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Shared Differences

The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Students of Color in Our Nation's Schools

A Report from the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network

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Shared Differences

The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Students of Color in Our Nation's Schools

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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/expresssion.

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PREFACE

For nearly a decade, GLSEN has documented the school experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students to inform our ongoing work to ensure that schools are doing everything they can to create safe learning environments for all students. While understanding these shared experiences is important, it is also critical to remember the differences among LGBT students, who are anything but a monolithic group, and to identify important variations in their school experiences. For this reason, we have conducted our second study that focuses specifically on the school experiences of LGBT students of color—*Shared Differences: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Students of Color in Our Nation's Schools.* This report provides a richer portrait of these distinct segments of the LGBT student population. Indeed, the data examined here reveals some important distinctions among different communities of LGBT students of color, while highlighting other areas where students of color face the same challenges as the overall LGBT student population.

Similar to findings from our past research on the general population of LGBT students, LGBT students of color most commonly reported experiencing harassment and assault in school because of their sexual orientation and how they expressed their gender. Many of these students were also harassed or assaulted in school because of their race or ethnicity; and for African American, Latino/a, Asian/ Pacific Islander and multiracial students, this was the third most commonly reported type of harassment. Native American students in

our study reported lower levels of racially motivated harassment, but reported the highest levels of verbal harassment and physical violence because of their actual or perceived religion—safety concerns related to actual or perceived religion may be particularly salient for this group. For all groups of students of color in our study, the racial/ethnic composition of their schools significantly impacted their safety-related experiences—minority students were much more likely to feel unsafe and experience harassment based on race/ethnicity than those who were in the racial/ethnic majority in school. Unfortunately, across all groups of students of color, less than half said that they ever reported incidents of victimization to school staff. Additional findings presented in this report further demonstrate the shared school experiences of LGBT students of color, as well as the ways in which experiences vary among these diverse populations.

This report is part of GLSEN's growing body of groundbreaking research dedicated to expanding our understanding of the nature, scope and impact of LGBT issues in K–12 education in the United States. Since 2001, GLSEN's *National School Climate Survey* has provided crucial information about the school experiences of LGBT students for educators and advocates committed to improving school climate. Other GLSEN studies—such as *From Teasing to Torment, The Principal's Perspective and Involved, Invisible, Ignored*—have illuminated additional facets of the school climate issue, increasing the knowledge base for reformers throughout the system.

GLSEN is committed to expanding the base of knowledge available to educators, advocates and organizations dedicated to improving K–12 schools across the country and partnering with them to advance our common goal.

Eliza Byard, PhD
Executive Director
GLSEN

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INTRODUCTION

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth often face unique challenges related to their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, challenges which most of their non-LGBT peers do not face. Youth who are LGBT often report experiencing harassment, discrimination, and other troubling events in school, often specifically related to their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or how they express their gender. Such experiences include high levels of verbal and physical harassment and assault, sexual harassment, social exclusion and isolation, and other interpersonal problems with peers.[1] GLSEN recently released a report of findings from the *2007 National School Climate Survey*, a national survey of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) secondary school students in U.S. schools that documents the experiences of LGBT students with regard to indicators of negative school climate: exposure to biased language, including homophobic remarks, in school; feeling unsafe in school for any reason; missing classes or days of school because of safety concerns, and experiences of harassment and assault in school.[2] Results from this study demonstrated that schools are often unsafe places for LGBT students. Hearing biased remarks at school, especially homophobic remarks, was a common occurrence. Teachers and other school authorities did not often intervene when homophobic or negative remarks about gender expression were made in their presence, and students' use of such language remained largely unchallenged. Three-quarters of LGBT students reported feeling unsafe in school because of at least one personal characteristic, with sexual orientation and gender expression being the characteristics

most commonly reported. Almost 90% of LGBT students had been verbally harassed in school because of their sexual orientation, and two-thirds had been harassed because of how they expressed their gender. The majority of students who were victimized in school did not report the incident to school staff and, among the minority who did report it, most said that school staff failed to effectively address the situation. In addition, many LGBT students did not have access to in-school resources that may improve school climate and students' experiences, such as Gay-Straight Alliances, supportive educators, and comprehensive safe school policies.

LGBT students are a diverse population and although there are commonalities with regard to their school experiences, such as having safety concerns related to their sexual orientation and/or how they express their gender, it is important to understand that experiences are shaped and may vary by students' personal characteristics, such as their race or ethnicity.[3] Although research regarding the educational experiences of LGBT youth has increased over the last two decades, the specific experiences and needs of LGBT students of color remain largely unexplored in existing research about LGBT students. The small body of research that does exist demonstrates that in addition to challenges related to their sexual orientation or gender identity, these youth often face challenges that are related to their race and ethnicity, which the vast majority of White LGBT youth do not.

In the *2007 National School Climate Survey*, we examined differences in LGBT students' experiences by students' race and ethnicity. LGBT students of color (i.e., African American/Black, Latino/a, Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander, and multiracial students) in the survey reported experiencing higher levels of victimization related to their race or ethnicity than White students. LGBT multiracial students, in fact, reported the highest levels of racially/ethnically motivated victimization. African American/Black students reported lower levels of victimization based on their sexual orientation and actual or perceived religion than other LGBT students. In addition, Native American students experienced the highest levels of victimization based on actual or perceived religion. LGBT students of color often have to deal with multiple forms of prejudiced behaviors in school. In the *National School Climate Survey*, we also looked at the intersections of sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, gender, and gender expression. We found that almost half of LGBT students of color were verbally harassed in school because of both sexual orientation and race/ethnicity, and more than a fifth experienced physical violence targeting both of these characteristics.

The report of the *2007 National School Climate Survey* provides valuable insight about the ways that LGBT students' school experiences differ based on certain personal characteristics, such as race/ethnicity, as well as information about how the experiences of LGBT students of color differ from White students. In order to acquire a better understanding of the issues facing LGBT students of color,

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it is important to create a more detailed picture of their experiences in school. In this report, we aim to broaden this picture by examining further the school experiences of LGBT students who are African American or Black, Latino or Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American or American Indian or Alaska Native, and multiracial. Using data from the student of color participants in the *2007 National School Climate Survey*, we specifically examine the experiences of students within each of these racial/ethnic groups with regard to indicators of negative school climate, including exposure to biased language in school, sense of safety and absenteeism related to safety concerns, and experiences of harassment and assault and their impact on academic performance. In addition, we look at how their experiences differ by the characteristics of their school communities, such as racial composition (i.e., whether students were in the racial/ethnic minority of majority in their school) and location. Further, we demonstrate the degree to which students of color have access to institutional resources, such as supportive educators, Gay-Straight Alliances, and LGBT-inclusive curriculum. In addition to analysis of data from the *National School Climate Survey*, we explored the diverse nature of the school experiences of LGBT students of color by talking with students in group and individual interviews. In this report, we examine their experiences in school with regard to harassment and other behaviors that may compromise students' safety and negatively impact their educational experience.

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METHODS

Survey Data

As stated earlier, the *National School Climate Survey* is a biennial survey of U.S. secondary school students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender. Data used in this report come from the fifth installment of the survey, which was conducted during the 2006–2007 school year. Two methods were used in order to locate participants and obtain a more representative sample of LGBT youth. First, participants were obtained through community-based groups or service organizations serving LGBT youth. Fifty randomly selected groups/organizations agreed to participate in the survey and surveys were then sent for the youth to complete. The groups were randomly selected from a list of over 300 groups nationwide and 108 groups were contacted in order to obtain 50 groups/organizations who agreed to participate. Of these groups, 38 were able to have youth complete the survey and a total of 288 surveys were obtained through this method. Our second method was to make the *National School Climate Survey* available online through GLSEN's website. Notices about the survey were posted on LGBT-youth oriented listservs and websites. Notices were also emailed to GLSEN chapters and to youth advocacy organizations, such as Advocates for Youth and Youth Guardian Services. To ensure representation of transgender youth and youth of color, special efforts were made to notify groups and organizations that work predominantly with these populations. We also conducted targeted advertising on the social networking site MySpace. Notices about the survey were shown to MySpace users who were between

13 and 18 years old and who indicated on their user profile that they were gay, lesbian or bisexual.[4] A total of 5,921 surveys were completed online. Data collection occurred from April to August 2007.

The full sample consisted of a total of 6,209 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students, from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. LGBT students who identified their race as White, except for those who also identified as Latino/a or Hispanic or another race in addition to White, were excluded from the analysis for this report. A total of 2,130 students of color participated in the survey: 356 were African American or Black, 805 were Latino/a or Hispanic, 253 were Asian or Pacific Islander, 385 were Native American or Alaska Native, and 331 were multiracial.[5] LGBT students of color were from 48 states and the District of Columbia, and were between 13 and 21 years of age.

The demographic composition of students of color in the survey differed across groups (see Table 1):

- African American, Native American, multiracial students in our survey sample were predominately female-identified, with about two-thirds of students within each group identifying as female.[6] Among Latino/a and Asian/Pacific Islander students, the sample was more evenly split between female- and male-identified students.

- Across all groups, less than a tenth of students identified as transgender. There were somewhat more transgender-identified Asian/Pacific Islander students in the survey than other transgender students of color.

- African American and Latino/a students were more likely to identify as gay or lesbian than other students of color in the survey – about two-thirds of these groups were gay or lesbian compared to about half of other students of color.[7]

- More than half of Native American students identified as bisexual, which was more than other students of color (see also Table 1).

Across all groups, the vast majority of students of color were attending public schools, although Asian/Pacific Islander students were somewhat more likely to be in private or independent schools than other students in the sample (see Table 2).[8] There were other differences in the community characteristics of groups of students:

- More than 80% of African American, Latino/a, Asian/Pacific Islander, and multiracial students were attending schools in urban or suburban areas. Native American LGBT students were less likely to be in urban/suburban schools (69%) and more likely to be in schools in small towns or rural communities (32%).[9]

- Asian/Pacific Islander students were concentrated in the West, with almost half (48%) attending schools in that region of the country, and were much more likely to be in schools in the West than other students of color.[10]

- More than a third of African American (42%), Latino/a (40%), and

multiracial (40%) LGBT students were in schools in districts with somewhat or very high levels of poverty. Asian/Pacific Islander (25%) and Native American (26%) students in our sample were less likely to be in high poverty schools.[11]

Further school characteristics of the survey sample, broken down by each racial/ethnic group, are presented in Table 2.

Interview Data

The interview data was obtained through group and individual interviews conducted via telephone. LGBT youth who were attending a U.S. high school at the time of the study and were a member of a U.S. racial or ethnic minority were eligible to participate. In order to obtain interview participants, we contacted organizations and community groups serving LGBT youth, with a particular focus on contacting those that predominately served youth of color. Fliers advertising the study were distributed to participating organizations and groups. In addition, notices about the study were posted on LGBT-youth oriented listservs. Notices were also emailed to GLSEN chapters and student listservs, and to youth advocacy organizations, such as Advocates for Youth. All participants were required to obtain consent from a parent or guardian prior to participating.

A total of four groups, ranging from 3 to 6 participants, and one individual interview were conducted, for a total of 13 participants. Data was collected between October 2007 and April 2008. Eight participants were Latino/a, two were African American, and three were biracial or multiracial. With regard to gender identity, seven identified as male, three as female, one as transgender, one as genderqueer, and one as "feminine." Five participants identified their sexual orientation as bisexual, five as gay, two as lesbian, and one as pansexual. Eight participants were in the 12th grade, three participants were in the 10th grade, and one was in the 11th grade at the time of the study. Participants' age ranged from 15 to 19 years.

Table 1. Demographics of the Survey Sample

	African American (n=356)	Latino/a (n=805)	Asian/Pacific Islander (n=253)	Native American (n=385)	Multiracial (n=331)
Gender Identity					
Female	61%	48%	48%	61%	60%
Male	31%	42%	39%	25%	32%
Transgender	3%	5%	8%	6%	4%
Other gender (e.g., genderqueer)	5%	5%	6%	8%	5%
Sexual Orientation					
Gay or Lesbian	62%	61%	57%	43%	54%
Bisexual	32%	37%	36%	53%	43%
Other sexual orientation (e.g., queer)	6%	3%	7%	4%	2%
Average Age for each group = 16 years					

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Table 2. School Characteristics of Survey Sample

	African American (n=356)	Latino/a (n=805)	Asian/Pacific Islander (n=253)	Native American (n=385)	Multiracial (n=331)
School Type					
Public School	92%	92%	86%	93%	91%
Religious-Affiliated School	3%	4%	5%	2%	4%
Other private or independent school	5%	4%	9%	5%	5%
Community Type					
Urban area	44%	45%	38%	29%	47%
Suburban area	40%	41%	50%	40%	36%
Small town/Rural area	16%	15%	13%	32%	17%
Region					
Northeast	30%	23%	16%	14%	23%
South	37%	31%	25%	30%	30%
Midwest	18%	10%	11%	26%	16%
West	14%	37%	48%	29%	32%
School District Poverty Level*					
Very High Poverty (>75%)	6%	13%	5%	4%	8%
Somewhat High Poverty (51–75%)	36%	27%	20%	22%	32%
Somewhat Low Poverty (26–50%)	41%	40%	43%	51%	44%
Very Low Poverty (≤25%)	17%	21%	32%	24%	17%

* Based on school district data from the National Center for Education Statistics regarding the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

References

4   MySpace did not offer users the ability to identify their gender as anything other than male or female. Thus, we were not able to conduct targeted advertising of transgender youth.

5   Throughout the rest of the report, we use the following racial/ethnic categories: African American, Latino/a, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, and multiracial.

6   A Chi-square test was conducted to examine differences in gender identity: χ^2=54.51, df=12, p<.001, Cramer's V=.09.

7   A Chi-square test was conducted to examine differences in sexual orientation: χ^2=55.11, df=8, p<.001, Cramer's V=.11.

8   A Chi-square test was conducted to examine differences in school type: χ^2=16.98, df=8, p<.05, Cramer's V=.06.

9   A Chi-square test was conducted to examine differences in locale: χ^2=80.00, df=8, p<.001, Cramer's V=.14.

10   A Chi-square test was conducted to examine differences in region: χ^2=144.00, df=12, p<.001, Cramer's V=.15.

11   A Chi-square test was conducted to examine differences in district poverty: χ^2=78.20, df=12, p<.001, Cramer's V=.12.

