



# The Safe Schools Coalition

Understanding &  
Addressing Anti-Gay  
Harassment and Violence  
in Schools

## What is the **Mission** of the Safe Schools Coalition?





We work to help schools - at home and all over the world - become safe places where every family can belong, where every educator can teach, and where every child can learn, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation.

# Who Belongs to the Coalition?

## Diverse organizations, for example:

- ☞ American Friends Service Committee
- ☞ Bainbridge Island School District's Multicultural Advisory Council
  - ☞ Benton/Franklin Council for Children
    - ☞ Committee for Children
- ☞ Gay Lesbian PTSA of Greater Puget Sound
- ☞ League of Women Voters of Washington
  - ☞ Mountain View High School GSA
- ☞ Multi-Faith Alliance of Reconciling Communities
  - ☞ NW Coalition for Human Dignity
- ☞ Open Door Ministries/LC - Evangelical Lutheran Churches of America
- ☞ Parents, Family & Friends of Lesbians & Gays
- ☞ School Nurse Organization of Washington
- ☞ Seattle-King Co. Dept. of Public Health
  - ☞ Seattle Office for Civil Rights
- ☞ Snohomish County Human Services Dept.
  - ☞ Stonewall Youth
- ☞ Washington Education Association
- ☞ WA State Superintendent of Public Instruction

# What was the Safe Schools Project?

-  one activity of the Coalition.
-  a state-wide 5-year (1994-1998) qualitative study.
-  an examination of anti-gay harassment & violence in schools, Kindergarten through 12th grade.
-  an exploration of the perspectives of children, teens, parents/guardians, and educators.

# How were the Data Collected?

Initially, **12 face-to-face reports** at one focus group and several support groups, while the instrument was being developed and tested

Then, **105 telephone interviews** conducted by trained counselors ... solicited via mass media, posters, and workshops

# We studied the perspectives of:

## Students

- 58 targeted children and teens
- 9 youth witnesses
- 5 friends of targeted youth

## Professionals

- 7 targeted educators
- 9 educator witnesses
- 16 professionals who learned about an incident after the fact

## Parents

- 3 parent witnesses
- 10 parents who learned about an incident after the fact

# We studied incidents from:

 **73 schools**

 **37 public school districts**

 **13 counties**



# All the incidents we studied:

☰ were based on bias against **gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender** people

☰ happened **since 1990**

☰ involved Washington State **elementary, middle or high schools** (public or private)

☰ occurred, at least in part ...

- on **school property**
- on the way to or from school
- at a **school-sponsored event**



## How was the Project funded?

Our primary grant and in-kind funding  
(in excess of \$1,000:) came from:

**Seattle Counseling Service for Sexual  
Minorities**

Seattle-King Co. Dept. of Public Health

**Northwest Coalition Against Malicious  
Harassment (now called the NW Coalition  
for Human Dignity)**

Pride Foundation

**National Education Association**

The City of Seattle and Providence Medical  
Center

**The King County Commission for Children,  
Youth and Families**


Snohomish County Human Services Dept.


**NW Center for Equity and Diversity at  
Edmonds Community College**


DSHS and the U.S. Department of Justice

**Washington Education Association**

# We studied one hundred eleven incidents:

 **26 one-time, climate-setting incidents**

 **38 cases of on-going verbal and other harassment**


 **17 cases of physical harassment and/or sexual assault, short of rape**

 **22 physical assaults**

 **8 gang rapes**

# what we learned re: WHEN & WHERE it happens ...

 **Every month** of the school year with peaks in **Oct. & Jan.**

 **All over school**, but especially in **class-rooms, halls and the locker room** or in or near the gym

 **Throughout the school day**, with most rapes between **3 & 3:30** p.m.

what we learned re:  
WHO is targeted ...

Everyone is vulnerable,  
regardless of:



