because they felt uncomfortable or unsafe in school. As shown in Figures 33 and 34, 30.6% of youth skipped a class at least once in the past month and 28.6% missed at least one entire day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe. These findings are consistent with those from the 2001 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey that found 16.4% of sexual minority students (those who identified themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual and/or had a history of same-sex sexual contact) did not go to school at least once in the preceding month because they felt unsafe as compared to 7.6% of other students.<sup>10</sup> The percentage from the Massachusetts study was lower than that in the national GLSEN study and may be due to the statewide attention paid to creating safe schools for LGBT students through the Massachusetts Safe Schools Program for Gay and Lesbian Students.<sup>11</sup>

There were few differences between the 2001 and 2003 surveys regarding youth feeling unsafe in their schools because of a personal characteristic. The only significant difference was a small decrease in the percentage of youth who reported feeling unsafe because of their gender expression: 45.7% in 2001 versus 39.1% in 2003.<sup>12</sup>

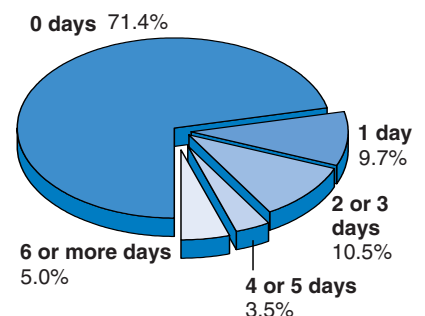
## Experiences of Harassment and Assault in School

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 nonphysical 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.<sup>13</sup> 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 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, their actual or perceived disability and/or their actual or perceived religion.<sup>14</sup> Youth were asked whether such incidents happened “frequently,” “often,” “sometimes,” “rarely” or “never.”

**Figure 33. Frequency of Missing Classes in the Past Month Because of Feeling Unsafe**



**Figure 34. Frequency of Missing Days of School in the Past Month Because of Feeling Unsafe**



<sup>10</sup> Findings from the 2001 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey are available from the Massachusetts Department of Education: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/hssss/yrebs/01/results.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> More information on this program is also available from the Massachusetts Department of Education: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/hssss/>.

<sup>12</sup> In 2001, youth were not asked about feeling unsafe in school because of an actual or perceived disability, and therefore, comparisons between surveys cannot be made.

<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> The attributions for the victimization event were not mutually exclusive and youth could indicate that harassment or assault was related to more than one personal characteristic.

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### ***Verbal Harassment***

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Figure 35 illustrates the youth responses regarding verbal harassment in school (being called names, being threatened, etc.). The majority of LGBT youth in our survey reported at least some experience of verbal harassment because of their sexual orientation<sup>15</sup> with almost a quarter of the youth (23.9%) reporting that such harassment happened frequently. The majority of youth also reported verbal harassment because of their gender expression with over 10% reporting that it occurred frequently. In addition, almost half of the youth reported verbal harassment because of their gender.

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### ***Physical Harassment***

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As illustrated in Figure 36, over a third of the youth reported at least some experience of physical harassment (being pushed, shoved, etc.) because of their sexual orientation and 10% reported that such harassment occurred frequently or often. Also, more than a quarter of the youth reported that they had experienced physical harassment because of their gender expression and nearly 20% reported that it was because of their gender. Over 10% of youth reported physical harassment because of their religion.

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### ***Physical Assault***

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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, because of a real or perceived disability and/or because of their real or perceived religion. 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, nearly 20% of youth reported some incident of physical assault in the past year because of their sexual orientation and over 10% of youth reported having been assaulted because of their gender expression (see Figure 37).

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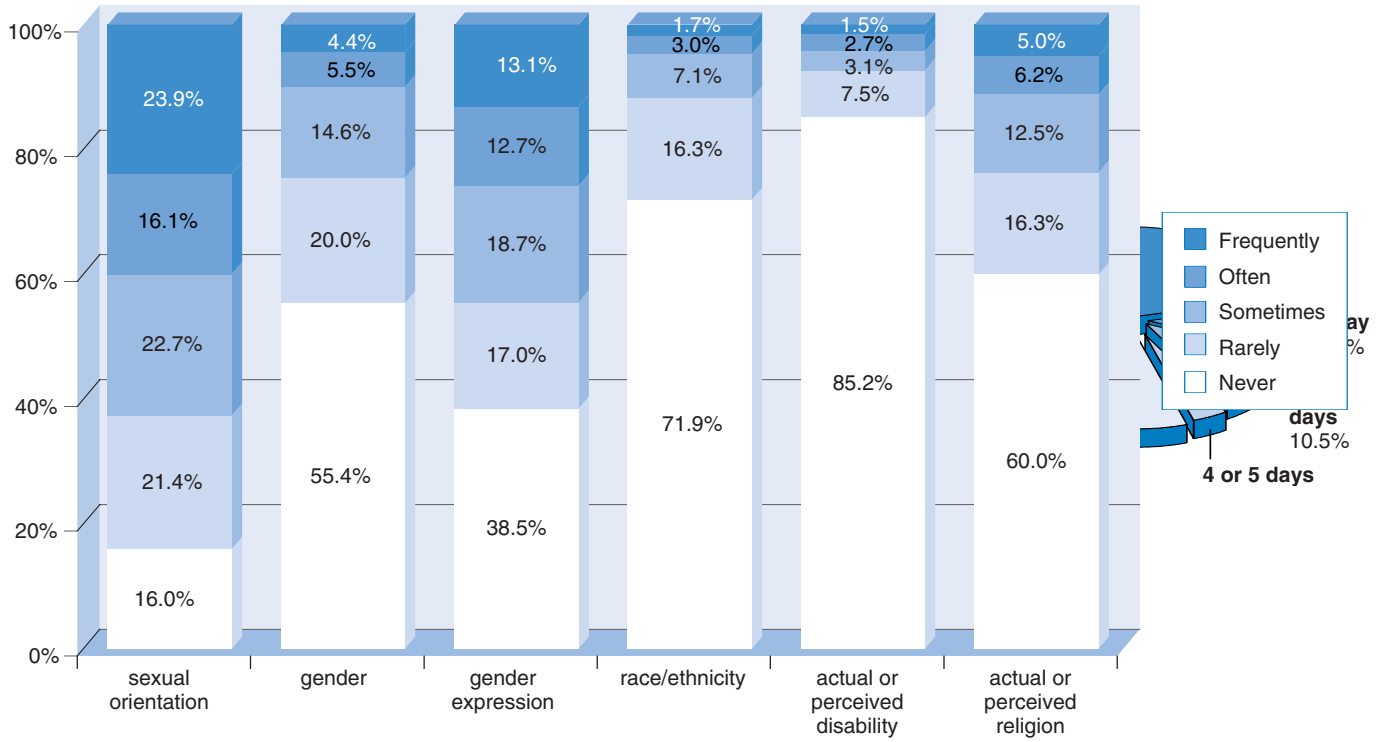
### ***Sexual Harassment***

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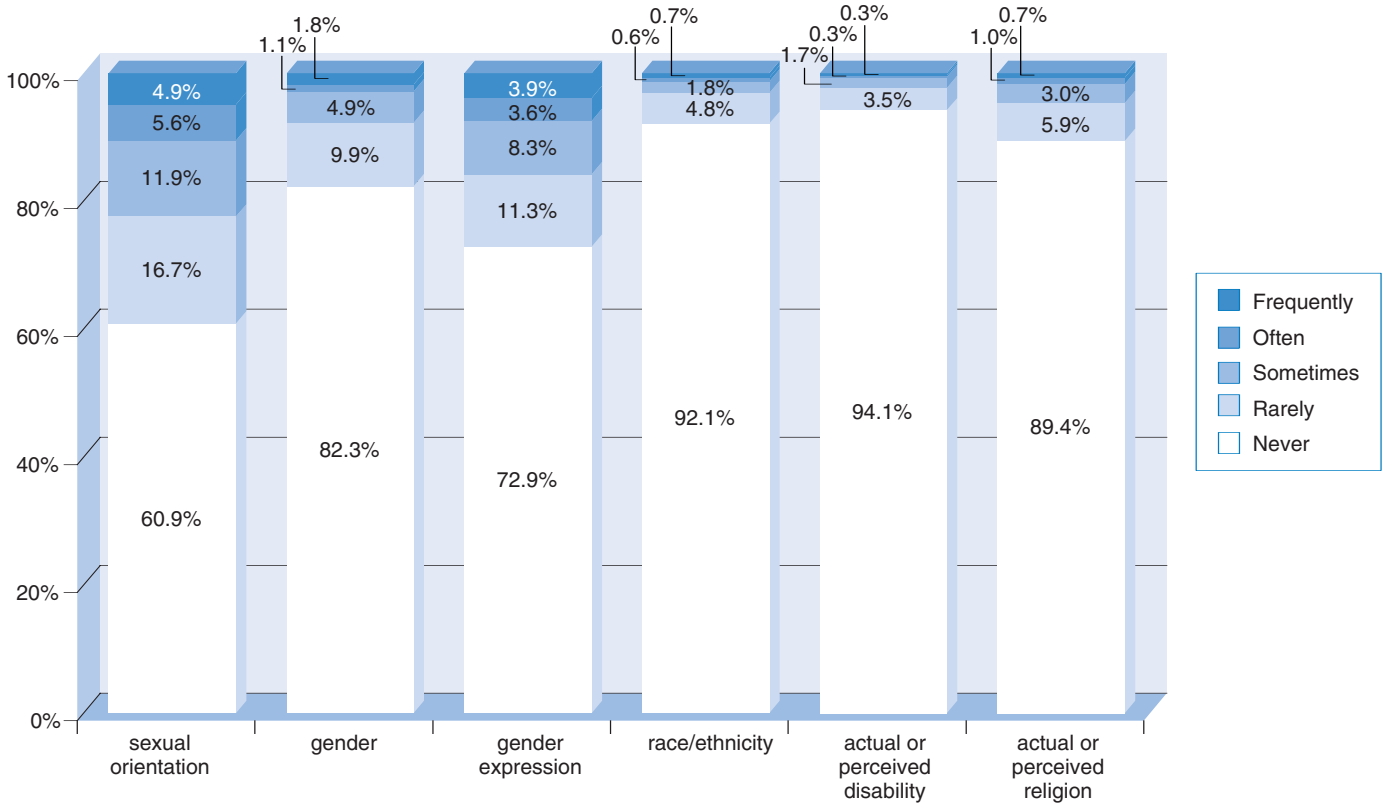
Another important finding from the Human Rights Watch report was the sexual nature of harassment of LGBT youth in school, particularly experienced by lesbian and bisexual young women and by transgender youth. In GLSEN's 2003 National School Climate Survey, youth were asked how often they had been sexually harassed at their school, such as sexual remarks made toward them or someone touching them inappropriately. As shown in Figure 38, almost two-thirds of youth (65.3%) reported having been sexually harassed during the past school year.

<sup>15</sup> 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.

**Figure 35. Frequency of Verbal Harassment in the Past School Year**

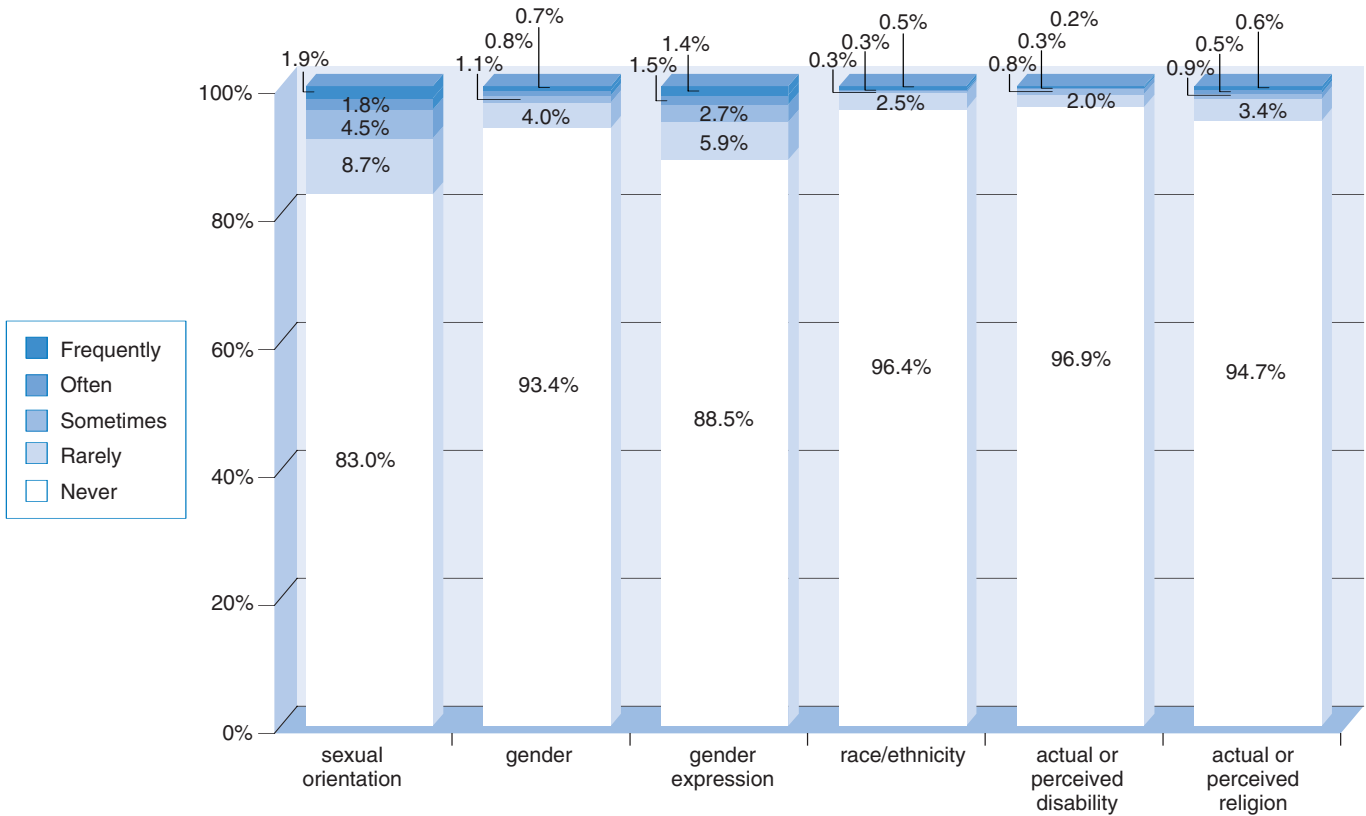


**Figure 36. Frequency of Physical Harassment in the Past School Year**

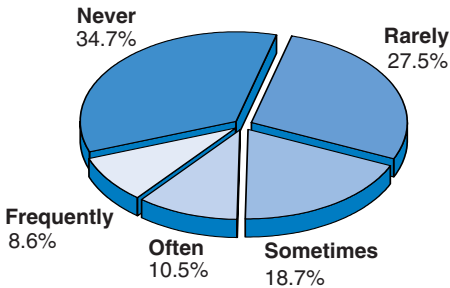




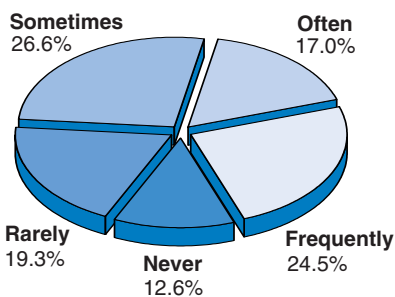
**Figure 37. Frequency of Physical Assault in the Past School Year**



**Figure 38. Frequency of Sexual Harassment in the Past School Year**



**Figure 39. Frequency of Being the Target of Mean Rumors or Lies in the Past School Year**



### Relational Aggression

Social science research on child and adolescent aggression toward peers has almost exclusively focused on physical or overt acts of aggressive behavior, such as physical harassment or assault. More recently, research has provided compelling evidence for a relational form of aggression, i.e., harm caused by damage to peer relationships.<sup>16</sup> One common form of relational aggression is spreading rumors or gossip about a peer. Thus, in the 2003 survey, we asked youth about their experiences with mean rumors or lies being spread about them in school. As shown in Figure 39, more than a third of youth encountered these behaviors frequently or often in their schools. Relative to other forms of harassment and victimization, this relational type of aggression was similar in prevalence to that of verbal harassment based on sexual orientation and was more prevalent than physical harassment and assault.