RESULTS

Biased Language

Keeping classrooms and hallways free of homophobic, racist, and other types of biased language is one aspect of creating a safe school climate for students. In the *2007 National School Climate Survey*, we asked LGBT students how often they heard homophobic remarks (such as "dyke," "faggot," or "queer" used in a derogatory way), racist remarks (such as "nigger" or "spic" used in a derogatory way), and sexist remarks (such as someone being called "bitch" in a derogatory way or talk about girls being inferior to boys) while in school. Students were also asked how often they heard negative remarks about how someone expressed their gender (such as a student being told she does not act "feminine" enough"). In addition, students were asked about the frequency of hearing biased language from school staff, as well as whether anyone intervened when hearing this type of language in school. Similar to results from the national survey of the general LGBT student population, we found that LGBT students of color often heard biased language in school, especially homophobic remarks, and that there was little intervention with such language on the part of school staff.

Across all groups of students of color, homophobic and sexist remarks were one of the most commonly heard types of biased language in school (see Figure 1):[12]

- More than 80% of LGBT students of color heard the words "gay" or "queer" used in a negative way often or frequently in school, such

as in the expression "that's so gay" which is often used to mean that something is "stupid" or worthless.

- Across all groups, more than two-thirds of students reported hearing other homophobic remarks, such as "faggot" or "dyke" used in a derogatory way, often or frequently in school.

- Sexist remarks were also very commonly heard by LGBT students of color, with more than two-thirds of students across all groups reporting that they heard sexist language in school often or frequently (see Figure 1).

Negative remarks about gender expression were pervasive as well – the majority of students of color heard negative remarks about gender expression often or frequently in school (see also Figure 1). Almost two-thirds of African American (62%), Latino/a (61%), Native American (62%), and multiracial (60%) students, and 57% of Asian/Pacific Islander students reported hearing these types of remarks often or frequently in school. Although less commonly reported than other types of biased remarks, across all groups almost half LGBT students of color reported hearing racist remarks often or frequently in school (see also Figure 1).

Figure 1. Hearing Biased Language in School
(percentage of students who heard remarks "often" or "frequently")
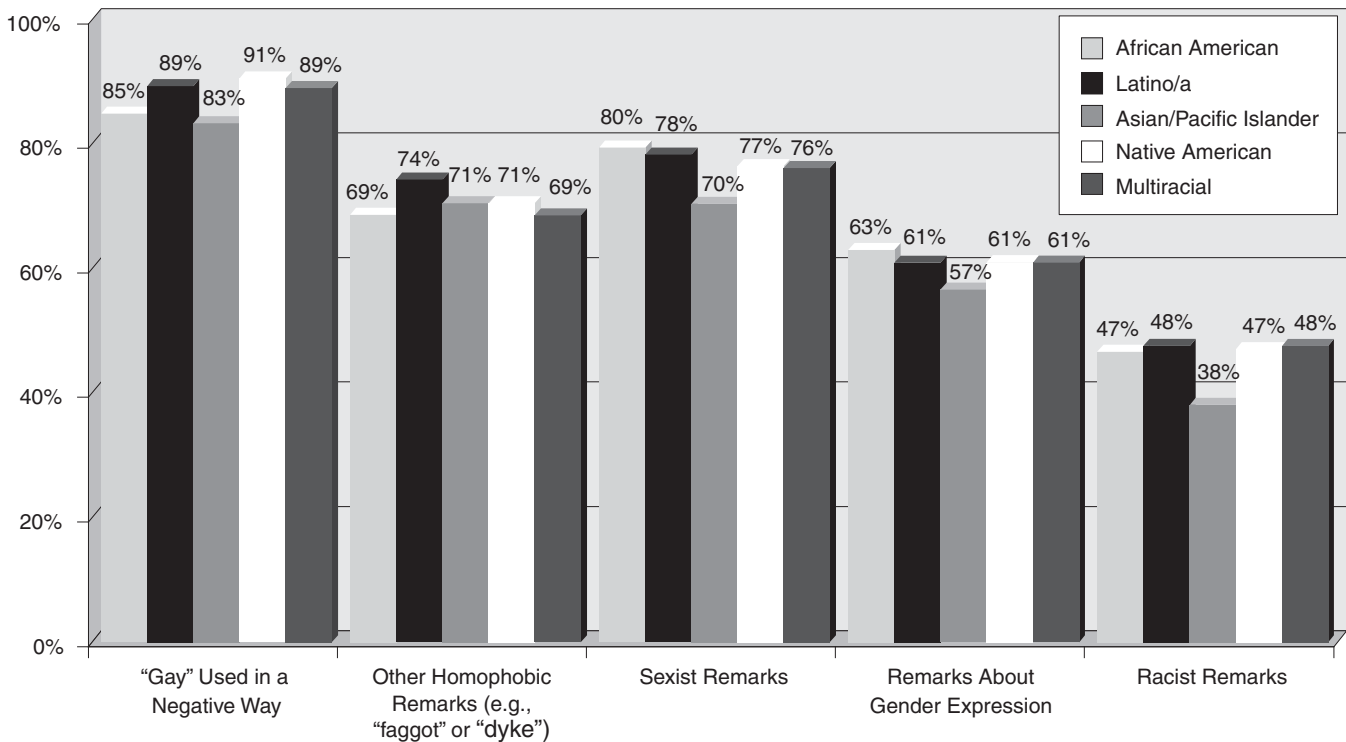
Just as we found among the broader population of LGBT students, many LGBT students of color also heard biased remarks from school personnel. As Figure 2 illustrates, across all groups, the majority of students reported that they ever heard school personnel make homophobic and sexist remarks, and negative comments about someone's gender expression in school during the past year.[13] For example, about six in ten students reported ever hearing homophobic remarks from school staff. Although less frequently reported than other types of remarks, sizable percentages of students of color also reported that they had heard racist remarks from staff in school – across all groups, more than a third of students reported ever hearing such remarks from school personnel (see also Figure 2). Although the use of biased language among teachers and other school staff was not as commonplace as it was among students, the fact that any students reported hearing school staff make biased remarks in school is concerning. When using biased language in school, school staff set an example that homophobic and other types of biased remarks are acceptable.

My choir teacher constantly makes gay jokes...and he doesn't realize that he makes it uncomfortable for us...

(genderqueer, Latino/a, 12th grade)

Figure 2. Biased Remarks from School Personnel
(percentage who reported ever hearing remarks from school)
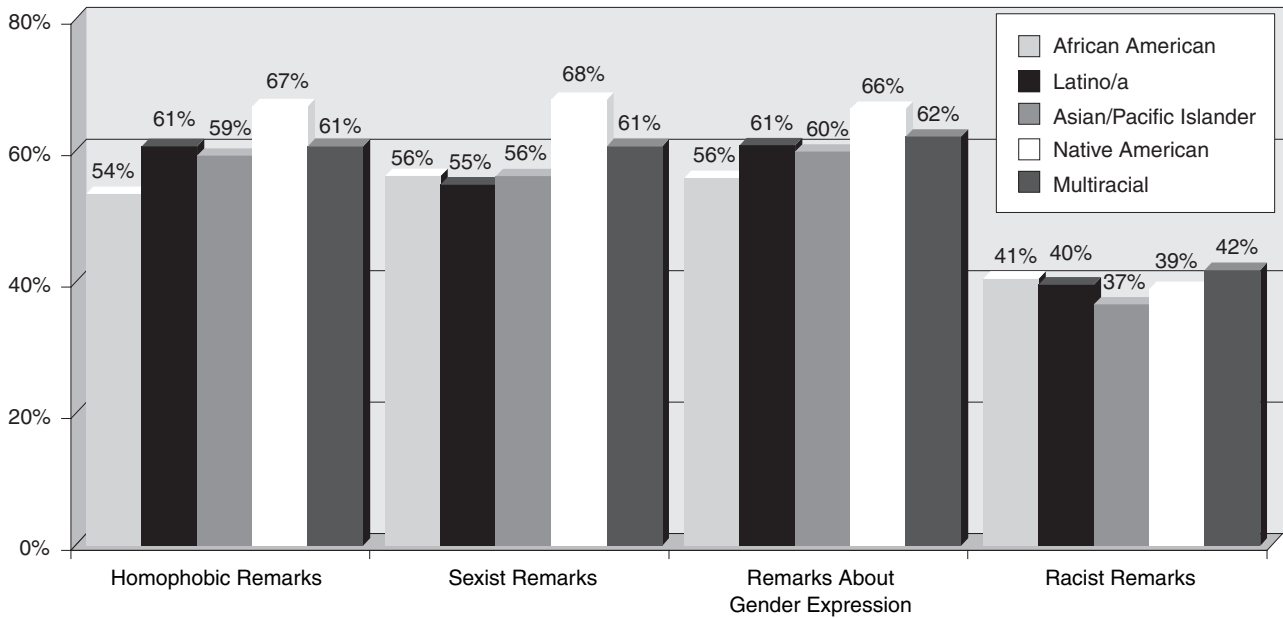
School authorities and students may dismiss the use of homophobic expressions, such as "that's so gay," and homophobic name-calling, such as "fag," as being innocuous or acceptable behavior among students, especially when the language does not appear to be directed at a specific individual. However, when students in our survey were asked how hearing this type of language affected them, 81% of LGBT students of color reported that hearing such language caused them to feel bothered or distressed to some degree. In the group and individual interviews, we learned more about how hearing biased remarks in schools may affect students and their perceptions of school climate. During the interviews, some students talked about how hearing biased remarks, specifically homophobic remarks, affected the climate of their school. For example, a student who heard a teacher make "gay jokes" in class discussed how they felt this behavior affected school climate for LGBT students:

> My choir teacher constantly makes gay jokes…and he doesn't realize that he makes it so uncomfortable for us because it's choir. There's a large LGBT community in choir and he sits there and cracks gay jokes all the time. (genderqueer, Latino/a, 12th grade)

One Latino student talked specifically about how hearing homophobic remarks negatively affected his own feelings as well as his overall perception of his school:

> You could very well on any day hear someone yelling across the hall, "fag," etc. I've heard it before…it's hurtful because it's just not something that you say. And it's just generally hurtful. And I know that I'll just be walking in a hallway, and someone will just say under their breath with a group of friends, "fag"…and hearing things like that in my school – it kind of brings me down almost. It kind of negates any hope that I have for our school to be a better place. (male, 10th grade)

Intervention with Biased Language by School Staff and Students

In addition to how often students hear biased remarks in school, the degree to which school staff do something to address the use of such language, when it is used in their presence, is another indicator of overall school climate. By intervening when hearing biased remarks, school staff may send the message that such language is unacceptable and will not be tolerated in school. Conversely, staff's failure to intervene with biased remarks may send a message that such language is not only tolerated in school but acceptable to use. In the survey, we asked students how often teachers or other school staff intervened in some way when biased remarks were made in their presence. Unfortunately, as we found in the general population of LGBT students, LGBT students of color reported that biased language use by students remained largely unchallenged by school personnel.

Across all groups, only about a fifth of students of color said that school personnel intervened "most of the time" or "always" when hearing homophobic remarks or negative remarks about someone's gender expression (see Figure 3). Across all groups, students of color were less likely to report that staff intervened when hearing homophobic remarks or comments about gender expression than when hearing sexist or racist remarks.[14] Although the percentages of staff intervention with sexist and racist remarks were larger, less than two-thirds of students reported that staff intervened "most of the time" or "always" when hearing these types of remarks in school (see also Figure 3). In addition, multiracial and Native American students were less likely to report that staff frequently intervened when sexist remarks were made in school.[15]

One would expect teachers and school staff to bear the responsibility for addressing problems of biased language in school, as they are the adult authorities charged with ensuring that schools are safe spaces for all students. However, students may at times intervene when hearing biased language, and the willingness of students to intervene may be another indicator of school climate. In the *2007 National School Climate Survey,* few LGBT students overall reported that their peers frequently intervened when hearing any type of biased remark and were least likely to intervene with homophobic remarks and negative comments about gender expression. Similarly, when we examined reports of intervention among the students of color in the national survey, we found that few reported that their classmates intervened when hearing biased remarks in school. As shown in Figure 4, students of color were less likely to report that other students intervened with homophobic remarks and negative remarks about gender expression, with less than a fifth reporting that their classmates frequently intervened when hearing these types of biased remarks.[16] Less than a third of these students said that their peers frequently intervened when sexist or racist language was used.

