

# Harsh Realities

**The Experiences of Transgender  
Youth in Our Nation's Schools**



**A Report from the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network**

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**The Experiences of Transgender  
Youth 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/expression.

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Inside photographs are of past and present members of GLSEN's National Student Leadership Team. The Team is comprised of a diverse group students across the United States; students in the photographs may or may not identify as transgender.

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## PREFACE

Societal norms of gender expression—masculinity or femininity—pervade American culture, on television, in advertising, at sporting events and in school hallways nationwide. Children hear words like “sissy” or “tomboy” or expressions like “you throw like a girl” from their first days on the playground. Name-calling and bullying based on gender expression are among the first forms of harassment that young people learn and experience. And as transgender and gender non-conforming students enter middle and high school, they can face far harsher realities than name-calling, including harassment and physical violence. *Harsh Realities: The Experiences of Transgender Youth in Our Nation’s Schools* provides an in-depth account of the experiences of transgender students.

Over the past decade, GLSEN has documented the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students with the biennial National School Climate Survey (NSCS). These reports repeatedly underscore the fact that LGBT students face high-levels of victimization based on both sexual orientation and gender expression, providing an overview of school climate for the LGBT student population in general. GLSEN’s Research Department has also undertaken in-depth examinations of the school experiences of specific segments of the LGBT student community. *Harsh Realities* is the newest addition to this important body of research, and is our first report focused on the school experiences of transgender students. This study illuminates the unique challenges faced by transgender students, who often challenge societal norms of gender and can face additional unique obstacles in school.

Transgender students face much higher levels of harassment and violence than LGB students. And these high levels of victimization result in these students missing more school, receiving lower grades and feeling isolated and not part of the school community. The report also reveals that many of these students lack the school supports and resources that have been shown to improve school climate for LGBT students. Most of these students, for example, do not have access to a Gay-Straight Alliance in school and most reported not having a school or district anti-bullying or anti-harassment policy that specifically includes protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity/ expression.

Amidst this dispiriting information, however, there are some encouraging findings. In the face of such hostile climates, transgender students can be resilient, as they more often talk to teachers about LGBT issues and raise these issues in their classes than their non-transgender LGB peers. Educators need to listen to and support these students when they speak up.

*Harsh Realities* truly demonstrates the urgent need for educators, policymakers and all who care about safe schools to address the disproportionate victimization of transgender students in school and to improve the knowledge and understanding of all members of the school community about issues related to gender and gender expression. This report also highlights the continued need for focused research so that all of us committed to creating safer schools for all students can more clearly understand the realities for specific student populations. Such understanding is critical as we work toward the development and implementation of effective policies, programs and resources.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eliza Byard'.

Eliza Byard, PhD  
Executive Director  
GLSEN





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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GLSEN (the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network) envisions a world where schools are safe places for all students, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Yet lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth may face particularly hostile school climates, as they often report experiencing harassment, discrimination, and other negative experiences in school. LGBT youth, regardless of their gender identity, often face victimization and stigmatization based on both sexual orientation and gender expression. However, our findings from the biennial National School Climate Surveys indicate that transgender youth are harassed and assaulted at higher levels than their non-transgender peers. In addition, transgender students may also face other unique challenges at school, such as difficulty accessing gender-segregated areas, including bathrooms and locker rooms. Thus, in order to ensure schools are safe environments for all students, it is important to understand the specific experiences of transgender youth in school.

Our *2007 National School Climate Survey* report provided information about transgender students' experiences of in-school victimization. The purpose of this report is to expand upon these findings by providing a broader picture of transgender students' school experiences nationwide, both in comparison to and independent of their non-transgender lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) peers. In this report we examine transgender students' experiences with regard to indicators of negative school climate, such as biased language, experiences of harassment and assault, and the impact of victimization on educational outcomes. Lastly, we explore transgender

students' engagement in their school community and access to institutional resources.

## Methods

Data used in this report come from GLSEN's fifth National School Climate Survey, which was conducted during the 2006–2007 school year. Two methods were used in order to locate participants in an effort to obtain a representative sample of LGBT youth: outreach through community-based groups serving LGBT youth and outreach via the Internet, including targeted advertising on the social networking site MySpace.

When examining differences between transgender students and non-transgender students, we used the full sample of 6,209 LGBT students. However, by and large, this report examines the specific experiences of the 295 students in the survey who identified as transgender. These transgender students were between 13 and 20 years of age, and the majority of the sample was White (64%), and identified as gay or lesbian (54%).

## Key Findings

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### ***Biased Language***

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Most transgender youth attended schools with hostile school climates. Similar to their non-transgender LGB peers, transgender students reported frequently hearing homophobic language and negative remarks about gender expression from other students. Although it was not frequent, some students reported hearing these types of remarks from school personnel.

- 90% of transgender students heard derogatory remarks, such as “dyke” or “faggot,” sometimes, often, or frequently in school.
- 90% of transgender students heard negative remarks about someone’s gender expression sometimes, often, or frequently in school. Remarks about students not acting “masculine” enough were more common than remarks about students not acting “feminine” enough (82% vs. 77% hearing remarks sometimes, often, or frequently).
- A third of transgender students heard school staff make homophobic (32%) remarks, sexist (39%) remarks, and negative comments about someone’s gender expression (39%) sometimes, often, or frequently in the past year.

Transgender students also reported little intervention on the part of school personnel when such language was used. Less than a fifth of transgender students said that school staff intervened most of the time or always when hearing homophobic remarks (16%) or negative remarks about someone’s gender expression (11%).

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

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Many transgender students were made to feel unsafe in school because of some personal characteristic, most notably their gender expression and sexual orientation. Two-thirds of transgender students felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation (69%) and how they expressed their gender (65%). Transgender students were more likely to feel unsafe in school because of a personal characteristic than were non-transgender students (82% of transgender students compared to 67% of female students, 68% of male students, and 73% of students with other gender identities).

Transgender students experienced high levels of in-school victimization. The majority of students had been verbally harassed in school in the past year because of their sexual orientation and gender expression, and many had also experienced physical violence.

- Almost all transgender students had been verbally harassed (e.g., called names or threatened) in the past year at school because of their sexual orientation (89%) and their gender expression (87%).
- Over half of all transgender students had been physically harassed (e.g., pushed or shoved) in school in the past year because of their sexual orientation (55%) and their gender expression (53%).
- Many transgender students had been physically assaulted (e.g., punched, kicked, or injured with a weapon) in school in the past year because of their sexual orientation (28%) and their gender expression (26%).
- Although LGBT students overall reported high levels of harassment and assault in school, transgender students experienced even higher levels than non-transgender students.

Similar to their non-transgender peers, most (54%) transgender students who were victimized in school did not report the events to school authorities. Unfortunately, among those who did report incidents to school personnel, few students (33%) believed that staff addressed the situation effectively.

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## ***Impact of Victimization on Educational Outcomes***

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A hostile school climate can have very negative repercussions on transgender students' ability to succeed in school – a high incidence of harassment was related to increased absenteeism, decreased educational aspirations, and lower academic performance. Transgender students fared worse on these educational outcomes than non-transgender lesbian, gay, and bisexual students, perhaps because of their increased levels of in-school victimization.

- Almost half of all transgender students reported skipping a class at least once in the past month (47%) and missing at least one day of school in the past month (46%) because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.

- Transgender students experiencing high levels of harassment were more likely than other transgender students to miss school for safety reasons (verbal harassment based on sexual orientation: 64% vs. 25%; gender expression: 56% vs. 32%; gender: 68% vs. 38%).
- Transgender students were more likely to miss school due to safety concerns than non-transgender students (46% of transgender students compared to 34% of female students, 27% of male students, and 40% of students with other gender identities).
- Transgender students who experienced high levels of harassment had significantly lower grade point averages than those who experienced lower levels of harassment (verbal harassment based on sexual orientation: 2.2. vs. 3.0; gender expression: 2.3 vs. 2.8; gender: 2.2 vs. 2.7).
- Transgender students experiencing high levels of harassment were more likely to report that they were not planning on going to college than those experiencing lower levels of harassment (verbal harassment based on sexual orientation: 42% vs. 30%; gender expression: 40% vs. 30%; gender: 49% vs. 32%).
- Transgender students had lower educational aspirations than male students and reported lower GPAs than male students and marginally lower GPAs than female students.

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### ***Engagement with the School Community***

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Given transgender students experienced high levels of harassment and assault, it is not surprising that they were less likely to feel a part of their school community than their non-transgender peers – transgender students reported lower feelings of school belonging than lesbian, gay, and bisexual non-transgender students. However, the more transgender students were able to fully participate in their school community – by being open about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and by being able to discuss LGBT issues at school – the greater their sense of belonging to their school community was.

- Transgender students who were out to most or all other students and school staff reported a greater sense of belonging to their school community than those who were not out or only out to a few other students or staff. The majority (66%) of transgender students were out to most or all of their peers, yet less than half (45%) were out to most or all of the school staff.
- The more transgender students discussed LGBT issues in school, the more likely they were to feel like a part of their school community. Most transgender students had talked with a teacher (66%) or a school-based mental health professional (51%) at least once in the past year about LGBT-related issues. Transgender students were also more likely than non-transgender students to talk with school staff about these issues.

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## ***In-School Resources and Supports***

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In addition to experiencing high levels of in-school victimization, many transgender students lacked the institutional supports that may lessen the negative effects of victimization. Although most transgender students (83%) could identify at least one supportive educator, only a third (36%) could identify many supportive staff. Furthermore, like their non-transgender peers, the majority lacked access to other supportive resources, such as Gay Straight-Alliances, inclusive curricula, and comprehensive anti-harassment policies.

- Less than half (44%) of transgender students reported that they had a student club that address LGBT student issues, i.e., a Gay Straight-Alliance (GSA), in their school. Although transgender students were not more likely to report having a GSA in their school, they did report attending GSA meetings more frequently than non-transgender LGB students.
- Less than half (46%) of transgender students reported that they could find information about LGBT people, history, or events in their school library and only a third (31%) were able to access this information using the school Internet.
- Less than a fifth of transgender students (16%) reported that LGBT-related topics were included in their textbooks or other assigned readings, and only a tenth (11%) were exposed to an inclusive curriculum that included positive representations of LGBT people, history, or events in their classes.
- Only half (54%) of transgender students reported that their school had an anti-harassment policy, and only 24% said that the school policy included specific protections based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Findings from this report demonstrate that transgender students often face extremely hostile school environments. Similar to non-transgender lesbian, gay, and bisexual students, most transgender students hear biased language, feel unsafe in school, are regularly harassed, and lack LGBT-related resources and supports. Furthermore, compared to their non-transgender peers, transgender students consistently reported higher levels of harassment and assault, were less likely to feel like a part of their school community, and had poorer educational outcomes. Transgender students were also more likely to be involved with LGBT-related issues in their schools, perhaps because they are faced with unique challenges in school, such as accessing gender-segregated facilities and being addressed by their preferred names and pronouns.

Educators, policymakers, and safe school advocates must continue to seek to understand the specific experiences of transgender students, and implement measures to ensure that schools are safe and inclusive environments for all LGBT youth. Given the potential

positive impact of supportive educators, student clubs, curricular resources, and comprehensive anti-harassment policies on the school experiences of LGBT students, it is imperative that schools work to provide these resources to students. Along with providing access to LGBT-related resources, it is important for educators, advocates, and policymakers to recognize how the needs of transgender youth may both be similar to and different from the needs of their non-transgender peers. Schools should explicitly address issues and experiences specific to transgender students.

Practices and policies that are sensitive to the experiences of transgender students would not only serve to improve the school experiences of those students, but can also send an important message to all members of a school community that individuals will not be limited nor defined merely by their gender. Taken together, these recommended measures can move us towards a future in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.





## INTRODUCTION

GLSEN (the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network) envisions a world where schools are safe places for all students, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Yet lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender<sup>1</sup> (LGBT) youth may face particularly hostile school climates, as they often report experiencing harassment, discrimination, and other negative experiences in school, often specifically related to their sexual orientation, gender identity, and how they express their gender. Such experiences include high levels of verbal and physical harassment and assault, social exclusion and isolation, and other interpersonal problems with peers.<sup>2</sup>

The population of LGBT youth includes both those whose sexual orientation (i.e., lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth) or gender identity (transgender youth) are considered non-normative by societal standards. Although sexual orientation and gender identity are distinct concepts, both are affected by societal expectations regarding gender. For example, a child who is assigned the gender of male at birth is traditionally expected to identify as male throughout his life, be romantically and sexually involved with females, and express himself in ways compatible with standard gender norms (e.g., expressing an interest in sports or not wearing make-up). LGBT youth, regardless of their gender identity, often face victimization and stigmatization based on both sexual orientation and gender expression. However, transgender youth may face additional, unique challenges at school, such as difficulty accessing gender-segregated areas including bathrooms and locker rooms, and the refusal of both educators and other students to address them by their preferred names and

pronouns. Thus, in order to ensure schools are safe environments for all students, including those whose gender identity might challenge traditional ideas about gender, it is important to understand the specific experiences of transgender youth in school.

Although research regarding the educational experiences of LGBT youth has increased over the last two decades, the specific experiences and needs of transgender students remain largely unexplored by the literature. The small body of existing research on the school experiences of transgender youth demonstrates that schools are not safe places for these students. Several qualitative studies have found that transgender students often face pervasive harassment and assault because of their gender identity, gender expression, and their actual or perceived sexual orientation, and are often subjected to intense scrutiny and judgment by their teachers and peers.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, school policies and practices that enforce gender segregation, such as school bathrooms, locker rooms, security procedures, dress codes, and classroom procedures (i.e., sorting students into groups by gender) can also pose challenges for transgender students,<sup>4</sup> either because they do not identify as either male or female or because other members of the school community do not accept them as the gender with which they identify. Not surprisingly, research indicates that this hostile school climate may also have negative effects on transgender youth's educational outcomes, including skipping school and eventually dropping out of school altogether.<sup>5</sup>

These in-depth qualitative research studies provide important insights into the experiences of transgender youth in specific contexts. However, to date, GLSEN's biennial National School Climate Survey is the only large-scale research study examining the specific school experiences of transgender youth nationwide. Since 1999, the National School Climate Survey has examined the experiences of LGBT secondary school students in U.S. schools and provided specific information about in-school victimization faced by the transgender youth who participated in the survey. We have included the findings from the *2007 National School Climate Survey*<sup>6</sup> about transgender students' experiences of victimization in this report. However, it is important to examine the wide array of transgender youth's experiences in greater detail, including, but not limited to, their experiences of victimization. In this report, we provide a broader picture of transgender students' school experiences nationwide, both in comparison to and independent of their non-transgender lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) peers. We examine transgender students' experiences with regard to indicators of negative school climate, including: exposure to biased language in school, sense of safety and absenteeism related to safety concerns, experiences of harassment and assault, and the impact of victimization on academic performance and future educational aspirations. In addition, we explore transgender students' access to institutional resources, such as supportive educators, Gay-Straight Alliances, LGBT-inclusive curriculum, and

comprehensive anti-harassment policies. Further, we examine the degree to which transgender students are engaged in their schools, through their interactions with educators and their sense of belonging to their school community.

## Notes

- 1 The term “transgender” refers broadly to people whose gender identity may not be consistent with the gender they were assigned at birth, including individuals whose gender identity may not conform to the binary gender system (e.g., a person who identifies as neither male nor female). Transgender may also be used as an umbrella term for all those whose gender expression is considered inconsistent with their birth assigned gender or sex (i.e. those who do not conform to “traditional” notions of “appropriate” gender expression).
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- 6 Kosciw, J. G., Diaz, E. M., & Greytak, E. A. (2008). *2007 National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth in our Nation’s Schools*. New York: GLSEN. To download a free copy of the report, visit [www.glsen.org/research](http://www.glsen.org/research).





## **METHODS**

GLSEN's 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 groups/organizations were randomly selected to participate from a list of over 300 groups nationwide. Of these 50 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 (MySpace does not provide a way to send targeted advertisements to users who identify as transgender). 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. In order to assess gender identity, students were provided the following list of terms and asked to select all the terms that applied to them: male, female, transgender, transgender male-to-female, and transgender female-to-male. Students were also given the opportunity to write in how they described their gender. For the purposes of this study, students were considered to be transgender if they chose any of the transgender terms, or wrote in that they identified as transgender. A total of 295 transgender students participated in the survey.