### Property Damaged or Stolen

Having one's personal property damaged or stolen is yet another dimension of a hostile school climate. In the present survey, we asked youth how often they had had their property, such as their car, clothing

<sup>16</sup> Crick, N. R. (1995). Relational aggression: The role of intent attributions, feelings of distress, and provocation type. *Development and Psychopathology*, 7, 313–322.  
 Galen, B. R., & Underwood, M. K. (1997). A developmental investigation of social aggression among children. *Developmental Psychology*, 33, 589–600.

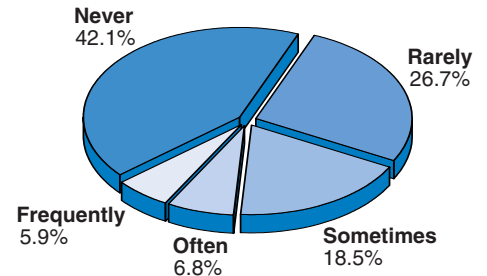
or books, stolen or deliberately damaged at school. More than half of the youth reported an occurrence of this event in the past year with just over 10% reporting that it happened frequently or often (see Figure 40).

### Comparisons with Population Based Studies

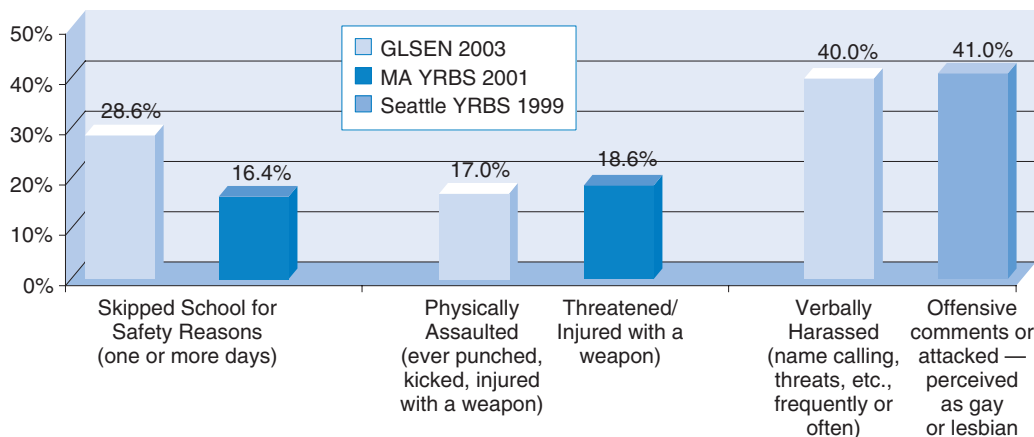
As GLSEN’s National School Climate Survey is the only study to examine the school-related experiences of LGBT-identified youth nationally, there exists no other data with which to compare the prevalence of harassment and assault of the youth in our study. Results from the 2003 NSCS are consistent, however, with available results from those state or local YRBSs that ask information about sexual orientation (see Figure 41). As previously mentioned, the percentage of sexual minority youth in Massachusetts who reported missing school for safety reasons was similar to the LGBT youth in GLSEN’s national survey. Also, in the 2001 Massachusetts YRBS, 18.6% reported having been threatened or injured with a weapon compared to 17.0% of youth in the NSCS who reported having been physically assaulted, which includes being injured with a weapon.<sup>17</sup> In the 1999 Seattle YRBS, 41.0% of lesbian, gay or bisexual students reported that they had been harassed or attacked because of their sexual orientation compared to 40.0% of youth in the NSCS who reported having been verbally harassed.<sup>18</sup> It is important to note that direct comparisons are difficult to make because all three studies ask about harassment, assault and school safety 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.

In order to assess the degree of school-based harassment for LGBT youth, it is important to compare the findings from the GLSEN survey

**Figure 40. Frequency of Having Had Personal Property Stolen or Deliberately Damaged in the Past School Year**



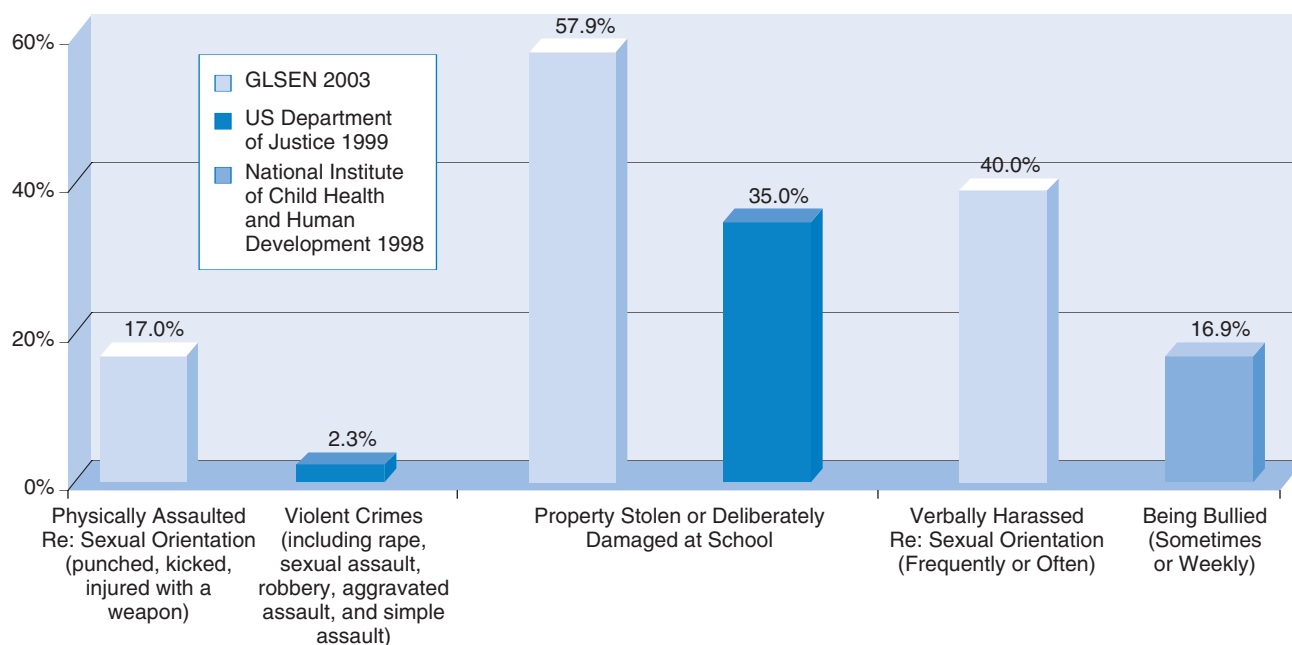
**Figure 41. Comparison of the 2003 NSCS with State-Wide Samples of LGBT Students (Massachusetts and Seattle YRBS)**



<sup>17</sup> Findings from the 2001 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey are available from the Massachusetts Department of Education: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/hssss/yrebs/01/results.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> 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](mailto:phillard@cks.ssd.k12.wa.us).

**Figure 42. Comparison of Student Victimization with National Data on High School Students**



with available national statistics. Figure 42 illustrates results from GLSEN’s 2003 survey with other national data samples of high school students.<sup>19</sup> A 1999 report from the United States Department of Justice documented that 2.3% of high school students reported violent crimes in school, including rape, sexual assault, robbery, simple assault and aggravated assault and 35.0% of students reported that their property had been damaged or stolen in school.<sup>20</sup> However, reports from LGBT youth in GLSEN’s survey for similar types of victimization were much higher—17.0% of LGBT youth reported being physically assaulted in school, which includes being punched, kicked and injured with a weapon, and 57.9% of LGBT youth reported property damaged or stolen. Using data from a 1998 study of middle and high school students on bullying behavior conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), researchers found that 16.9% of students reported being bullied sometimes or weekly during the current term.<sup>21,22</sup> In GLSEN’s 2003 survey, a much higher percentage of youth (40%) reported being verbally harassed often or frequently because of their sexual orientation in the past year. Again, direct comparisons are difficult to make because the studies ask about harassment and victimization in different ways, except for the question about property being damaged or stolen.

19 Given that the studies used for comparison purposes are drawn from national samples of high school students, one would assume they include LGBT students but predominately include heterosexual and non-transgender students.

20 Source: Kaufman, P., Chen, X., Choy, S.P., Ruddy, S.A., Miller, A.K., Fleury, J.K., Chandler, K.A., Rand, M.R., Klaus, P., and Planty, M.G. *Indicators of School Crime and Safety*, 2000. U.S. Departments of Education and Justice. NCES 2001-017/NCJ-184176. Washington, D.C.: 2000. This publication can be downloaded from the World Wide Web at <http://nces.ed.gov> or <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs>.

21 Because the term “bullying” is a relatively broad term that can include verbal aggression (name-calling or threats) and physical aggression (hitting, kicking), there is no exact parallel data in the GLSEN survey. Verbal harassment was used for comparison because it would fall under the broader category of “bullying” and because it would provide a fairer comparison with the national data as it is perhaps the least egregious of the victimization behaviors reported in the GLSEN survey.

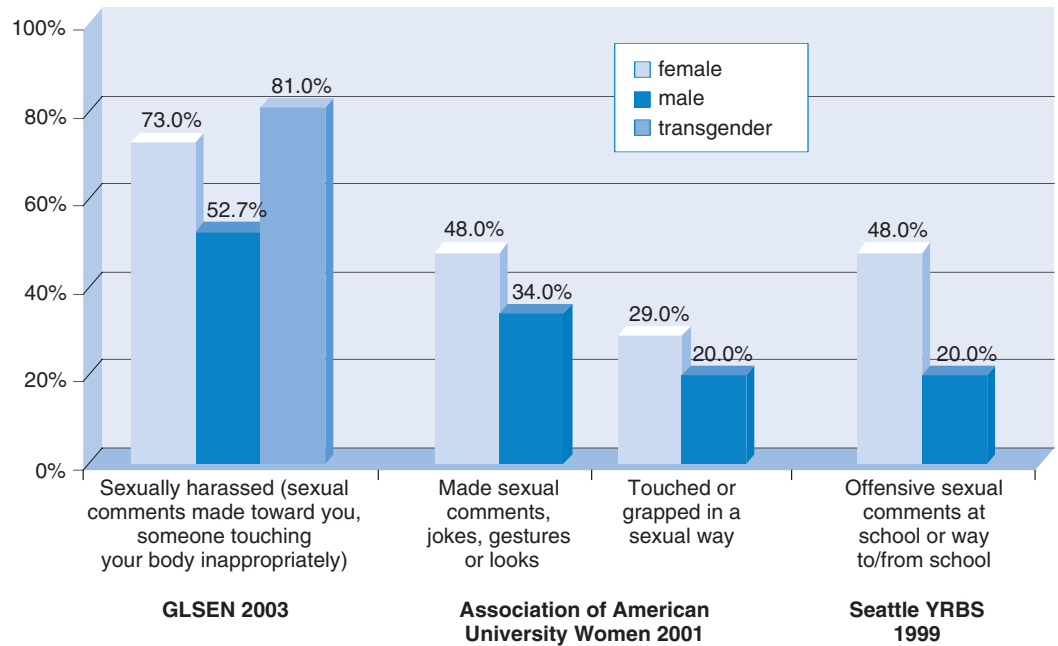
22 Nansel, T. R., Overpeck, M., Pilla, R. S., Ruan, W. J., Simons-Morton, B. and Scheidt, P. (2001). Bullying behaviors among US youth: Prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 285, 2094–2100.

Nevertheless, the comparisons suggest that LGBT youth experience a much higher percentage of victimization experiences in school than other youth.

Other population-based studies that have examined sexual harassment addressed 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 43). In a 2001

national study of high school students by the AAUW Educational Foundation,<sup>23</sup> 48% of girls and 34% of boys reported that they had been the target of sexual comments, jokes, gestures or looks. In the 2003 NSCS, reported frequency of sexual harassment was significantly higher—half of male youth and almost three-quarters of female youth reported some form of sexual harassment in the past year. Thus, these findings 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 neither the Seattle YRBS nor the AAUW study specifically included youth who identified as transgender<sup>24</sup> and neither asked about harassment related to gender identity or expression.

**Figure 43. Comparison of Reported Sexual Harassment of LGBT Students with National Samples of High School Students**



### **Comparison between GLSEN's 2001 and 2003 surveys**

The ultimate goal of GLSEN's work is to create more accepting and safer environments in our nation's schools for all students, including LGBT students. Since our 2001 survey, several states including New Jersey and Washington have passed inclusive legislation protecting LGBT students in schools, the National Education Association, the country's largest teachers union, has adopted a policy to provide annual trainings about educational issues and LGBT students and the number of GSAs who have registered with GLSEN's Student Organizing Department has doubled. As more schools institute gay-straight alliances or other types of clubs that address LGBT student issues and more school districts develop and implement inclusionary

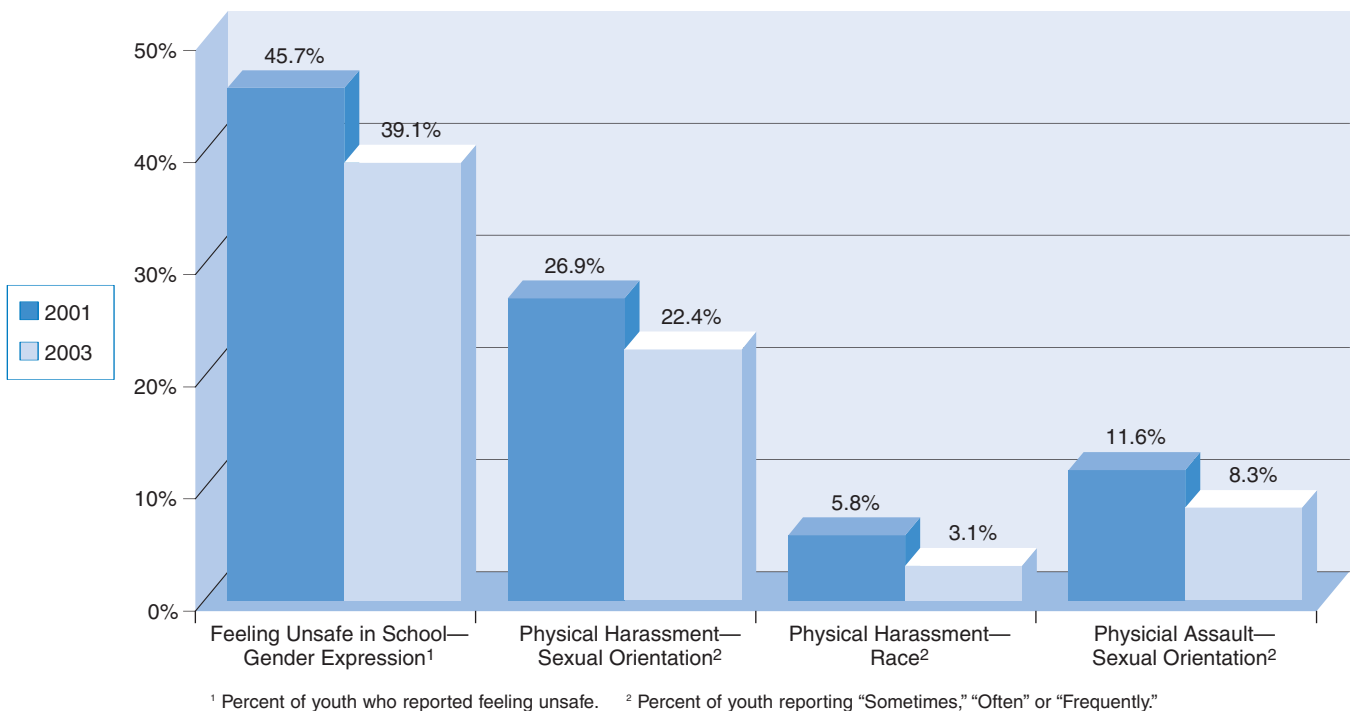
<sup>23</sup> AAUW Educational Foundation (2001). *Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing and Sexual Harassment in School*. Washington, DC. For information on this report, visit [www.aauw.org](http://www.aauw.org).