Figure 3. Intervention by School Personnel When Biased Remarks Were Made in School

Legend:
- African American
- Latino/a
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Native American
- Multiracial

Homophobic Remarks: 21%, 18%, 23%, 19%, 19%
Sexist Remarks: 47%, 47%, 47%, 39%, 38%
Remarks About Gender Expression: 18%, 22%, 16%, 14%, 15%
Racist Remarks: 58%, 59%, 60%, 60%, 50%
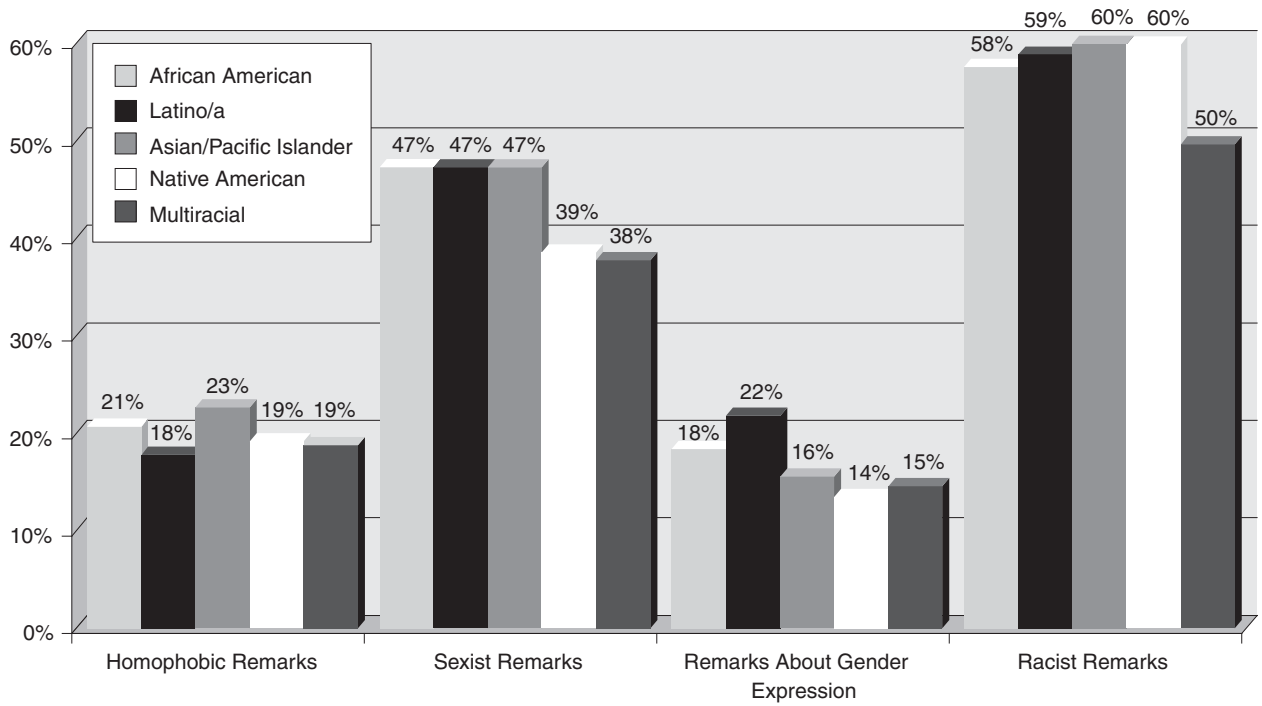
Figure 4. Intervention by Other Students when Biased Remarks Were Made in School

Legend:
- African American
- Latino/a
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Native American
- Multiracial

Homophobic Remarks: 9%, 9%, 8%, 10%, 11%
Sexist Remarks: 25%, 22%, 24%, 26%, 23%
Remarks About Gender Expression: 15%, 11%, 13%, 11%, 11%
Racist Remarks: 28%, 24%, 24%, 23%, 31%
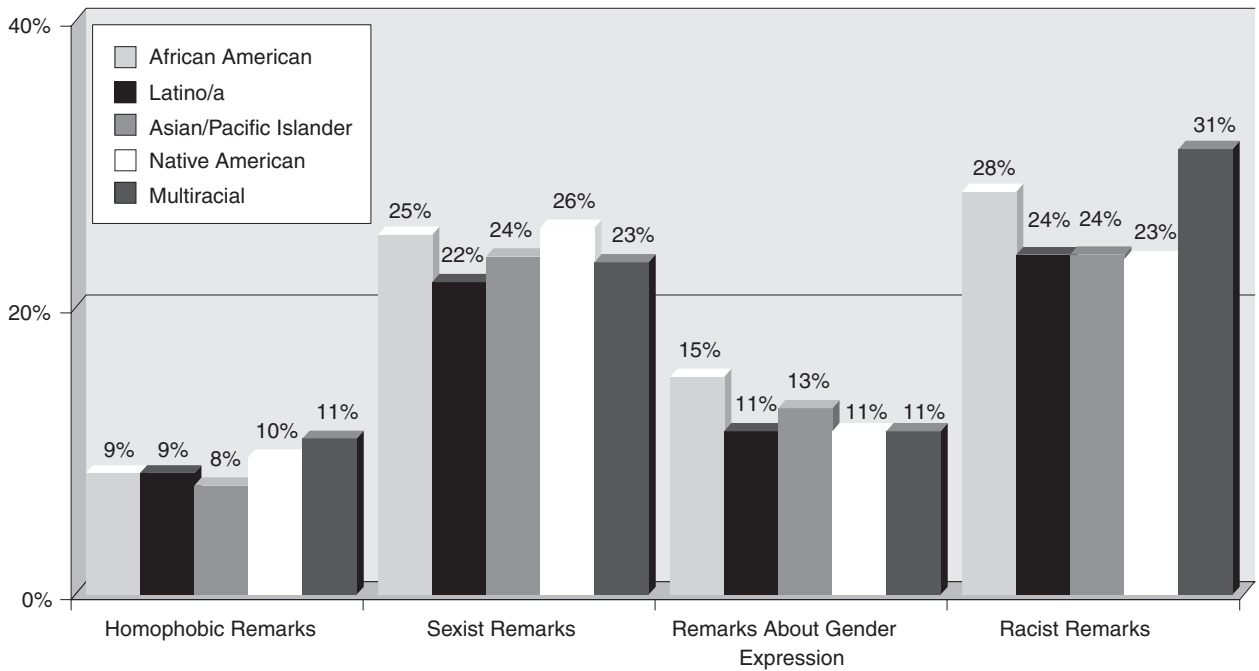
References

12   Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes. Mean differences in the frequencies across types of biased remarks were examined using repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance. The multivariate effect was significant: Pillai's Trace=.48, F(4, 2112)=482.49, p<.001.

13   Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes. Mean differences in the frequencies across types of biased remarks from school staff were examined using repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance. The multivariate effect was significant: Pillai's Trace=.20, F(3, 2100)=177.89, p<.001.

14   Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes. Mean differences in the frequencies across staff intervention with different types of biased remarks were examined using repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance. The multivariate effect was significant: Pillai's Trace=.51, F(3, 1118)=388.86, p<.001.

15   Percentages are for illustrative purposes. To test differences across groups, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all staff intervention variables as dependent variables and controlling for respondents' gender identity and school characteristics (region, locale, district poverty level, and racial composition). Pillai's Trace=.03, F(16, 4084)=1.68, p<.05. Univariate effects were considered significant at p<.05. Percentages presented are based on the estimated marginal means.

16   Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes. Mean differences in the frequencies across student intervention with different types of biased remarks were examined using repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance. The multivariate effect was significant: Pillai's Trace=.19, F(3, 1866)=140.88, p<.001.

Overall Safety in School

In order to assess overall feelings of safety in school, students in our *2007 National School Climate Survey* were asked if they felt unsafe in school because of certain personal characteristics: sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, and actual or perceive race/ethnicity, ability, or religion. In that report of the broader LGBT student population, students reported feeling unsafe because of a variety of characteristics, most commonly their sexual orientation and gender expression. We found that the majority of LGBT students of color reported feeling unsafe in school because of at least one characteristic: about seven in ten Native American (74%) and multiracial students (69%), and about six in ten Asian/Pacific Islander (65%), Latino/a (65%), and African American (60%) students felt unsafe in school.[17] Native American students were more likely than Asian/Pacific Islander, Latino/a, and African American students to report feeling unsafe in school.

LGBT students of color across all groups most commonly reported feeling unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation or how they expressed their gender:

- More than half of African American (53%), Latino/a (60%), Asian/Pacific Islander (56%), Native American (65%), and multiracial (59%) students reported feeling unsafe in school during the past year because of their sexual orientation (see Table 3). African American students were less likely to report feeling unsafe in school for this reason than Native American and Latino LGBT students.[18]

- More than a third of Asian/Pacific Islander (44%), Native American (45%), multiracial (42%), and Latino/a (38%) students felt unsafe in school because of how they expressed their gender (see also Table 3). African American students were less likely than Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, and multiracial students to report feeling unsafe for this reason.

Multiracial, African American/Black, and Asian/Pacific Islander students were more likely to report feeling unsafe in school because of their race/ethnicity than other students of color – about a fifth of multiracial (21%), African American/Black (18%), and Asian/Pacific Islander students reported feeling unsafe for this reason (see also Table 3).

About a tenth of students of color, across all groups, felt unsafe in school because of their gender, and there were not significant differences in students' reports (see also Table 3). For Native American LGBT students, safety related to actual or perceived religion may be a particular concern – almost a third (31%) of Native American students reported feeling unsafe in school for this reason, which was higher than for other LGBT students of color (see also Table 3). With the exception of multiracial students, Native American students were also somewhat more likely than other students of color to report feeling unsafe because of an actual or perceived ability.

Feeling unsafe or uncomfortable in school may negatively affect a student's academic performance, particularly if it results in avoiding classes or missing entire days of school. We asked students in the survey how many times in the past month they had skipped a class or missed a day of school because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable. About a quarter of African American and Asian/Pacific Islander students had missed class at least once or missed at least one day of school in the past month for this reason (see Figure 5). Latino/a, Native American, and multiracial students were even more likely to have missed classes or school for safety reasons – about a third or more of these students reported skipping class at least once or missing at least one full day of school in the past month because of feeling unsafe (see also Figure 5).[19]

Table 3. Feelings of School Safety Related to Personal Characteristics (percentage of students who felt unsafe)						
	Sexual Orientation	Gender Expression	Race/ Ethnicity	Gender	Religion	Ability
African American Students	53%	32%	18%	8%	10%	2%
Latino/a Students	60%	38%	13%	7%	11%	4%
Asian/Pacific Islander Students	56%	44%	17%	8%	14%	4%
Native American	65%	45%	13%	9%	31%	8%
Multiracial Students	59%	42%	21%	10%	18%	6%
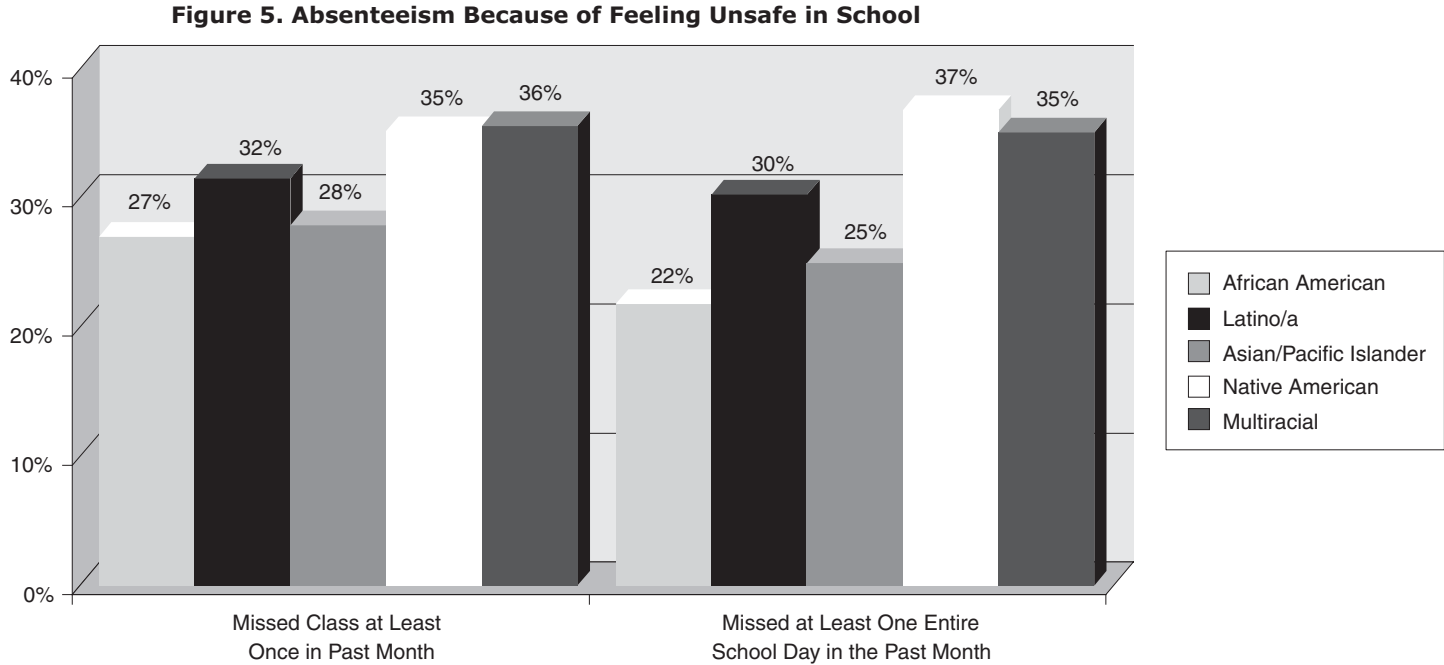
Figure 5. Absenteeism Because of Feeling Unsafe in School

Legend:
- African American
- Latino/a
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Native American
- Multiracial

Missed Class at Least Once in Past Month: 27%, 32%, 28%, 35%, 36%

Missed at Least One Entire School Day in the Past Month: 22%, 30%, 25%, 37%, 35%

Experiences of Harassment and Assault in School

In order to understand school climate for all LGBT students more fully, it is important to examine their experiences related to in-school harassment and assault. In the *2007 National School Climate Survey*, we asked students how often ("never," "rarely," "sometimes," "often," or "frequently") they had been verbally harassed, physically harassed, or physically assaulted during the past school year because of their sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, or actual or perceived race or ethnicity, ability, or religion. Given that the majority of LGBT students of color reported feeling unsafe in school, it was not surprising that we found that many of them had experienced harassment and assault.

Verbal Harassment

Similar to the broader population of LGBT students, students of color most commonly reported experiencing verbal harassment (e.g., being called names or threatened) related to their sexual orientation and gender expression. Substantial percentages of students also reported being harassed in school because of their race or ethnicity. The degree to which students of color reported experiencing verbal harassment in school varied across groups.[20]

- The vast majority of LGBT students of color experienced verbal harassment related to their sexual orientation in the past school year. More than eight out of ten students reported being verbally harassed in school because of their sexual orientation, with Native American, multiracial, and Latino/a students being somewhat more likely to report these experiences (see Figure 6).

- More than six in ten LGBT students of color had been verbally harassed because of their gender expression in school in the past year, and there were no significant differences across groups (see also Figure 6).

- Verbal harassment related to race/ethnicity was the third most commonly reported type of harassment for African American, Latino/a, Asian/Pacific Islander, and multiracial students – a little more than half of each of these groups had been verbally harassed in school because of their race or ethnicity (see also Figure 6).