Transgender students in the survey were from 47 states and the District of Columbia, and were between 13 and 20 years of age. Table 1 presents the sample's demographics. The category "transgender" encompasses a wide range of identities, and transgender students in our survey identified in a variety of ways, including but not limited to, male-to-female, female-to-male, and solely as transgender. Some students, who when asked about their gender identity, selected both male and transgender or selected both female and transgender (although not male-to-female or female-to-male). Other students in our sample identified as both male and female or both male-to-female and female-to-male and were categorized as "multigender" for the purposes of this study.

About two-thirds of the sample (64%) was White and over half identified as gay or lesbian (53%). Students were in grades 6 to 12, with the largest numbers being in 10th or 11th grade. Table 2 shows the characteristics of the schools attended by transgender students in our survey. The majority of students (93%) attended public schools, and students were most likely to attend schools in urban areas (40%) and in districts with low levels of poverty (73%).

Although this report focuses on transgender students' specific experiences in school, we also examined how their experiences may have differed from the experiences of the non-transgender students in the National School Climate Survey, i.e., LGB male and female students and LGB students who selected "other" as their gender identity.<sup>7</sup> Throughout this report, we discuss our findings regarding potential differences between transgender students and other students from the survey. In addition to examining differences between transgender students and non-transgender LGB students, we thought it was important to look at how transgender students' experiences may differ by the specific ways in which they identify. We found no differences in transgender students' experiences based on the way they specifically identified their gender (male-to-female transgender, female-to-male transgender, transgender only) and thus discuss the experiences of transgender youth as a whole group throughout this report.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 1. Demographics of Transgender Survey Respondents (n=295)**

<b>Gender Identity</b>			<b>Sexual Orientation</b>		
Transgender <sup>a</sup>	6%	n=19	Gay or Lesbian	53%	n=157
Transgender Female-to-Male	56%	n=164	Bisexual	32%	n=93
Transgender Male-to-Female	14%	n=41	Straight/Heterosexual	3%	n=10
Transgender and Female	10%	n=28	Other sexual orientation	12%	n=34
Transgender and Male	2%	n=7	(e.g., queer, questioning, pansexual)		
Multigender <sup>b</sup>	9%	n=55			
<b>Race and Ethnicity</b>			<b>Grade</b>		
White	64%	n=185	6th	0%	n=1
African American or Black	4%	n=12	7th	7%	n=19
Hispanic or Latino/a	13%	n=38	8th	11%	n=31
Asian or Pacific Islander	7%	n=19	9th	20%	n=57
Native American, American Indian or Alaska Native	7%	n=21	10th	22%	n=65
Multiracial	5%	n=13	11th	21%	n=60
			12th	20%	n=58

Average Age =15.9 years

<sup>a</sup> Refers to students who identified as “transgender” but not did not identify as male, female, male-to-female, or female-to-male.

<sup>b</sup> “Multigender” refers to transgender students who identified as male and female or male-to-female and female-to-male.

**Table 2. School Characteristics of Transgender Survey Respondents (n=295)**

<b>Grade Levels</b>			<b>School Type</b>		
K through 12 School	3%	n=9	Public School	93%	n=275
Lower School	2%	n=7	Charter	3%	n=7
Middle School	12%	n=36	Magnet	7%	n=20
Upper School	8%	n=24	Religious-affiliated	4%	n=11
High School	74%	n=219	Other independent or private school	3%	n=9
<b>Community Types</b>			<b>District-Level Poverty<sup>a</sup></b>		
Urban	40%	n=115	Very High (>75%)	4%	n=12
Suburban	37%	n=106	Somewhat High (51–75%)	22%	n=61
Small town/Rural	23%	n=66	Somewhat Low (26–50%)	46%	n=127
			Very Low (≤25%)	27%	n=74
<b>Region</b>			<sup>a</sup> Based on data from the National Center for Education Statistics regarding the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch.		
Northeast	23%	n=68			
South	26%	n=78			
Midwest	21%	n=62			
West	30%	n=87			

## Notes

- 7 There were significant differences between transgender students and non-transgender students in how they identified their sexual orientation. Compared to non-transgender students, transgender students were less likely to identify as bisexual and more likely to identify as something other than gay, lesbian, or bisexual (e.g., straight/heterosexual, pansexual). In the *2007 National School Climate Survey*, we found differences in students' experiences based on sexual orientation; thus, we control for sexual orientation when testing differences across gender identity throughout this report.
- 8 For students who selected "male" or "female" in addition to "transgender," we could not discern whether also selecting "male" or "female" indicated the gender they were assigned at birth or the gender with which they currently identify. Thus, these students were not included in the analyses of differences within the group of transgender students. Students categorized as "multigender" were also not included in these analyses, as "multigender" was an umbrella term for a variety of ways of identifying that may or may not share any inherent meaning.





## RESULTS

### Biased Language in School

Keeping classrooms and hallways free of homophobic, sexist, and other types of biased language is one aspect of creating a safe school climate for students. The *2007 National School Climate Survey*, similar to our previous surveys, asked students about the frequency of hearing homophobic remarks (such as “faggot” and “dyke”), racist remarks (such as “nigger” or “spic”) and sexist remarks (such as someone being called a “bitch” in a derogatory way or comments about girls being inferior to boys) while at school. Students were also asked about the frequency of hearing negative remarks about the way in which someone expressed their gender at school (such as a student being told that she does not act “feminine enough”). Students were also asked about the frequency of hearing biased remarks from school staff. In addition to being asked about the frequency of hearing remarks from other students and from school staff, students were asked whether anyone intervened when hearing this type of language used in school.

Although we would not necessarily expect transgender students to hear biased remarks in school any more or less often than other students in the *2007 National School Climate Survey*, we believe it is important to demonstrate how often transgender students were exposed to biased language. Similar to results from the national survey of the general LGBT student population, we found that transgender students often heard biased language in school, especially homophobic remarks, sexist remarks, and negative

remarks about students' gender expression, and that there was little intervention with such language on the part of school staff.

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### ***Students' Reports of Hearing Biased Remarks in School***

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Homophobic remarks were commonly heard in school by transgender students. As shown in Figure 1, 90% of students reported hearing derogatory remarks, such as “dyke” or “faggot,” sometimes, often, or frequently in school. Hearing expressions using “gay” in a negative way, such as “that’s so gay,” was also quite prevalent, with 97% of students hearing them sometimes, often, or frequently at school. These expressions are often used to mean that something or someone is worthless or boring and, thus, may be dismissed as innocuous in comparison to overtly derogatory remarks such as “faggot.” However, most transgender students did not view these expressions as innocuous — 85% reported that hearing “gay” used in a negative manner at school caused them to feel bothered or distressed to some degree.

Negative remarks about the way in which someone expressed their gender (i.e., not acting “masculine” or “feminine” enough) were pervasive, with nine out of ten (90%) transgender students hearing negative remarks about someone’s gender expression sometimes, often, or frequently in school (see Figure 1). Remarks about students not acting “masculine” enough were more common than remarks about students not acting “feminine” enough (82% vs. 77% hearing remarks sometimes, often, or frequently).<sup>9</sup>

Sexist remarks were also very commonly heard by transgender students, with almost all (95%) students reporting that they heard sexist language in school sometimes, often, or frequently (see Figure 1). Although less commonly reported than other types of biased remarks, just over two-thirds (67%) of transgender students reported hearing racist remarks sometimes, often, or frequently in school (see also Figure 1).

Students not only heard biased language from other students, but from school personnel as well. About a third of transgender students reported that they heard school staff make homophobic (32%) and sexist remarks (39%), and negative comments about someone’s gender expression (39%) sometimes, often, or frequently in the past year (see Figure 1). Although less frequently reported than other types of remarks, one in ten (10%) students reported that they had heard school staff make racist remarks at least some of the time at school (see also Figure 1).

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### ***Intervention with Biased Language by School Staff and Students***

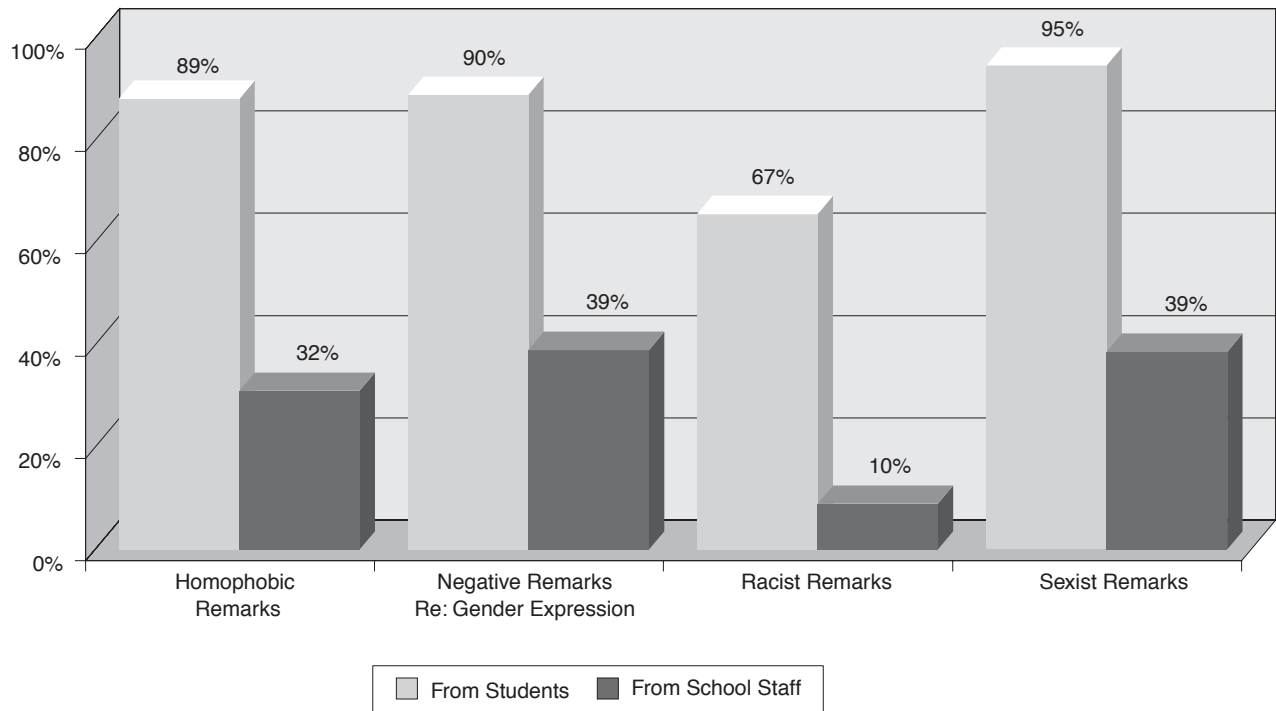
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In addition to how often students hear biased remarks in school, the degree to which school staff address the use of such language when used in their presence is another indicator of overall school climate. By intervening when hearing biased remarks, 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. Therefore, we asked students in our survey how often teachers or other school staff intervened in some way when biased remarks were made in their presence.

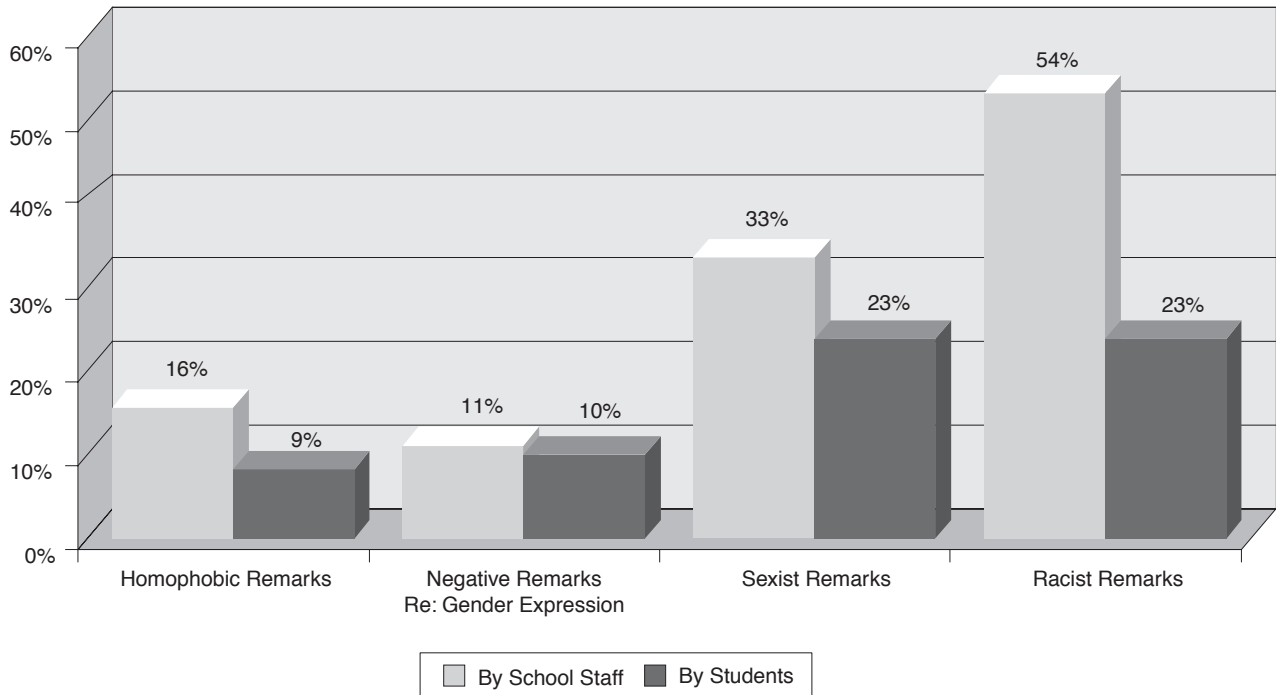
Biased language use by students remained largely unchallenged by school personnel. As shown in Figure 2, less than a fifth of students said that school personnel intervened most of the time or always when hearing homophobic remarks (16%) or negative remarks about someone's gender expression (11%). In contrast, students were more likely to report that staff intervened when hearing sexist or racist remarks,<sup>10</sup> with a third (33%) reporting that staff intervened most of the time or always when hearing sexist remarks and just over half (54%) reporting this level of intervention with racist remarks (see also Figure 2).

One would expect teachers and school staff to bear the responsibility for addressing problems of biased language in school as they are the authorities charged with ensuring that schools are safe for all students. However, students may at times intervene when hearing biased language as well, and such interventions may be another indicator of school climate. As shown in Figure 2, few transgender students reported that their classmates intervened when hearing biased remarks in school. About one-tenth reported that other students intervened most of the time or always when hearing homophobic remarks (9%) or negative comments about someone's gender expression (10%). Although the percentage of student intervention with sexist and racist remarks was greater,<sup>11</sup> only a quarter of students said that their peers intervened most of the time or always when sexist (24%) or racist (24%) language was used.

**Figure 1. Hearing Biased Remarks in School**  
(percentage hearing remarks "sometimes," "often," or "frequently")



**Figure 2. Intervention When Biased Remarks Were Made in School**  
(percentage reporting that students or staff intervened "most of the time" or "always")



## Notes

- 9 Mean differences in the frequencies between types of biased remarks based on gender expression were examined using paired t-tests and percentages are shown for illustrative purposes. The effect was significant,  $t(294)=2.70$ ,  $p<.001$ .
- 10 Mean differences in the frequencies of school staff intervention across types of remarks were examined using repeated measures multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) and percentages are shown for illustrative purposes. The multivariate effect was significant, Pillai's Trace=.48,  $F(3, 165)=49.76$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ .
- 11 Mean differences in the frequencies of student intervention across types of remarks were examined using repeated measures multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) and percentages are shown for illustrative purposes. The multivariate effect was significant, Pillai's Trace=.17,  $F(3, 260)=17.60$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ .

## Overall Safety in School

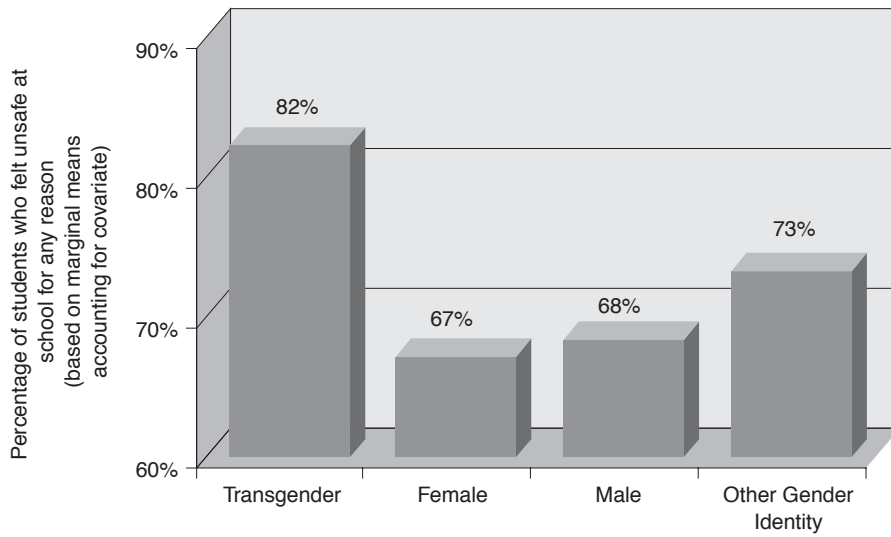
In order to assess overall feelings of safety in school, students in our survey were asked if they felt unsafe in school because of certain personal characteristics: sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, and actual or perceived race/ethnicity, disability, or religion. In the *2007 National School Climate Survey*, LGBT students reported feeling unsafe because of a variety of characteristics, most commonly their sexual orientation and gender expression. Similarly, we found that a majority of transgender students reported feeling unsafe because of at least one of these characteristics, and in fact, transgender students were more likely to feel unsafe than LGB students who were not transgender.<sup>12</sup> For example, as illustrated in Figure 3, 82% of transgender students felt unsafe at school because of one of the personal characteristics, compared to two-thirds (67%) of female students.

As shown in Figure 4, about two-thirds (65%) of transgender students felt unsafe because of how they expressed their gender (i.e., a student who does not express themselves in a way considered to be appropriately “masculine” or “feminine” according to traditional societal norms). More than two-thirds of transgender students felt unsafe because of their sexual orientation (69%), and more than a third (36%) felt unsafe because of their gender (see also Figure 4). Furthermore, a quarter (25%) felt unsafe because of their actual or perceived religion, and less than a fifth felt unsafe because of their actual or perceived race or ethnicity (15%), or because of an actual or perceived disability (9%).

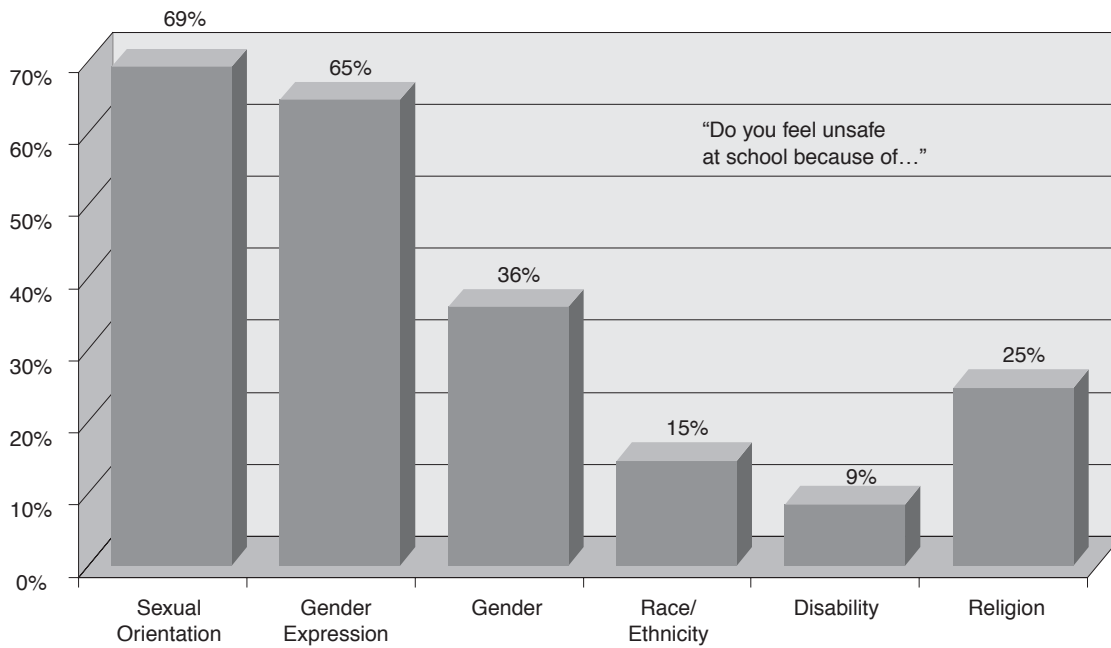
Transgender students often felt unsafe because of multiple characteristics, illustrating the ways in which multiple dimensions of identity may intersect to shape students’ experiences. As shown in Table 3, a closer look at the three most common reasons transgender students often felt unsafe at school – sexual orientation, gender expression, and gender – revealed that students most commonly felt unsafe because of all three characteristics (27%) or because of both their sexual orientation and gender expression (29%). Fewer students (16%) felt unsafe because of only one of these characteristics (see also Table 3).

Feeling unsafe or uncomfortable in school can negatively affect students’ academic success, particularly if it results in avoiding classes or missing days of school. Thus, we asked students how many times they had missed classes or an entire day of school in the past month because they felt uncomfortable or unsafe in school. As shown in Figure 5, almost half of all transgender students reported skipping a class at least once in the past month (47%) and missing at least one day of school in the past month (46%) because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable. Given that transgender students were more likely to feel unsafe at school, it is not surprising that they were also more likely to miss school due to safety concerns than non-transgender students.<sup>13</sup> For example, 46% of transgender students had missed at least one entire day of school for this reason, compared to 27% of male students (see Figure 6).

**Figure 3. Feeling Unsafe at School by Gender Identity**



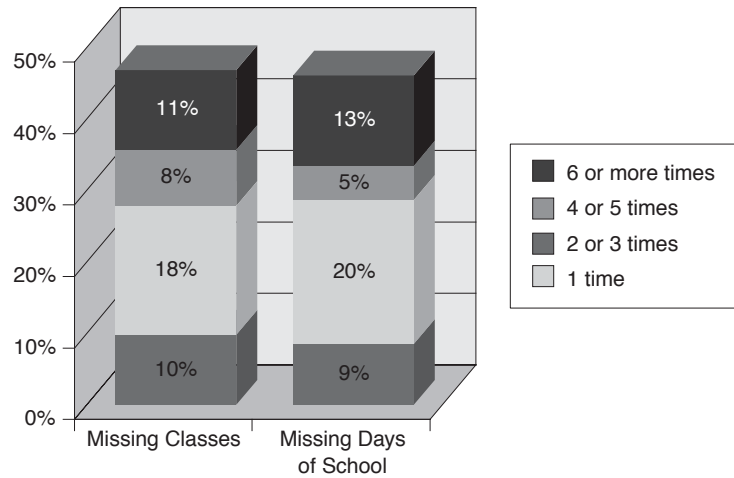
**Figure 4. Percentage of Transgender Students Who Felt Unsafe at School**



**Table 3. Feeling Unsafe at School Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Expression, and/or Gender**

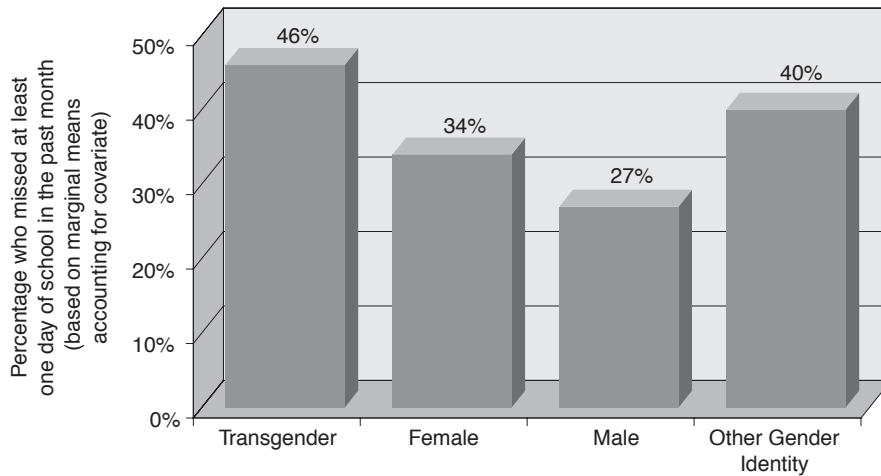
All Three (Sexual Orientation, Gender Expression, & Gender)	27%	n=79	Sexual Orientation Only	9%	n=27
Sexual Orientation & Gender Expression	29%	n=85	Gender Expression Only	6%	n=17
Sexual Orientation & Gender	4%	n=13	Gender Only	1%	n=3
Gender & Gender Expression	4%	n=11	None	20%	n=60

**Figure 5. Frequency of Missing School and Classes in Past Month Because of Feeling Unsafe or Uncomfortable**





**Figure 6. Missing School Because of Safety Concerns by Gender Identity**



## Notes

- 12 To test differences across gender identity, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted with feeling unsafe at school for any reason as the dependent variable, gender identity as the independent variable, and sexual orientation as a covariate. When examining potential differences across gender identity, we used the more restrictive  $p > .01$  in determinations of statistical significance for our analyses because of the large sample size ( $n=6184$ ). The main effect of gender identity was significant:  $F(3, 6165)=10.84, p < .001$ .
- 13 To test differences across gender identity, a multiple analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted with missing school because feel unsafe or uncomfortable and skipping class because feel unsafe or uncomfortable as the dependent variables, gender identity as the independent variable, and sexual orientation as a covariate. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes. The multivariate effect was significant: Pillai's Trace=.01,  $F(6, 12284)=11.18, p < .001$ . Univariate effects were considered significant at  $p < .01$  and marginally significant at  $p < .05$ .

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

Given that the majority of transgender students felt unsafe in school, it was important to document their experiences related to in-school harassment and assault. 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, disability, or religion.

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### ***Verbal Harassment***

As we had found in the full sample of LGBT students, students’ sexual orientation and gender expression were the most commonly targeted characteristics with regard to verbal harassment (e.g., being called names or threatened) in school.<sup>14</sup> About nine in ten transgender students reported being verbally harassed at school because of their gender expression (87%) and their sexual orientation (89%), and over half experienced this form of harassment often or frequently (see Figure 7). The next most frequent type of verbal harassment for transgender students was related to gender, with 72% reporting any occurrence in the past year and a quarter (25%) reporting it occurred often or frequently. In addition, as shown in Figure 7, nearly half of transgender students reported having ever been verbally harassed in the past year because of their actual or perceived race/ethnicity (44%) or religion (48%) and fewer reported being harassed because of an actual or perceived disability (28%).

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### ***Physical Harassment***

Similar to the reported experiences of verbal harassment, physical harassment (e.g., being pushed or shoved) was most commonly related to transgender students’ sexual orientation or how they expressed their gender.<sup>15</sup> As illustrated in Figure 8, over half had been physically harassed in school in the past year because of their sexual orientation (55%) or their gender expression (53%). Furthermore, over a quarter had experienced this type of victimization often or frequently (sexual orientation: 29%, gender expression: 27%). Nearly half (42%) of transgender students had been physically harassed in the past school year because of their gender, with 17% experiencing this type of harassment often or frequently. Fewer students had experienced physical harassment in the past year because of their actual or perceived religion (24%), race/ethnicity (21%), or disability (15%).

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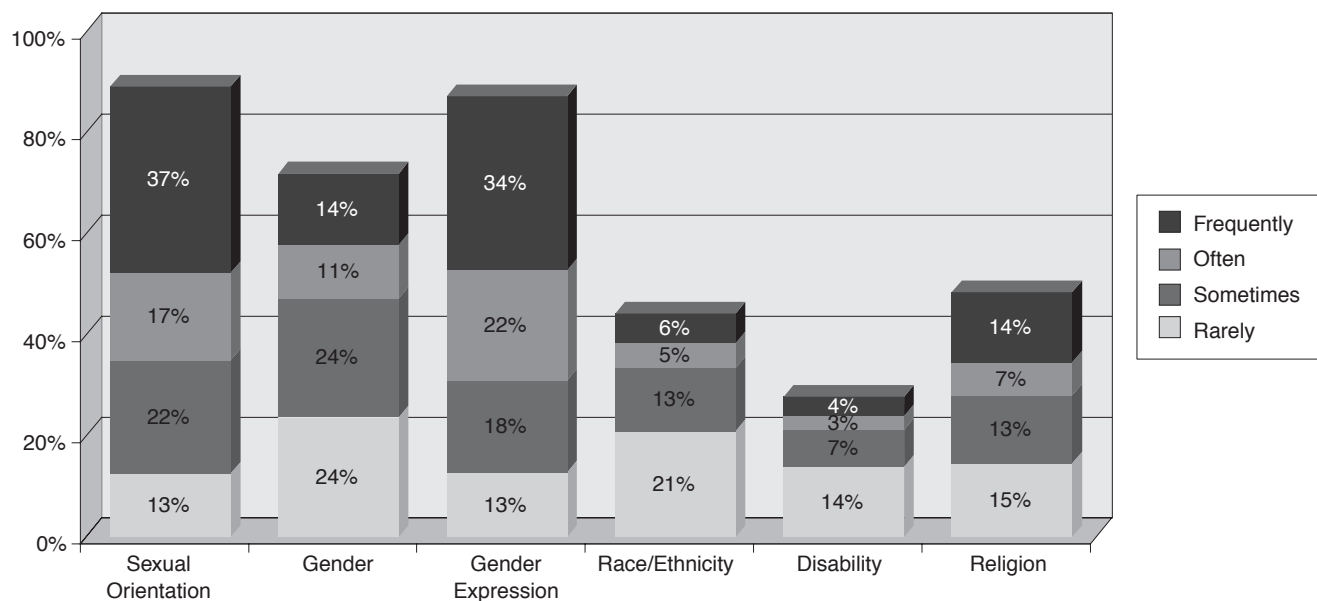
### ***Physical Assault***

Students were also asked whether they had been physically assaulted (e.g., being punched, kicked, or injured with a weapon) while in school. Given the more severe nature of physical assault, it is not surprising that students were less likely to report this type of victimization than to report verbal or physical harassment. Nonetheless, almost half (44%) of all transgender students reported that they had been physically

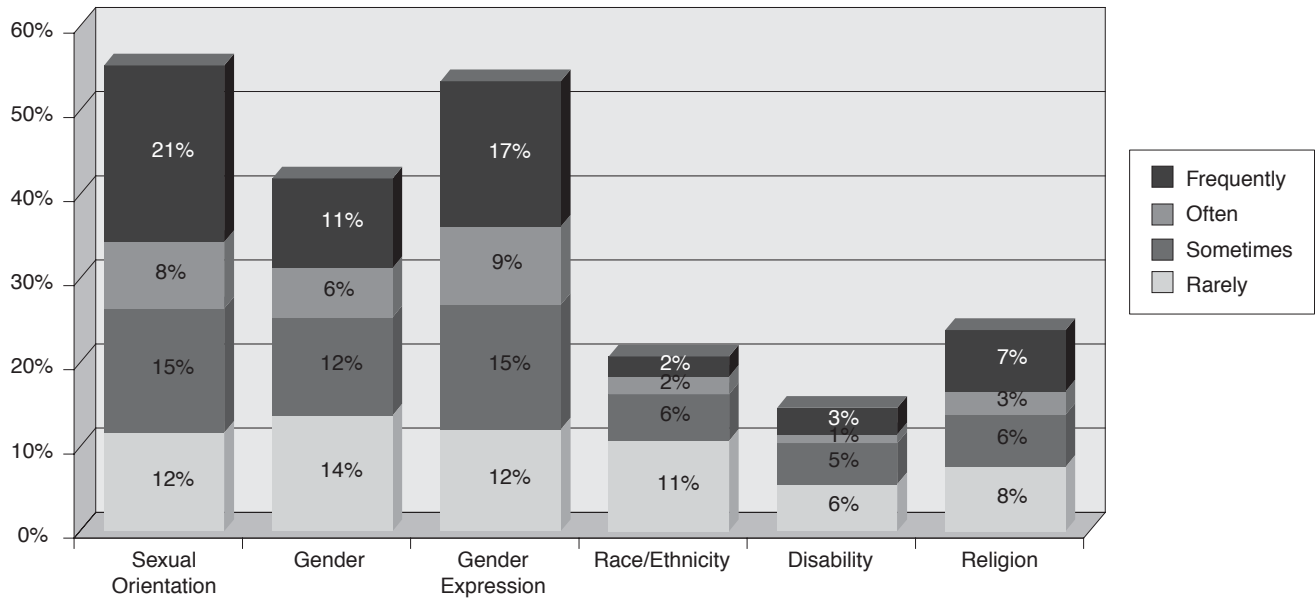
assaulted at some point at school in the past year. As shown in Figure 9, sexual orientation and gender expression were, again, the most commonly targeted characteristics — 28% of students reported that they had ever been physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation and 26% because of how they expressed their gender.<sup>16</sup> The next most prevalent type of assault was because of their gender, with more than a tenth (16%) of transgender students reporting that they had ever been physically assaulted for this reason. Fewer students reported physical assault based on their actual or perceived religion (11%), race/ethnicity (7%), or disability (4%).