age



gender



race



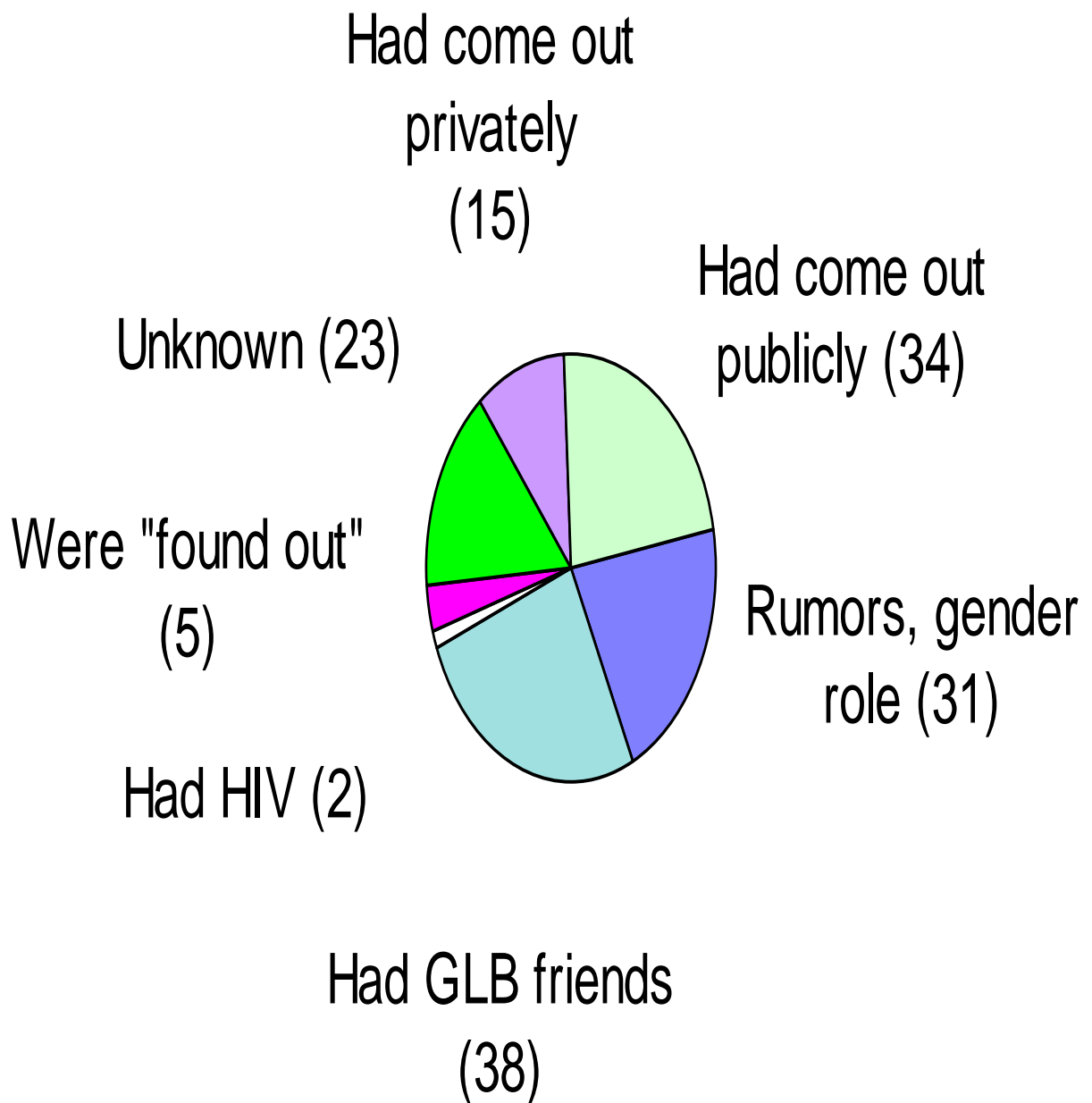
where they live



and even their

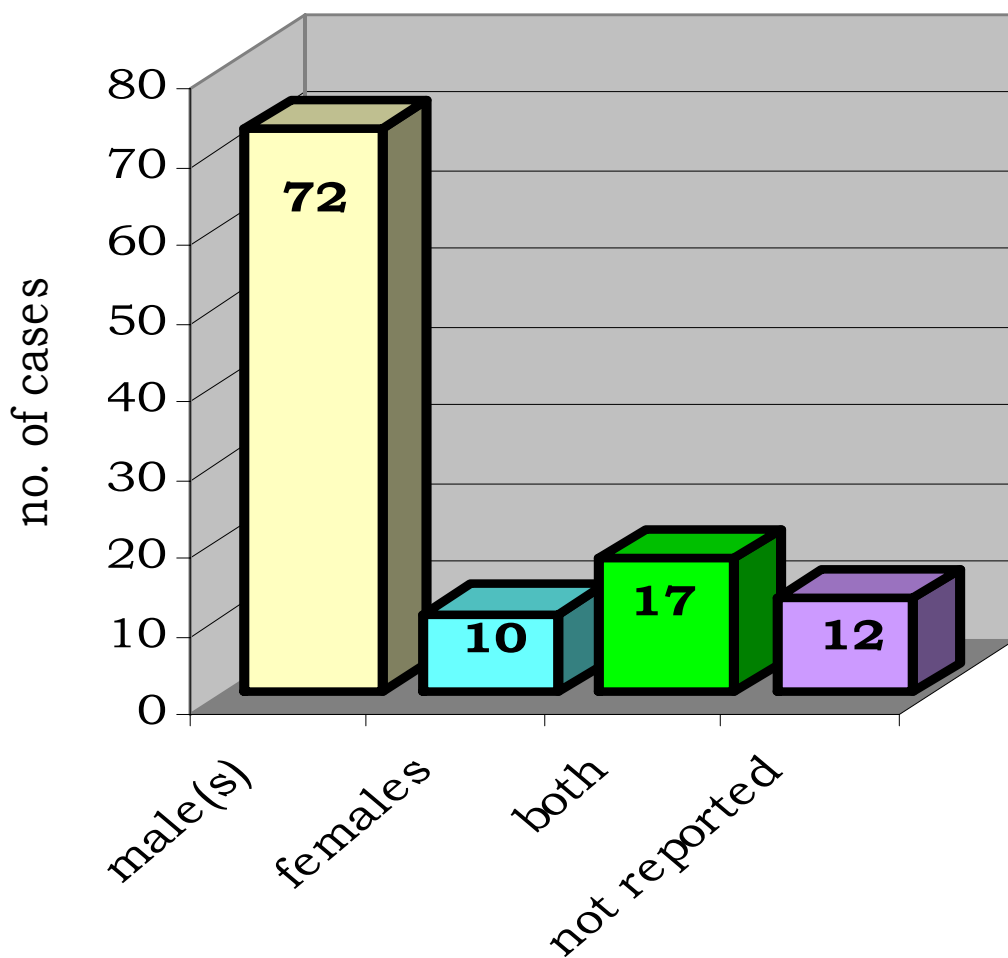
orientation

# What seemed to make the offenders think these 148 people were gay?

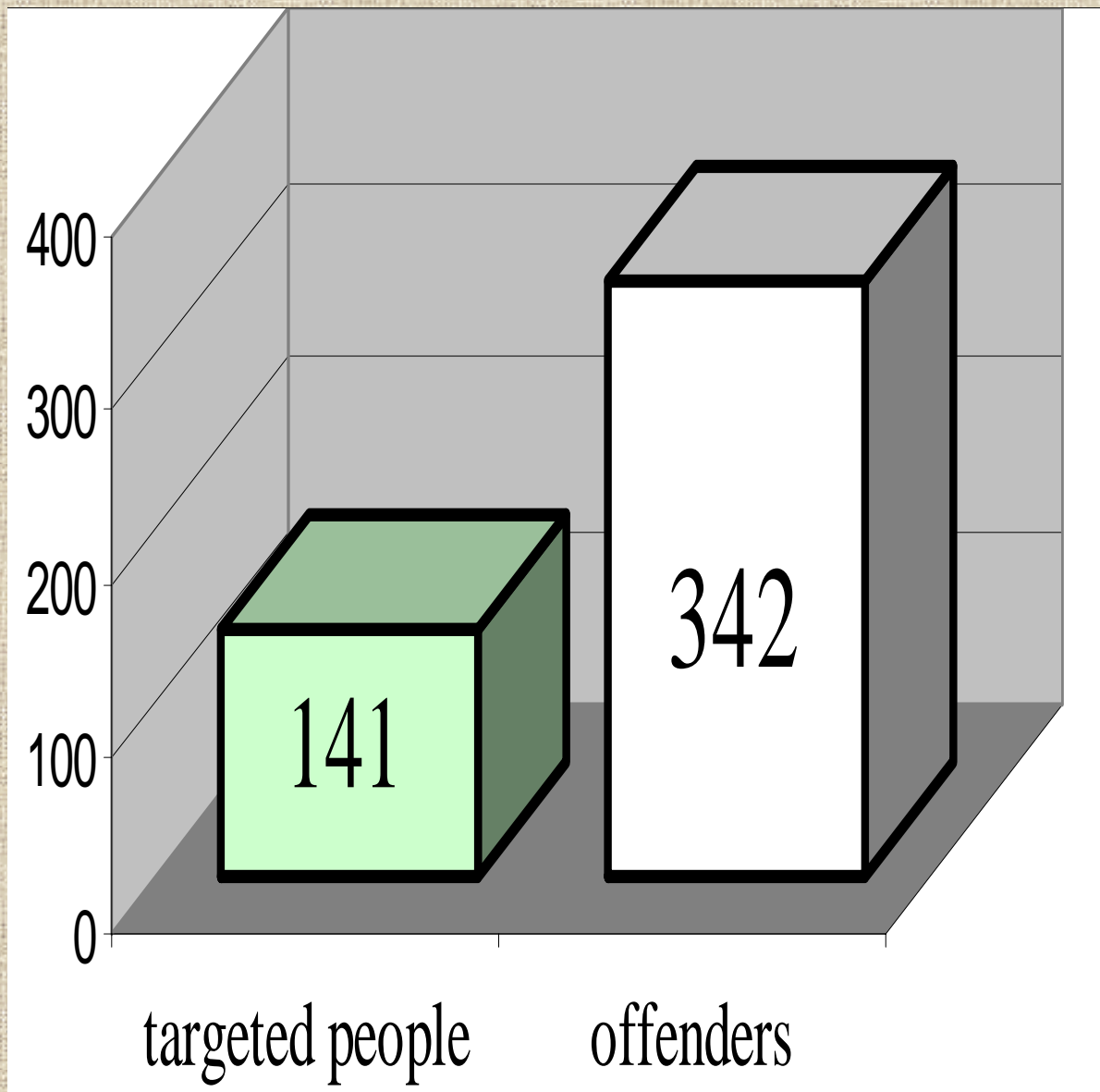


# what we learned re: WHO offends ...

- They were of **all ages**.
- They were of **various races**.
- More were **male** than female:



Offenders outnumbered the people they targeted by about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  against 1.



what we learned re: the  
**EFFECTS** on targeted  
youth ...