- In contrast to other LGBT students of color in our survey, harassment related to actual or perceived religion was the third most commonly reported type of harassment for Native American LGBT students. More than half (54%) had been verbally harassed in school for this reason, which was greater than for other students of color (see also Figure 6). In addition, Native American students were less likely than other students of color to report experiencing verbal harassment related to their race/ethnicity, with 43% reporting that they had been verbally harassed in the past year for this reason.

Figure 6. Experiences of Verbal Harassment in School
(percentage of students who were ever verbally harassed in the past year)

Legend:
- African American
- Latino/a
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Native American
- Multiracial

Category	African American	Latino/a	Asian/Pacific Islander	Native American	Multiracial
Sexual Orientation	82%	86%	81%	88%	88%
Gender Expression	61%	69%	63%	69%	69%
Race/Ethnicity	51%	55%	55%	43%	59%
Gender	35%	50%	41%	56%	45%
Religion	27%	32%	42%	54%	40%
Ability	14%	17%	17%	23%	17%
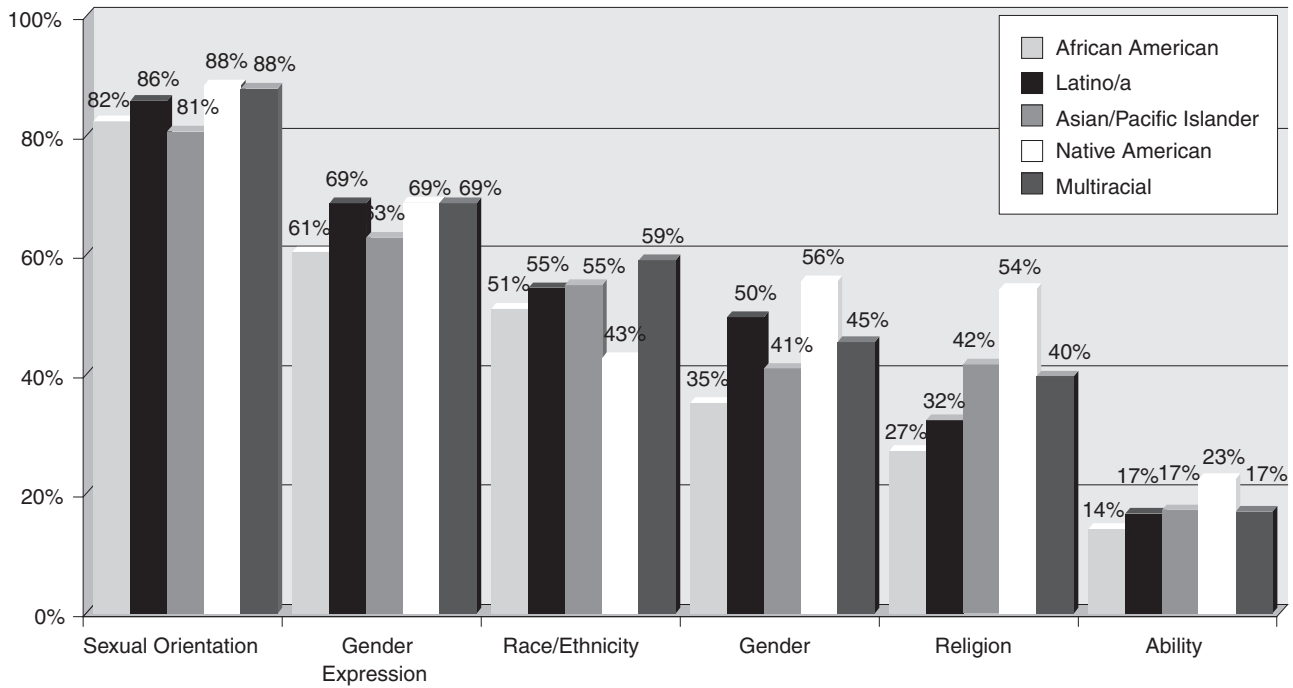
Figure 7. Experiences of Physical Violence in School
(percentage of students who were ever physically harassed or assaulted in the past year)

Legend:
- African American
- Latino/a
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Native American
- Multiracial

Category	African American	Latino/a	Asian/Pacific Islander	Native American	Multiracial
Sexual Orientation	33%	45%	41%	54%	45%
Gender Expression	27%	35%	24%	37%	33%
Race/Ethnicity	16%	20%	17%	18%	23%
Gender	19%	26%	21%	26%	26%
Religion	9%	15%	13%	26%	17%
Ability	7%	9%	8%	12%	10%

19
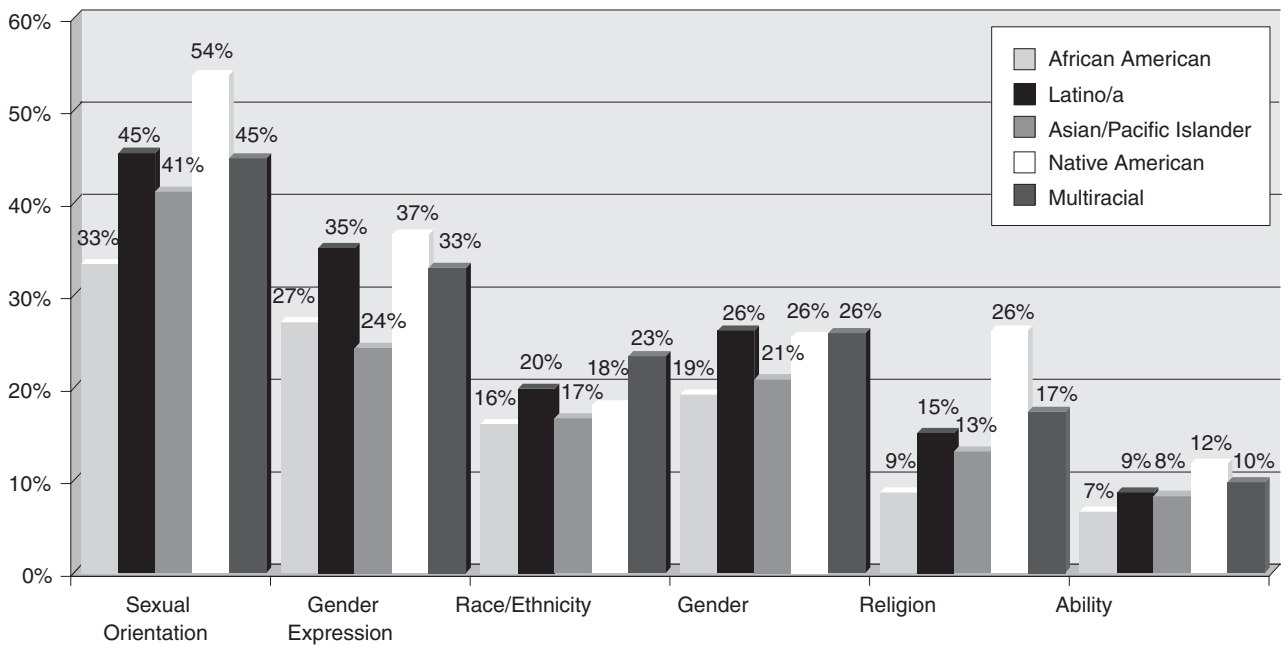
Physical Violence

LGBT students of color in our survey most commonly reported experiencing physical violence (i.e., physical harassment, such as being pushed or shoved, or physical assault, such as being punched, kicked, or injured with a weapon) in school because of their sexual orientation, followed by gender expression. Across all groups, a third of more of students of color experienced physical violence in school because of their sexual orientation, and a quarter or more experienced physical violence because of their gender expression (see Figure 7). Although these were the most commonly reported types of physical violence for all students of color, the degree to which students reported experiencing physical violence in school varied across groups:[21]

- Native American LGBT students were more likely to report experiencing physical violence because of their sexual orientation than other students of color – more than half (54%) of Native American students compared to a substantial minority of other students (see also Figure 7).

- A third or more of multiracial (33%), Latino/a (35%), and Native American (37%) students had experienced physical violence because of their gender expression. About a quarter of African American (27%) and Asian/Pacific Islander (24%) students reported experiences of this type of physical violence, which was lower than for other students of color (see also Figure 7).

- About a fifth of LGBT students of color reported experiencing physical violence in school in the past year because of their race or ethnicity, which did not significantly differ across groups (see also Figure 7).

- Native American students were more likely than all other students of color to report experiencing physical violence related to their actual or perceived religion – about a quarter (26%) of Native American students had these experiences compared to less than a fifth of other students (see also Figure 7).

For Native American LGBT students, there was a pattern with regard to safety and harassment issues related to actual or perceived religion. Not only were Native American students more likely than other students of color to report feeling unsafe in school for this reason, they also experienced more verbal harassment and physical violence related to their religion than other students. In the larger 2007 survey, we found that students who identified their religion as Wiccan or Pagan were more likely to experience harassment related to their religion than other students. Native American students in our survey were more likely than other students to be Wiccan or Pagan, which may explain, in part, the differences in their reported experiences of religious-based victimization compared to other students of color.[22]

In the *2007 National School Climate Survey* report, we found that many LGBT students of color experienced harassment in school

related to multiple aspects of their identity. For example, 48% of LGBT students of color reported being verbally harassed in school because of both their sexual orientation and race/ethnicity, and 15% had been physically harassed based on both of these characteristics. In addition, almost half (44%) of female students of color were verbally harassed in school because of a combination of their sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and gender. In order to further understand students' experiences of biased behaviors in school, we asked students in the interviews to talk about experiences they may have had with harassment, assault, or types of victimization based on their personal characteristics. In the group and individual interviews, students often described specific incidents where personal characteristics, such as their race or sexual orientation, were targeted.

For example, an African American student described experiencing multiple incidents of harassment and assault in school because of his sexual orientation:

> I had students throw paper balls at me or call me a faggot or say pretty homophobic things…I've also been attacked or had my share of hate crimes for just being open about my sexuality. (male, 12th grade)

A student described an incident where he witnessed a group of students in his school harassing others because of their (actual or perceived) sexual orientation or gender identity:

> Students stood upstairs on the balcony, and they'd spit down on students who were or who were perceived to be LGBTQ. And I know that a lot of people who support [LGBT students], including myself…were very hurt and offended by it. It really kind of shocked us to see that kind of hatred and discrimination going on at our school. (male, Latino, 10th grade)

Another students student described being subjected to racist harassment by his peers:

> At school, I get harassed a lot for being Hispanic. They usually call me Mexican and I always tell people that I don't like being called Mexican because I identify as Guatemalan. And usually, they'll usually still call me Mexican. They're like, oh, whatever, it's the same thing, and they say that I steal their stuff because I'm Mexican and that I'm going to rob their house because I'm Mexican… just the usual stereotyping of a Hispanic person. (transgender, Latino, 10th grade)

One student described a situation where a teacher's routine verbal harassment of a classmate was both homophobic and racist in nature:

> I have a teacher who calls his students gay…I was like, "don't say that around me." I was like, "I think that's really offensive"…He says it to this guy [name of classmate] and he was like, "oh, we only pick

on [name of classmate] and tell him he's gay, but we really pick on him because he's Black." (genderqueer, Latino/a, 12th grade)

Reporting of School-Based Harassment and Assault

We learned from the *2007 National School Climate Survey* that the majority of LGBT students who are victimized in school did not tell school authorities about the incident, and when they did they did not feel that staff effectively addressed the situation. Our findings for LGBT students of color are similar – most LGBT students of color who were harassed or assaulted in school did not report the incident to school staff. As shown in Figure 8, less than half of students of color who had been harassed or assaulted in school in the past year said that they ever reported the incident to school staff. Furthermore, for those students who did report incidents to school staff, less than half believed that staff's resulting response was effective (see Figure 9). There were no differences across groups of students of color in frequency of reporting incidents or reports of the effectiveness of staff's response.[23, 24]

Students who were harassed or assaulted in school were also asked whether they reported it to an adult family member, such as a parent. Less than half of Latino/a (43%), African American (39%), and Asian/Pacific Islander (37%) students told a family member about being harassed or assaulted. Native American (57%) and multiracial (50%) students were more likely than other students of color in our survey to report incidents to a family member.[25]

In the interviews, students talked about their responses to harassment and other negative events and the responses of staff and peers. Some of the students described their own acts of intervention when these types of events occurred. One student described being called racist epithets and his attempts to intervene as a way to educate individuals about the hurtful nature of derogatory remarks and behaviors:

> *I would still get called a Spic by people on the streets and by people in my school… if I hear them say it, I would…walk up to them with just like a grin and say, you know, I'm [name of participant]and then some people would say, "oh, I didn't say nothing." That's what happens a lot. But some people will say, "I called you a Spic." And I'm like, "oh, well, do you know what that word means?"…What I've learned is just show them that it's not a right word and needs to be addressed. But then again, it doesn't need to be a war; just slowly show them that you're not a bad person for what your genetics are or your orientation. (male, Latino, 12th grade)*

Another student described an incident in which a teacher not only failed to intervene, but also would not allow the student to intervene:

> *There was a boy in my class that everyone was harassing and they were calling him a faggot and a queer and all this stuff, and*

he got really upset…and the teacher, all the while that this was going on, never intervened and would never let me intervene, even though she knew that I knew exactly what to say to them and I knew exactly how to handle the situation. She wouldn't let me intervene because she said that she didn't want that controversy in her classroom. (genderqueer, Latino/a, 12th grade)

