

Highlights from the American Association of University Women's

Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing, and Sexual Harassment in School

(www.aauw.org/2000/hostile.html)

The report describes the findings of a nationally representative survey of 2,064 eighth- through 11th-graders regarding sexual harassment in public schools. It also compares the findings with AAUW's original 1993 survey.

The Safe Schools Coalition of Washington was particularly interested to find out what the study found out regarding anti-gay harassment.

HOW COMMON IS ANTI-GAY SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

- Overall, 61% of students said they knew someone who had been called gay or lesbian.
- That's the biggest increase of any form of harassment students knew about, up from 51% in 1993. Most other experiences have remained steady or decreased.
- When asked about their *own* experiences, 36% say they have "ever" been called lesbian or gay.
- That's the biggest jump among all the types of harassment students experienced, up from 17% in 1993.
- 19% of boys said they had been called gay "occasionally" or "often," double the rate in 1993 (9%).
- 13% of girls said they had been called lesbian "occasionally" or "often," almost triple the rate in 1993 (5%).

WHAT'S MOST UPSETTING ... FOR GIRLS?

- The most upsetting form of sexual harassment among girls was being forced to do something sexual other than kissing. 92% said they would be "very upset" by this.
- That was followed by:
 - having their clothing pulled off or down -- 91% would be very upset,
 - having sexual rumors spread about them -- 88%,
 - being spied on as they showered or dressed at school -- 85%,
 - being forced to kiss someone -- 79%,
 - being the target of sexual graffiti on bathroom walls or in locker rooms -- 74%,
 - being called gay or lesbian -- 73%,
- Seven other forms of harassment were described by fewer than 70% of girls as very upsetting.

WHAT'S MOST UPSETTING ... FOR BOYS?

- Among boys, being called gay was by far the most upsetting form of sexual harassment. 74% said they would be "very upset" if this happened to them.
- That was followed by:
 - having sexual rumors spread about them -- 63% would be very upset,
 - having their clothing pulled off or down -- 59%,
 - being spied on as they dressed or showered at school -- 55%,
 - being forced to do something sexual other than kissing -- 54%,
 - being the target of sexual graffiti on bathroom walls or in locker rooms -- 53%,
- Eight other forms of harassment were described by fewer than 50% of boys as very upsetting.

HOW YOUNG DOES SEXUAL HARASSMENT START?

- It starts young. About one-third (35%) of those who experience sexual harassment say they first experienced it in elementary school.

WHO IS AT RISK OF ANTI-GAY SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

- 61% of urban students said they knew someone who had been called gay or lesbian.
- 61% of suburban/rural students said they knew someone who had been called gay or lesbian.
- White boys are more likely than African-American boys to report having been called gay (45% vs. 30%).
- White girls were more likely than African-American girls to report having been called lesbian (32% vs. 20%).

WHO ENGAGES IN ANTI-GAY SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

- 38% of boys and 29% of girls report having ever called someone gay or lesbian.
- White boys are more likely than Hispanic or African-American boys to have called someone gay or lesbian (40% of White boys vs. 33% of Hispanic boys and 29% of African-American boys). *[So much for the myth that homophobia is worse in communities of color.]*

DO STUDENTS SEEK HELP WITH SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

- Only 40% of students said they would be likely to complain to a school adult if they were sexually harassed by another student.
- In contrast, 71% said they would complain to a school adult if they were sexually harassed by a school employee.
- Their peers need skills, because students are far more likely to tell a friend than anyone. 61% say they would tell a friend, 24% a relative, 11% a teacher, 9% another school employee. One in five (20%) tell no one.

WAS THERE ANY GOOD NEWS?

- More students report now than in 1993 that they know for sure their schools have sexual harassment policies (69% in 2001 vs. 26% in 1993).
- And more report that they know for sure their school distributes materials *about* sexual harassment (36% in 2001 vs. 13% in 1993).
- Students today are less likely than those in 1993 to say they would be very upset by many of these experiences. The largest differences relate to feelings about being called gay or lesbian – 73 % would feel upset today vs. 86% in 1993 – and being touched, grabbed or pinched in a sexual way – 48% vs. 56%. *[One can only speculate why the biggest drop involved fear of being called gay or lesbian. Perhaps this reflects a real decrease in homophobia. Perhaps there is some other explanation.]*