**Many take flight:**

- 64%** said it was harder to concentrate in class
- 36%** cut one or more classes
- 27%** skipped whole days of school
- 16%** dropped a class
- 14%** changed schools, some multiple times
- 16%** dropped out of school
- 14%** began or increased their substance abuse
- 13%** attempted suicide

***2 young people committed suicide***



# what we learned re: ADULTS roles ...

☞ Some were offenders

☞ Some weren't offenders, but added to the target's distress

☞ Some did or said nothing

☞ Some intervened

☞ Some intervened and educated

☞ Some intervened, educated, and supported the target

☞ Some removed the offender(s)


☞ Some disciplined offender(s)

What we learned about  
the times **NOBODY**  
**WENT** to school  
authorities **FOR HELP**

**1/3** of incidents were  
neither witnessed by,  
nor reported to school  
authorities, due to  
targets'

- **shame,**
- **confusion,**
- **hopelessness or**
- **fear**

# What we learned about FAMILIES' roles ...

 Almost half of children and teens **confided in a parent or guardian.**

 Maybe those who didn't had good reason, but **9 out of 10** of those who did, **got support.**

 13 parents actually called Safe

Schools

for help:

now **1-888-307-9275**



(which we can still provide in Washington State)



# The stories speak for themselves.

Category 1 = one-time, climate setting incidents

Category 2 = on-going verbal & other harassment

Category 3 = physical harassment and/or  
sexual assault, short of rape

Category 4 = physical assaults

Category 5 = gang rapes

# Eighty-three Thousand Youth:

Selected Findings of  
Eight Population-Based  
Studies

Regarding Anti-Gay  
Harassment and the  
Safety and Well-Being of  
Sexual Minority Students

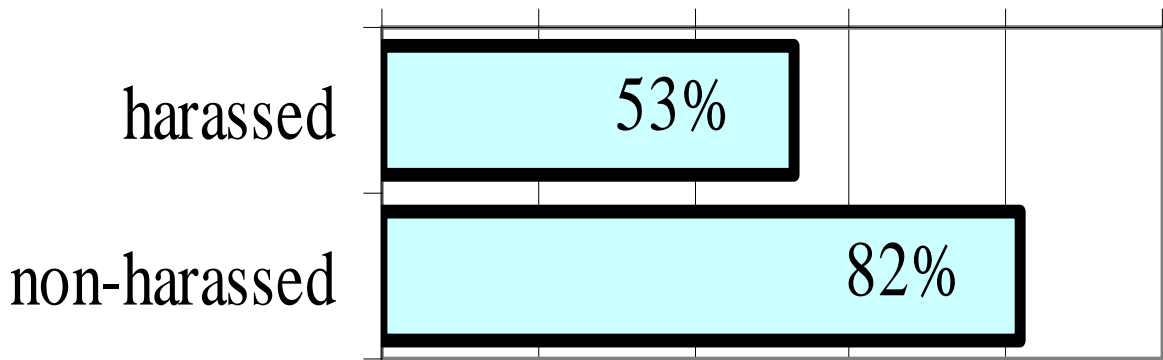
Harassed because someone thought they were gay ...

**Seattle: 8% of all students grades 9-12** (6% of heterosexual teens; 34% of GLB teens)

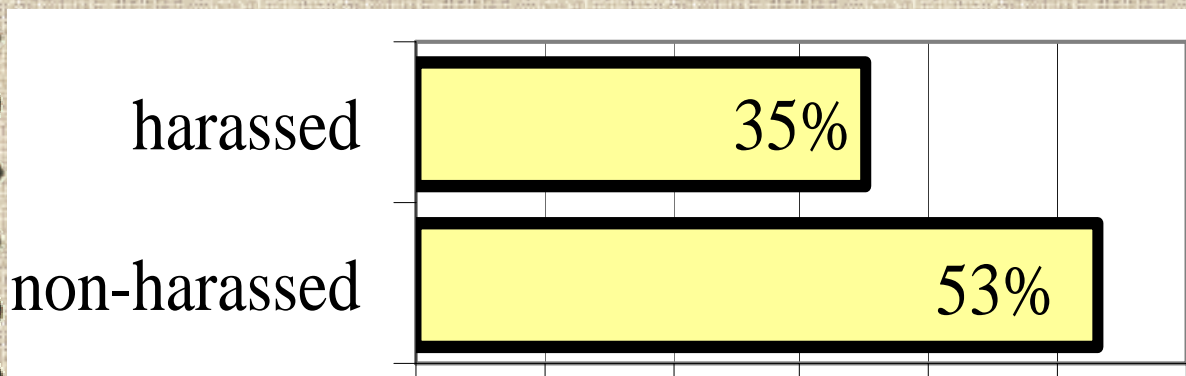
**Wisconsin: 5% of sample of students grades 9-12**