<sup>24</sup> 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.

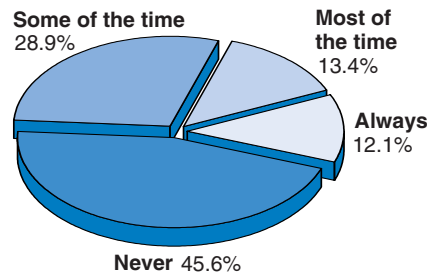
protective policies and teacher training programs, we would hope to see a decrease in the incidence of biased language and in the reports of harassment and victimization taking place in our schools. To gain some understanding of whether there has been improvement in school climate for LGBT youth in middle and high schools, we compared the incidence of reported harassment and assault and feelings of safety in school from our 2003 survey with those from our 2001 survey. Overall, there were few differences (see Figure 44):

- With regard to feeling unsafe in school because of personal characteristics, there was a small but significant decrease in the percentage of youth who felt unsafe in their schools because of their sexual orientation—from 45.7% in 2001 to 39.1% in 2003.
- There were no significant differences in reported frequencies of any type of verbal harassment.
- With regard to physical harassment, there was a small but significant decrease in physical harassment because of one’s sexual orientation.
- There was also a small but significant decrease in physical harassment because of one’s race or ethnicity.
- With regard to physical assault, there was a small but significant decrease in reported physical assault because of one’s sexual orientation.
- There were no significant differences between 2001 and 2003 regarding the incidence of sexual harassment.

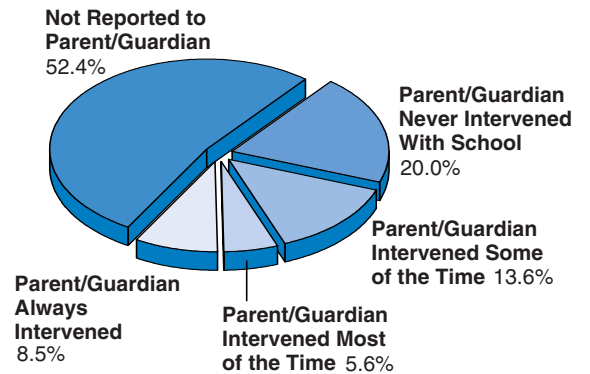
**Figure 44. Comparison of 2001 and 2003 National School Climate Surveys: Harassment and Assault**



**Figure 45. Frequency of Reporting Victimization to School Faculty or Staff**



**Figure 46. Intervention by Parent/Guardian Regarding School-Based Victimization**

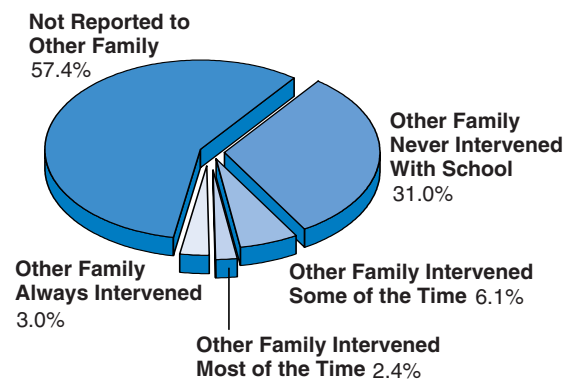


## Reporting of School-Based Victimization Events to Faculty/Staff and Family Members

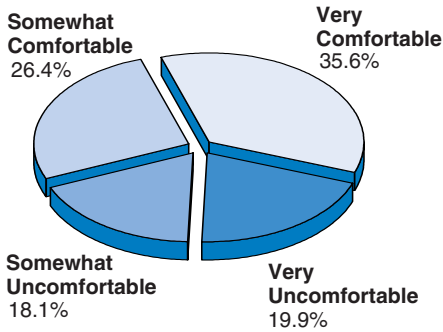
There is no guarantee that reporting incidents of harassment and assault to school personnel will result in action taken or in systemic changes to improve school safety. However, if teachers or school staff are not informed about such events, they cannot intervene. Yet some LGBT youth may not feel comfortable reporting harassment and assault for a myriad of reasons. For example, they may believe that school personnel will not be receptive or they may not feel comfortable discussing issues related to their sexual orientation or gender expression or they may fear repercussions from other students. Family members of LGBT youth may also intervene with school personnel if they are told about the victimization experiences by their children. In the current survey, we asked those youth who had experienced any incident of harassment or assault in their schools during the past year whether they had reported the incidents to faculty or school staff, their parents or guardians or other family members.

Youth were somewhat more likely to have reported an incident of harassment or assault to teachers or school staff than to family members, yet almost half of those youth who had experienced harassment or assault in the past year never reported the incidents to school personnel (see Figure 45). Over half of the youth never reported being harassed or assaulted in school to their parents or guardians. An additional 20% of youth reported that their parents or guardians had never intervened with school personnel after learning about an incident of harassment or assault (see Figure 46). Youth were least likely to report an incident of harassment or assault to another family member other than their parent or guardian—over 80% of youth reported that they had either never informed another family member or that the family member never intervened with school personnel when they had been informed (see Figure 47).

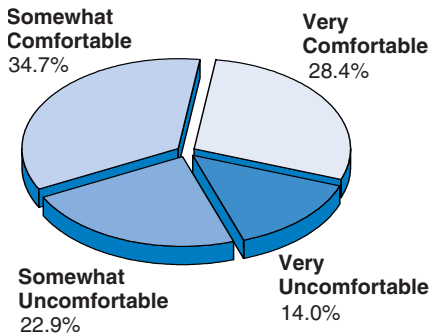
**Figure 47. Intervention by Other Family Regarding School-Based Victimization**



**Figure 48. Comfort with Attending School Dance or Prom**



**Figure 49. Comfort with Raising LGBT Issues in Class**



## Participation in School Events

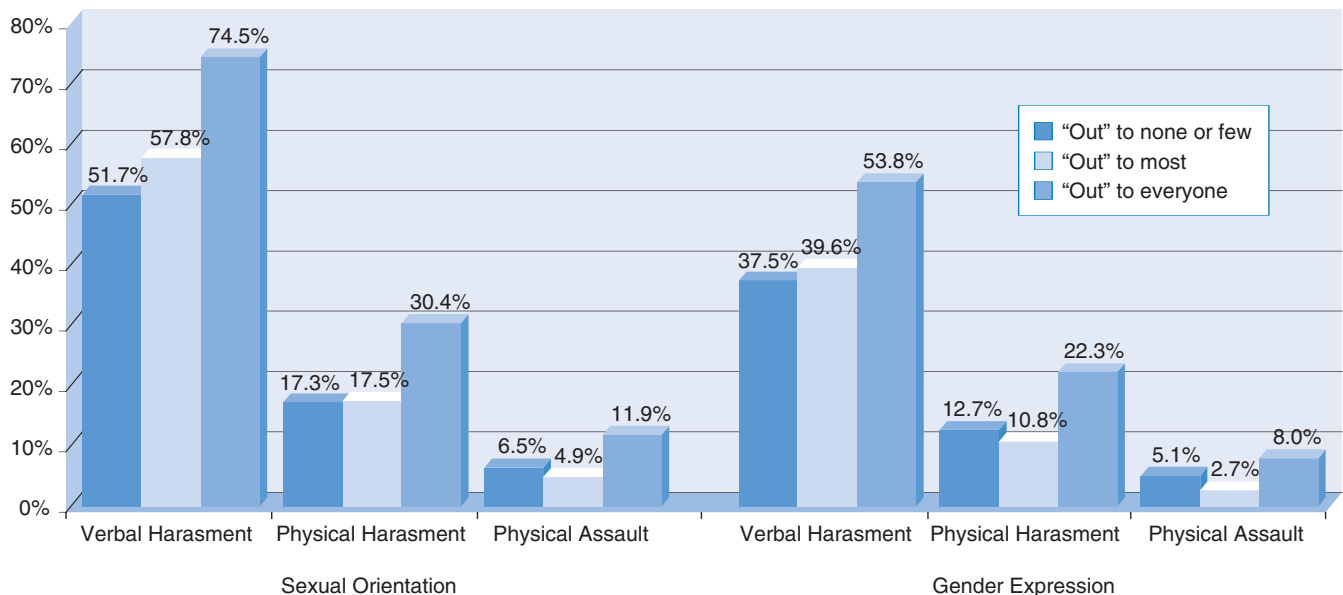
Even when youth feel safe from physical harm in their school, they may not be comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation or transgender status in school and, therefore, may not be able to participate in school activities as fully as do their peers. For example, over a third of the LGBT youth in our survey reported they would be uncomfortable going to a school dance or the prom with a date of the same gender (see Figure 48) and over a third reported that they would be uncomfortable raising LGBT issues in the classroom (see Figure 49).

Some LGBT youth may also feel that they cannot acknowledge their sexual orientation or gender identity because it may single them out for harassment by their peers. Those youth in our survey who were more open about their sexual orientation were more likely to report harassment and assault due to their sexual orientation or their gender expression (see Figure 50). However, LGBT youth who were more open about their sexual orientation in school were also more likely to report these incidents to school personnel—35.5% of youth who reported being “out” to everyone at school indicated that they reported incidents of harassment or assault to teachers or school staff most of the time or always compared to 18.7% of others.

## Academic Achievement and College Aspirations for LGBT Youth

As shown in the current survey, most LGBT youth reported feeling unsafe in their schools because of their sexual orientation and a large number of them reported missing classes or entire days of school because of feeling unsafe. Thus, LGBT youth do not have the same access to education as other youth, as feeling unsafe and being

**Figure 50. Degree of Being “Out” at School, and Frequency of Harassment and Assault**  
(percent of youth reporting the event “Sometimes,” “Often,” or “Frequently”)

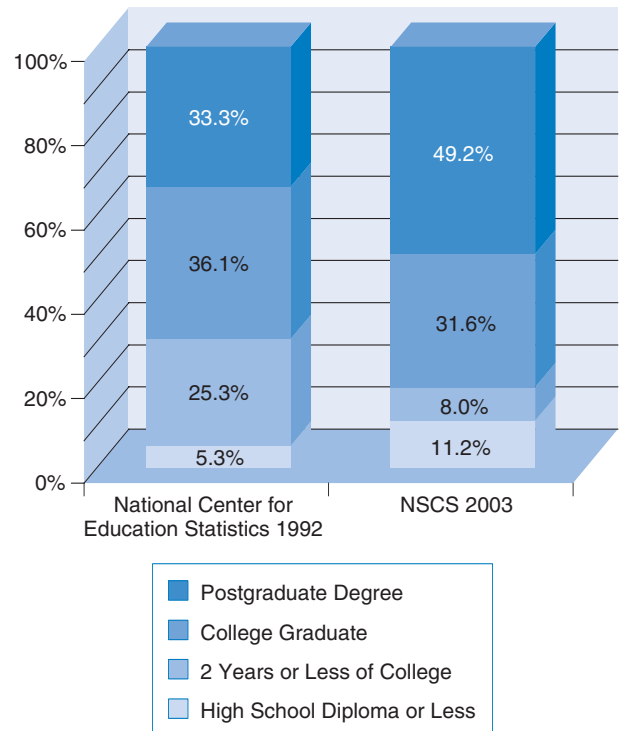


harassed or assaulted in school can negatively affect one’s ability to learn. In the 2003 survey, we asked youth about their academic achievement as well as their aspirations for post-secondary education in order to examine further the relationship between school safety and achievement. Figure 51 compares educational plans of high school seniors from a study by the National Center for Education Statistics with the subsample of LGBT high school seniors from the GLSEN survey.<sup>25</sup> The percentage of LGBT youth who planned on pursuing a postgraduate degree (e.g., Master’s degree, JD, MD, PhD) was larger than in the national sample (49.2% vs. 33.3%, respectively). However, the percentage of LGBT youth who were not planning to pursue any post-secondary education (obtaining only a high school diploma or not finishing high school) was twice as high as the percentage in the national sample (11.2% vs. 5.3%, respectively). It is important to note that the GLSEN survey only included youth who had been in school during the 2002–2003 school year. Therefore, the percentage of LGBT youth not pursuing post-secondary education would be higher with the inclusion of those youth who have already dropped out of school.

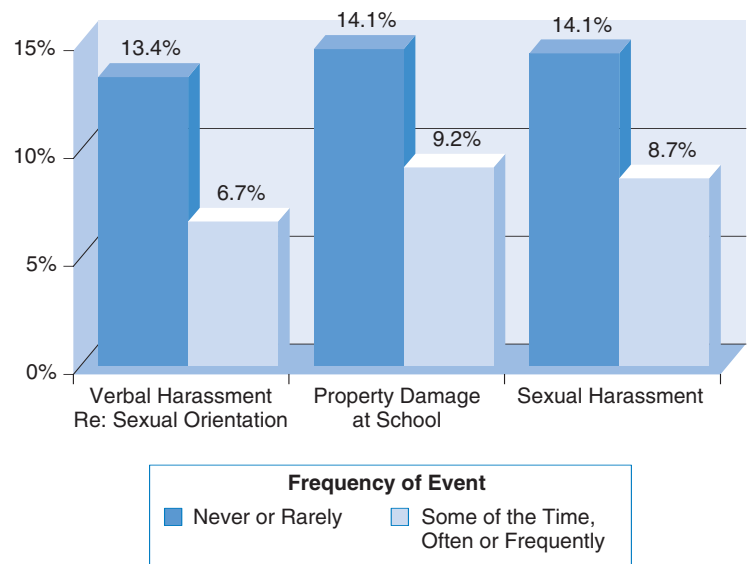
These differences between our sample of LGBT youth and the national sample of all high school students may be related to the higher incidence of in-school victimization reported by LGBT youth. As shown in Figure 52, higher frequencies of verbal harassment because of their sexual orientation, damage to or theft of their personal property and sexual harassment were associated with youth’s plans not to continue their education after high school. For example, youth who reported verbal harassment because of their sexual orientation more often were twice as likely to report they did not plan to attend college than youth who reported experiencing such harassment less often. Among LGBT youth who reported a low incidence of harassment, the percentage who were not planning on further education was similar to the percentage of youth from the NCES study: 6.7% of LGBT youth reporting low frequency of verbal harassment did not plan on college versus 5.3% of youth in the NCES study.