Overall, transgender students experienced higher levels of harassment and assault than other students in the *2007 National School Climate Survey* sample. As shown in Figure 10, transgender students had the highest average levels of victimization when compared to non-transgender LGB students.<sup>17</sup> The differences between transgender students and other students in the survey were most pronounced for victimization based on gender and gender expression, followed by sexual orientation. Nevertheless, transgender students were also higher on levels of victimization based on race/ethnicity, disability, and religion. Given that gender, gender expression, and sexual orientation are linked, it is perhaps not surprising that transgender students experienced higher levels of victimization based on these three characteristics. However, it is unclear why transgender students would also have had higher levels of victimization based on the other characteristics. It is possible that because transgender students may be more frequently targeted because of their gender or gender expression, they then are more likely to become targets for other types of harassment as well. Further research should explore why transgender students may be at greater risk than their non-transgender LGB peers for victimization based on all types of personal characteristics.

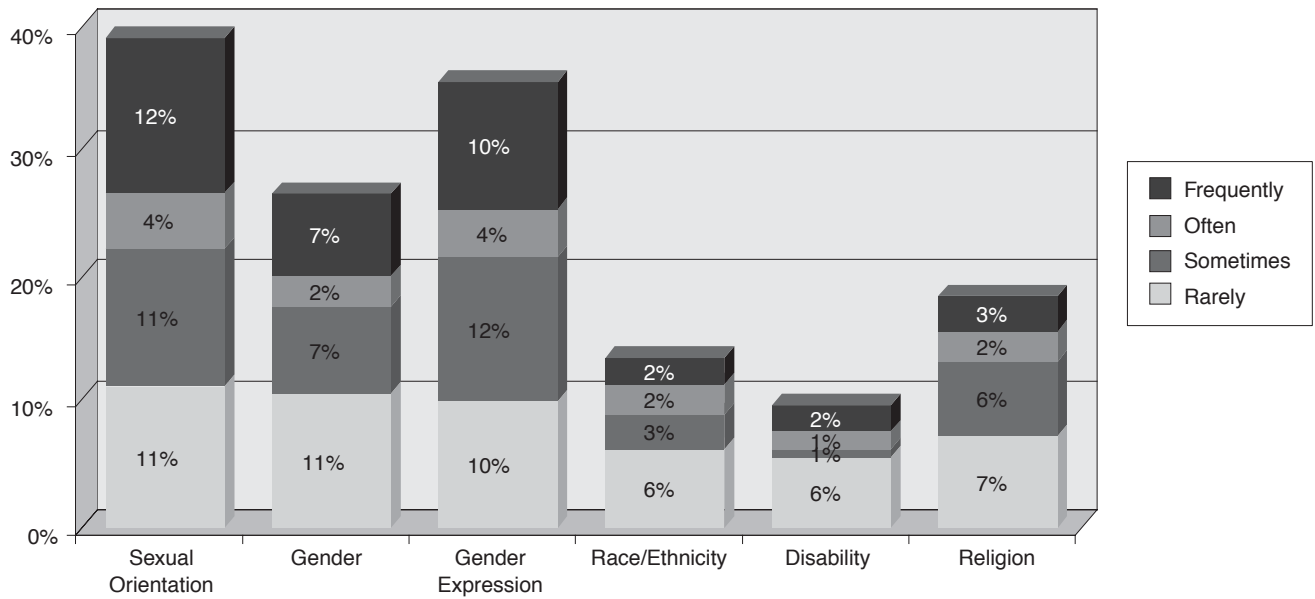
**Figure 7. Frequency of Verbal Harassment in the Past School Year**



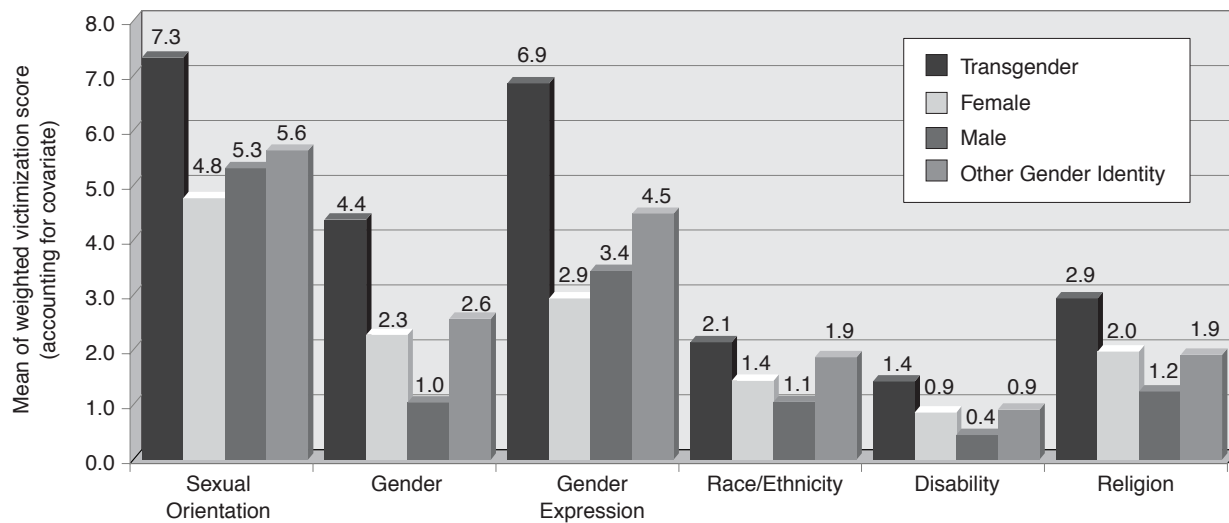
**Figure 8. Frequency of Physical Harassment in the Past School Year**



**Figure 9. Frequency of Physical Assault in the Past School Year**



**Figure 10. Experiences of Victimization by Gender Identity**



### ***Other Types of Victimization Events in School***

In addition to experiences of harassment and assault that are related to specific personal characteristics, transgender students may experience other types of victimization at school that are not clearly related to a personal characteristic. Thus, we asked students in our survey about other negative events they may have experienced in school, such as being sexually harassed or having their property stolen or deliberately damaged.

As shown in Figure 11, sizable percentages of transgender students reported experiencing these other forms of victimization at school in the past year:

- Over three-fourths of transgender students (76%) reported being sexually harassed, such as receiving unwanted sexual remarks or being touched inappropriately.
- Nine in ten transgender students experienced some sort of relational aggression – 89% reported being the target of mean rumors or lies, and 92% had felt deliberately excluded or “left out” by other students.
- Almost two-thirds (62%) of transgender students reported experiencing some sort of electronic harassment or “cyberbullying” (e.g., text messages, emails, or postings on Internet social networking sites such as MySpace).
- Two-thirds of transgender students (67%) had their property (e.g., car, clothing, or books) stolen or deliberately damaged at school.

Similar to findings about harassment and assault based on personal characteristics, transgender students were more likely than non-

transgender LGB students to experience these other types of victimization.<sup>18</sup> Specifically, transgender students were more likely than all other non-transgender students to have their property damaged or stolen or to feel excluded by other students. They were also more likely than male and female students to have experienced electronic harassment or to have been the target of mean rumors or lies, and more likely than male students to have been sexually harassed. As mentioned above regarding victimization based on personal characteristics, transgender students may be targeted for these other types of harassment given they are commonly targeted because of their gender, gender expression, or sexual orientation, and further research is needed in this area.

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### ***Reporting of Harassment and Assault***

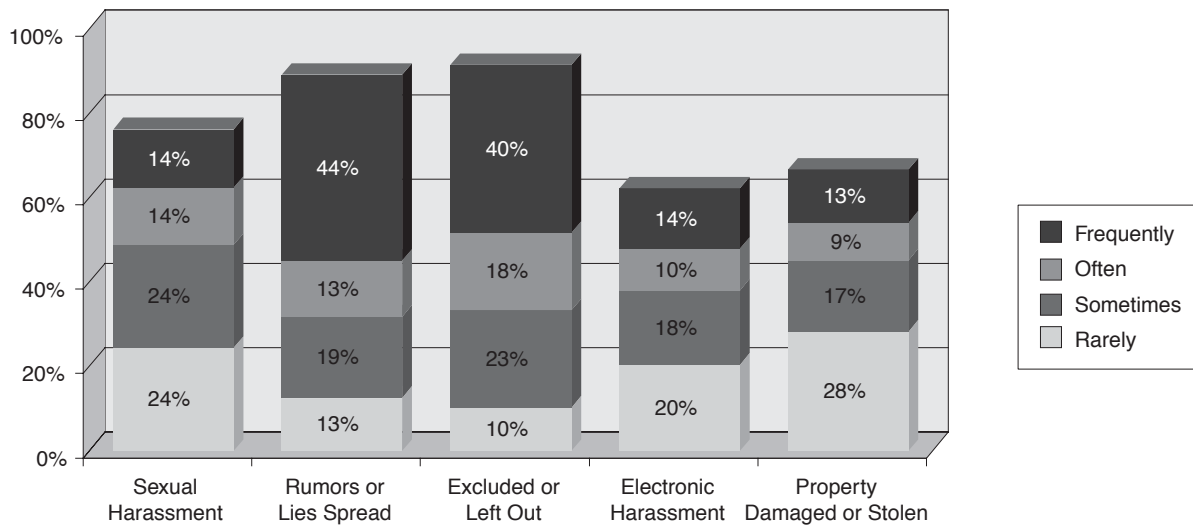
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We learned from the *2007 National School Climate Survey* that the majority of LGBT students who are victimized in school did not tell school authorities about the incident, and when they did most did not feel that staff effectively addressed the situation. Our findings for transgender students are similar – most (54%) who were harassed or assaulted in school did not report the incident to staff (see Figure 12). As illustrated in Figure 12, few students indicated that they reported incidents of harassment or assault most of the time or always to staff (14%). Although transgender students experienced higher levels of harassment and assault than non-transgender students, there were no differences in rates of reporting these incidents to school authorities.<sup>19</sup>

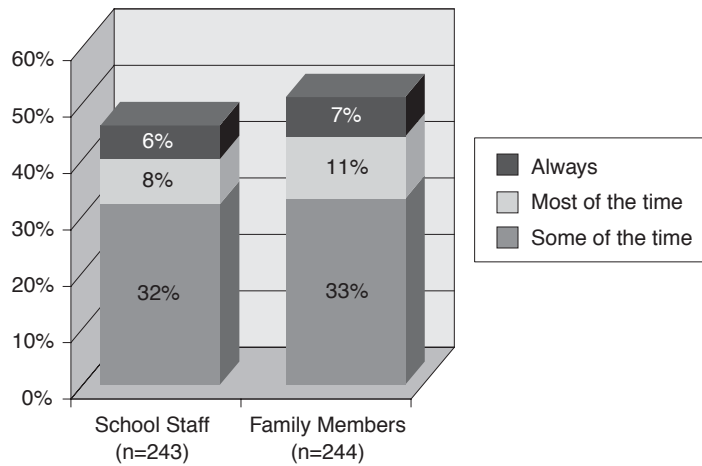
Reporting incidents of harassment and assault to school staff may be an intimidating task for students. Furthermore, there is also no guarantee that reporting incidents to school staff would result in effective intervention. For students who had reported any such incident to school staff, we asked how effective it was to do so. As shown in Figure 13, only a third (33%) of transgender students who reported incidents of victimization to school staff said that effective actions were taken to address the situation. Transgender students were not any more or less likely than non-transgender students to say that the responses of staff were effective.<sup>20</sup>

Family members may represent an additional resource for students who are harassed or assaulted in school and may be able to advocate for the student with school personnel. Only half (51%) of transgender students told a family member when they were harassed or assaulted at school (see Figure 12). For those students who had reported incidents to a family member, we asked how often a family member had talked to school staff about the incident – almost two-thirds (61%) said that the family member addressed the issue with school staff at least some of the time. As with reporting to school staff, transgender students were not different from non-transgender students in their frequency of reporting incidents to a family member. They also did not differ from other students in how frequently they reported a family member addressed the incidents with school staff.<sup>21</sup>

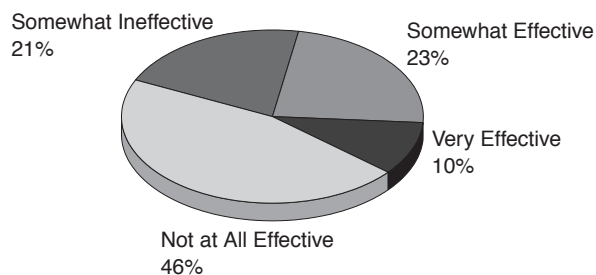
**Figure 11. Frequency of Other Types of Harassment in the Past School Year**



**Figure 12. Frequency of Reporting Incidents of Harassment and Assault**



**Figure 13. Effectiveness of Reporting Incidents of Victimization to a School Staff Person (n=111)**



## Notes

- 14 Mean differences in the frequencies of verbal harassment across types were examined using repeated measures multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) and percentages are shown for illustrative purposes. The multivariate effect was significant, Pillai's Trace=.67,  $F(5, 275)=108.98$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ .
- 15 Mean differences in the frequencies of physical harassment across types were examined using repeated measures multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) and percentages are shown for illustrative purposes. The multivariate effect was significant, Pillai's Trace=.38,  $F(5, 278)=33.32$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ .
- 16 Mean differences in the frequencies of physical assault across types were examined using repeated measures multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) and percentages are shown for illustrative purposes. The multivariate effect was significant, Pillai's Trace=.25,  $F(5, 274)=18.50$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ .
- 17 For the purpose of analysis, weighted variables measuring "victimization" were created based on each personal characteristic. For each type of victimization (sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, race/ethnicity, disability, religion), a weighted variable measuring the frequency of victimization across the three severity levels (verbal harassment, physical harassment, physical assault) was created, giving more weight to physical harassment and, in turn, physical assault because of the increased severity of the event. Six "victimization" variables were created. Scores on the "victimization" variables ranged from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of 22. To test differences across groups, a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted with all the victimization variables as dependent variables, gender identity as the independent variable, and sexual orientation as a covariate. Multivariate results were significant: Pillai's Trace=.104,  $F(18, 16,995)=33.83$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ . Transgender students experienced higher levels of victimization than LGB male and female students and LGB students with other gender identities for victimization based on gender expression, gender, sexual orientation, and religion. Transgender students experienced higher levels of victimization than LGB male and female students (but not than LGB students with other gender identity) for victimization based on race/ethnicity and victimization based on disability.
- 18 To test differences across gender identity, a multiple analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted with frequencies of each type of victimization (sexual harassment, having rumors or lies spread, being excluded or left out, having property damaged or stolen, and electronic harassment) as the dependent variables, gender identity as the independent variable, and sexual orientation as a covariate. The multivariate effect was significant, Pillai's Trace=.03,  $F(15, 18219)=11.32$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ .
- 19 To test differences across gender identity, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted with frequencies of reporting incidents to school staff as the dependent variable, gender identity as the independent variable, and sexual orientation as a covariate. The main effect of gender identity was not significant at  $p<.01$ .
- 20 To test differences across gender identity, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted with effectiveness of reporting harassment or assault to school staff as the dependent variable, gender identity as the independent variable, and sexual orientation as a covariate. While the main effect of gender identity was significant:  $F(3, 1826)=4.19$ ,  $p<.01$ , post-hoc comparisons revealed that there were no significant differences between transgender students and non-transgender students.
- 21 To test differences across gender identity, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted with reporting incidents to family member as the dependent variable, gender identity as the independent variable, and sexual orientation as a covariate. The main effect of gender identity was not significant at  $p<.01$ .  
  
To test differences across gender identity, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted with family member addressing incident with school staff as the dependent variable, gender identity as the independent variable, and sexual orientation as a covariate. While the main effect of gender identity was significant:  $F(3, 2269)=4.28$ ,  $p<.01$ , post-hoc comparisons revealed that there were no significant differences between transgender students non-transgender students.



## Impact of Victimization on Educational Outcomes

For all 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 negatively affect a student's ability to focus on their school work and 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 were related to lower grade point averages, decreased educational aspirations, and increased absenteeism due to safety concerns for LGBT students. In this report, we examined the relationship between harassment and academic achievement, educational aspirations, and absenteeism for transgender students specifically, looking at how experiences of harassment related to sexual orientation, gender, and gender expression affect these educational outcomes.