**Connecticut: 6% of sample of 7th, 9th and 11th graders**

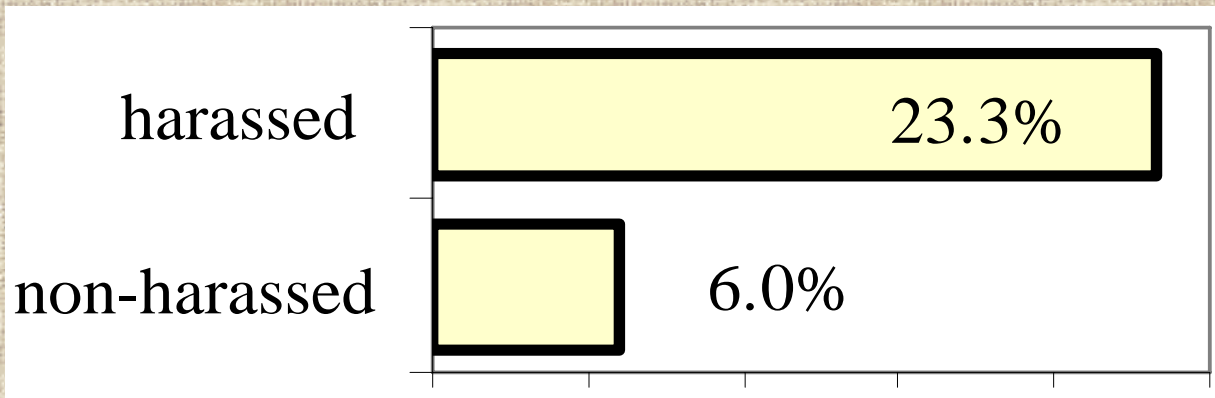
"My family loves and supports me."



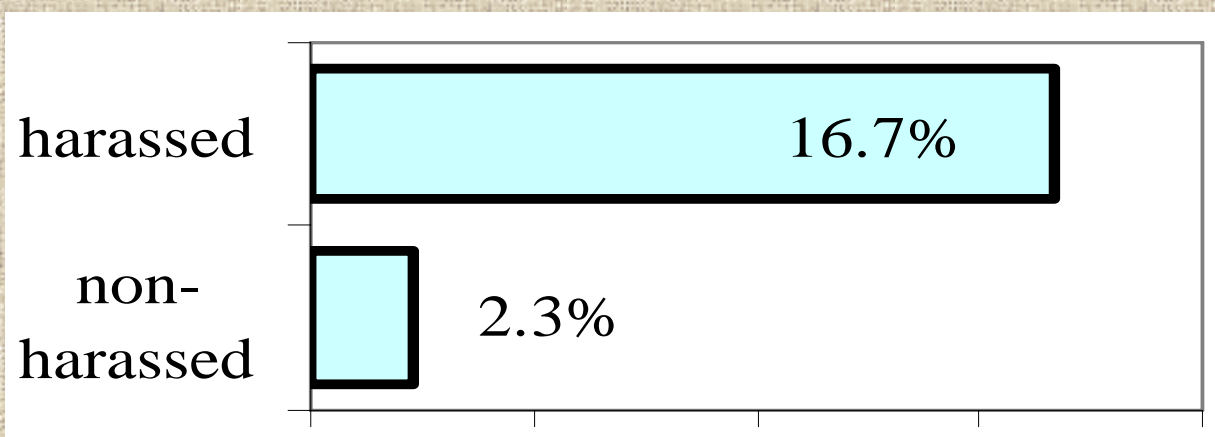
"My teachers really care about me and encourage me."



"I was threatened or injured By someone with a weapon at school in past 12 months"



"I have missed at least one day of school because I felt unsafe in past 30 days."





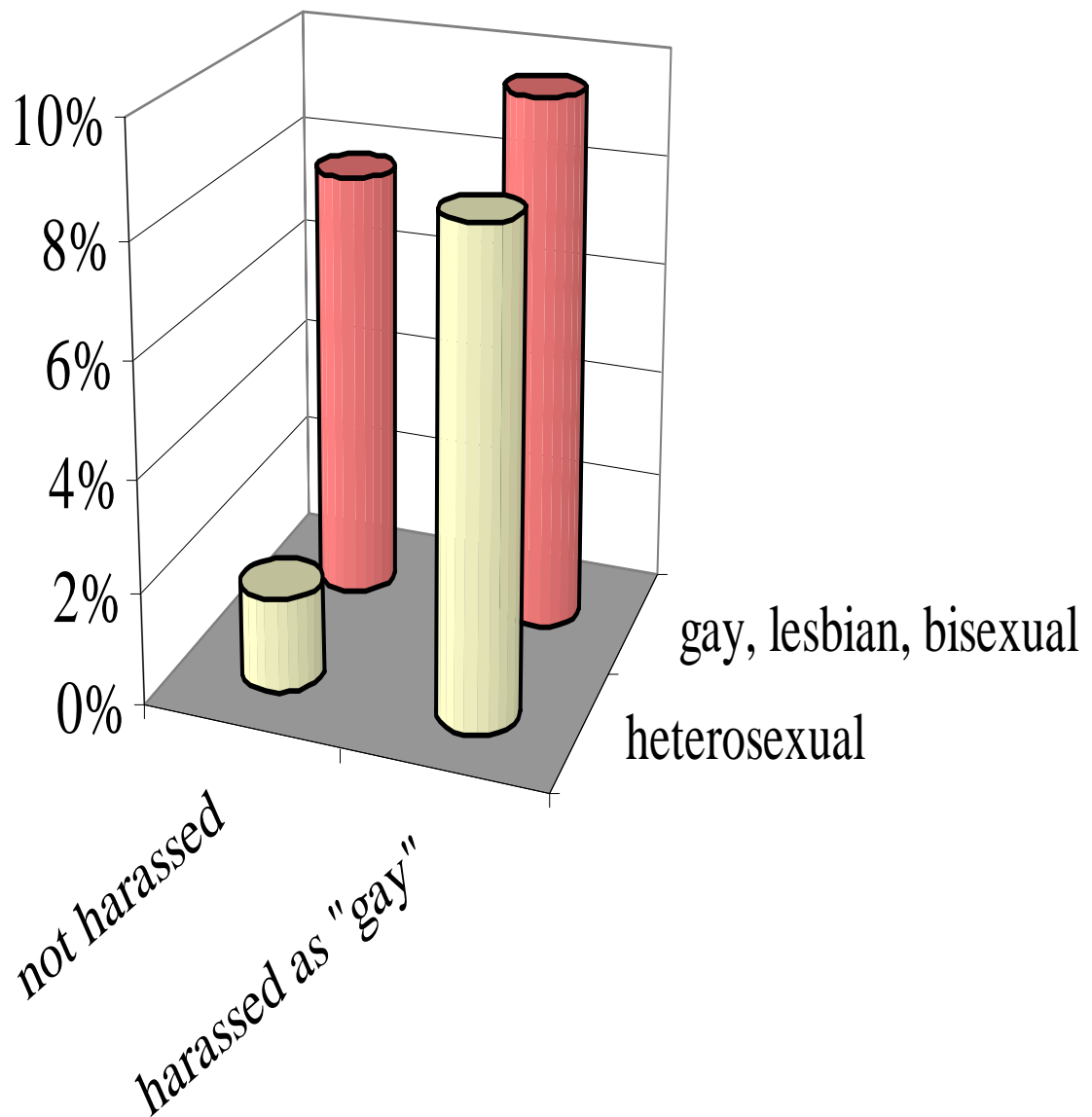
Described themselves as  
gay, lesbian or bisexual ...