Higher incidence of harassment and assault because of one’s sexual orientation was also associated with lower academic achievement. As

**Figure 51. Educational Aspirations: LGBT Students vs. National Data**  
(percents for high school seniors only)



**Figure 52. Experiences of Victimization and College Aspirations**  
(percent of students who do not plan to attend college)



<sup>25</sup> National statistics are taken from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 from their 1992 follow-up with high school seniors. Results are available from National Center for Education Statistics at [nces.ed.gov](http://nces.ed.gov).



shown in Figure 53, LGBT youth who reported they were harassed, assaulted or had their personal property damaged or stolen at least some of the time reported lower grades than others in the sample. The difference was greatest for youth who reported more frequent physical assault—youth who experienced more frequent assault had a grade point average 20% lower than other youth (grade average of 2.5 overall for youth reporting more frequent assault vs. 3.1 for youth reporting less frequent assault).<sup>26</sup>

## 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 schools or become the targets of harassment because of their sexual orientation or gender expression, but also because of their race/ethnicity or their gender. For these reasons, we examined whether there were demographic differences in the experience of school climate based on race/ethnicity and gender.

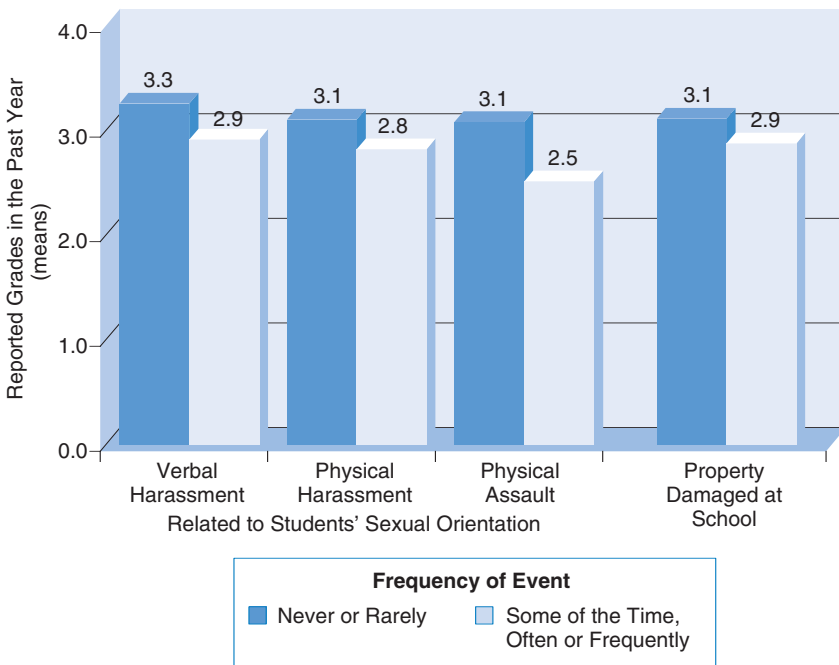
### Comparisons by Race/Ethnicity<sup>27</sup>

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.

The groups were also similar with the reported frequency of hearing racist remarks in their schools. However, the experiences of youth of color were quite different from white youth with regard to feeling safe in school and harassment and assault because of race/ethnicity.

**Feeling Safe in School.** Youth of color were also likelier than white youth to report feeling unsafe in their schools because of their race or ethnicity—14.3% of youth of color compared to 3.0% of white youth. As shown in Figure 54, the largest percentage of youth who reported feeling unsafe because of race/ethnicity was among the Asian/Pacific Islander group (33.3%) followed by

**Figure 53. Experiences of Victimization and Academic Achievement**



<sup>26</sup> Youth were asked to report their grades in the past school year with the following scale: “Mostly A’s,” “A’s and B’s,” “Mostly B’s,” “B’s and C’s,” “Mostly C’s,” “C’s and D’s,” “Mostly D’s” and “Mostly F’s.” To compute the standard grade point scale of 0 to 4, the responses were coded as 4, 3.5, 3, 2.5, 2, 1.5, 1 and 0 respectively.

<sup>27</sup> Comparisons regarding racial/ethnic groups were among the White/European American, African American/Black, Latino/a, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American and Multiracial groups. The remaining group, Other Race/Ethnicity, included only a small number of youth and was excluded from these comparative analyses for statistical reasons.

the Multiracial group (17.9%). LGBT youth of color in our survey were also more likely to report missing school in the past month because they felt unsafe—35.1% for youth of color vs. 26.2% for white youth.

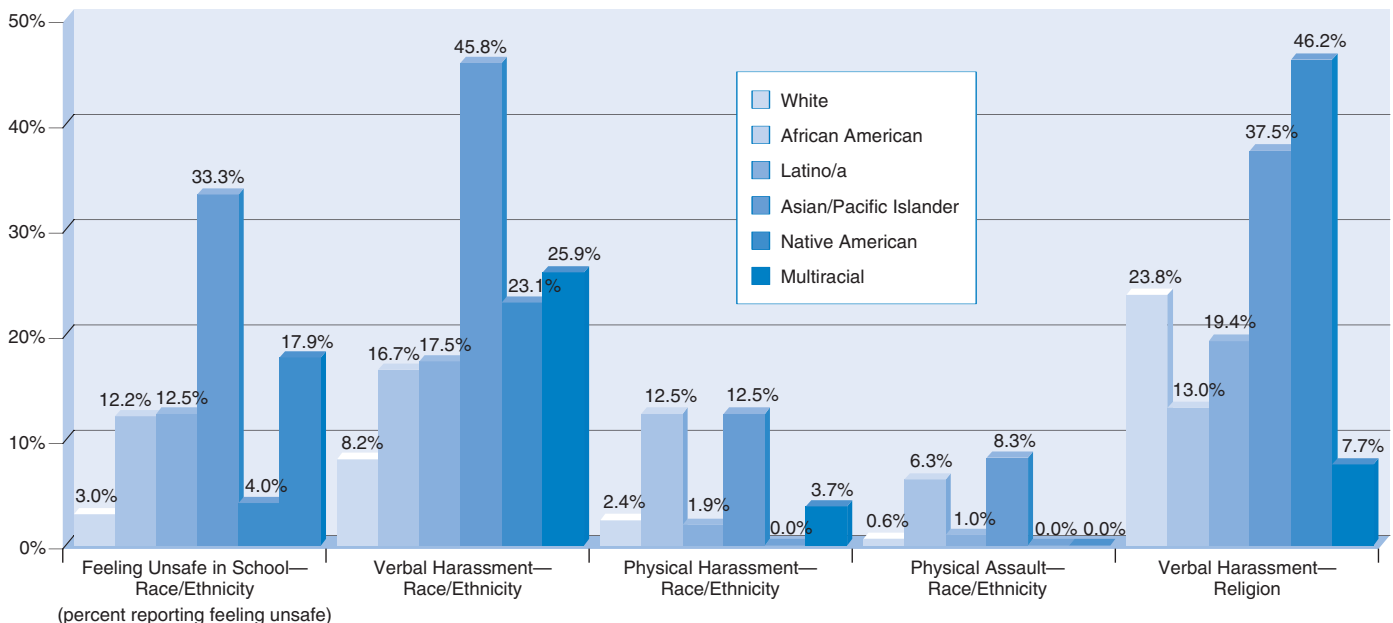
**Harassment and Assault.** Youth of color reported higher incidence of verbal harassment, physical harassment and physical assault because of their race or ethnicity than white youth:

- 21.9% of youth of color reported having been verbally harassed in school at least some of the time in the past year because of their race or ethnicity compared to 8.2% of white youth.
- 5.3% of youth of color reported having been physically harassed in school at least some of the time in the past year because of their race/ethnicity compared to 2.4% of white youth.
- 2.6% of youth of color reported having been physically assaulted in school at least some of the time in the past year because of their race/ethnicity compared to less than 1% of white youth.

As shown in Figure 54, Asian/Pacific Islander youth reported the highest frequencies of racially motivated verbal harassment. Regarding physical harassment and physical assault, African American youth and Asian/Pacific Islander youth reported higher frequencies than white youth and Latino/a youth. Regarding physical assault, African American and Asian/Pacific Islander youth reported higher levels than did youth from the other racial/ethnic groups.

There were also differences among the racial/ethnic groups regarding verbal harassment because of one’s actual or perceived religion. As also shown in Figure 54, Native American youth and Asian/Pacific Islander youth reported higher frequencies of religiously motivated

**Figure 54. Experience of Racial Harassment and Assault by Race/Ethnicity**  
(percent reporting “Sometimes,” “Often,” or “Frequently,” unless otherwise indicated)



verbal harassment than all other youth. Even with these differences across racial/ethnic groups in feeling unsafe, no group was more or less likely to have reported missing classes or entire days of school for safety reasons.

In our 2003 survey, Asian/Pacific Islander youth and multiracial youth consistently reported higher levels of harassment and assault than youth from other ethnic groups. These differences may, in part, be related to the racial composition of the schools that these youth attend. Both the Asian/Pacific Islander and the Multiracial groups reported that they were, on average, a smaller percentage of their schools' student population than youth from other groups— Asian/Pacific Islander youth reported that they were, on average, 12.7% of their school populations and Multiracial youth reported that they were 23.9%, compared to 75.7% for whites, 56.9% for African Americans, 33.1% for Latino/as and 61.4% for Native Americans. Thus, having fewer school peers of the same race/ethnicity may exacerbate school climate issues for these youth.

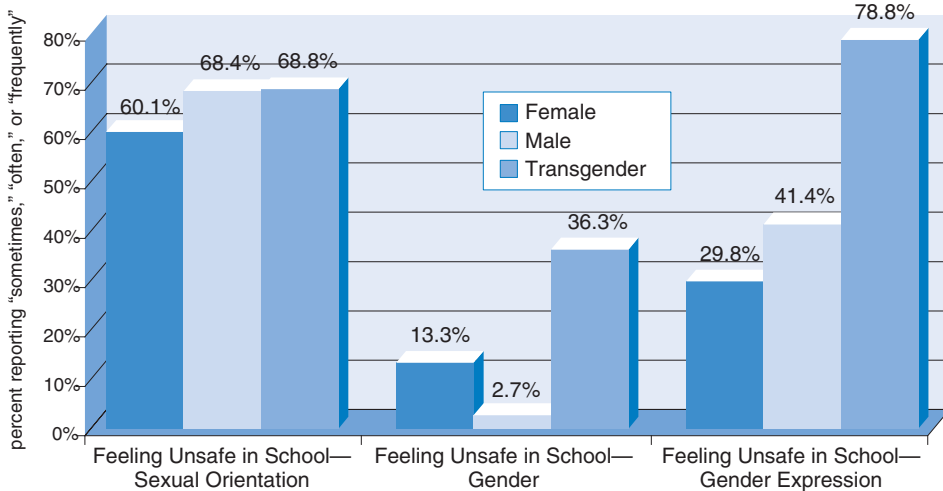
### Comparisons by Gender<sup>28</sup>

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: 78.8% of female and 81.3% of transgender youth heard sexist remarks often or frequently compared to 68.1% of male youth.

There were significant gender differences in feeling unsafe in school because of one's sexual orientation, gender and gender expression (see Figure 55). The percentage of female youth who reported feeling unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation was lower than male

**Figure 55. Feeling Unsafe in School by Gender**



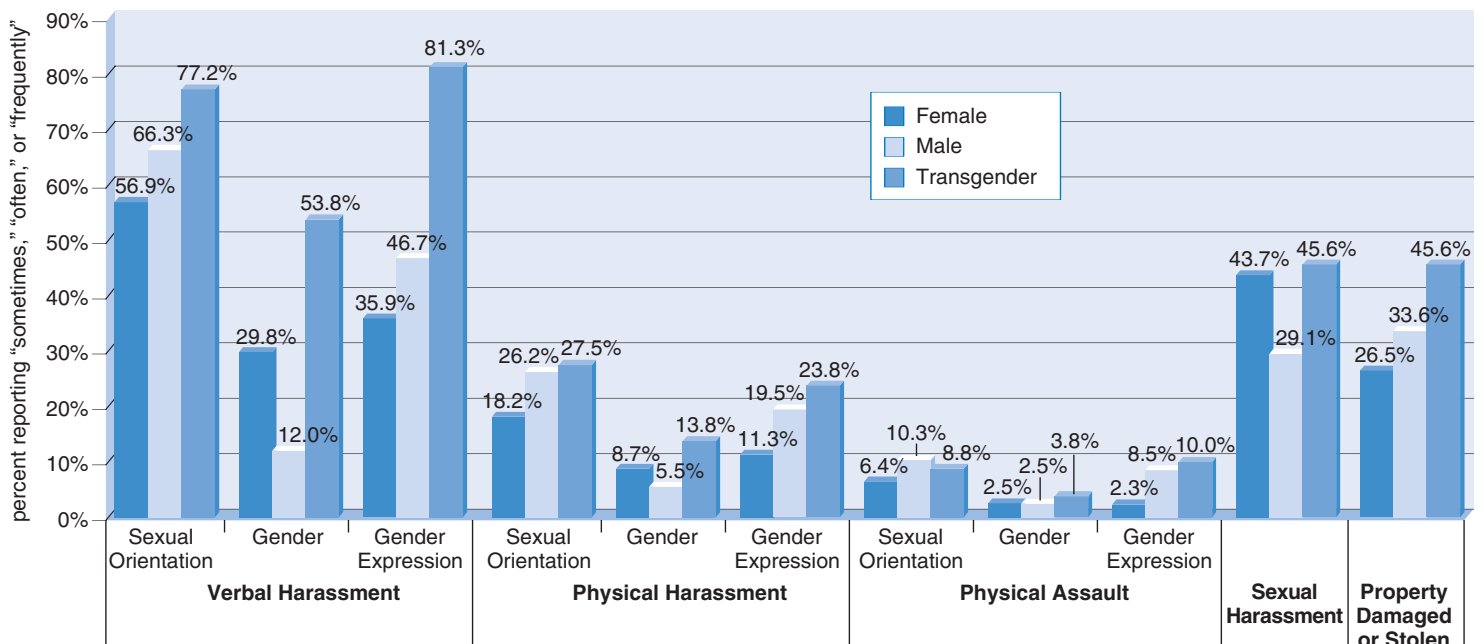
<sup>28</sup> It is important to note that the number of transgender youth in the sample was very small and much smaller than the number of males and females. Because of this, one must exert caution in interpreting group differences and must pay attention to those instances when it is noted in the text that there are statistically significant differences.

and transgender youth. Transgender youth were more likely to report feeling unsafe because of their gender and their gender expression than male and female youth. Female youth were more likely than male youth to report feeling unsafe because of their gender but less likely to report feeling unsafe because of their gender expression.