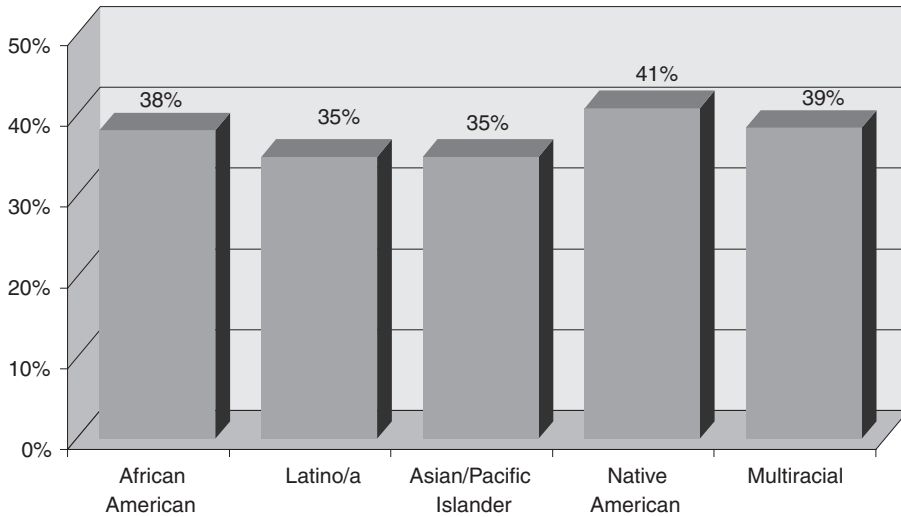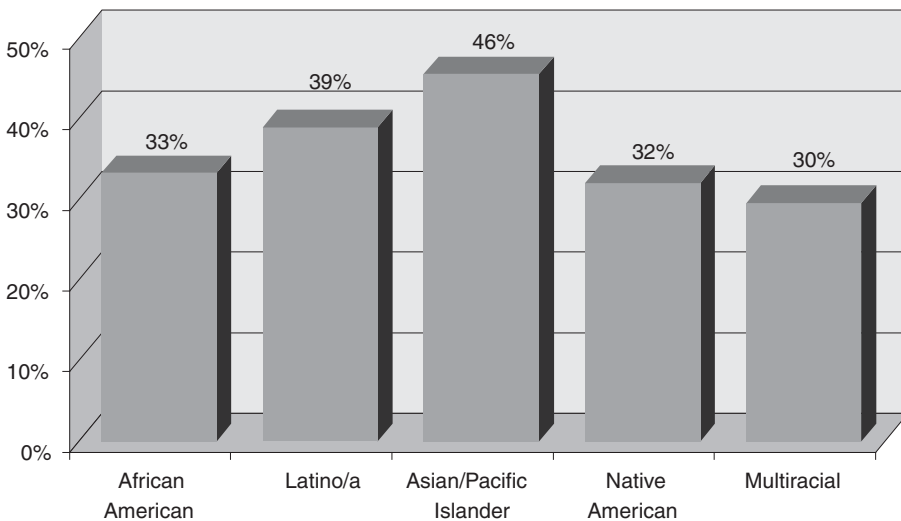**Figure 8. Reporting Incidents of Harassment and Assault to School**

Figure 9. Effectiveness of Reporting Incidents to School Staff
(percentage reporting that staffs' response was "somewhat" or "very" effective)

References

17 Percentages are for illustrative purposes. To test differences across groups, a univariate analysis of variance was conducted with a combined safety variable as the dependent variable and controlling for respondents' gender identity and school characteristics (region, locale, district poverty level, and racial composition). $F(4, 1948)=4.15$, $p<.01$. Percentages presented are based on the estimated marginal means.

18 Percentages are for illustrative purposes. To test differences across groups, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all the safety variables as dependent variables and controlling for school characteristics (region, locale, district poverty level, and racial composition). Pillai's Trace=.06, $F(24, 7836)=5.29$, $p<.001$. Univariate effects were considered significant at $p<.05$. Percentages presented are based on the estimated marginal means.

19 Percentages are for illustrative purposes. To test differences across groups, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with the missing school variable as the dependent variable and controlling for school characteristics (region, locale, district poverty level, and racial composition). Pillai's Trace=.01, $F(8, 3902)=2.41$, $p<.05$. Univariate effects were considered significant at $p<.05$. Percentages presented are based on the estimated marginal means.

20 Percentages are for illustrative purposes. To test differences across groups, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all verbal harassment variables as dependent variables and controlling for respondents' gender identity and school characteristics (region, locale, district poverty level, and racial composition). Pillai's Trace=.08, $F(24, 7428)=6.09$, $p<.001$. Univariate effects were considered significant at $p<.05$. Percentages presented are based on the estimated marginal means.

21 Percentages are for illustrative purposes. To test differences across groups, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with combined physical harassment/assault variables as dependent variables and controlling for respondents' gender identity and school characteristics (region, locale, district poverty level, and racial composition). Pillai's Trace=.05, $F(24, 7376)=3.54$, $p<.001$. Univariate effects were considered significant at $p<.05$. Percentages presented are based on the estimated marginal means.

22 A Chi-square test was conducted to examine differences in religious identification: $\chi^2=137.53$, $df=20$, $p<.001$, Cramer's V=.13.

23 Percentages are for illustrative purposes. To test differences across groups, an analysis of variance was conducted with the reporting to school staff variable as the dependent variable and controlling for whether the student was out about sexual orientation or gender identity to school staff. $F(4, 1507)=1.81$, $p>.10$. Percentages presented are based on the estimated marginal means.

24 Percentages are for illustrative purposes. To test differences across groups, an analysis of variance was conducted with the effectiveness of reporting as the dependent variable. $F(4, 563)=1.35$, $p>.10$.

25 Percentages are for illustrative purposes. To test differences across groups, a univariate analysis of variance was conducted with the reporting to family member variable as the dependent variable and controlling for whether the student was out about sexual orientation or gender identity to a parent/guardian. $F(4, 1510)=4.64$, $p<.01$. Percentages presented are based on the estimated marginal means.

Differences in Safety and Harassment Experiences by School Community Characteristics

The school experiences of LGBT students often vary depending on the characteristics of their school communities. Findings from the *2007 National School Climate Survey* demonstrated that, for LGBT students in general, schools in the South and in small towns and rural communities were less safe than schools in other locations. In this report, we examined specifically how the experiences of LGBT students of color may differ depending on school community characteristics. We looked at how students' sense of safety and experiences of harassment may differ by the racial/ethnic composition of their school (i.e., whether a student believed they were in the racial/ethnic minority or majority at school), region (i.e., whether a student attended school in the Northwest, South, Midwest, or West), locale (i.e., whether a student attended school in an urban, suburban, or rural/small town community), and school district poverty level. Although we did not find differences by district poverty level, we found differences in students' experiences based on the other characteristics.

Differences by Racial/Ethnic Composition of School

LGBT students in our survey were asked how many other students in their school were of the same race or ethnicity as themselves. Across all groups, most students of color believed that they were a racial/ethnic minority in their school – a little less than half of African American (43%), Latino/a (49%), and Native American (49%) students believed that they were in predominately same race or ethnicity schools. Asian/Pacific Islander students were even less likely to report being in a school where the majority of the student body was of the same race/ethnicity as themselves (25%).[26] In addition, about a fifth (19%) of multiracial students reported being in a school where they believed the majority of the student body was of the same race/ethnicity as themselves.[27]

Being a racial/ethnicity minority in school was related to students' sense of safety and experiences of harassment, particularly those based on race or ethnicity. Across all groups of students of color, those in schools where they were in the racial/ethnic minority were more likely to feel unsafe because of their race or ethnicity than students who were in the racial/ethnic majority in their school (see Figure 10):[28]

- Asian/Pacific Islander students who were racial/ethnic minorities in their school where seven times more likely to feel unsafe because of their race/ethnicity than those who were in schools that were predominately Asian/Pacific Islander (23% versus 3%).

- African American students who were minorities in their school were more than three times as likely to report feeling unsafe because of their race/ethnicity than those who were in predominately African American schools (27% versus 7%).

- Latino/a, Native American, and multiracial LGBT students who were minorities in school were about twice as likely to report feeling unsafe because of their race/ethnicity than those who were in the majority in school.

For all groups of LGBT students of color, being a racial/ethnic minority in school was also related to increased racial harassment.[29] As shown in Figure 11, across groups, students who reported being minorities in their school were almost twice as likely as those who were not minorities to have been verbally harassed in the past year because of their race or ethnicity.

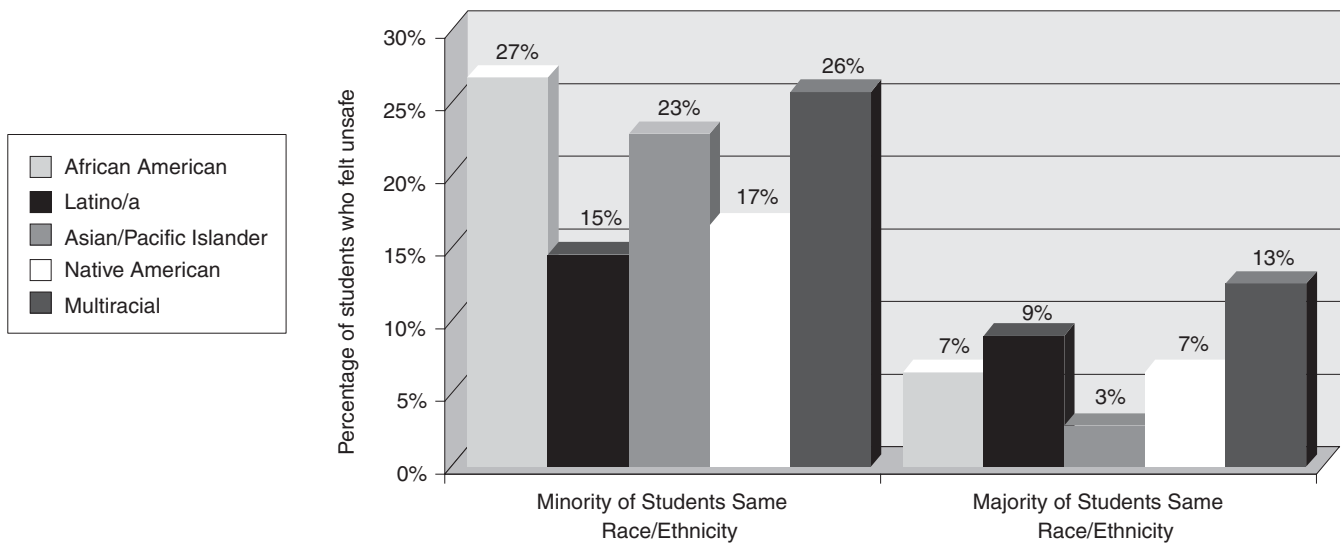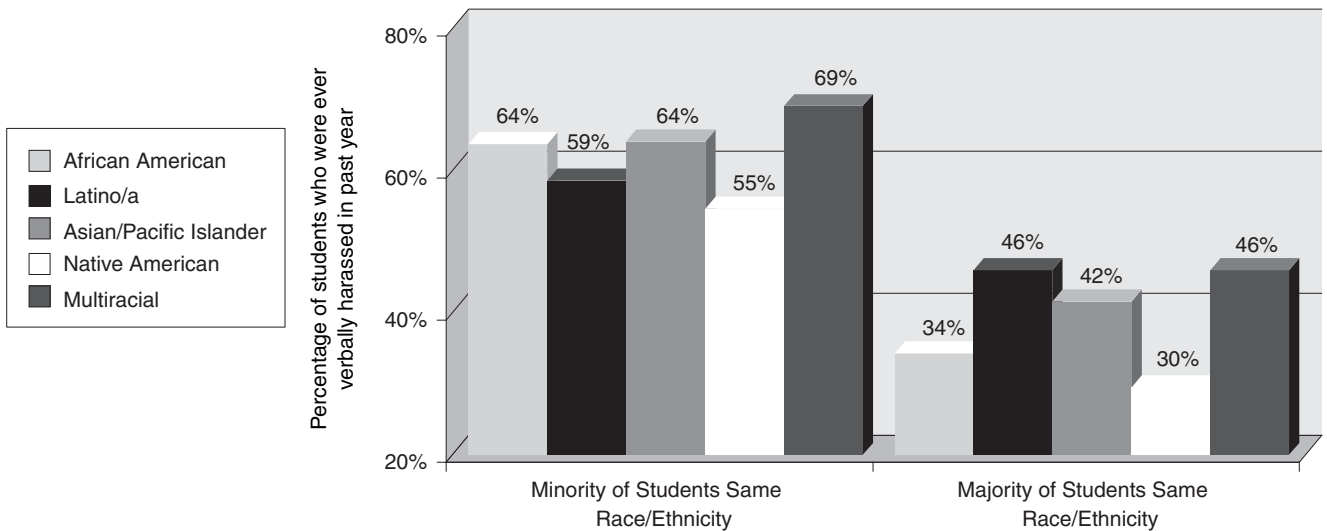**Figure 10. Feeling Unsafe Because of Race/Ethnicity by Racial Composition of School**

Figure 11. Experiences of Verbal Harassment Related to Race/Ethnicity by Racial Composition of School

Differences by Region and Locale

Overall, LGBT students of color in the South more likely to report being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation than those in the Northeast or West (see Figure 12).[30] For Latino/a and multiracial LGBT students, region did not have the same impact on their school experiences related to sexual orientation as for other students of color in our survey – within each group, percentages of students who reported being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation were similar across region. Asian/Pacific Islander students in the Midwest were more likely to be verbally harassed for this reason. In addition, African American LGBT students in the West were somewhat more likely to be verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation than those in schools in other regions.

Overall, LGBT students of color who were in schools in the South were more likely to report being verbally harassed in school because of their actual or perceived religion than students in other regions of the country. Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, and multiracial students in the South were much more likely to be verbally harassed in school because of their actual or perceived religion than students in other regions (see Figure 13). For African American and Latino/a students, region did not appear to have as much of an impact on their experiences related to religion – within these groups, percentages of students who reported being harassed for this reason were similar across regions (see also Figure 13).

There was a similar pattern across groups with regard to harassment related to race/ethnicity. LGBT students of color in the Northeast were less likely to report being verbally harassed in school because of their race/ethnicity than students in other regions of the country, and there was little difference in reported harassment across the South, Midwest, and West (see Figure 14). Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, and multiracial students in the Northeast were much less likely to report experiencing verbal harassment for this reason than students in other regions (see also Figure 14). For African American students, this difference appeared less pronounced, particularly between those in the Northeast and South (see also Figure 14). For Latino/a LGBT students, however, there were not significant regional differences in their harassment experiences related to race/ethnicity, and they reported similar experiences across all regions.

Among LGBT students of color, there were also differences in their experiences depending on whether they attended school in an urban, suburban, or small town/rural community:[31]

- Latino/a and Asian/Pacific Islander students in small town or rural communities were more likely to report experiencing verbal harassment because of their sexual orientation than students in urban or suburban communities (see Figure 15).