**Seattle: 4.5% of all  
students grades 9-12  
(another 4% were unsure)**

**Minnesota: 1.1% of sample  
of students grades 7-12**

**Massachusetts: 2.0% of  
sample of students grades  
9-12**

"I made a suicide attempt in the past 12 months and was treated by a doctor or a nurse."



## Reported same-gender sexual ...

"experience": 3.0% of a  
sample of students grades  
9-12 (Massachusetts)

"contact": 4.4% of a  
sample of students grades  
8-12 (Vermont)

"intercourse": 0.2% of a  
sample of students grades  
9-12 (San Francisco)

In nearly *every* study in which researchers have analyzed the associations, *sexual minority youth were more likely* than their peers to report:

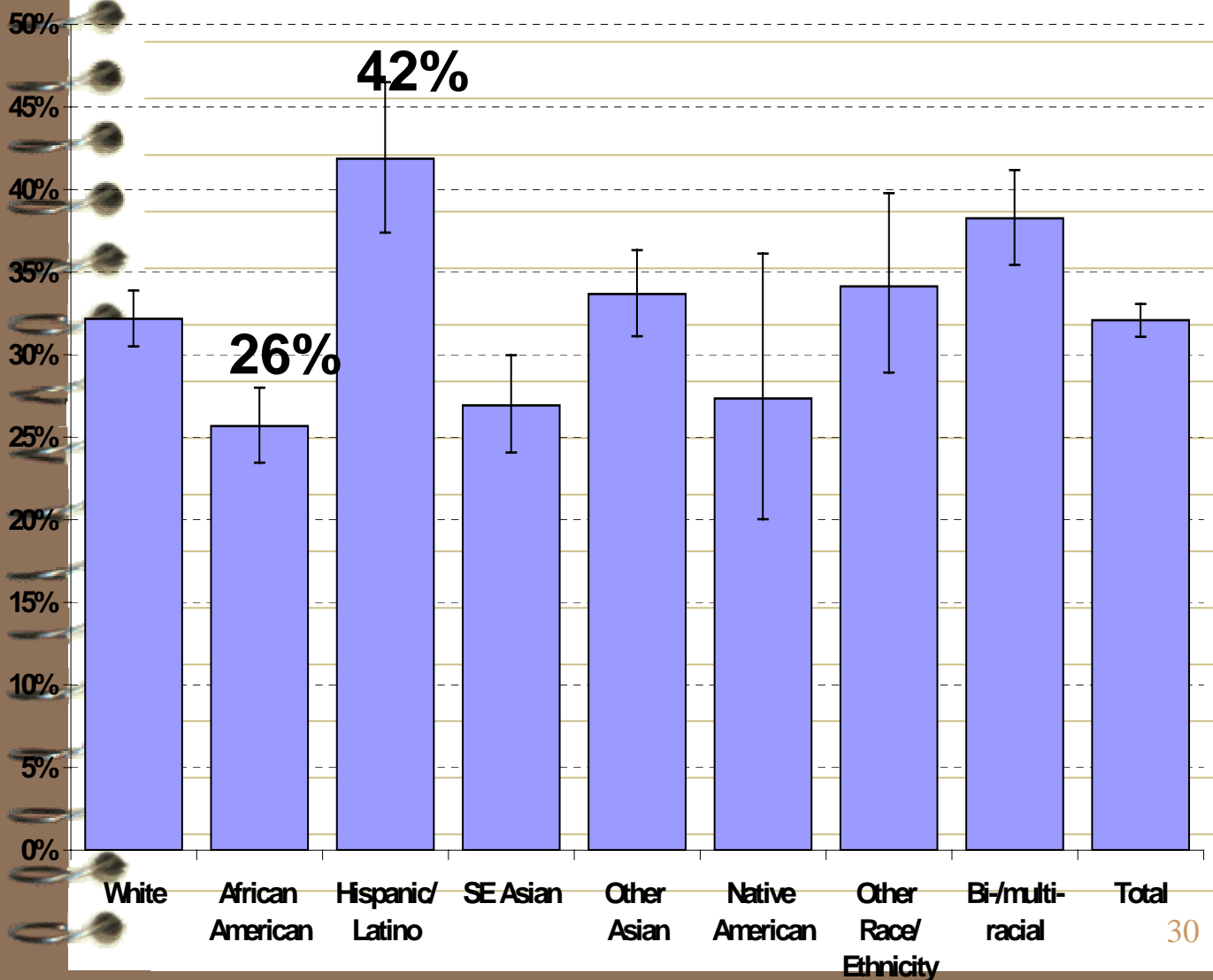
- **having been victimized and threatened.**
- **fearing for their safety.**
- ***self-endangering*:**
  - ▽ heavy alcohol or other drug use,
  - ▽ anorexia/bulimia,
  - ▽ having been (or having gotten someone) pregnant,
  - ▽ having made a serious suicide attempt.