We found that experiences with harassment were, in fact, related to missing days of school for transgender students. As shown in Figure 14, transgender students who experienced high frequencies of verbal harassment related to gender expression, gender, or sexual orientation were more likely than transgender students who did not experience such frequent harassment to report missing school because they felt unsafe.<sup>22</sup> For example, 68% of transgender students experiencing high levels of harassment because of their gender missed at least one day of school in the last month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable in school, compared to 38% of transgender students experiencing low levels of harassment (see Figure 14).

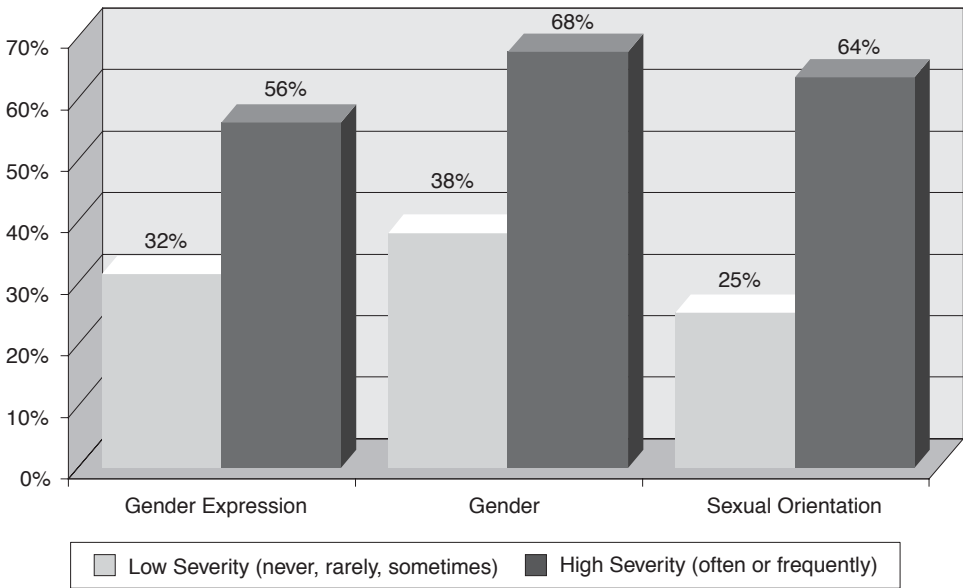
Harassment was also related to lower academic achievement among transgender students. Figure 15 shows the reported grade point averages (GPAs) of transgender students by levels of verbal harassment based on gender, gender expression, and sexual orientation. Across all three types, transgender students who were more frequently harassed had significantly lower grades than those who were less often harassed.<sup>23</sup> For example, transgender students who were verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation often or frequently reported a GPA of 2.2, compared to transgender students who were harassed less often who reported a GPA of 3.0.

Not only may frequent harassment result in lower academic achievement, but it may also affect a student's educational aspirations. Figure 16 shows the percentage of transgender students not planning to pursue a college education by levels of verbal harassment based on gender, gender expression, and sexual orientation. Across all three types of harassment, transgender students who were more frequently harassed were more likely to say they did not plan to pursue further education than those who were less often harassed.<sup>24</sup> For example,

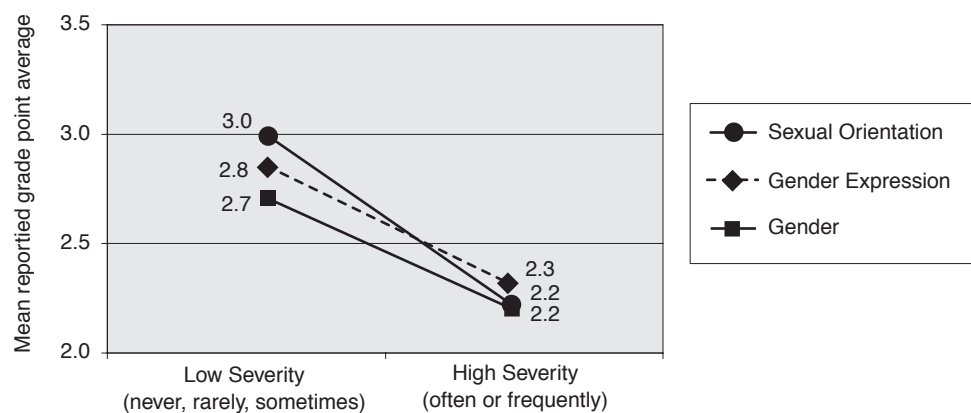
almost half (49%) of students who experienced high frequencies of verbal harassment because of their gender did not plan to go to college, compared to a third (32%) of those who had not experienced such high levels of harassment (see Figure 16).

Given the relationship between harassment and educational outcomes, and given that transgender students are more likely to be harassed than non-transgender LGB students, it is not surprising that transgender students reported poorer educational outcomes than non-transgender students. Specifically, transgender students had lower educational aspirations than male students and reported lower GPAs than male students and marginally lower GPAs than female students.<sup>25</sup> In addition, there was a difference for transgender students in the degree to which harassment negatively affected academic achievement. Although for all gender groups increased harassment was associated with lower GPAs, this negative relationship was stronger for transgender students such that their GPAs fell even lower than non-transgender students when having experienced high levels of harassment. It is possible that victimization for transgender students has a greater effect on their emotional well-being, which then results in lowered achievement.

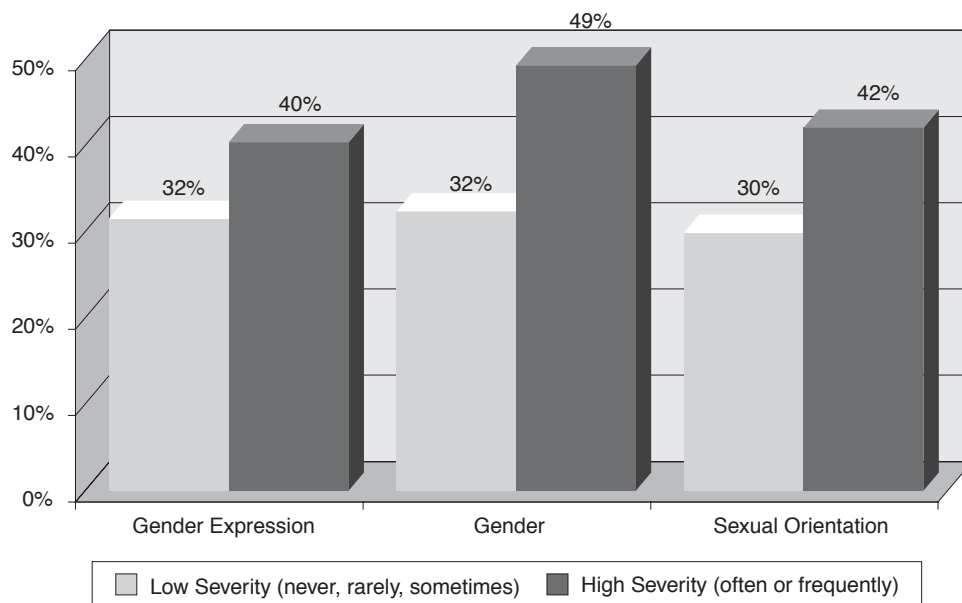
**Figure 14. Severity of Verbal Harassment and Absenteeism Due to Safety Reasons**  
(percentage who missed at least one day of school in the past month)



**Figure 15. Academic Achievement and Severity of Verbal Harassment**



**Figure 16. Severity of Verbal Harassment and Educational Aspirations**  
(percentage NOT planning to pursue post-secondary education)



## Notes

- 22 The relationships between missing school and harassment were examined through Pearson correlations —verbal harassment based on gender expression:  $r=.27$ ; verbal harassment based on gender:  $r=.34$ ; verbal harassment based on sexual orientation:  $r=.40$ . All correlations were significant at  $p<.01$ . Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 23 The relationships between GPA and harassment were examined through Pearson correlations: verbal harassment based on gender expression:  $r=-.21$ ; verbal harassment based on gender:  $r=-.20$ ; verbal harassment based on sexual orientation:  $r=-.30$ . All correlations were significant at  $p<.01$ . Mean GPAs by level of harassment are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 24 The relationships between educational aspirations and harassment were examined through Pearson correlations: verbal harassment based on gender expression:  $r=-.13$ ,  $p<.05$ ; verbal harassment based on gender:  $r=-.14$ ,  $p<.05$ ; verbal harassment based on sexual orientation:  $r=-.16$ ,  $p<.01$ . Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 25 To test differences across gender identity, a multiple analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted with GPA and educational aspirations as the dependent variables, gender identity as the independent variable, and sexual orientation as a covariate. The multivariate effect was significant: Pillai's Trace=.01,  $F(6, 12196)=9.89$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered significant at  $p<.01$  and marginally significant at  $p<.05$ .

## Engagement with the School Community

The degree to which students feel accepted by and a part of their school community is another important indicator of the quality of their school experience and is related to educational outcomes. To the extent that students feel comfortable in school and with their classmates and believe that school staff care about their well-being and academic success, they may then have greater academic motivation and higher academic achievement.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, being harassed or assaulted in school would likely make a student feel less welcome or part of the school community. In the *2007 National School Climate Survey*, we examined indicators of school engagement, such as: LGBT students' sense of belonging to their school community, their level of "outness" about their sexual orientation or gender identity, and their participation in discussions of LGBT-related issues in school. We found, in fact, that students experiencing more frequent victimization were less likely to feel like a part of their school community. Given that transgender students experienced higher levels of harassment and assault than non-transgender students in the survey sample, we believed it was important to specifically examine their sense of belonging to and engagement in their school community.

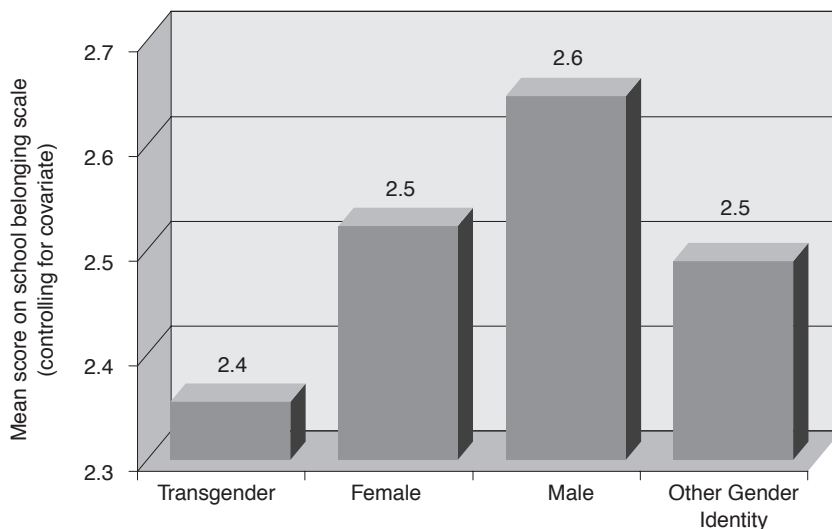
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### School Belonging

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In order to examine students' sense of belonging to their school community, students were given a series of statements about feeling like a part of their school and were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with the statements.<sup>27</sup> Given that transgender students experienced higher levels of victimization than other students in the *2007 National School Climate Survey* sample, we expected that they would be less likely to feel that they were a part of their school. And, in fact, as illustrated in Figure 17, transgender students had a lower sense of school belonging than non-transgender LGB students.<sup>28</sup>

**Figure 17. Sense of School Belonging by Gender Identity**



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## Outness

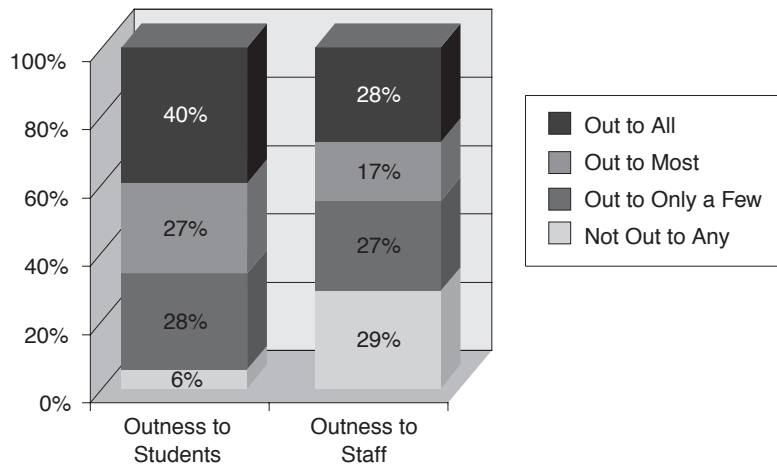
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Even when transgender students feel safe from physical harm in school, they may not be comfortable disclosing their gender identity and/or sexual orientation which may prevent them from participating in school activities as fully as their peers. Students were asked how “out” or open they were in school about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity to other students and to school staff. As shown in Figure 18, the majority (66%) of transgender students were out to most or all of their peers. In contrast, less than half of transgender students (45%) were out to most or all of the school staff (see also Figure 18). Transgender students were not different than non-transgender LGB students in their degree of outness to other students;<sup>29</sup> however, transgender students were more likely to be out to staff members than other students. As shown in Figure 19, three-quarters of transgender students were out to most or all of the school staff compared to about two-thirds of the other groups.<sup>30</sup> Students were also asked whether or not they were out to a parent or guardian. As illustrated in Figure 19, transgender students were more likely than female students and students with other gender identities to be out to be to a parent or guardian, but were not more likely than male students.<sup>31</sup>

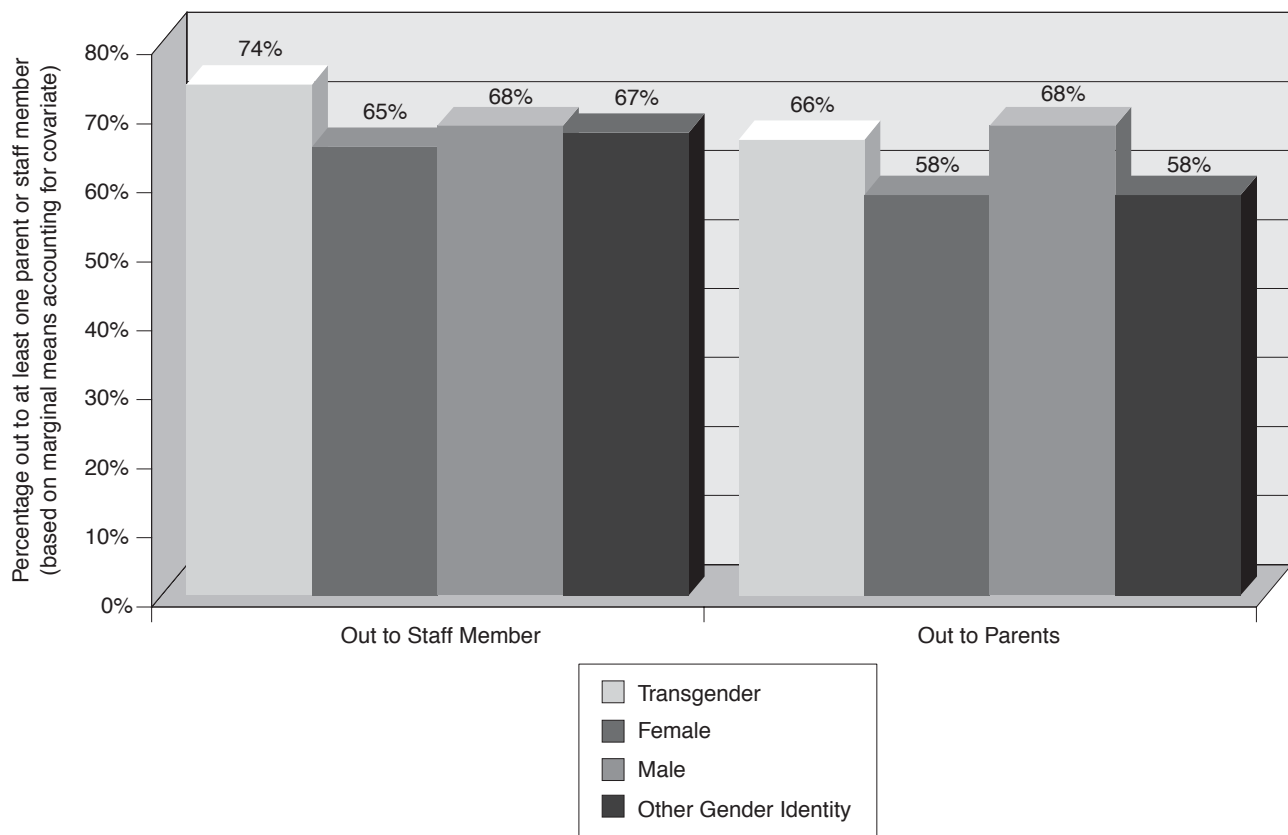
Some transgender students may feel that they cannot publicly acknowledge their sexual orientation or gender identity because it may single them out for harassment in school. As shown in Figure 20, the more out transgender students were to their peers at school, the higher their reported experiences of victimization related to their gender expression and sexual orientation.<sup>32</sup> However, those who were more out in school were also more likely to report experiences of victimization to school staff.<sup>33</sup> In the *2007 National School Climate Survey*, some students indicated that they did not report incidents to school staff because of concerns about confidentiality, specifically that they feared being “outed” by the staff person to other members of the school community. A transgender student who is already out to students or staff might be less concerned about being “outed” and thus, as we found, more likely to report incidents. For example, as illustrated in Figure 21, 18% of transgender students who were out to most or all of their school staff indicated that they reported incidents of harassment or assault to staff most of the time or always, compared to 10% of those who were either not out to staff or only out to a few staff.