- For African American and multiracial LGBT students, there were not significant differences by locale in their harassment experiences related to sexual orientation (see also Figure 15).

- Among Native American students in our survey, we found that those in schools in suburban areas were more likely to report experiencing verbal harassment because of their sexual orientation than Native American students in other communities (93% compared to 84% in urban communities and 86% in small towns or rural communities). In addition, Native American students in urban and small town/rural schools reported similar experiences of harassment (see also Figure 15).

In the *2007 National School Climate Survey*, we found that for the general LGBT student population, schools in the South and in small towns and rural communities were more hostile for LGBT students than schools in other locations. In this study, there were some notable differences in students' experiences across groups, suggesting that locational factors, such as region and locale, may not have the same impact on all students' experiences. A more in-depth exploration of why patterns by region and locale differed by racial/ethnic group was beyond the scope of this study, and further research is needed that examines relationships between school community characteristics and the experiences of LGBT students.

Figure 12. Regional Differences in Verbal Harassment Related to Sexual Orientation
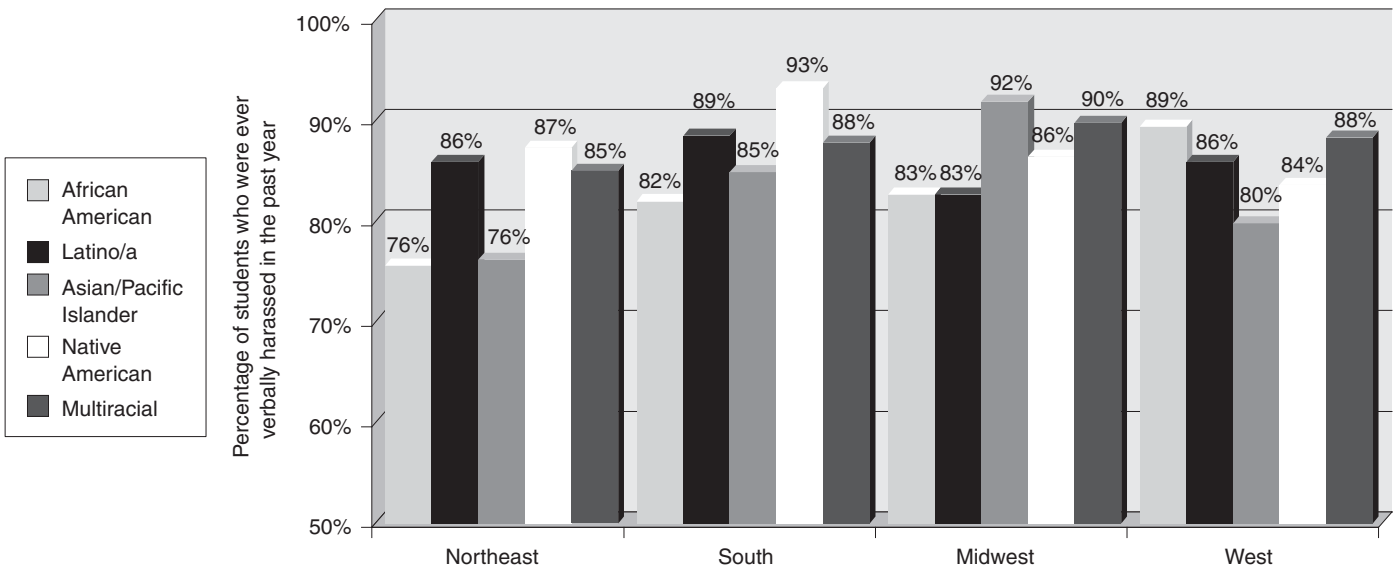
Figure 13. Regional Differences in Verbal Harassment Related to Actual or Perceived Religion

Percentage of students who were ever harassed in the past year

Legend: African American, Latino/a, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, Multiracial

Northeast: 29%, 29%, 35%, 40%, 34%
South: 23%, 32%, 59%, 66%, 49%
Midwest: 28%, 26%, 44%, 52%, 36%
West: 36%, 35%, 35%, 54%, 37%
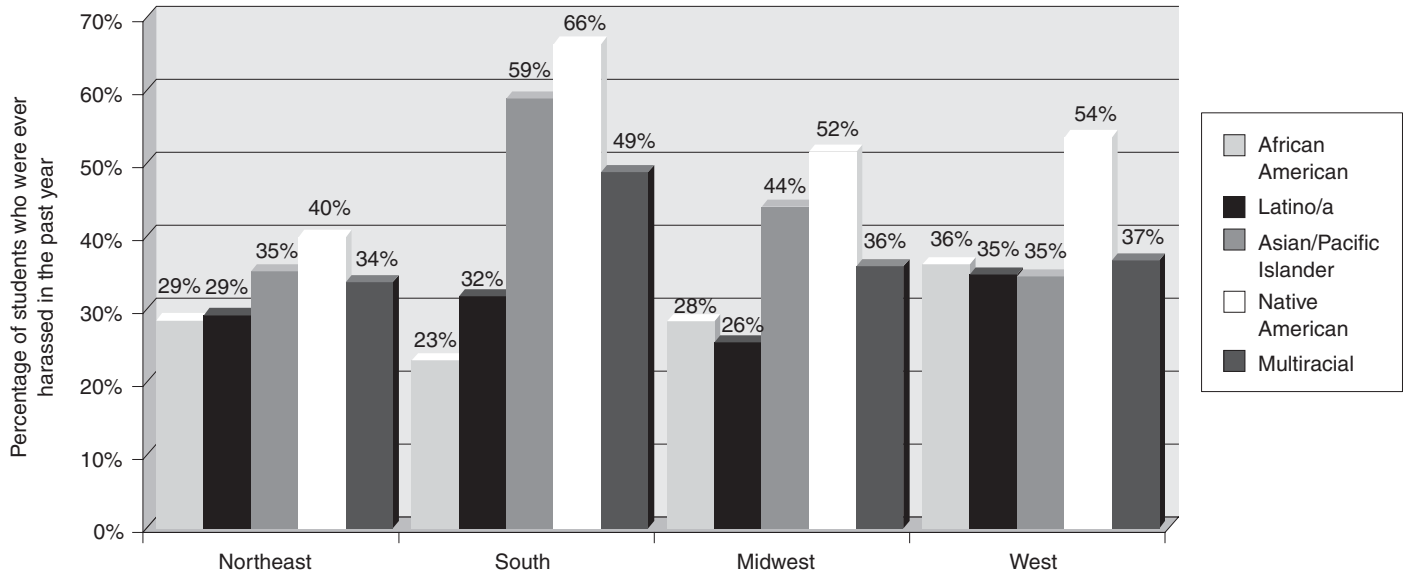
Figure 14. Regional Differences in Verbal Harassment Related to Race/Ethnicity

Percentage of students who were ever harassed in the past year

Legend: African American, Latino/a, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, Multiracial

Northeast: 42%, 60%, 39%, 23%, 45%
South: 49%, 51%, 64%, 50%, 65%
Midwest: 55%, 54%, 72%, 42%, 58%
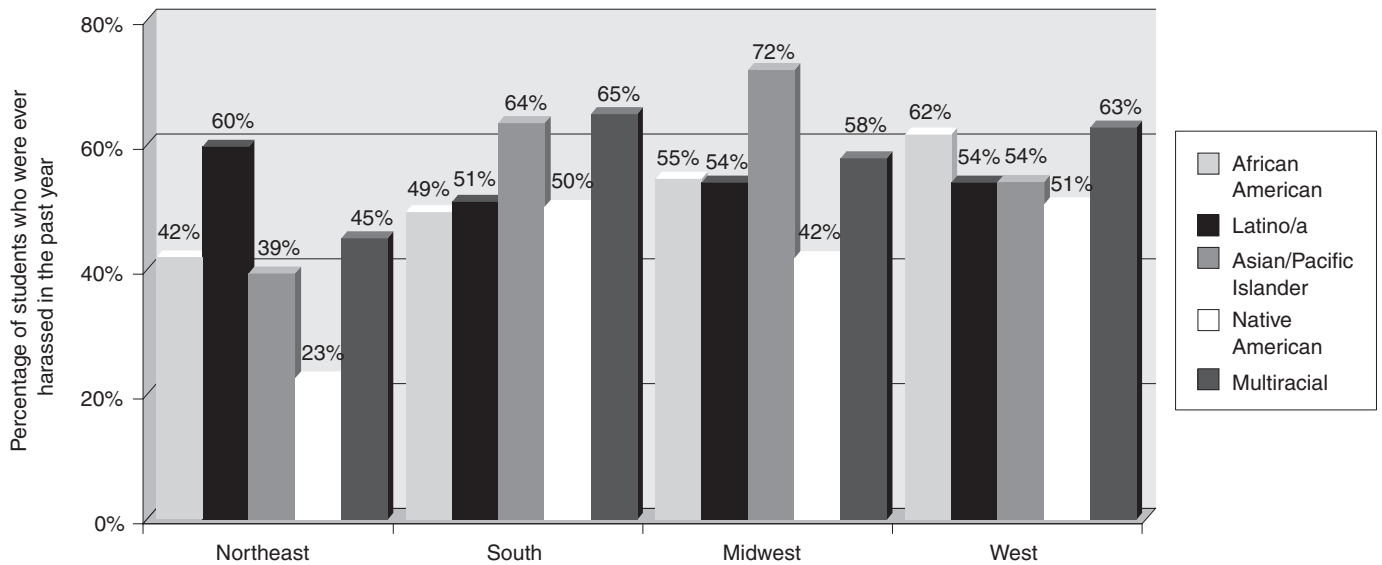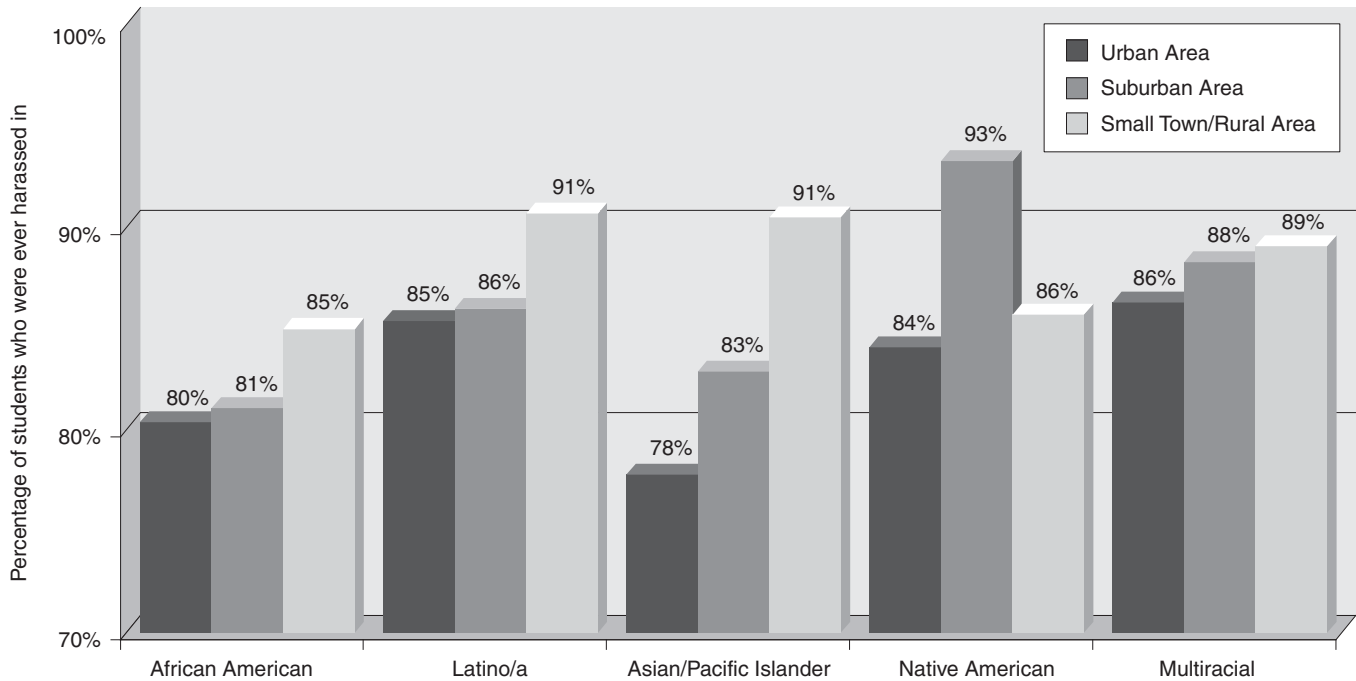West: 62%, 54%, 54%, 51%, 63%

Figure 15. Experiences of Verbal Harassment Related to Sexual Orientation by Locale

References

26   A Chi-square test was conducted to examine differences in school composition: χ^2=116.91, df=4, p<.001, Cramer's V=.24.

27   In the survey, students were asked how many other students in their school were of the same race or ethnicity as themselves, with the following possible responses: "none," "a few," "some," "most," or "all." The category "multiracial" is composed of students with a diverse array of racial/ethnic identities. For example, students in our survey who indicated that they were both African American and Native American were categorized as multiracial for the purposes of this study, as were students who indicated that they were Asian and Latino. We cannot know from the data how these students interpret their racial/ethnic identity in relation to other students in their school. We believed it important, however, to describe the experiences of multiracial LBGT students and have included them in the analysis.

28   Percentages are for illustrative purposes. To test differences across groups, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all safety variables as dependent variables and controlling for school characteristics (region, locale, and district poverty level). The main effect for racial composition was significant: Pillai's Trace=.03, F(6, 1952)=11.20, p<.001. The interaction race/ethnicity x racial composition was not significant. Univariate effects were considered significant at p<.05. Percentages presented are based on the estimated marginal means.

29   Percentages are for illustrative purposes. To test differences across groups, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all verbal harassment variables as dependent variables and controlling for school characteristics (region, locale, and district poverty level). The main effect for racial composition was significant: Pillai's Trace=.04, F(6, 1863)=13.14, p<.001. The interaction race/ethncity x racial composition was not significant. Univariate effects were considered significant at p<.05. Percentages presented are based on the estimated marginal means.