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Harassment in Schools

In a 1999 Seattle study, **more than 1/4** of high school students in every ethnic group reported experiencing **harassment based on their race/ethnicity.**



# So what?

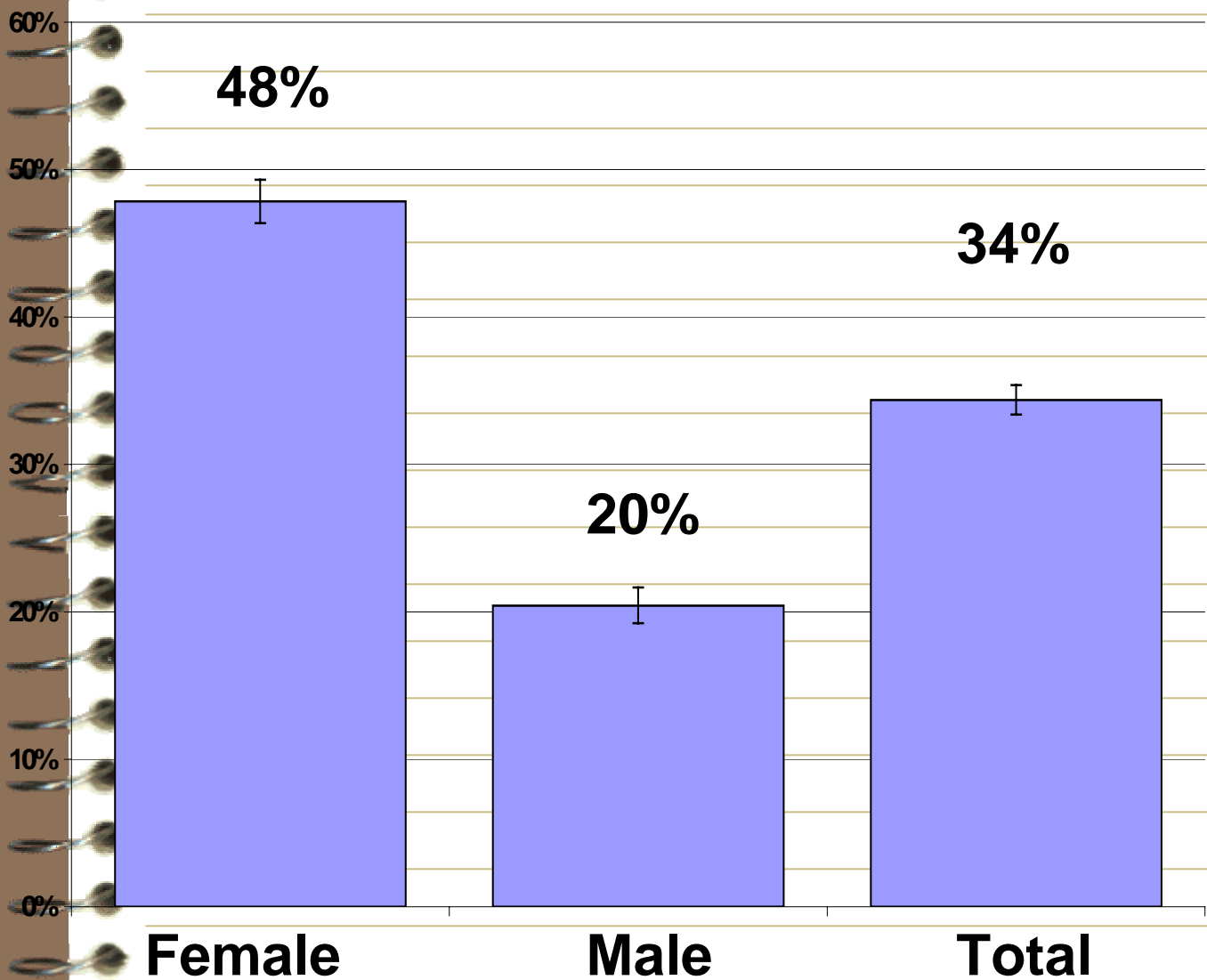
They were nearly *three times* as likely as their non racially-harassed peers *to report having skipped at least one whole day of school* in the past month out of fear for their own safety.