Being out about one’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity may also have positive effects on transgender students’ educational experiences. For transgender students, being out, and thus able to participate more fully in one’s school community, was related to a greater sense of belonging in school.<sup>34</sup> For example, as shown in Figure 22, transgender students who were out to most or all other students reported a greater sense of belonging to their school community than those who were not out or only out to a few other students.

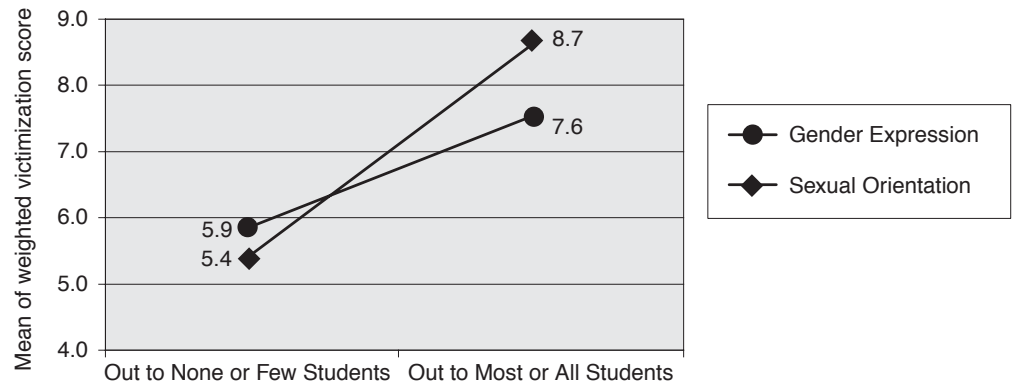
**Figure 18. Degree of Being Out to Other Students and School Staff**



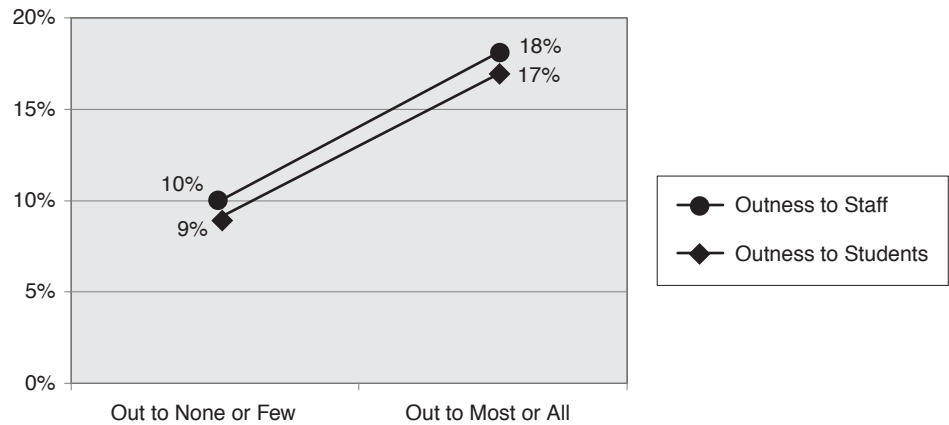
**Figure 19. Outness to School Staff and Parents by Gender Identity**



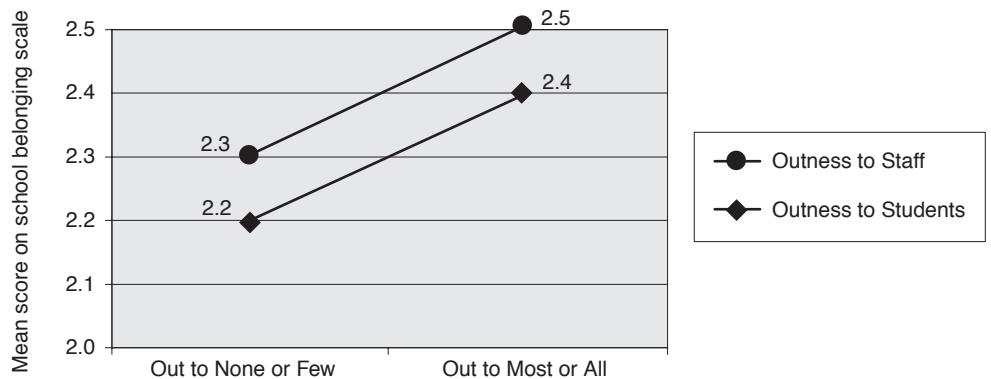
**Figure 20. Experiences of Victimization Based on Gender Expression and Sexual Orientation and Degree of Outness to Students at School**



**Figure 21: Reporting of Harassment and Assault to School Staff and Degree of Outness at School**  
(percentage reporting incidents to staff "most of the time" or "always")



**Figure 22: Sense of Belonging by Degree of Outness at School**





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### ***Talking About LGBT-Related Issues in School***

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Discussing LGBT issues in class may be another indicator of school engagement, as being able to talk about these issues in school may enhance a student's educational experience and make the student feel like a greater part of the school community. For example, students may want to raise issues related to LGBT people or events, such as discussions of the LGBT civil rights movement in a social studies class. Almost half (43%) of transgender students reported being uncomfortable raising LGBT issues in class (see Figure 23); nevertheless, three-fourths (76%) had actually raised these issues at least once in the past year (see Figure 24).

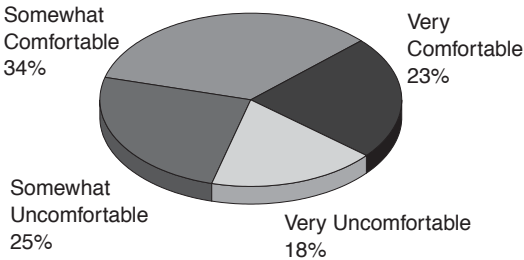
In addition to asking students about raising LGBT issues during class, we asked about their interactions with various school personnel about LGBT-related issues. Transgender students reported that they would be most comfortable talking one-on-one with teachers or school mental health professionals, such as counselors, social workers, or psychologists. As shown in Figure 25, about half of students reported that they would be somewhat or very comfortable talking with their teachers or a school counselor, social worker, or school psychologist, and over a third said that they would be comfortable talking with a school nurse or other medical professional. Fewer transgender students said they would feel comfortable talking one-on-one with a principal, vice/assistant principal, school librarian or other resource staff, or a coach about these issues.

Students were also asked how often they had actually spoken with various school personnel about LGBT-related issues in the past school year. By and large, the staff with whom they most often had discussed these issues were the same staff with whom they were most comfortable – teachers and school mental health professionals (counselors, social workers, psychologists). However, as shown in Figure 26, transgender students were more likely to have actually spoken with a teacher (66%) than a school mental health professional (51%) even though their comfort level with counselors/social workers/psychologists was somewhat higher. This finding is to be expected given that students typically spend more time interacting with teachers than school-based mental health professionals and thus students may have more opportunity to engage in conversations with teachers. Transgender students were much less likely to report having talked about LGBT issues with principals, vice/assistant principals, or other school personnel (see again Figure 26).

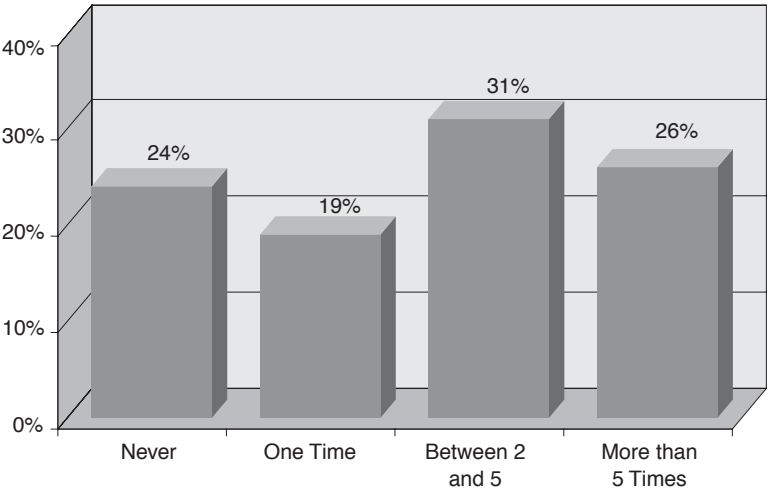
Being able to talk about LGBT issues in school may help transgender students feel more connected to their school community. We found that students who talked about these issues more often in school, both by raising them in class and talking to school staff, were more likely to feel like a part of their school.<sup>35</sup> For example, as shown in Figure 27, transgender students who rarely talked to their teachers about LGBT issues had lower scores on the school belonging scale (2.3) than those who regularly talked to their teachers (2.7).

Compared to non-transgender lesbian, gay, and bisexual students, transgender students were more likely to talk about LGBT issues in school, although they were not any more comfortable doing so.<sup>36</sup> Specifically, transgender students were more likely to report having actually raised LGBT issues in class<sup>37</sup> and having talked with school staff about these issues<sup>38</sup> (see Figures 28 and 29). For example, as illustrated in Figure 29, over half (52%) of transgender students had talked to a school counselor, social worker, or psychologist about LGBT issues in the past year, compared to a third (34%) of male students. Although we had thought that these differences may be related to the higher levels of victimization reported by transgender students – having higher levels of victimization perhaps increasing the likelihood of talking to school staff – these gender differences remained even after accounting for levels of victimization experienced.<sup>39</sup> Thus, it appears that transgender students may be talking more often to school staff about LGBT-related issues other than their experiences of victimization. Further research should examine the content of these LGBT-related communications, and research should explore why, even when they feel no more comfortable doing so, transgender students are more likely to discuss LGBT issues in school than LGB students who do not identify as transgender.

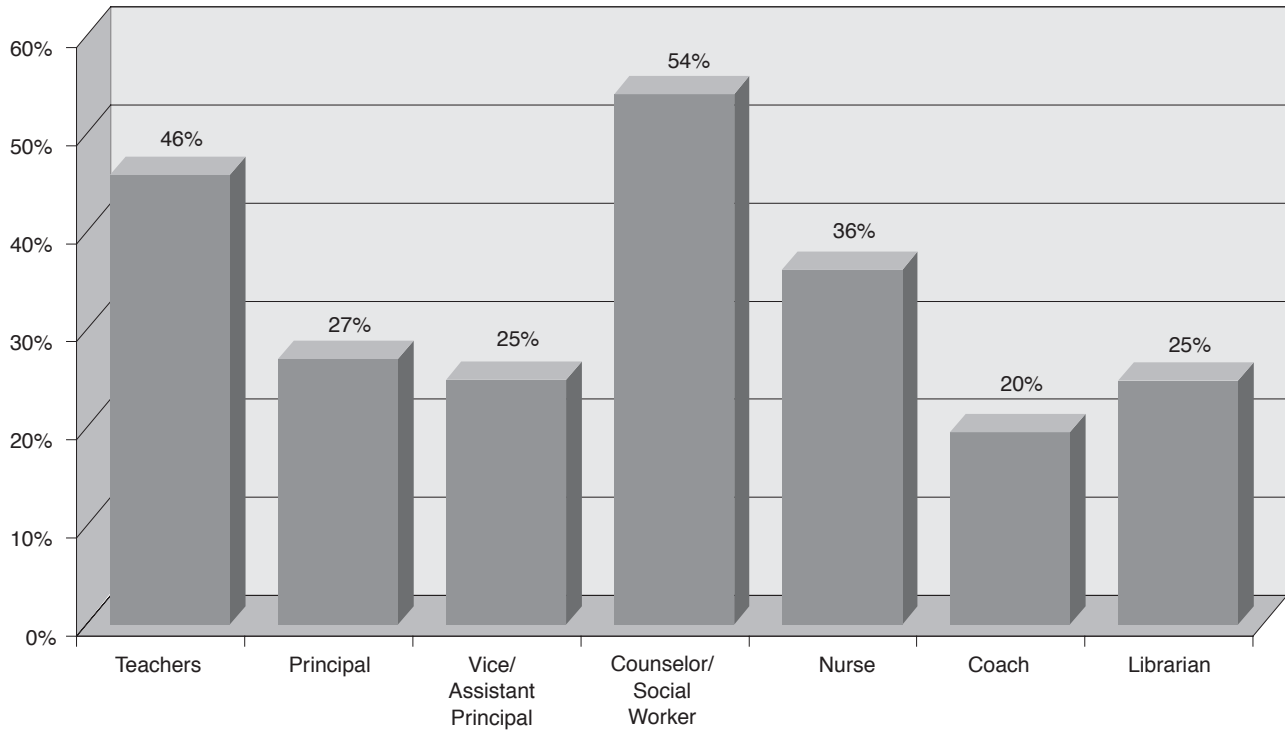
**Figure 23. Comfort Level Raising LGBT Issues in Class**



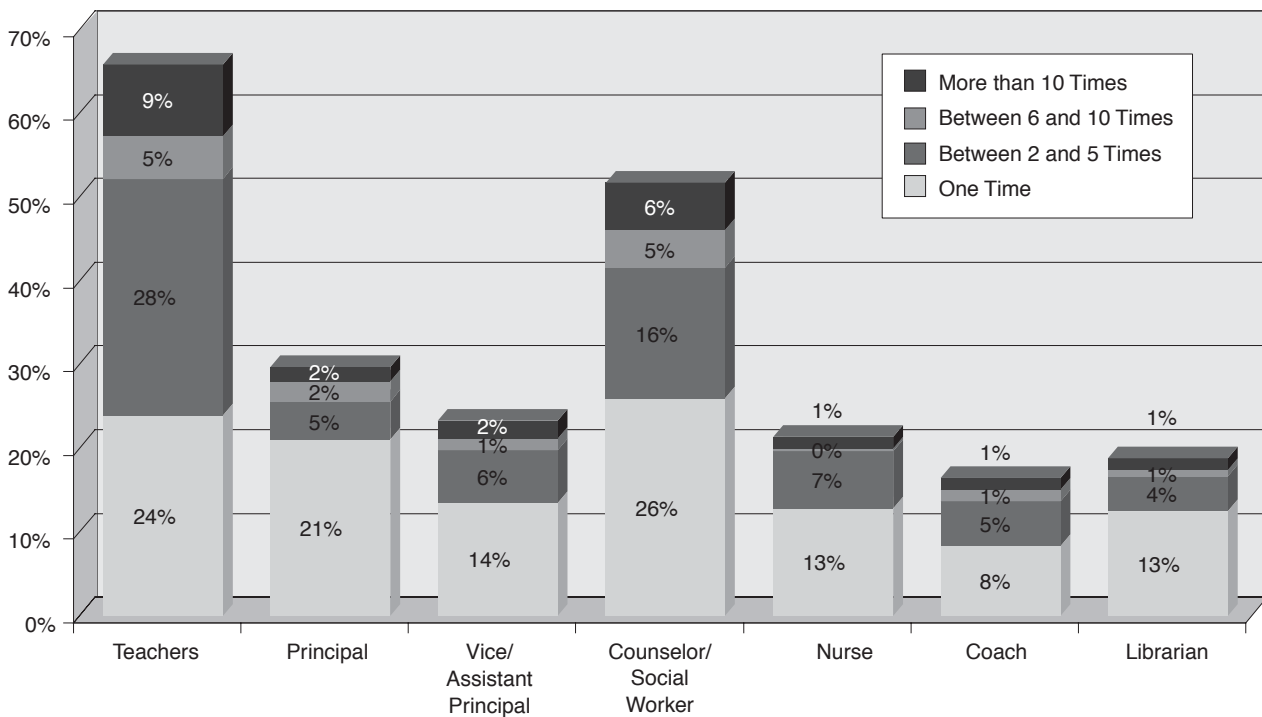
**Figure 24. Frequency of Students Raising LGBT Issues in Class**