30   Percentages are for illustrative purposes. To test differences across groups, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all the verbal harassment variables as dependent variables and controlling for school characteristics (school racial composition, locale, and district poverty level). The main effect for region was significant: Pillai's Trace=.03, F(18, 5571)=2.73, p<.001. The interaction race/ethnicity x region was marginally significant: Pillai's Trace=.05, F(72, 11160)=1.25, p<.10. Univariate effects were considered significant at p<.05. Percentages presented are based on the estimated marginal means.

31   Percentages are for illustrative purposes. To test differences across groups, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all the verbal harassment variables as dependent variables and controlling for school characteristics (school racial composition, region, and district poverty level). The main effect for locale was significant: Pillai's Trace=.01, F(12, 3720)=1.84, p<.05. The interaction race/ethnicity x locale was also significant: Pillai's Trace=.04, F(48, 11184)=1.36, p<.05. Univariate effects were considered significant at p<.05. Percentages presented are based on the estimated marginal means.

Impact of Harassment on Academic Performance and Absenteeism

For all LGBT students, experiencing victimization in school may negatively affect their ability to receive an education. The potential stress caused by being frequently harassed in school may affect a student's ability to focus on their school work and negatively affect their academic performance. In addition, students who are frequently harassed in school may attempt to avoid these hurtful experiences by not attending school and may be more likely to miss school than students who do not experience such victimization. In this way, school-based victimization may impinge on a student's right to an education. In the *2007 National School Climate Survey*, we found that higher frequencies of harassment and assault were related to lower grade point averages and increased absenteeism due to safety concerns for all LGBT students. In this report, we also examined the relationship between harassment and academic achievement and absenteeism for LGBT students of color, looking specifically at how experiences of harassment related to sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and gender expression affect these educational outcomes. Not surprisingly, students who experienced more severe levels of harassment in school, particularly when the harassment was related to multiple characteristics, generally reported more negative educational outcomes:

- LGBT students of color who experienced high severities (i.e., were often or frequently harassed) of multiple forms of harassment had significantly lower academic achievement than other students.[32] As Figure 16 illustrates, the reported grade point average of students who were severely verbally harassed in school because of both their sexual orientation and race/ethnicity was about half a grade lower than for students who did not experience severe forms of either type of harassment (2.3 versus 2.8). Their reported grade point average was also lower than students who reported experiencing a high severity of harassment because of only one of these characteristics (either sexual orientation or race/ethnicity) (see also Figure 16).

- Findings with regard to verbal harassment related to both gender expression and race/ethnicity were somewhat different.[33] The grade point average of students who did not experience severe forms of either type of harassment was higher than for all other students (2.8). Interestingly, there was no significant difference in grade point average between students who experienced high severities of harassment related to both gender expression and race/ethnicity (2.5), and those who experienced a high severity of harassment because of gender expression alone (2.6). LGBT students of color who experienced a high severity of verbal harassment because of their race/ethnicity alone actually reported the lowest grade point average (2.3) (see Figure 17).

- LGBT students of color who were severely verbally harassed in school because of both their sexual orientation and race/ethnicity were more than three times as likely to miss school because they

felt unsafe than those who did not experience high severities of either type of verbal harassment (57% versus 16%) (see Figure 18).[34] These students were also more likely to miss school than those who reported being severely harassed because of only one of these characteristics (see also Figure 18). We found similar findings with regard to verbal harassment related to gender expression and race/ethnicity (see Figure 19).[35]

Figure 16. Experiences of Verbal Harassment Related to Sexual Orientation and Race/Ethnicity and Academic Achievement
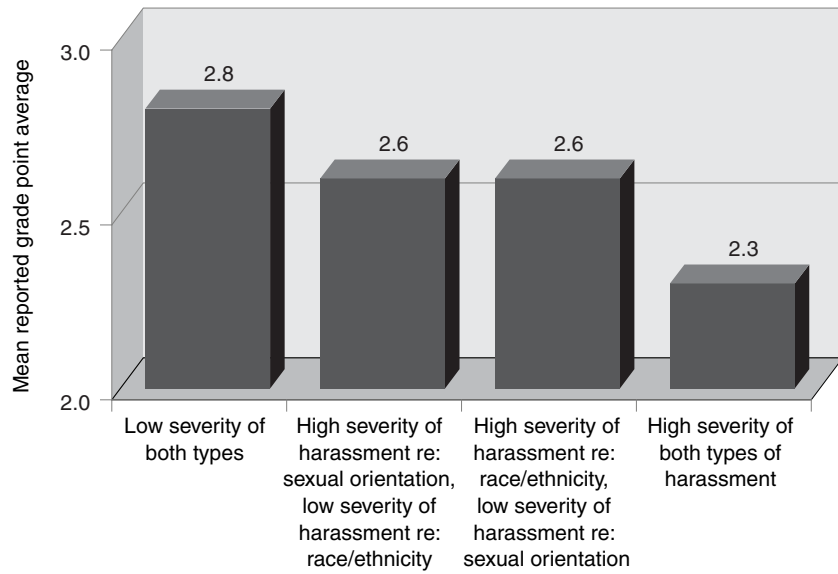

Figure 17. Experiences of Verbal Harassment Related to Gender Expression and Race/Ethnicity and Academic Achievement
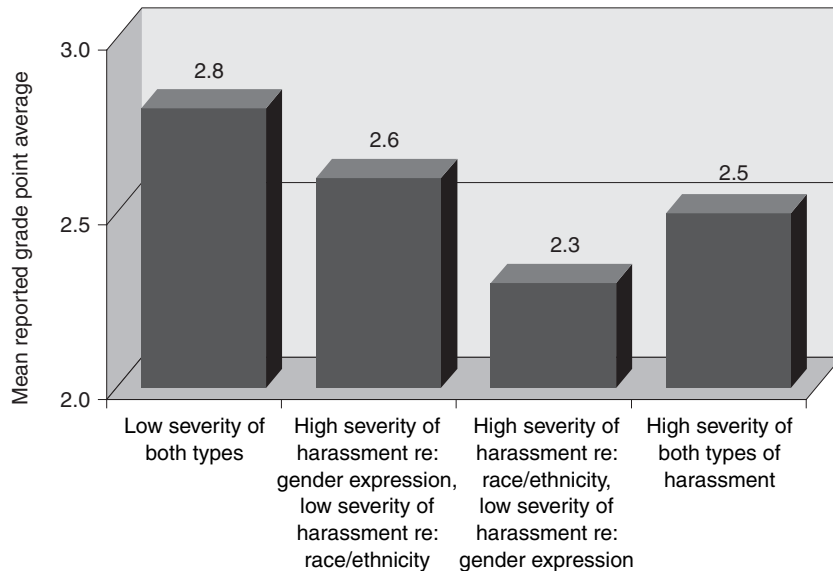
Figure 18. Experiences of Verbal Harassment Related to Sexual Orientation and Race/Ethnicity and Absenteeism Due to Safety Reasons

Percentage of students who missed at least one day of school in the past month

- Low severity of both types: 16%
- High severity of harassment re: sexual orientation, low severity of harassment re: race/ethnicity: 43%
- High severity of harassment re: race/ethnicity, low severity of harassment re: sexual orientation: 39%
- High severity of both types of harassment: 57%
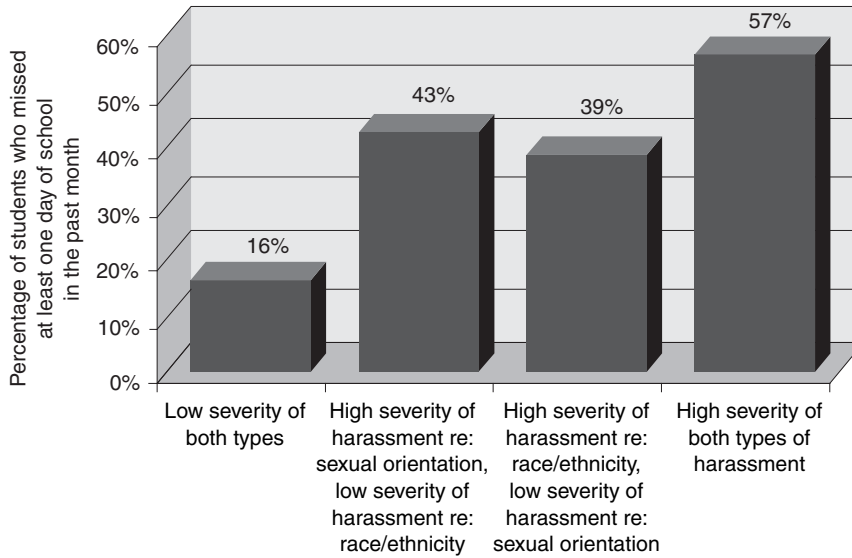
Figure 19. Experiences of Verbal Harassment Related to Gender Expression and Race/Ethnicity and Absenteeism Due to Safety Reasons

Percentage of students who missed at least one day of school in the past month

- Low severity of both types: 21%
- High severity of harassment re: gender expression, low severity of harassment re: race/ethnicity: 44%
- High severity of harassment re: race/ethnicity, low severity of harassment re: gender expression: 44%
- High severity of both types of harassment: 59%
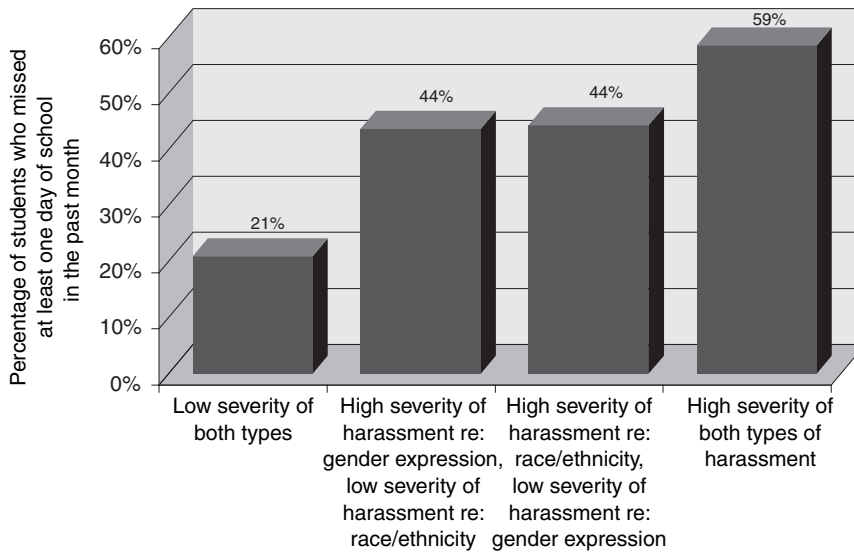
References

32 Percentages are for illustrative purposes. To examine differences across groups, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted with the GPA variables as the dependent variable. $F(3, 2071)=18.59$, $p<.001$.

33 Percentages are for illustrative purposes. To examine differences across groups, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted with the GPA variables as the dependent variable. $F(3, 2048)=12.79$, $p<.001$.

34 Percentages are for illustrative purposes. To examine differences across groups, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted with the missing school variable as the dependent variable. $F(3, 2076)=83.19$, $p<.001$.

35 Percentages are for illustrative purposes. To examine differences across groups, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted with the missing school variable as the dependent variable. $F(3, 2053)=62.53$, $p<.001$.

School Resources and Supports

Another dimension of school climate for LGBT students is the availability of resources that address students' issues and support these students through potentially difficult experiences. In the *National School Climate Survey*, students were asked about the availability of in-school resources: school-based student clubs that address LGBT students' issues (such as Gay-Straight Alliances); the inclusion of positive portrayals of LGBT people, history, and events in class curricula or discussions; teachers and other school staff who are supportive of LGBT students; and school policies for addressing incidences of harassment and assault. In our 2007 report, we demonstrated how each of these resources can have a positive impact on overall school climate and the experiences of LGBT students. Unfortunately, we also found that many LGBT students did not have access to these types of resources in school. In this report, we looked at the availability of resources to LGBT students of color. We did not expect that the availability of these school-based resources would differ by students' racial/ethnic identity, and in fact did not find significant differences in availability across groups. However, we believed it important to describe students' access to resources and do so in the following section.

In my school, if I have something that's bothering me, I kind of keep it to myself. I don't really tell anyone because it doesn't really get fixed.

(male, African American, 11th grade)

Supportive Educators

Supportive teachers and other school staff serve as an important resource for LGBT students. Being able to speak with a caring adult in school may have a significant positive impact on the experiences of students, particularly those who feel marginalized or experience harassment. The majority (82%) of students of color in our survey could identify at least one teacher or other school staff member who they felt was supportive of LGBT students. However, only about a third (36%) of students reported having many (six or more) supportive staff available to them in school. The presence of school staff who are openly LGBT may provide another source of support for LGBT students, as well as be another indicator of school climate – 39% of LGBT students of color knew of at least one staff person who was openly LGBT.

In the survey, students were also asked how comfortable they would be talking with a teacher about LGBT-related issues, and there were differences in students' reported comfort with teachers across groups. Asian/Pacific Islander students were more likely than other students of color to report that they were comfortable talking with a teacher about LGBT issues. Sixty-percent of Asian/Pacific Islander students in our survey said they were somewhat or very comfortable talking with a teacher about such issues, compared to about half of African American (50%) and Latino/a (53%) students, and less than half of Native American (46%) and multiracial students (46%).[36]

The people I could turn to at my high school…LGBT teachers that understand what I'm going through because, believe it or not, they were once kids themselves, and I usually go to them and ask for advice or ask them, "Were you faced with this?"

(male, Latino,12th grade)

Supportive Students Clubs

Student clubs that address the issues of LGBT students, such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), are another school-based resource that may offer critical support. As shown in Figure 20, only a little more than a third (36%) of LGBT students of color reported that their school had a student club. Students who reported that their school had a GSA or similar type of club were also asked how often they participated in club activities, such as meetings. A majority of students of color said that they participated in club activities at least sometimes – 57% of African American and multiracial students, 59% of Latino/a students, 60% of Asian/Pacific Islander students, and 69% of Native American students. For those students that had a GSA, there was no significant difference between groups in their frequency of participation.[37]

Curricular Resources

Including positive representations of LGBT people, history, and events in the curriculum may promote a general tone of acceptance of LGBT people and increased awareness of LGBT-related issues, resulting in a more positive school climate for LGBT students. Thus, students in the *National School Climate Survey* were asked whether any of their textbooks or other assigned school texts contained information about LGBT people, history, or events. Less than a fifth (14%) of LGBT students of color reported that their school texts contained such information (see Figure 20). When asked whether they could access information about LGBT-related topics through their school's Internet, only about a quarter (27%) of students said that they could do so.[38] In addition, a little more than a third (38%) reported that they could access LGBT-related resources in their school library (see also Figure 20).