**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 56). 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 gender expression, and females tended to report higher frequencies of harassment related to their gender:

- Male and transgender youth reported more frequent verbal and physical harassment related to their sexual orientation and their gender expression than did female youth. In addition, transgender youth reported more verbal harassment related to gender expression than did male youth.
- Female and transgender youth reported more frequent verbal and physical harassment related to their gender than male youth. Transgender youth reported more frequent harassment because of gender than did female youth.
- Female youth reported less frequent physical assault because of their sexual orientation than did male or transgender youth.
- Transgender youth reported more frequent physical assault because of their gender than did female or male youth.

**Figure 56. Experience of Harassment and Assault by Gender**



- Transgender youth were also more likely to report physical assault because of their gender expression than male or female youth; male youth were more likely to experience such assault than female youth.

**Sexual Harassment.** Female and transgender youth were more likely to report sexual harassment, such as sexually suggestive comments made to them or being touched inappropriately, than were male youth. Almost half of both female youth and transgender youth reported frequent sexual harassment (at least some of the time) compared to just over a quarter of male youth.

**Property Damaged or Stolen.** Male youth and transgender youth reported more frequent incidents of personal property being damaged or stolen in school. About a quarter of female youth reported more frequent incidents compared to about a third of male youth and almost half of transgender youth.

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### ***Comparisons by Locale***

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We were interested in whether youth in our survey reported different experiences based on the type of community in which their schools were located—large cities and their suburbs, mid-size cities and their suburbs, small cities or towns and rural areas. Overall, there were only a few differences across the different locales (see Figure 57):

- Youth from large cities reported fewer homophobic remarks in school than youth from other locales.
- Youth from suburbs of large cities were less likely to report feeling unsafe in their schools because of their gender expression.
- Youth from large cities and from suburbs of large cities reported lower frequencies of verbal harassment because of their sexual orientation.
- Youth from small cities or towns or from rural areas reported being the target of mean rumors or lies more often than youth from large cities and their suburbs and from mid-size cities.

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### ***Comparisons by Region***

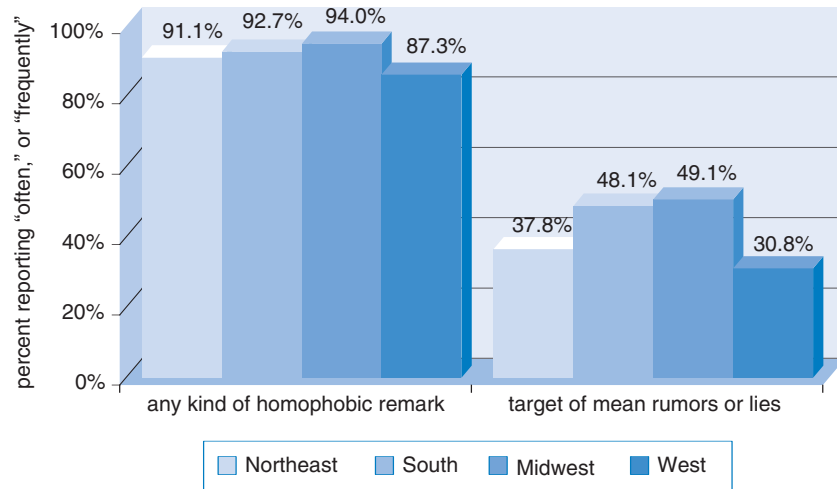
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We were also interested in whether there were regional differences with regard to biased language, school safety and experiences of harassment and assault. Overall, geographic region was not a significant factor regarding school climate issues as there were very few regional differences. As shown in Figure 58, youth from Western states reported fewer homophobic remarks than youth from all other parts of the country. Youth from Northern and Western states were also less likely to report being the target of mean rumors or lies in school than youth in Southern states and in Midwestern states.

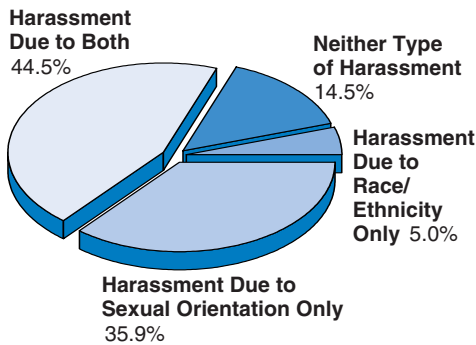
**Figure 57. Comparisons by Locale: Biased Language, School Safety, Harassment and Assault**



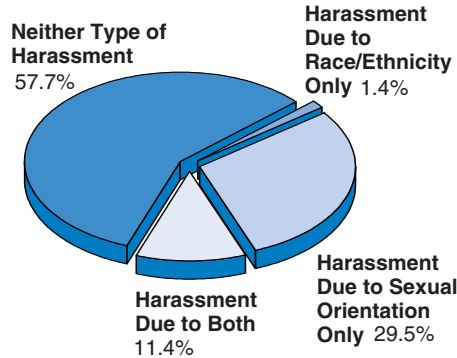
**Figure 58. Comparison by Geographic Region: Biased Language, School Safety, Harassment and Assault**



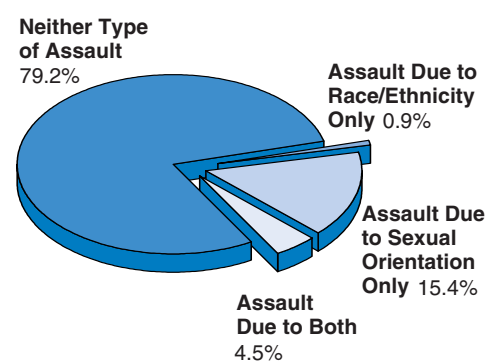
**Figure 59. Intersection of Racism and Homophobia: Verbal Harassment Experiences of Youth of Color**



**Figure 60. Intersection of Racism and Homophobia: Physical Harassment Experiences of Youth of Color**



**Figure 61. Intersection of Racism and Homophobia: Physical Assault Experiences of Youth of Color**



## 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 may be pertinent 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.

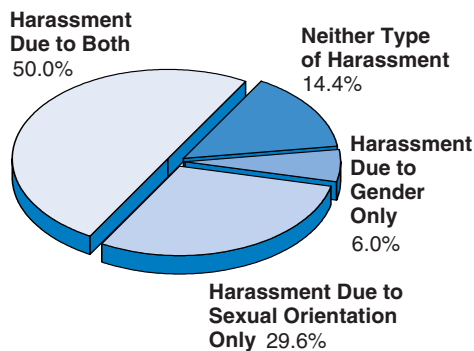
### Experiences of LGBT Youth of Color

As shown in Figure 59, almost half (44.7%) 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 (57.3%), 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 60). 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 and of those who did report such assault, more youth reported assault based on sexual orientation alone than on race/ethnicity alone or on both race/ethnicity and sexual orientation (see Figure 61).

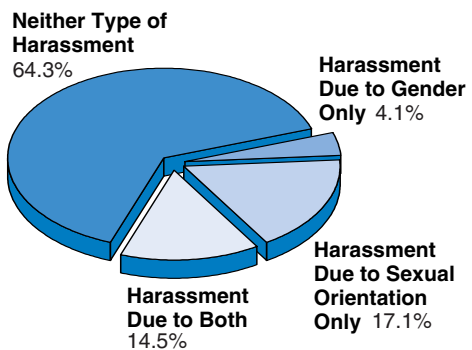
## Experiences of Lesbian and Bisexual Female Youth

As shown in Figure 62, half of the female youth in our survey reported verbal harassment based on both their gender and their sexual orientation and another quarter of female youth reported verbal harassment based on their sexual orientation alone. The majority of female youth reported no incidents of physical harassment in school based on their gender or their sexual orientation (see Figure 63). However, those who reported such incidents of physical harassment were likelier to report that they were based on their sexual orientation alone or based on both their sexual orientation and their gender. The vast majority of female youth also reported no experiences of physical assault based on gender or sexual orientation and none reported assault based only on their gender (see Figure 64).

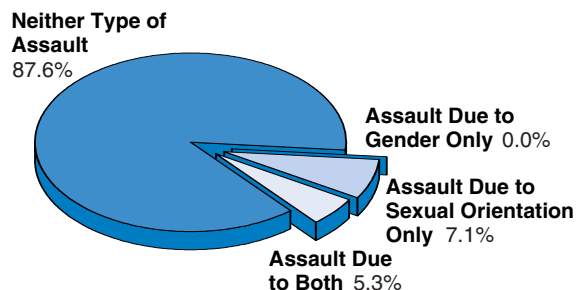
**Figure 62. Intersection of Sexism and Homophobia: Verbal Harassment Experiences of Female Youth**



**Figure 63. Intersection of Sexism and Homophobia: Physical Harassment Experiences of Female Youth**



**Figure 64. Intersection of Sexism and Homophobia: Physical Assault Experiences of Female Youth**





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### ***Experiences of Lesbian and Bisexual Female Youth of Color***

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As shown in Figure 65, the largest number of female youth of color reported verbal harassment based on all three personal characteristics—race/ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation (30.8%). Although the majority of these youth reported no incidents of physical harassment or physical assault, about 10% reported physical harassment and about 5% reported physical assault because of their race/ethnicity, their gender and their sexual orientation (see Figures 66 and 67).

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### ***Experiences of Transgender Youth***

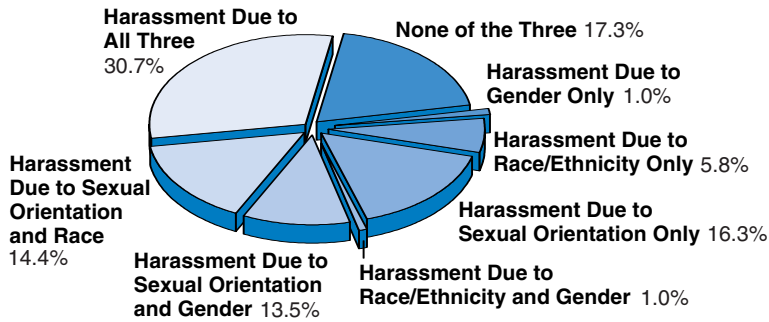
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As shown in Figure 68, the largest number of transgender youth reported verbal harassment based on all three personal characteristics—gender expression, gender and sexual orientation. Over half of these youth also reported some incident of physical harassment with over a third reporting this type of harassment because of all three characteristics (see Figure 69). Although the majority of these youth reported no incidents of physical assault, over 10% reported assault because of their gender expression, their gender and their sexual orientation (see Figure 70).

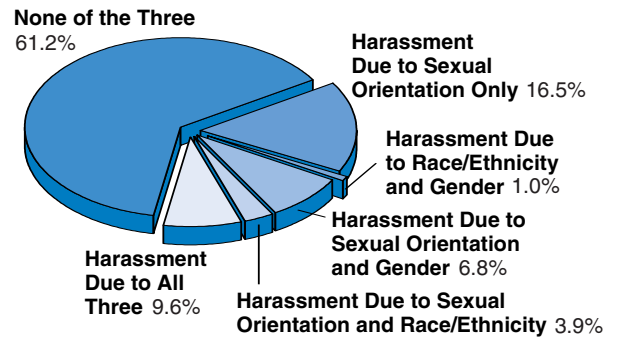
These results regarding the intersections of sexual orientation, gender, gender expression and race/ethnicity highlight the importance of understanding the diversity in experiences of LGBT youth. When discussing the experiences of lesbian and bisexual female youth, one must consider both experiences 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. When discussing the experiences of transgender youth, one must consider their experiences related to gender expression, gender and sexual orientation.

From our survey, we cannot know how youth with multiple identities make sense of harassment and assault that they experience. 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 his being both Native American and gay. Little is known in the social science literature about how LGBT individuals with multiple identities, such as

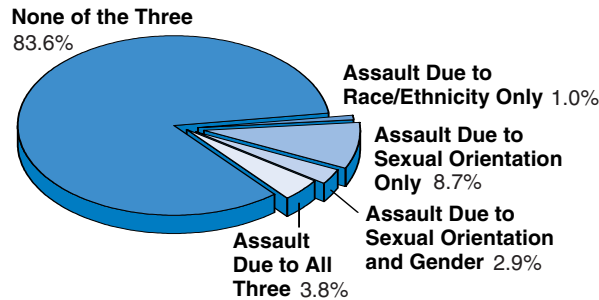
**Figure 65. Intersection of Racism, Sexism and Homophobia: Verbal Harassment Experiences of Female Youth of Color**



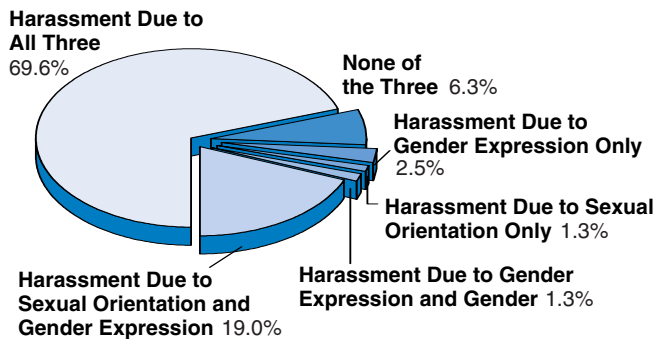
**Figure 66. Intersection of Racism, Sexism and Homophobia: Physical Harassment Experiences of Female Youth of Color**



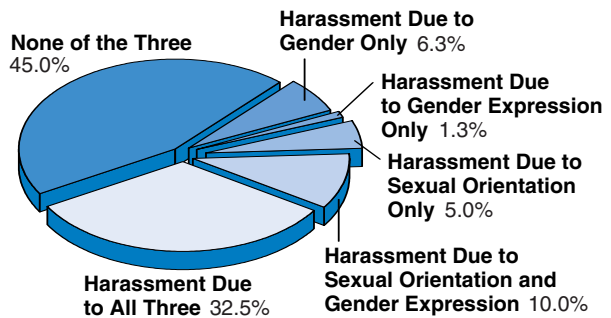
**Figure 67. Intersection of Racism, Sexism and Homophobia: Physical Assault Experiences of Female Youth of Color**



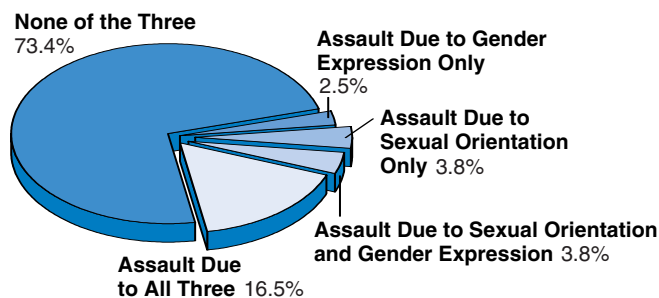
**Figure 68. Intersection of Gender Bias and Homophobia: Verbal Harassment Experiences of Transgender Youth**



**Figure 69. Intersection of Gender Bias and Homophobia: Physical Harassment Experiences of Transgender Youth**



**Figure 70. Intersection of Gender Bias and Homophobia: Physical Assault Experiences of Transgender Youth**



being African American and lesbian, experience this multiplicity.<sup>29</sup> More research is needed on LGBT youth that is both cognizant of the intersections of race/ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation and that explores how LGBT youth understand and experience these intersections of identity.

## **LGBT Resources and Supports in School**

Another dimension of school climate for LGBT youth is the availability of positive resources about LGBT-related issues and of supportive faculty or staff. Thus, we asked the youth in our survey about certain school supports, such as a gay-straight alliance, a school policy or procedures for reporting incidents of harassment or assault, teachers or school staff who are supportive of LGBT youth, and the inclusion of LGBT people, history or events discussed in classroom curricula.