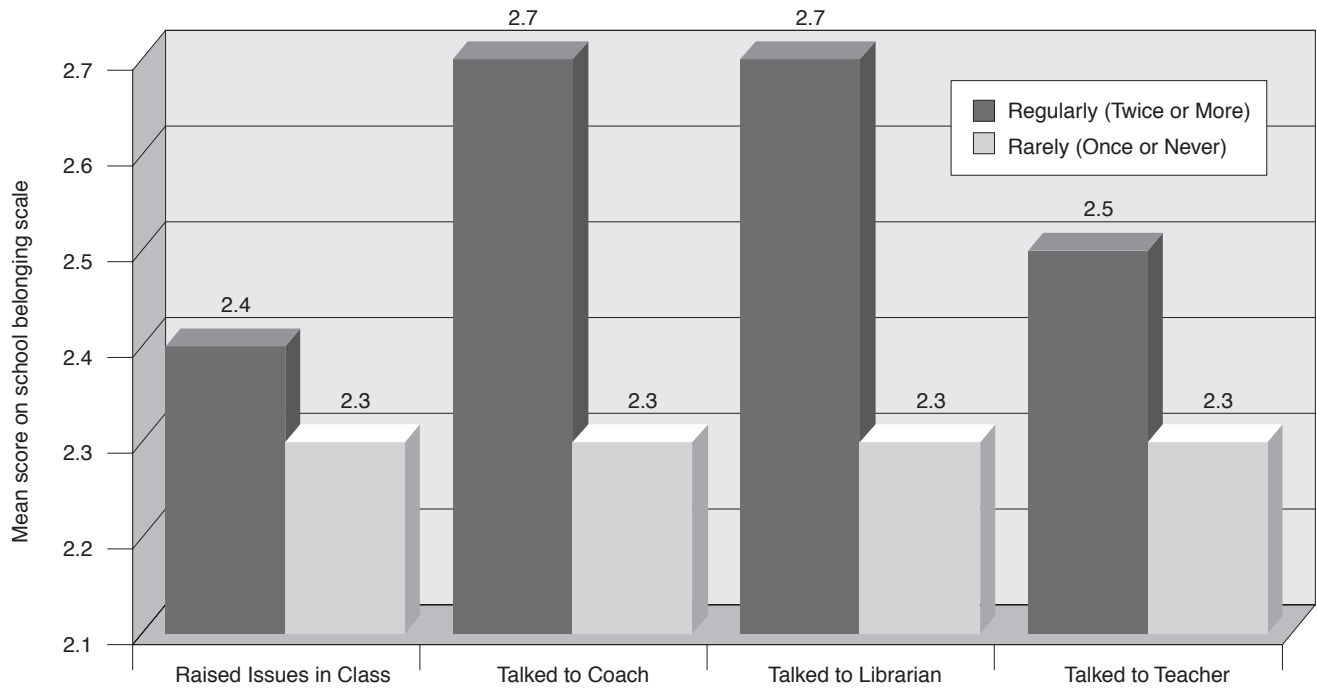
**Figure 25. Comfort Talking with School Staff about LGBT Issues**  
(percentage reporting they would be “somewhat comfortable” or “very comfortable”)



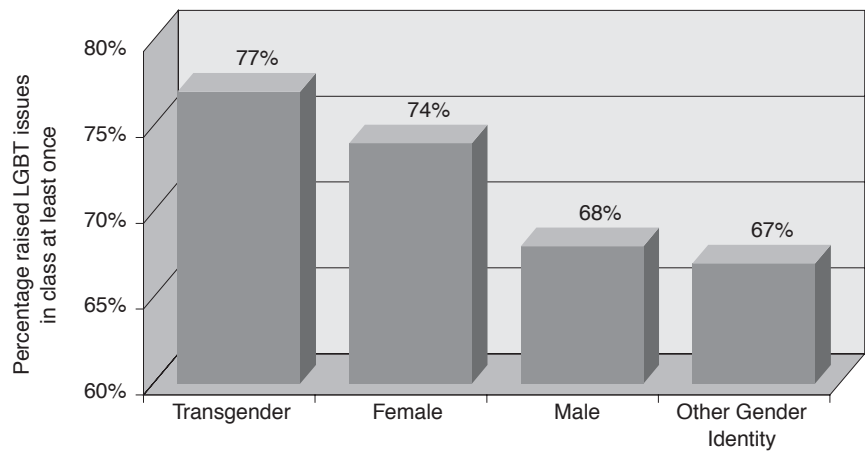
**Figure 26. Frequency of Students Speaking to School Staff about LGBT Issues**



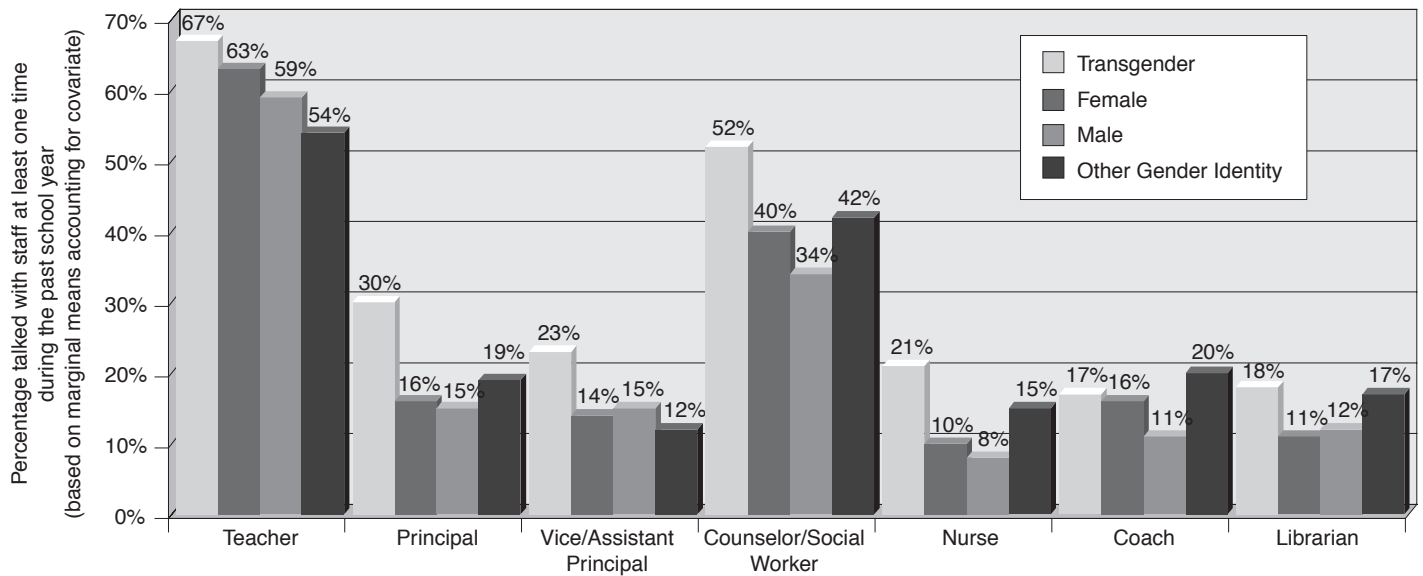
**Figure 27. Sense of Belonging and Talking about LGBT Issues in School**



**Figure 28. Raising LGBT Issues in Class by Gender Identity**



**Figure 29. Talking to School Staff about LGBT Issues by Gender**



## Notes

- 26 Goodenow, C. & Grady, K.E. (1993). The relationship of school belonging and friends' values to academic motivation among urban adolescent students. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 62(1), 60–71.
- Roeser, R.W., Midgley, C. & Urdan, T.C. (1996). Perceptions of the school psychological environment and early adolescents' psychological and behavioral functioning in school: The mediating role of goals and belonging. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 88, 408–422.
- 27 A measure for the psychological sense of school membership was developed for use with adolescents by Carol Goodenow: Goodenow, C. (1993). The psychological sense of school membership among adolescents: Scale development and educational correlates. *Psychology in the Schools*, 30(1), 79–90.
- 28 To test differences across gender identity, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted with feeling of school belonging as the dependent variable, gender identity as the independent variable, and sexual orientation as a covariate. The main effect of gender identity was significant:  $F(3, 6136)=27.64$ ,  $p<.001$ .
- 29 To test differences across gender identity, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted with outness to students as the dependent variable, gender identity as the independent variable, and sexual orientation as a covariate. The main effect of gender identity was not significant.
- 30 To test differences across gender identity, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted with outness to staff as the dependent variable, gender identity as the independent variable, and sexual orientation as a covariate. The main effect of gender identity was significant:  $F(3, 6149)=9.73$ ,  $p<.001$ . Transgender students were significantly higher on outness to staff than non-transgender LGB female students, and marginally higher than non-transgender GB male students and LGB students with other gender identities. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 31 To test differences across gender identity, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted with outness to parents as the dependent variable, gender identity as the independent variable, and sexual orientation as a covariate. The main effect of gender identity was significant:  $F(3, 6147)=4.31$ ,  $p<.01$ . Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 32 The relationships between being out to students and experiences of victimization were examined through Pearson correlations— victimization based on sexual orientation:  $r=.23$ ,  $p<.01$ ; victimization based on gender expression:  $r=.20$ ,  $p<.01$ . The correlation between being out and experiences of victimization based on gender was not significant. Category means are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 33 The relationships between reporting and being out were examined through Pearson correlations – out to other students:  $r=.18$ ,  $p<.01$ ; out to staff:  $r=.17$ ,  $p<.05$ . Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 34 The relationships between school belonging and being out were examined through Pearson correlations – out to other students:  $r=.19$ ,  $p<.01$ ; out to staff:  $r=.20$ ,  $p<.01$ . Category means are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 35 The relationships between raising LGBT issues in class and school belonging was examined through a Pearson correlation— $r=.13$ ,  $p<.01$ .
- The relationships between talking to school staff and school belonging were also examined through Pearson correlations. The correlations were significant for talking to teachers:  $r=.20$ ,  $p<.01$ ; coaches:  $r=.15$ ,  $p<.01$ ; and librarians/resource staff:  $r=.16$ ,  $p<.01$ .

- 36 To test differences in comfort level raising LGBT issues in class across gender identity, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted with comfort level raising LGBT issues in class as the dependent variable, gender identity as the independent variable, and sexual orientation as a covariate. The main effect of gender identity was significant:  $F(3, 6142)=4.92, p<.01$ , although post-hoc comparisons indicated that there were no differences between transgender students and other students.
- To test differences in comfort level talking school staff about LGBT-related issues across gender identity, a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted with comfort level talking to each school staff member as dependent variables, gender identity as the independent variable, and sexual orientation as a covariate. Multivariate results were significant: Pillai's Trace=.047,  $F(21, 17,781)=13.58, p<.001$ , although post-hoc comparisons indicated that there were no differences between transgender students and other students.
- 37 To test differences across gender identity, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted with number of times raising LGBT issues as the dependent variable, gender identity as the independent variable, and sexual orientation as a covariate. The main effect of gender identity was significant:  $F(3, 6134)=10.91, p=.001$ . Post-hoc comparisons revealed that transgender students were more likely ( $p<.01$ ) than non-transgender GB male students and LGB students with other gender identities to have raised LGBT issues in class, and marginally more likely ( $p<.05$ ) than LGB female students. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 38 To test differences across gender identity, a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted with talking to each school staff member (never talking staff member and talking to staff member at least once) as the dependent variables, gender identity as the independent variable, and sexual orientation as a covariate. Multivariate results were significant: Pillai's Trace=.026,  $F(21, 17460)=7.28, p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ . Transgender students were more likely to have talked with principals and vice/assistant principals than all other types of students. Transgender students were more likely than LGB female students and LGB students with other gender identities to have talked with teachers. Transgender students were more likely than male and female LGB students and marginally more likely ( $p<.05$ ) than LGB students with other gender identities to have talked with counselors/school social workers/school psychologists and with school nurses/other medical professionals. Transgender students were more likely than male and female LGB students to have talked with librarians/other resource staff. Transgender students were only marginally more likely ( $p<.05$ ) than male LGB students to have talked with coaches. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 39 To test differences across gender identity, controlling for levels of victimization, a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted with talking to each school staff member as the dependent variables, gender identity as the independent variable, and sexual orientation, victimization based on sexual orientation, victimization based on gender, and victimization based on gender expression as covariates. Multivariate results were significant: Pillai's Trace=.015,  $F(21, 16692)=3.39, p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ .

## **In-School Resources and Supports**

Another dimension of school climate for transgender students is the availability of positive resources about LGBT-related issues and of supportive teachers and other school personnel. Students were asked about the availability of in-school resources and supports: student clubs that address LGBT student issues (such as Gay-Straight Alliances); the inclusion of LGBT people, history, or events in class curricula; teachers and other school staff who are supportive of LGBT students; and school policies for addressing incidences of harassment or assault. In the *2007 National School Climate Survey*, we found that each of these resources can have a positive impact on overall school climate and the experiences of LGBT students. Given their potential to improve school climate, it is important to examine students' access to these in-school resources and supports. We did not expect that the availability of these school-based resources would be different for transgender students than for non-transgender LGB students; and, in fact, there were no significant differences in availability of resources. However, we believed it important to describe transgender students' access to resources and do so in the following section.

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### ***Supportive Student Clubs***

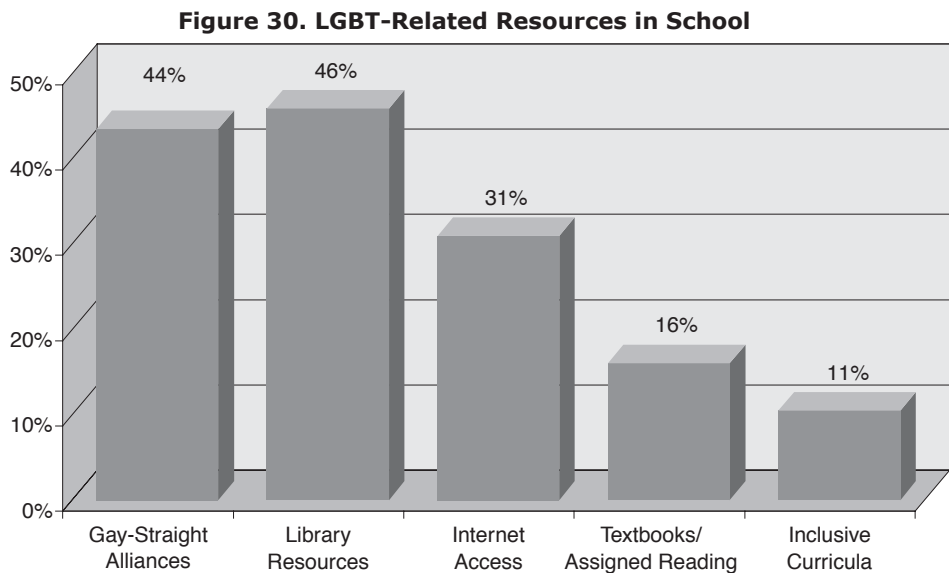
For many LGBT students and their allies, student clubs that address LGBT student issues (commonly called Gay-Straight Alliances or GSAs) may offer critical support. Slightly less than half (44%) of transgender students reported that they had a GSA in their school (see Figure 30). Among transgender students who had a GSA, over two-thirds (68%) said that they attended meetings often or frequently. Although transgender students were not more likely to report having a GSA in their school, they did attend GSA meetings more often than lesbian, gay, and bisexual students in our survey who were not transgender.<sup>40</sup> For example, over two-thirds (69%) of transgender students reported attending GSA meetings frequently or often compared to less than half (47%) of male students (see Figure 31). Transgender students, however, were not more generally involved in extracurricular activities, as there was no difference in level of participation with other school activities, such as student government or drama club, between transgender students and non-transgender students.<sup>41</sup>

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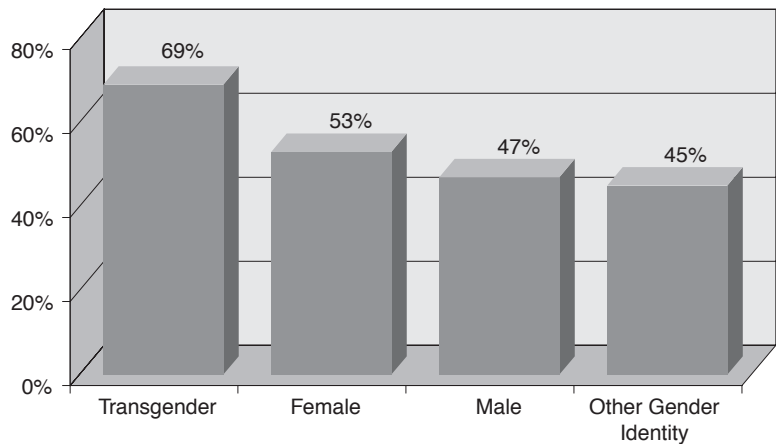
### ***Curricula Resources***

Most transgender students did not have access to LGBT-related curricular resources in school. As shown in Figure 30, less than half (46%) reported that they could find information about LGBT people, history, or events in their school library and only a third (31%) were able to access this information using the school Internet. Additionally, less than a fifth of transgender students (16%) reported that LGBT-related topics were included in their textbooks or other assigned

readings, and only a tenth (11%) were exposed to an inclusive curriculum that included positive representations of LGBT people, history, or events in their classes (see also Figure 30).