Figure 20. Availability of LGBT-Related Resources in School for LGBT Students of Color
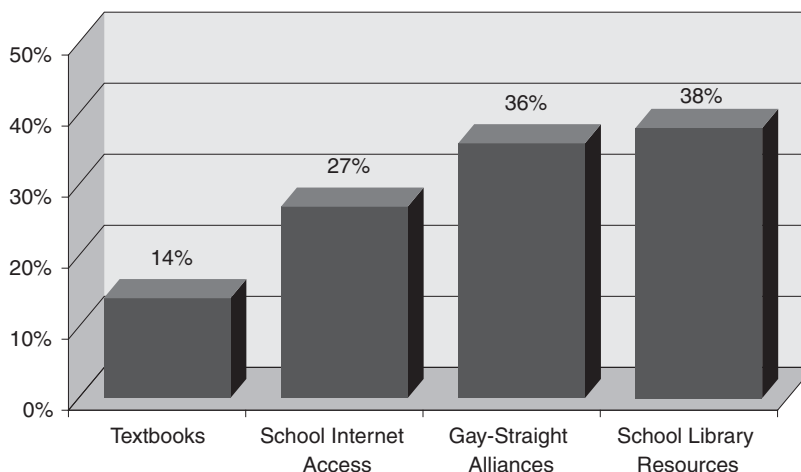
When asked if they were ever taught about LGBT-related topics in their classes, less than a fifth (14%) reported that this had occurred. Among those students of color who were taught about LGBT-related topics, 84% thought that the representations were somewhat or very positive. However, among all LGBT students of color in the survey, only about a tenth (11%) were actually exposed to positive representations of LGBT people, history, or events in class, and the majority were never taught about these topics in class.

Many experts in multicultural education believe that curricula that is inclusive of diverse groups promotes respect and equity for all, regardless of culture, race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, in that it enforces the belief in the intrinsic worth of all individuals and the value of different cultures.[39] The inclusion of positive representations of people of color in school curricular resources – individuals, histories, events, and other issues affecting communities of color – may positively impact the educational experiences of all students, but especially students of color, including those who are LGBT. The *National School Climate Survey* did not include questions about the availability of curricular resources related specifically to people of color, thus, we were unable to assess the availability of such resources to LGBT students of color in our study. Future research about the school experiences of these students should examine access to and the potential impact of curricular resources that include positive representations of communities of color.

School Anti-Harassment and Reporting Policies

School policies that address in-school harassment and assault are imperative for creating school environments where students feel safe. GLSEN believes that all schools should have comprehensive school anti-harassment policies that protect all students from harassment and assault, and that the most effective policies are those that include enumerated categories and explicitly state protection based on personal characteristics, including sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. When a school has and enforces a comprehensive policy, it can send a message that harassment and assault are unacceptable and will not be tolerated. It can also send a message that student safety, including the safety of LGBT students, is taken seriously by school administrators. "Generic" anti-bullying or anti-harassment school policies do not include enumerated categories or specify the various types of harassment that are unacceptable. Comprehensive school policies may provide students with greater protection against harassment and assault because they make clear the various forms of harassment and assault that will not be tolerated and provide guidelines for reporting such events.

In our *2007 National School Climate Survey*, LGBT students were asked whether their school had a policy or procedure for reporting incidents of in-school harassment or assault, and if that policy explicitly included sexual orientation and gender identity or expression.

Among all LGBT students, few reported that their school had a comprehensive policy and results were similar among the LGBT students of color – less than a fifth (18%) of all students of color reported that their school had a policy that explicitly mentioned sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. In contrast, 38% reported that their school had a generic anti-harassment policy, and almost half (44%) reported that their school had no policy at all.

References

36 Percentages are for illustrative purposes. To examine differences across groups on comfort talking with a teacher, a univariate analysis of variance was conducted with the comfort variable as the dependent variable, controlling for respondents' gender identity. $F(4, 2099)=2.97$, $p<.05$. Percentages presented are based on the estimated marginal means.

37 To examine differences across groups on frequency of GSA participation, a univariate analysis of variance was conducted with the GSA participation variable as the dependent variable, controlling for respondents' gender identity. Neither the main effect for racial composition nor the interaction racial composition x race/ethnicity were significant.

38 Students who did not have Internet access at their school are not included.

39 National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME). (2003). Definition of multicultural education. Resolutions and position papers. Available at www.nameorg.org.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Limitations

The findings presented in this report provide new information about the school experiences of LGBT students of color, and may add to our understanding of the educational experiences of this youth. However, as with all research, there are some limitations to our study. First, it is important to note that our survey sample is representative only of students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender and have some connection to LGBT communities (either through their local youth organization or through the Internet) or have a MySpace page. As discussed in the Methods section, in addition to the traditional methods of announcing the survey, we conducted targeted advertising on MySpace in order to broaden our reach and obtain a more representative sample. Advertising on MySpace did allow LGBT students of color who did not necessarily have any connection to the LGBT community to participate in the survey. Yet, the MySpace subsample is still limited only to those LGBT students who use the Internet and have a MySpace profile. Although available data have shown that nearly all secondary school students report using the Internet, only half use social networking sites like MySpace.[40] LGBT students of color who do not use the Internet or do not have a MySpace profile may differ from LGBT students of color who do. Furthermore, the MySpace advertisements for the survey were sent only to 13 to 18 year-olds who identified on their MySpace profile that they were lesbian, gay, or bisexual and thus, LGB students of color

who were not comfortable identifying their sexual orientation in this manner would not have received the advertisement about the survey through MySpace, nor would transgender students of color who did not identify as LGB.

We also cannot make determinations from our data about the experiences of students of color who might be engaging in same-sex sexual activity or be experiencing same-sex attractions but who do not identify themselves as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Such youth may have experiences that differ from those of youth who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual – they may be more isolated, they may not be aware of supports for LGBT youth, or, even if aware, may not be comfortable using such supports. Similarly, not all youth whose gender identity or gender expression is outside of cultural norms may experience themselves as, or identify as, transgender or even have the resources to understand what being transgender means. Our data may not reflect the experiences of these students, who may also be more isolated and without the same access to resources as the transgender students of color in our survey.

With regard to the data obtained through group and individual interviews, the sample size was small and therefore findings may not be generalizable to larger populations of LGBT students of color. In addition, participants were required to obtain consent from a parent or guardian prior to participating in the study. Requiring students to obtain parental consent may have resulted in the exclusion of LGBT youth of color who have not yet disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity to a parent/guardian, since obtaining parental consent to participate in a study about LGBT youth would effectively "out" the individual as being LGBT. Due to the methods used to locate participants, youth who do not have some connection to LGBT communities or resources may not have learned about the study, thus limiting the pool of potential participants to youth of color who were connected in some way to LGBT communities.

Discussion

Findings presented in this report highlight the shared school experiences of LGBT students of color, as well as the ways in which these experiences vary among the diverse populations that fall under the "LGBT students" umbrella. Most LGBT students of color attended schools that had hostile climates across multiple dimensions. Many students of color reported frequently hearing homophobic, sexist and racist language, and negative remarks about gender expression from other students in school. Students reported little intervention on the part of school personnel when such language was used, as well as hearing school personnel make such remarks themselves. Many LGBT students of color were made to feel unsafe in school because of their personal characteristics, most notably their sexual orientation and gender expression. The majority of students experienced verbal harassment in school in the past year because of

their sexual orientation and gender expression, and many students also experienced physical violence in school for these reasons. Additionally, sizable percentages of students of color reported being victimized in school because of their race/ethnicity.

Native American LGBT students in our survey were more likely than other students of color to report feeling unsafe in school in general, and safety and harassment concerns related to actual or perceived religion may be particularly salient for this group of students. They were more likely than other students of color to report feeling unsafe in school because of their actual or perceived religion, and to experience verbal harassment and physical violence in school for this reason. Multiracial, African American, and Asian/Pacific Islander LGBT students were more likely than other students of color to feel unsafe in school because of their racial/ethnic identity, and were more likely to experience harassment in school for this reason. For all LGBT students of color in our survey, being a racial/ethnic minority in school was related to greater safety issues – across all groups of students, those who were racial/ethnic minorities were more likely than students who were not minorities to feel unsafe in school because of their race/ethnicity and to experience racially motivated harassment.

Schools in the South and in small towns or rural areas generally have more hostile climates for LGBT students than schools in other locations. We found some notable differences in students' experiences, however. Whereas Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, and multiracial students in the South were much more likely than those in the Northeast, Midwest, or West to report being verbally harassed because of their actual or perceived religion, African American and Latino/a students' reports of this type of harassment were similar across regions. In addition, Latino/a and multiracial students' experiences of verbal harassment related to sexual orientation did not vary across region, but for other students of color there were significant differences – African American LGBT students in the West, Asian/Pacific Islander students in the Midwest, and Native American students in the South were more likely to report being verbally harassed for this reason. Latino/a LGBT students' experiences of verbal harassment related to race/ethnicity did not vary across region, but for other students of color in our survey, those in schools in the Northeast were less likely to report experiencing this type harassment than those in other regions. With regard to differences in experiences by locale, overall students of color were similar to the broader population of LGBT students in that those in small towns and rural communities were more likely than those in urban or suburban communities to report being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation. For Native American LGBT students, however, there was a different pattern – Native American students in the suburbs were more likely than those in urban or small town/rural communities to report experiencing harassment in school because of their sexual orientation.

Similar to our findings for the broader population of LGBT students, harassment had very negative repercussions on the ability of LGBT students of color to access an education and succeed in school – experiencing high severities of harassment because of one's sexual orientation, gender expression, and race/ethnicity was related to increased absenteeism and lower academic performance among these students. Unfortunately, few LGBT students of color who were victimized in school reported events to school authorities, the very people who are tasked with ensuring that all students have a safe learning environment. Furthermore, among those who did report incidents to school personnel, less than half of all groups of LGBT students of color believed that staff's resulting response addressed the situation effectively.

Findings in the *2007 National School Climate Survey* report highlight the important role that institutional supports can play in making schools safer for all LGBT students. For all LGBT students, the availability of supportive school staff, Gay-Straight Alliances, LGBT-inclusive curricular resources, and the presence of comprehensive anti-harassment school policies were related to improved school climate on a number of indicators, including: increased feelings of safety and lower frequencies of harassment and assault, lower absenteeism due to safety concerns and higher academic achievement, higher frequencies of reporting incidents of harassment to school authorities, and more effective responses to incidents by school staff. Unfortunately, we found in this study that the majority of LGBT students of color did not have access to Gay-Straight Alliances or inclusive curricular resources, and few attended schools with comprehensive anti-harassment policies. On a positive note, the vast majority of LGBT students of color could identify at least one supportive staff person in school, although only about a third reported having access to many supportive staff.

Given the potential positive impact of supportive educators, students clubs, and curricular resources on the school experiences of LGBT students of color, it is imperative that schools work to provide these resources to students. Schools should provide training for school staff to improve rates of intervention and increase the number of supportive faculty and staff available to students. In addition, schools should support Gay-Straight Alliances and other students clubs that address issues specific to LGBT students. Student access to appropriate and accurate information regarding LGBT people, history and events through inclusive curriculum and library, Internet resources should also be increased. Individual schools and districts should also adopt and implement comprehensive policies that enumerate categories, including sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, and have clear and effective systems for reporting and addressing incidents that students experience.

Recommendations for Future Directions

Addressing the concerns of LGBT students of color necessitates a nuanced approach to combating racism, homophobia, heterosexism, and transphobia. In this study we demonstrated that, although LGBT students of color share similar school climate experiences in many respects, their experiences are not monolithic and there exists great variation. Further research is needed that more fully examines how LGBT students of color make sense of the different types of harassment and assault they may experience with regard to the multiple dimensions of identity, as well as how these youth experience the multiple facets of their identities. Research that acknowledges the diversity of youth who are grouped within broad, pan-ethnic categories, such as "Native American," "Latino/a," and "Asian/Pacific Islander," – categories which encapsulate diverse groups of people with differing cultural values and norms, etc. – is also important in order to better understand their experiences. In addition, further research is needed on all LGBT students that is cognizant of the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation and explores how youth understand and experience these intersections of identity. Furthermore, it is important that future research examines additional factors not included in this study that potentially impact the school experiences of LGBT students of color. For example, issues of acculturation (e.g., an individual's length of residence in the U.S. or English-language knowledge and use) and nativity-status (meaning, whether an individual was born in U.S. or in another country) are important factors affecting in the experiences of many students, including those who are LGBT.

As educators, advocates, and others concerned with issues of educational equity and access continue to address the myriad forms of oppressions found in and out of school, such as racism, heterosexism, homophobia and transphobia, they must account for the intersections of these forms of oppression. Therefore, it is important to have a greater understanding of the experiences, needs and concerns of LGBT students of color through specific and focused research. Educators, policymakers, safe school advocates, and others working to make schools safer and more inclusive spaces, which serve all of our youth and provide them opportunities to learn and succeed, must continue to seek to understand the multifaceted experiences of LGBT students of color, particularly with regard to how we can render accessible specific resources that support these students at school and in larger communities outside of school.

References

40 Findings from a recent Pew Center survey found that 93% of 12–17 year olds use the Internet and 52% use social networking sites like MySpace or Facebook (with an overwhelming majority reporting they use MySpace more often). See:

Lenhart, A. et al. (2007). Teens and social media: The use of social media gains a greater foothold in teen life as they embrace the conversational nature of interactive online media. Washington, DC: Pew Internet and American Life Project.

Lenhart, A. & Madden, M. (2007). *Social networking websites and teens: An overview.* Washington, DC: Pew Internet and American Life Project.

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