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### ***School Policies about Harassment and Assault***

Having a policy or procedure for reporting incidents of harassment in school is an important tool for making schools safer for all students. When such policies or procedures exist and are enforced, schools are sending a message to the student population that victimizing behaviors will not be tolerated. Youth were asked whether their schools had a policy or procedure for reporting incidents of in-school harassment or assault. Although the majority of the youth reported that their schools did have a policy (59.9%), a sizeable percentage of youth (33.6%) reported that they did not know whether their schools had a policy or not.

It is important to note that youth reports on the existence of policy may not necessarily reflect the extent to which individual schools or school districts actually have policies. Some youth may mistakenly believe that their schools had such a policy and others may be unaware that their schools actually did indeed have a policy. Given that such a sizable portion did not know of a policy indicates that school officials may not be doing an adequate job of informing their students about school policies regarding harassment and assault.

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### ***Resources and Curricula***

Three-quarters of the youth (76.2%) reported that LGBT issues were never addressed or discussed in their classes. For those youth who reported that LGBT issues had been addressed, history/social studies, English and health classes were mentioned most often as having included information on LGBT people, history or events. As shown in

<sup>29</sup> 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 Booklink, 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.). (2001). *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice: An Anthology on Racism, Anti-Semitism, Sexism, Heterosexism, Ableism, and Classism*. New York: Routledge.

These books and others on this topic are available on-line through GLSEN's website: [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org).

**Figure 71. Classes in Which LGBT-Related Topics Were Taught**  
(percent of youth reporting LGBT topics were taught)

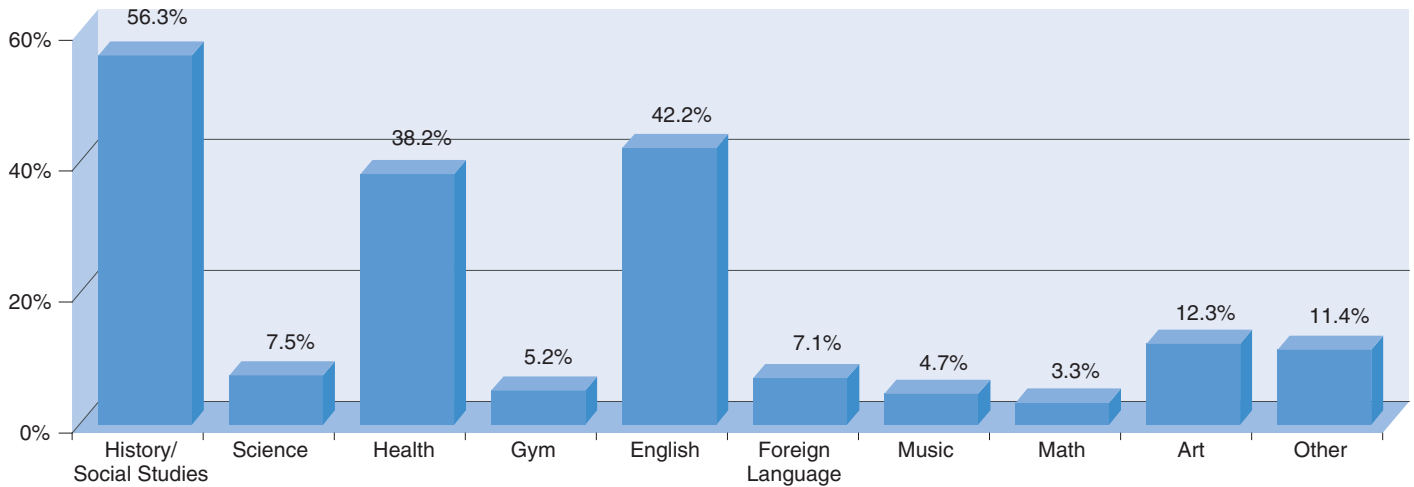
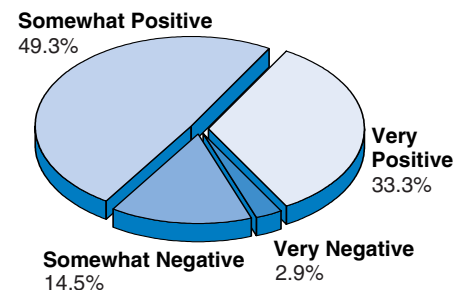


Figure 71, over half of these youth reported that LGBT issues were mentioned in their history or social studies classes and over a third in their health or English classes. In addition to those classes about which we specifically asked, several youth also reported that LGBT issues were taught in psychology and religion classes. Most youth reported that the representations of LGBT topics, when mentioned, were either somewhat positive or very positive (see Figure 72).

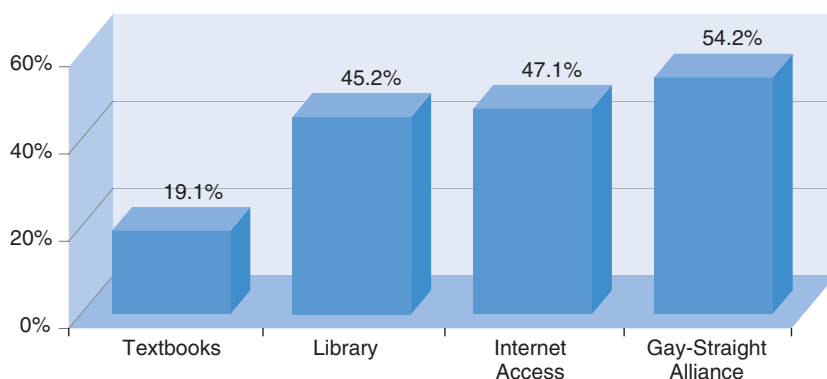
Many youth reported that they did not have access to LGBT-related resources in their schools. As shown in Figure 73, only about half of the youth reported having gay-straight alliances in their schools, having Internet access to LGBT community sites or having LGBT resources in their libraries. Far fewer students reported having inclusionary textbooks used in their classes.

Having LGBT resources available in school is an extremely important step toward having a more inclusive school climate. However, the existence of resources alone 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 may not feel comfortable using the school Internet to access LGBT sites or borrowing LGBT-related

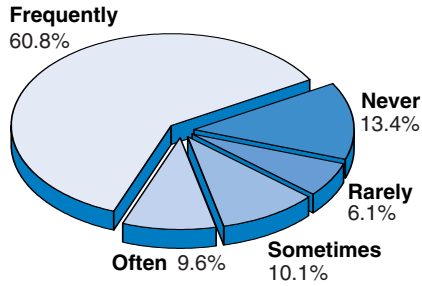
**Figure 72. How Positive LGBT Issues Were Taught**  
(percent of youth reporting LGBT topics were taught)



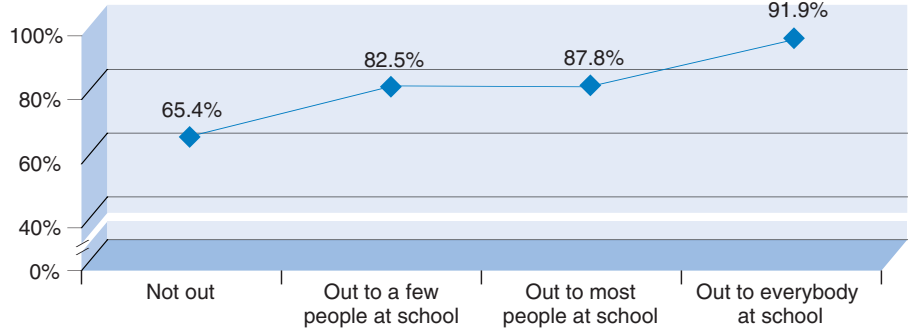
**Figure 73. LGBT-Related Resources in School**  
(percent knowing the resource is available)



**Figure 74. Frequency of Attending GSA meetings in School**

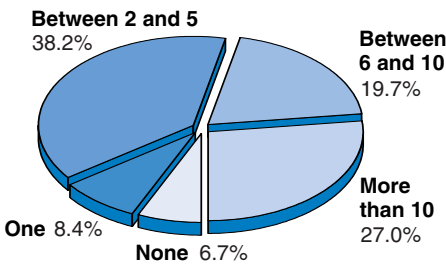


**Figure 75. Relationship Between Being “Out” in School and Attending GSA Meetings**



books from the school library. For example, about 20% of youth who had GSAs in their schools reported that they never or rarely attended the meetings (see Figure 74).

**Figure 76. Number of Faculty/Staff Supportive of LGBT Students**

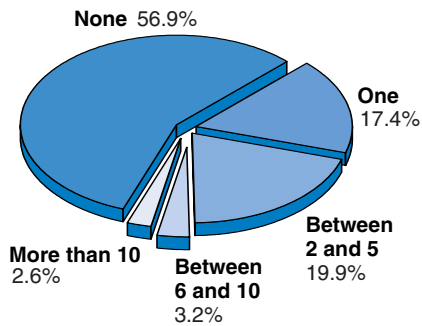


Youth who were more open about their sexual orientation at school were more likely to report attending GSA meetings. As shown in Figure 75, of those youth who reported being “out” to everyone at school, nearly all reported that they had attended GSA meetings at their school. Of those youth who reported being “out” to no one at school, only about two-thirds reported ever having attended a GSA meeting.

### School Personnel

The vast majority of youth (93.3%) reported that they knew of a teacher or other school staff person who was supportive of LGBT students at their schools (see Figure 76). Also, about half of the youth (43.1%) reported that they knew of a teacher or other staff person at their schools who was open about being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (see Figure 77).

**Figure 77. Number of Openly LGBT Faculty/Staff**



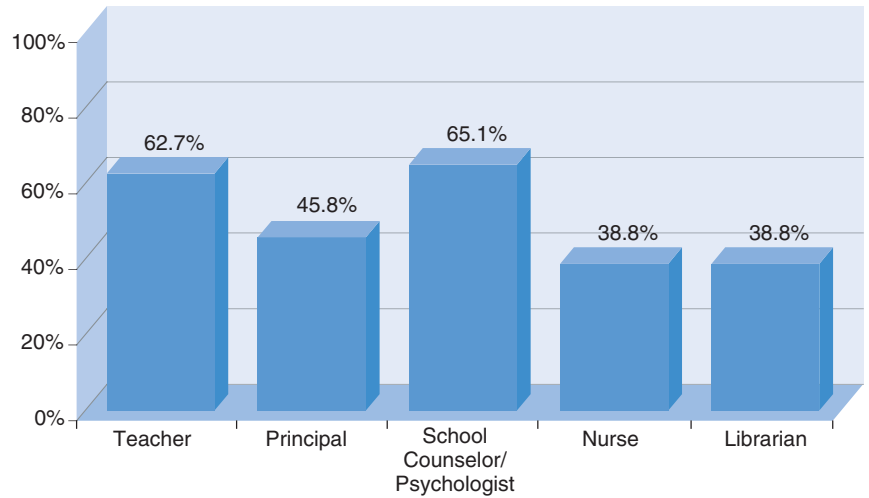
We asked the youth in the survey how comfortable they would be talking to certain school personnel about LGBT issues. As shown in Figure 78, more than half of the youth said that they would be comfortable talking to one of their teachers or to the school counselor/school psychologist about LGBT issues. Fewer youth reported that they would be comfortable talking with their principal about LGBT issues and even fewer reported that they would be comfortable with their school librarian or school nurse.

## Comparison of School Resources and Supports by Locale and Region

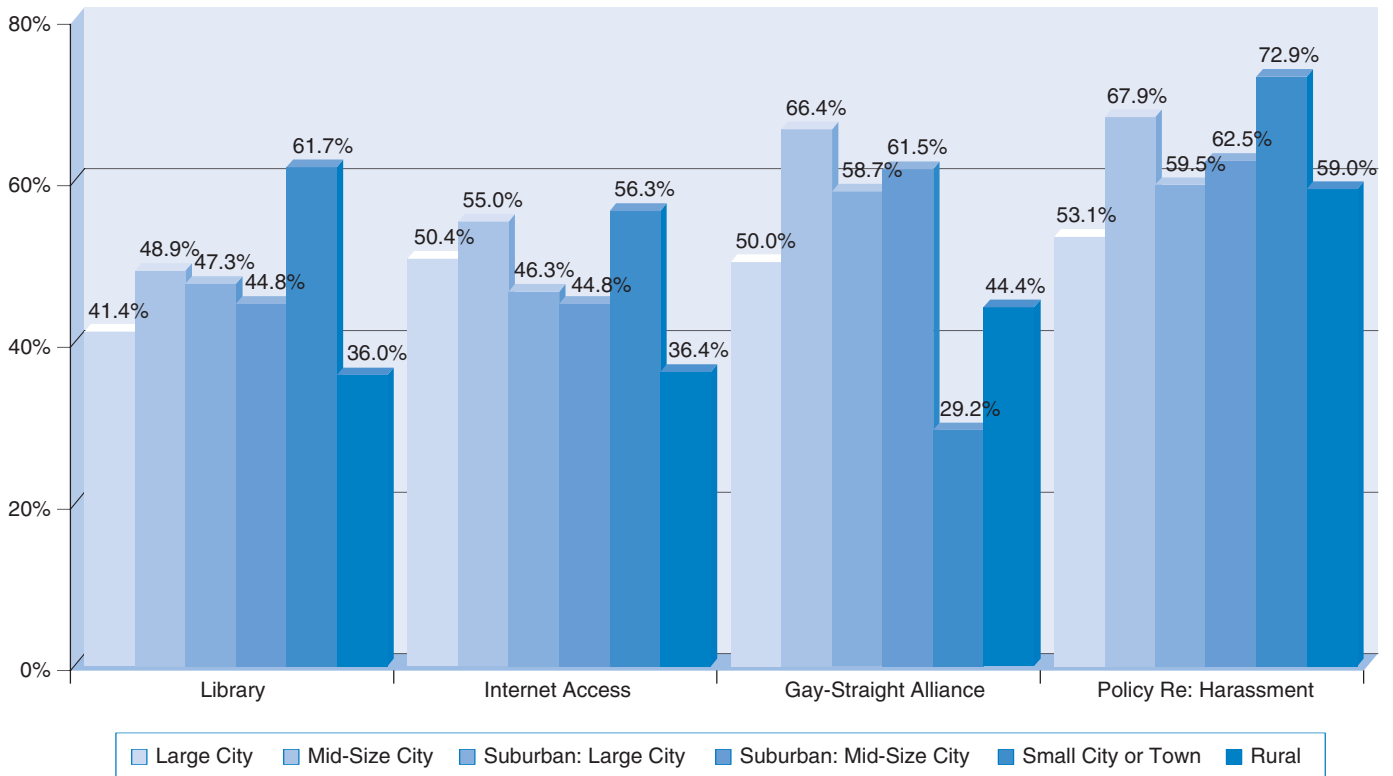
Given the differences by locale and geographic region regarding the experiences of harassment or assault, it is also important to examine whether there were any such differences regarding school-based resources. Overall, there were few differences by locale regarding the availability of LGBT-related resources in school (see Figure 79):

- Youth in rural schools were less likely to report that LGBT resources were available in the library and that they had access to LGBT Internet sites at school computers.
- Youth from schools in small cities or towns were much less likely to report having a GSA in their schools than youth from other locales.
- Youth from large city schools were less likely to report having a school policy regarding harassment and assault than youth in mid-size cities and small cities or towns.