**Figure 31. Frequency of Attending Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) Meetings by Gender Identity**  
(percentage who attended GSA meetings “frequently” or “often”)





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### ***Supportive School Personnel***

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Supportive teachers, principals, and other school staff serve as another important resource for transgender students. Having the support of caring adults in school may have a positive impact on the school experiences for students, particularly for those who feel marginalized or experience harassment. Eight out of ten transgender students (83%) could identify at least one school staff member whom they believed was supportive of LGBT students at their school, yet only slightly more than a third (36%) could identify six or more supportive school staff (see Figure 32).

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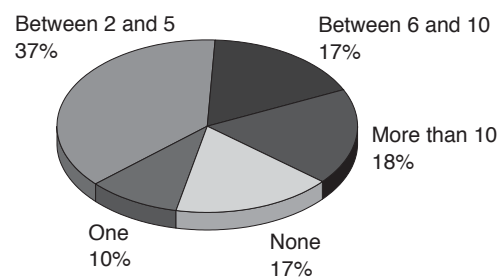
### ***School Policies for Addressing Harassment and Assault***

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School policies that address in-school harassment and assault are imperative for creating school environments where students feel safe. Comprehensive policies enumerate categories that explicitly state protection based on personal characteristics, such as sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. When a school has and enforces a comprehensive policy, one that also includes procedures for reporting incidents to school authorities, 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.

In the *2007 National School Climate Survey*, we found that having a comprehensive school policy was related to a more positive school climate for LGBT students in general. Policies that include gender identity and gender expression among enumerated categories may be particularly important for transgender students because they provide students with greater protection by making clear the various forms of harassment and assault that will not be tolerated and providing guidelines for reporting such events. 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. As shown in Table 4, nearly half (46%) of transgender students reported that their school did not have a policy or did not know if their school had a policy. Among those who said their school had a policy, more reported that their school had a “generic” policy, one that does not include enumerated categories or specify the various types of harassment that are unacceptable. Few said that their school had a comprehensive policy that included sexual orientation and/or gender identity or expression (see also Table 4). Only about a tenth (12%) of transgender students reported that their school had a policy that specifically mentioned gender identity or gender expression.

**Figure 32. Number of School Staff Supportive of LGBT Students**



**Table 4. Students' Reports Regarding School Policies for Reporting Harassment and Assault**

No Policy <sup>a</sup>	46%
Any Policy	54%
Generic Policy <sup>b</sup>	31%
Comprehensive Policy	24%
Sexual Orientation Only	11%
Gender Identity/Expression Only	3%
Both Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity/Expression	9%

<sup>a</sup> Includes students who indicated that they did not know if there was a policy or not.

<sup>b</sup> Includes students who indicated that they did not know if the policy included specific enumeration.

## Notes

40 To test differences across gender identity, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted with frequency of GSA attendance as the dependent variable, gender identity as the independent variable, and sexual orientation as a covariate. The main effect of gender identity was significant:  $F(3, 2236)=9.83$ ,  $p<.001$ . Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.

41 To test differences across gender identity, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted with level of school activity participation as the dependent variable, gender identity as the independent variable, and sexual orientation as a covariate. The main effect of gender identity was not significant.



## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Limitations**

The findings presented in this report provide valuable information about the school experiences of transgender students and may add to our understanding of the educational experiences of these youth. However, as with all research, there are some limitations to our study. It is important to note that the sample for this report is representative only of students who identified as transgender and had some connection to LGBT communities (either through their local youth organization or through the Internet) or had a MySpace page. However, because MySpace did not offer its users the opportunity to identify their gender as anything other than male or female, our outreach to transgender students through MySpace was limited to transgender students who identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

### **Discussion**

Findings presented in this report highlight the experiences of transgender youth in U.S. schools. Similar to their non-transgender lesbian, gay, and bisexual peers, most transgender youth attended schools with hostile school climates. Many transgender students reported frequently hearing homophobic and sexist language, and negative remarks about gender expression from other students. They 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 transgender students were made to

feel unsafe in school because of their personal characteristics, most notably their gender expression and sexual orientation. The majority of students were verbally harassed in school in the past year because of their gender expression, sexual orientation, and gender. Many also experienced physical violence in school for these reasons. This hostile school climate had very negative repercussions on transgender students' ability to succeed in school – a high incidence of harassment was related to increased absenteeism, decreased educational aspirations, and lower academic performance. In addition to experiencing high levels of in-school victimization, many transgender students lacked the institutional supports that may ameliorate the negative effects of victimization. Transgender students who were victimized in school were unlikely to regularly report the events to school authorities, the very people who are tasked with ensuring that all students have a safe learning environment. Unfortunately, among those who did report incidents to school personnel, few students believed that staff addressed the situation effectively. Furthermore, although most transgender students could identify at least one supportive educator, the majority lacked access to other supportive resources, such as, GSAs, inclusive curricula, and comprehensive anti-harassment policies.

Findings from this report indicate that the school experiences of transgender students are similar to, yet also distinct in some ways, from their non-transgender lesbian, gay, and bisexual peers. Although LGBT students in general experience high levels of victimization, transgender students consistently reported the highest levels of victimization and were less likely than non-transgender students to feel like a part of their school community. Prior National School Climate Surveys<sup>42</sup> have found similar differences, with transgender students experiencing a more hostile school environment than non-transgender students. Whereas lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are often viewed as not conforming to traditional gender norms, transgender people may pose a challenge not only to gender roles, but also to the traditional understanding of gender itself; by challenging the convention that one's gender identity naturally follows their gender assigned at birth. Thus, transgender people may be more vulnerable to stigmatization, harassment, and discrimination that results from the strict enforcement of the traditional system of gender. In fact, prior research indicates that the more individuals deviate from traditional societal norms related to gender, the more likely they are to experience victimization and isolation.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to experiencing a more hostile school climate, this report demonstrates that transgender students were also more likely to be engaged with LGBT-related issues in their schools, as evidenced by more frequent attendance at GSA meetings, more frequent interaction with school personnel about LGBT issues, and greater frequency of raising LGBT issues in class. It is possible that transgender students are more engaged in LGBT-related issues and talk more with school staff because they face higher levels of in-school victimization; yet,

even when accounting for levels of victimization, there were still differences between transgender and non-transgender students. Thus, it may be that beyond explicit victimization, transgender students face other unique challenges in school that result in an increased interaction with educators and other students about LGBT issues. Perhaps transgender students are put in the position of having to educate school personnel and advocate for their rights in ways that non-transgender LGB students are not – for example, having to explain to others what being transgender means. School personnel and secondary students are most likely familiar with the idea of being gay, lesbian, or bisexual, and given that there are more gay, lesbian, and bisexual people than transgender people, they may have limited exposure to the concept of being transgender or to transgender individuals. In fact, past research found that both students and educators were more than twice as likely to know a gay, lesbian, or bisexual student than a transgender student.<sup>44</sup> In addition to educating members of the school community about being transgender, these students may also have to advocate for themselves with school authorities, particularly around issues related to accessing gender-segregated facilities (e.g., bathrooms and locker rooms) or being addressed by their preferred names and pronouns. An increased need to explain their situation and advocate for themselves may also account for why we found that transgender students were more likely to be out to school staff than non-transgender LGB students. Yet, although transgender students were more likely than their non-transgender peers to talk about LGBT issues in school, they were not any more comfortable doing so. Thus, perhaps transgender students engage in an inadvertent activism of sorts, in that given the nature of the challenges they face in school, they may have to advocate for their rights in ways that non-transgender students do not.

In addition to facing hostile school climates, both transgender and non-transgender lesbian, gay, and bisexual students shared other similar school experiences. All were unlikely to report incidents of harassment and assault to school staff, and those that did were unlikely to find the response of school staff to be effective. Transgender students' access to resources and supports also did not differ from their non-transgender peers, as LGBT students, regardless of their transgender status, lacked access to many school-based resources and supports.

## **Future Directions for Research**

This report adds to available information about LGBT youth by examining the specific experiences of a national sample of transgender students. With 295 participants, this study had one of the largest samples of transgender youth. Yet, research with larger samples of transgender youth is necessary to further our understanding of their experiences and enable examination of specific subgroups within the larger population of transgender youth. Future research should examine

the school experiences within various subgroups of transgender youth (e.g., Latino/a transgender youth, lesbian transgender youth, transgender youth in rural communities) and explore differences in experiences based on various demographic characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, age, sexual orientation). Furthermore, although we found no differences in transgender students' experiences based on the way they specifically identified their gender (e.g., male-to-female transgender, female-to-male transgender, transgender), the relatively small sample of youth in each category may have limited our ability to detect any differences in their experiences. Given that transgender people identify in a variety of ways, future research should examine potential differences in their experiences based on how they identify. Quantitative research with a large enough sample size to detect potential differences is needed, as well as qualitative research that explores transgender youth's experiences more in depth.

The current report has also raised a number of additional questions for future research. The findings from this report indicate that, compared to lesbian, gay, and bisexual students who do not identify as transgender, transgender students are more likely to be involved in LGBT-related issues, through their involvement in GSAs, interactions with school staff, and participation in classroom discussions. Research that explores both the content of and possible explanations for transgender students' greater involvement in LGBT issues at school would be an important contribution to our understanding of LGBT students' school experiences.

Further research is also needed on school structures, policies, and practices related to issues of gender expression and gender identity. For example, as existing research indicates that gender identity and expression are less likely than sexual orientation to be addressed in anti-harassment policies<sup>45</sup> and trainings for educators,<sup>46</sup> it is likely that other LGBT-inclusive resources (e.g., curricula, library resources) are more apt to include information about lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, history, and events than information about transgender people or issues. Findings from this report indicate that many transgender students do not have access to LGBT-related in-school resources at all, but further research should examine the extent to which these resources specifically address transgender people, history, and events. In addition to specifically LGBT-related resources, research should examine other school policies and practices, as school facilities are often segregated by gender with no alternatives provided for students for whom this creates difficulties. Research on the existence of traditionally gender segregated spaces (e.g., bathrooms and locker rooms) and school policies (e.g., dress codes and athletic teams) would provide a more complete picture of the ways in which school environments may accommodate or disenfranchise students who do not conform to traditional gender norms.



## Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The findings detailed in this report make it clear that there is an urgent need for action to create a safer school climate for transgender students. Educators, policymakers, and safe school advocates must continue to seek to understand the specific experiences of transgender students, and implement measures to ensure that schools are safe and inclusive environments for transgender youth.

Findings from the *2007 National School Climate Survey* highlight the important role that institutional supports can play in making schools safer for 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, lower frequencies of harassment and assault, lower absenteeism due to safety concerns, lower academic achievement, higher frequencies of reporting incidents of harassment and assault to school authorities, and more effective responses to incidents by school staff. Unfortunately, we found that the majority of transgender students did not have access to most of these resources. On a positive note, the vast majority of transgender students 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, student clubs, curricular resources, and comprehensive anti-harassment policies on the school experiences of LGBT students, it is imperative that schools work to provide these resources to students.

Along with providing access to LGBT-related resources, it is important for educators, advocates, and policymakers to recognize how the needs of transgender youth may both be similar to and different from the needs of their non-transgender peers. It appears that educators are aware that transgender students may face particularly hostile climates – in two national studies, teachers and school principals recognized that transgender students would feel less safe at school than LGB students.<sup>47</sup> Yet, in order for LGBT-related resources to truly be inclusive and effective for transgender students, they must explicitly address issues and experiences specific to transgender students. However, prior research indicates that the needs of transgender students are often ignored and that issues involving gender identity or gender expression are rarely included in school policies or practices. School personnel need professional development to improve rates of intervention and increase the number of supportive school staff available to transgender students. However, a national survey of public school principals indicates that educators were rarely exposed to information about transgender students or victimization based on gender identity or expression.<sup>48</sup> Although educators were unlikely to receive this information, few principals believed that transgender issues were among the areas where their staff needed the most support and

training. Thus, it may be necessary for advocates to engage in efforts to make school administrators aware of the importance of training for educators on these issues. School staff can also help to create a safe and welcoming environment for all students by proactively educating their students. In an effort to prevent the all too pervasive negative remarks about gender expression, homophobic remarks, and harassment of transgender students, students should be taught that this type of behavior is not acceptable. Yet, based on research from a national survey of principals, most anti-bullying/harassment programs for students did not include information on bullying or harassment based on students' gender identity or gender expression.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to educating staff and students, 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. Yet, similar to findings from past research,<sup>50</sup> this report indicates that most schools do not have such policies. In addition, LGBT students overall reported that their schools' policies were more likely to specifically enumerate sexual orientation than gender identity or gender expression. Furthermore, many students were not aware whether their school had a policy or not. Thus, in addition to the inclusion of specific protections based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, schools must take measures to ensure that all members of the school community are aware of the policies that are currently in place.

Although implementing strategies to decrease bullying and harassment for all students is crucial, schools must also go beyond addressing these critical issues and consider how policies and practices related to traditional notions of gender may contribute to a hostile school climate. For example, the gender segregation of school facilities, such as bathrooms, locker rooms, and physical education classes, gender-specific dress codes, and classroom procedures that sort students into groups by gender may all pose challenges for transgender students. Practices and policies that are sensitive to the experiences of transgender students would not only serve to improve their school experiences, but can send an important message to all members of a school community that individuals will not be limited nor defined merely by their gender.

Taken together, these recommended measures can move us towards a future in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.



## Notes

42 Kosciw and Diaz (2006). See Note 2 for full citation.

Kosciw, J. G. (2004). *The 2003 National School Climate Survey: The School-Related Experiences of our Nation's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth*. New York: GLSEN.

43 Daley et al. (2008). Daley, A., Solomon, S., Newman, P. A., & Mishna, F. (2008). Traversing the margins: Intersectionalities in the bullying of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 19(3), 9–29.

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Young, R. & Sweeting, H. (2004). Adolescent bullying, relationships, psychological well-being, and gender-atypical behavior: A gender diagnosticity approach. *Sex Roles*, 50(7/8), 525–537.

44 Harris Interactive & GLSEN (2005). *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America, A Survey of Students and Teachers*. New York: GLSEN.

45 Kosciw, et al. (2008). See Note 6 for full citation.

GLSEN & Harris Interactive. (2008). *The Principal's Perspective: School Safety, Bullying and Harassment, A Survey of Public School Principals*. New York: GLSEN.

Harris Interactive & GLSEN. (2005). See Note 44 for full citation.

46 GLSEN & Harris Interactive. (2008). See Note 45 for full citation.

47 In a national survey of secondary teachers (Harris Interactive & GLSEN, 2005), a smaller percentage of teachers believed that a transgender adolescent would feel “somewhat” or “very” safe at school than would a gay, lesbian, or bisexual adolescent (57% vs. 73%). Similarly, a national survey of public school principals (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2008) found that fewer secondary school principals believed a transgender student would feel “somewhat” or “very” safe at school, compared to those who believed a gay, lesbian, or bisexual student would feel that safe (76% vs. 89%).

48 GLSEN & Harris Interactive. (2008). See Note 45 for full citation.

49 GLSEN & Harris Interactive. (2008). See Note 45 for full citation.

50 GLSEN & Harris Interactive. (2008). See Note 45 for full citation.

Harris Interactive & GLSEN (2005). See Note 44 for full citation.

Kosciw & Diaz (2006). See Note 2 for full citation.





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