**Figure 78. Comfort Talking with School Personnel about LGBT Issues**  
(percentage reporting "Somewhat Comfortable" or "Very Comfortable")



**Figure 79. LGBT-Related Resources by Locale**  
(percentage knowing the resource is available)



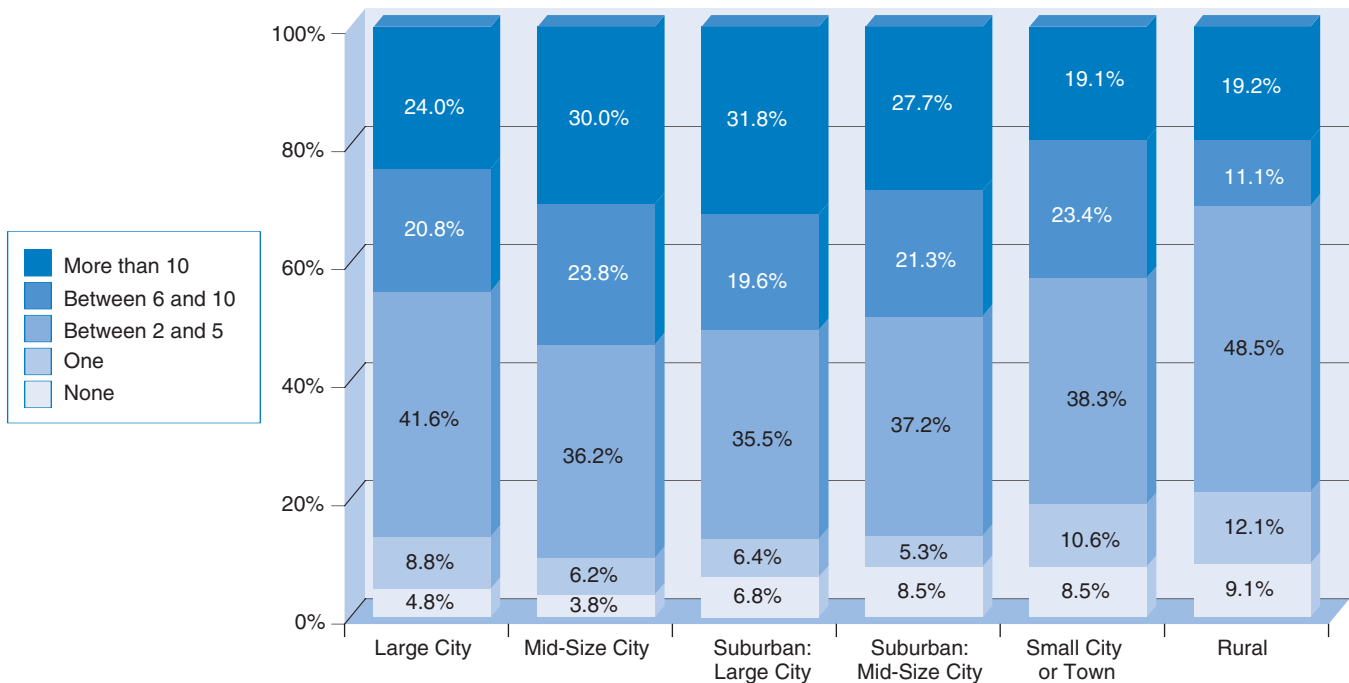
Given that many of the nation’s largest school districts do have policies about school harassment, this difference between youth from large city schools and other locales may actually represent differences in students’ knowledge about protective policies. This lack of knowledge may then ultimately reflect the failure of school officials from the larger school districts in educating their students about these policies.

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 (see Figure 80). There were no significant difference across locales regarding comfort talking to teachers or school staff.

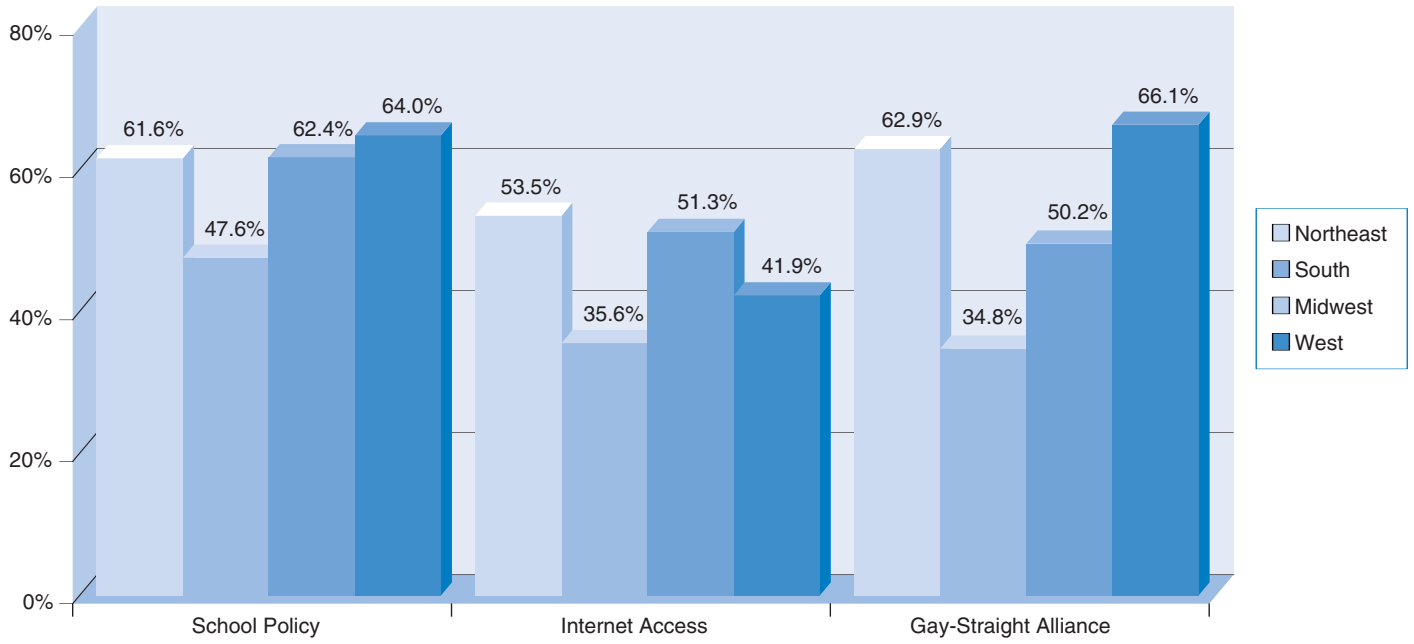
There were also several differences across geographical regions regarding school resources and supports (see Figures 81 and 82):

- Youth from the South were least likely to report that their schools had a policy regarding harassment and assault than youth from all other regions.
- Youth from the South along with youth from the West were less likely to report that they had access to LGBT Internet sites at their schools than youth from the Northeast and the Midwest.
- Youth from the Northeast and the West were likelier to report that their schools had GSAs than youth from the South and Midwest.
- Youth from the Northeast and the West reported more supportive faculty or staff at their schools than youth from the South and Midwest.

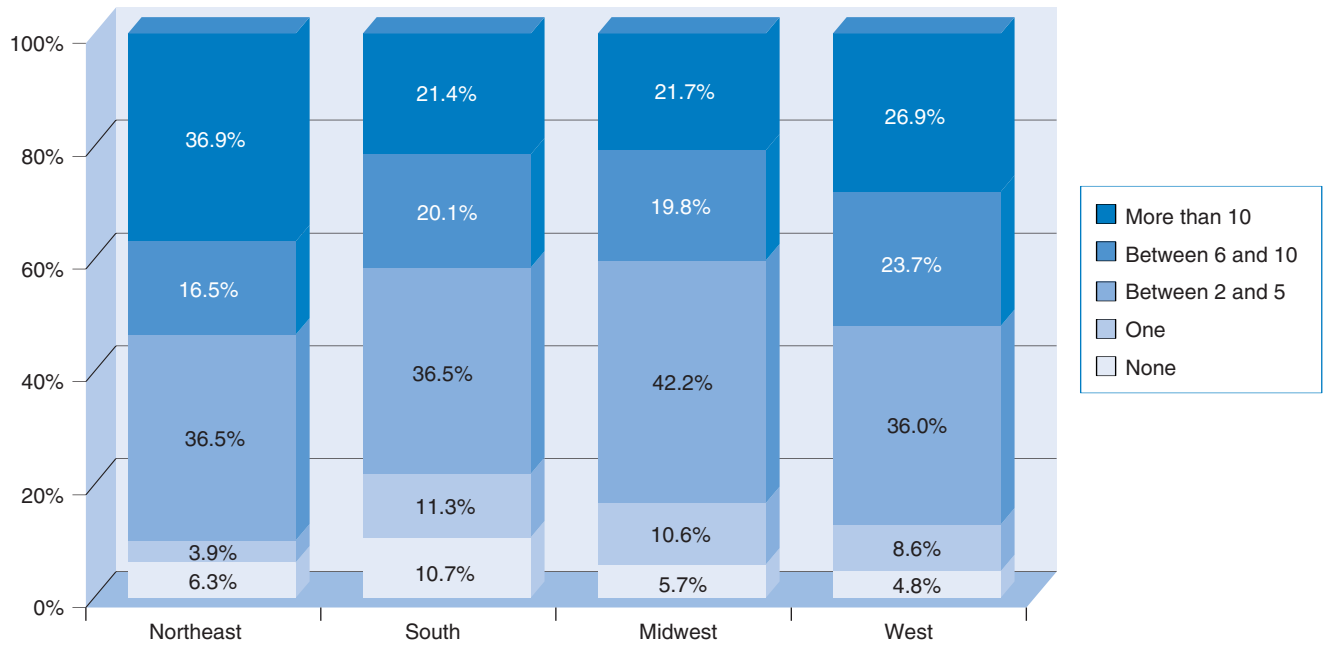
**Figure 80. Number of Faculty/Staff Supportive of LGBT Issues by Locale**



**Figure 81. LGBT-Related Resources by Geographic Region**  
(percent knowing the resource is available)



**Figure 82. Number of Faculty/Staff Supportive of LGBT Issues by Geographic Region**





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## ***Utility of School Resources and Supports***

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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 LGBT students. Given that GLSEN's National School Climate Survey was cross-sectional<sup>30</sup> in design, we cannot make definitive statements 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.

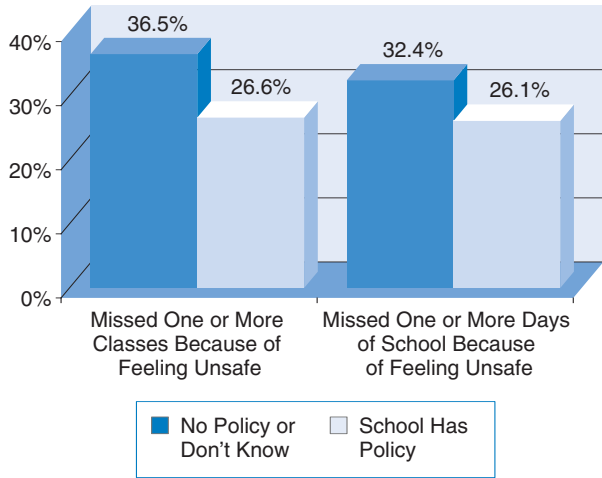
Being in a school that lacks a policy about harassment was significantly related to missing classes or days of school because of feeling unsafe. As shown in Figure 83, more youth in schools without policies (or without evident policies) reported that they had missed classes or days of school for safety reasons than youth in schools with evident policies about harassment. Youth were also more likely to report victimization events to teachers or school staff if they believed their schools had a policy regarding such behaviors (see Figure 84).

There is some evidence that certain institutional supports may be related to a better quality school experience for LGBT youth:

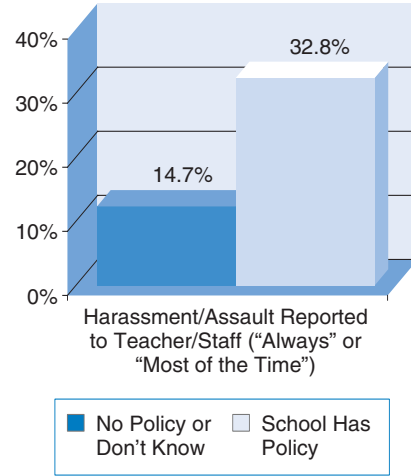
- Youth whose schools had GSAs were less likely to have reported feeling unsafe: 60.9% of youth from schools with GSAs reported feeling unsafe because of their sexual orientation compared to 68.3% of youth from schools without GSAs.
- Having more supportive or openly LGBT faculty or staff was associated with a greater sense of belonging in their schools. The percentage of youth who reported a sense of belonging in school was twice as high for youth reporting 10 or more supportive or "out" faculty/staff in school than for youth reporting none (see Figure 85).
- Being open about one's own sexual orientation was also associated with a greater sense of belonging in school for the LGBT youth in our survey. For example, youth who were "out" to everybody at their schools were twice as likely to report a sense of belonging in school than youth who were not "out" to anyone at school (see Figure 86).

<sup>30</sup> "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 schools 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.

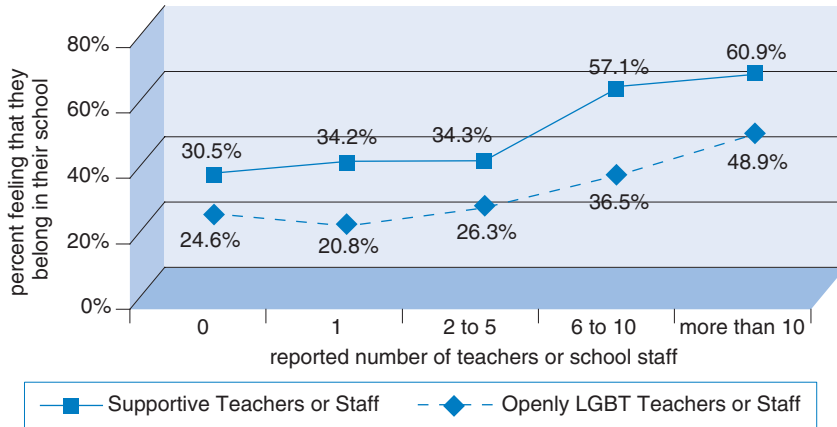
**Figure 83. Relationship Between Existing School Policy on Harassment or Assault and Missing School for Safety Reasons**



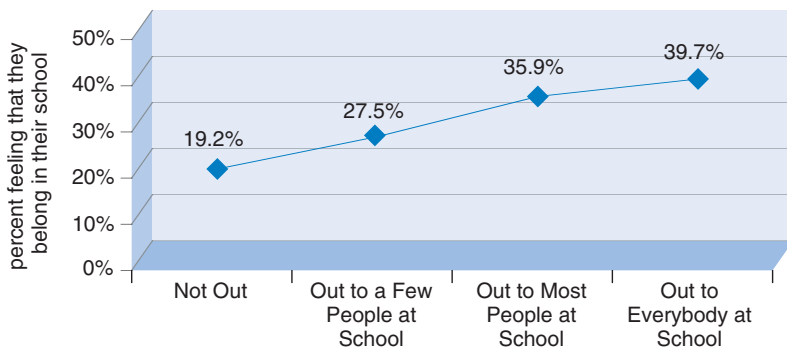
**Figure 84. Relationship Between Existing School Policy on Harassment or Assault and Reporting Events to School Personnel**



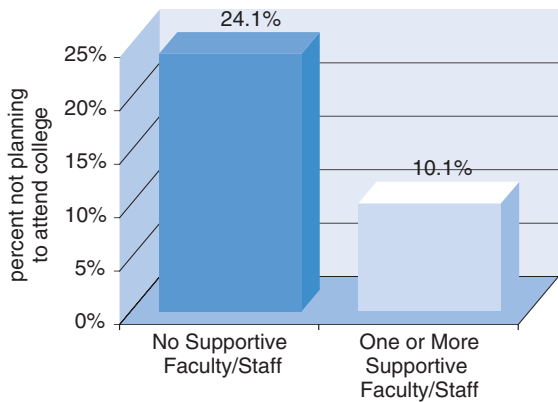
**Figure 85. Relationship Between Sense of Belonging in School and Supportive or Openly LGBT Faculty/Staff**



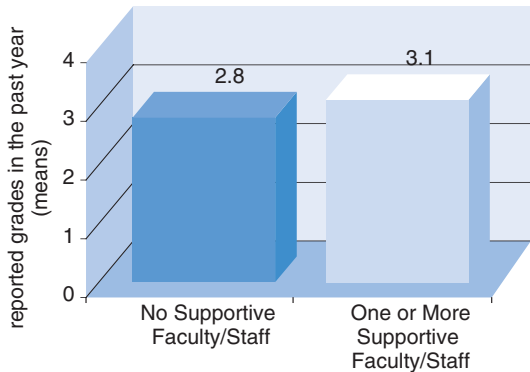
**Figure 86. Relationship Between Being "Out" in School and Sense of Belonging in School**  
(percentage who felt as if they belonged in their school)



**Figure 87. Relationship Between Supportive Faculty/Staff and Educational Aspirations**



**Figure 88. Relationship Between Supportive Faculty/Staff and Academic Achievement**



Having supportive faculty or staff was also related to better educational outcomes for LGBT youth. As shown in Figure 87, youth who reported no supportive faculty or staff in their schools were twice as likely to report that they were not going to continue their education after high school. Similarly, as shown in Figure 88, youth who reported at least one supportive school personnel reported, on average, higher grades in the past academic year.

Reporting incidents of harassment or assault to school officials was also associated with the existence of supportive faculty or staff in school. As shown in Figure 89, youth who reported having 10 or more supportive faculty or staff members in their schools were almost twice as likely to report incidents of harassment or assault to school officials most of the time or always than youth who reported having no supportive faculty or staff in their schools. Having more supportive faculty in school may provide youth greater options for accessing support when experiencing hostile events. However, the greater number of supportive faculty, in and of itself, may simply create a more supportive climate in which LGBT youth can discuss these experiences.

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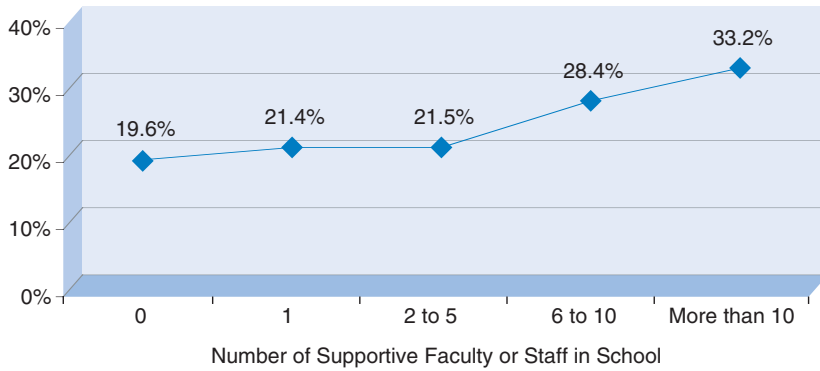
**Comparison between GLSEN's 2001 and 2003 surveys**

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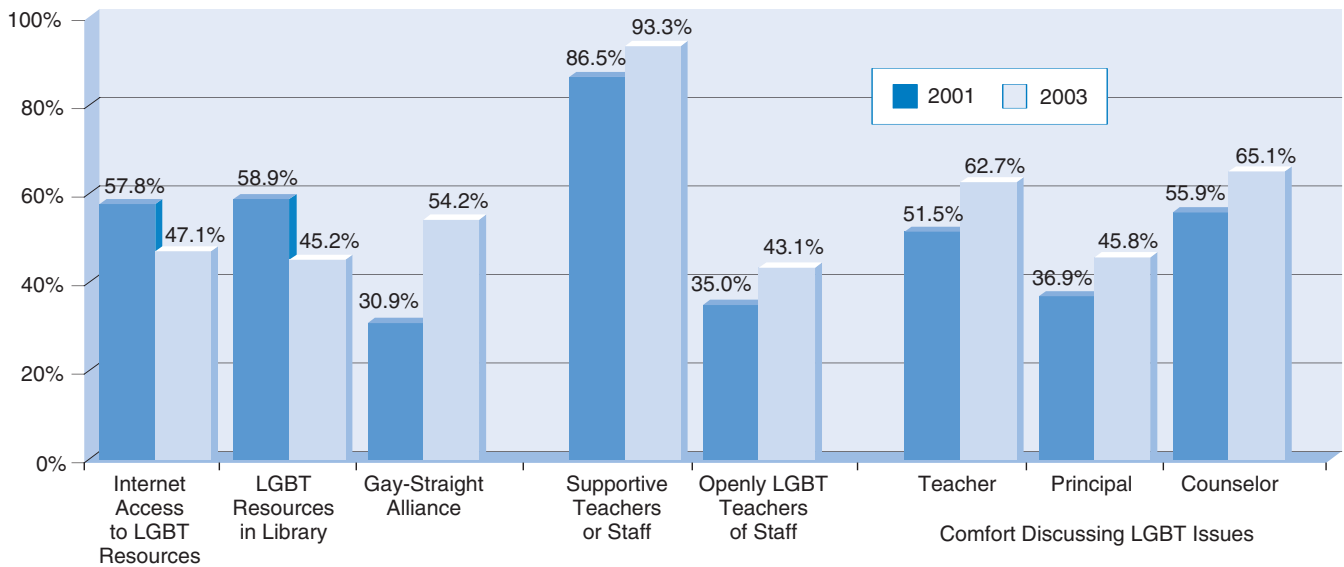
GLSEN works to improve school climate and resources for LGBT youth in our nation's schools by educating educators about LGBT issues, by providing inclusive curricular resources, by working with educational policy makers and by supporting students to change their own school environments. Therefore, it is important to examine whether there have been changes in resources over time. As shown in Figure 90, there were several significant increases and a few significant decreases in available resources from 2001 to 2003:

- Fewer youth reported having Internet access to LGBT community resources and fewer youth reported having LGBT resources in their libraries in 2003.
- Almost twice as many youth in 2003 reported that their schools had GSAs.
- There were also small increases in the percentage of youth who reported having at least one teacher or staff person at school who was supportive of LGBT youth and in the percentage of youth who reported having at least one openly LGBT teacher or staff person at school.
- There was also an increase in the percentage of youth who were comfortable talking to teachers, principals and/or school counselors about LGBT issues.

**Figure 89. Relationship Between Number of Supportive Faculty/Staff and Youths' Reporting Harassment and Assault Experiences to School Officials**  
 (percentage saying they reported harassment or assault most of the time or always)



**Figure 90. Comparison of 2001 and 2003 NSCS: LGBT Resources in School**





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## CONCLUSIONS

The methods used for our survey result in a fairly representative sample of LGBT youth. However, 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 engaging in 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 certainly may be more isolated, may not be aware of supports for LGBT youth and, even if aware, 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 even have the resources to understand what being transgender means. Our data may not reflect the experiences of these youth, who also may be more isolated and without the same access to resources as the transgender youth in our survey. For these reasons, large-scale population-based studies, such as the YRBS, must include questions about sexual orientation and gender identity and expression because youth who do not presently identify as LGBT but who may later identify as LGBT would be difficult to reach through other means.

The results from the 2003 National School Climate Survey are consistent with the findings of our prior surveys—for many of our nation's LGBT youth, school can be an unsafe and even dangerous place. The majority of the LGBT youth in our study frequently heard homophobic remarks, felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation and reported being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation or their gender expression. A large number of youth also reported experiencing incidents of physical harassment, physical assault, sexual harassment and deliberate damage to personal property. The findings from this survey also indicate that transgender students are particularly vulnerable because of their gender expression.

In reviewing changes between the 2001 and 2003 surveys regarding homophobic remarks and victimization events related to sexual orientation, there were small but significant decreases in the more serious, but rarer events of physical harassment and physical assault, and not with the less serious but more common event of verbal harassment. Similarly, there was a significant decline in hearing homophobic remarks in school such as “fag” or “dyke” used in a derogatory manner, but no decline in the more commonly used expression “that’s so gay.” This pattern may indicate that verbal harassment and expressions such as “that’s so gay” may be considered to be more benign. Thus, more education may be needed at the school or district level around the negative effect that these less serious events may have on LGBT students.

GLSEN's 2003 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 had gay-straight alliances and that LGBT people, history and events were mentioned in classroom curricula. It is important to reiterate that the most isolated of LGBT youth may be underrepresented in the current survey and that these youth may not have access to supportive resources in their schools. Middle schools and high schools with supportive resources for LGBT students may be more likely to have students who are comfortable with their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression and, therefore, comfortable identifying as LGBT. For example, the finding that half of the youth in our survey had GSAs in their schools does not necessarily reflect that half of the schools in our country have GSAs. It is possible that schools with GSAs and other supportive resources may be likelier to have students who are comfortable with their identity as a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender person.

Although many youth reported supportive resources in their schools, this number is far outweighed by the number of youth reporting acts of harassment and victimization. In addition, the positive changes between 2001 and 2003 regarding school resources, such as increases in GSAs or supportive teachers/staff, were greater than the positive changes regarding harassment and assault, such as decreases in physical harassment and assault related to sexual orientation. It may be that changes in attitude follow institutional changes. GLSEN staff and chapter members typically do not address attitudes directly with student populations but rather provide resources for teachers and students to use in their schools and advocate for policy change at the state and local district levels. The greater changes in resources for students may be a result of GLSEN's efforts over the past two years, in part, and it may take more time for these changes to "trickle down" to the student level, particularly with anti-LGBT student attitudes and behaviors. These findings highlight the importance of tracking changes in school climate and the experiences of LGBT youth over time. They also underscore the importance of promoting attitude change at the student level in addition to providing school supports and resources for LGBT students.

Differences in resources across locales and geographic regions may provide valuable information for targeting future action. More resources and advocacy may be needed in rural areas and in the southern states given that youth from these areas were less likely to report having access to LGBT-related resources.

Although there were increases in many LGBT-related resources from 2001 to 2003, there were two important and disconcerting decreases as they may be related to changes in federal legislation regarding school resources. First, fewer youth in 2003 reported that they had access to LGBT-related Internet resources than youth in 2001. In December 2000, President Clinton signed the Children's Internet

31 More information about the Children's Internet Protection Act and the ramifications for public school libraries may be found on the American Library Association's website: [www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org). GLSEN's public policy statement about Internet filtering software is available at: <http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/library/record/1010.html>

Protection Act, legislation which requires public schools and public libraries that received federal funds for Internet services or technology to use Internet filtering software that would screen out visual depictions that are “obscene, child pornography; or harmful to minors.”<sup>31</sup> The decrease in youth reports regarding Internet access may be a direct result of filtering packages introduced by public schools to comply with the new federal legislation. Second, fewer youth in 2003 reported that their schools libraries had books or other resources that contained information about LGBT people, history or events. In 1981, direct federal funding for school libraries was eliminated and local school districts and states have consistently cut school library funding in order to address other educational needs. According to a recent survey by the *School Library Journal* on spending, resources and services, school library spending overall has decreased since 1999, and although book expenditures per pupil have risen, the increase is not enough to keep up with rising book prices.<sup>32</sup> As school libraries have fewer and fewer financial resources, it is likely that books and resources about LGBT issues would be less of a priority. The decline in the availability of Internet and library resources and the role that federal legislation may have played in the decline highlights the importance of advocating for inclusionary school resources at the federal level.

Results from the 2003 National School Climate Survey also indicate the importance of advocating for state and local policies that protect LGBT youth in school. Youth who reported that their schools had a policy or procedure for reporting harassment were less likely to miss school and more likely to report incidents of harassment or assault to faculty or school staff. The results also suggest that individual schools and local school districts that have protective policies may not be adequately educating their students about them. Many youth from school districts that are known to have protective policies reported that their district did not have such a policy or that they did not know whether such a policy existed. A policy that is not enforced or that is not commonly known to exist may be as useless as no policy at all. Thus, state and local activists should work with educational professionals around the implementation of safe school policies, including plans for educating the student population about them.

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 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. Just as future research that examines youth experiences with school-based harassment and assault must include information about sexual orientation (same-sex sexual behavior as well as lesbian, gay or bisexual identity) and gender identity/expression, future research on LGBT youth must also include information about race/ethnicity and gender.

<sup>32</sup> Miller, M. L. & Shontz, M. L. *The SLJ Spending Survey*. *School Library Journal*, October 1, 2003. Also available from the journal website: <http://slj.reviewsnews.com/>



By conducting the National School Climate Survey, our hope is that national, state and local activists will use these statistics to show policymakers, legislators and local school administrators that many LGBT youth are targeted for harassment and assault because of their sexual orientation and their gender identity or expression and that laws and policies must be enacted and enforced that would make all schools safer for LGBT youth. The youth in our survey come from communities across the country and our results provide what we believe to be a fairly accurate picture of the experiences of LGBT youth nationwide. However, states and localities vary with regard to legislation and policies that are in place to protect LGBT students. Even among states and localities with inclusive legislation and policies, there may be differences with regard to implementation and enforcement. Such differences in laws and policies could affect the school climate for LGBT youth.

Some local policymakers and legislators may believe that the experiences of LGBT youth in their state or their locality are more positive than what is depicted in our national study, so it is important to conduct representative studies at the state or local level. For this reason, 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.<sup>33</sup> 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. In addition, there also may be professional researchers who are conducting local research on the experiences of LGBT youth 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 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 Resources (GayDAR), is available from the IGLSS website ([www.iglss.org](http://www.iglss.org)).

Perhaps the most important conclusion that can be gleaned from the 2003 NSCS 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 students. Given the evidence that incidents of harassment and assault are not uncommon to LGBT youth in their schools, policymakers, school administrators, local community leaders, GLSEN chapter members, teachers, parents and GSA members need to work within their schools and their schools districts to insure that all students are taught with respect and have access to a quality education.

<sup>33</sup> 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](http://www.glsen.org)





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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Joseph G. Kosciw has a PhD in psychology from New York University and a BA in psychology and MEd in counseling from the University of Pennsylvania. He trained as a family therapist and has worked as a school counselor and psychoeducational consultant in elementary and secondary schools. Dr. Kosciw has been conducting community-based research for over 12 years, including program evaluations for non-profit social service organizations and for local government, including Gay Men's Health Crisis, Safe Horizons, the New York City Mayor's Office for AIDS Policy Coordination and the New York State Department of Health. From 2000 to 2002, he was the research staff person in GLSEN's Public Policy Department and spearheaded GLSEN's 2001 National School Climate Survey. He has recently rejoined GLSEN as their Research Director.



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