***“I feel as if the issue of racism and sexual harassment need to be talked about more in schools because every year and every grade you go up it gets worse and worse.”***

-- anonymous student comment on the open-ended part of the survey



In the same study, **48% of high school girls** and **20% of boys** said they had been the target of offensive sexual comments.



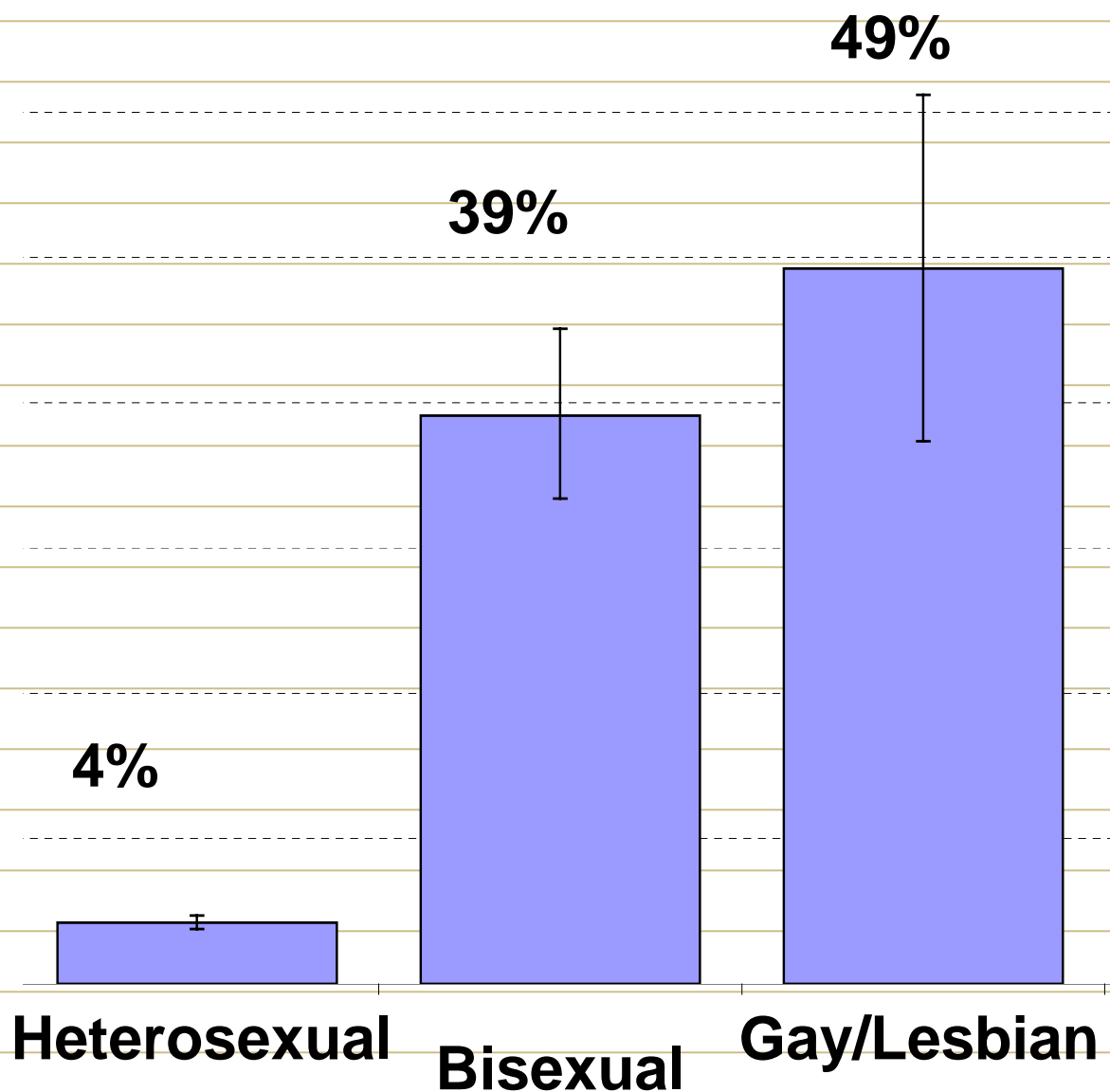
# So what?

Like the racially harassed students, youth of both genders were *twice* as likely if they had been sexually-harassed *to report having skipped at least one whole day of school* in the past month out of fear.

***“I have been harassed by having people say rude and disturbing things which I find uncomfortable and also some of them will even touch girls ... I notice again how little the teachers do.”***

-- anonymous student comment on the open-ended part of the survey

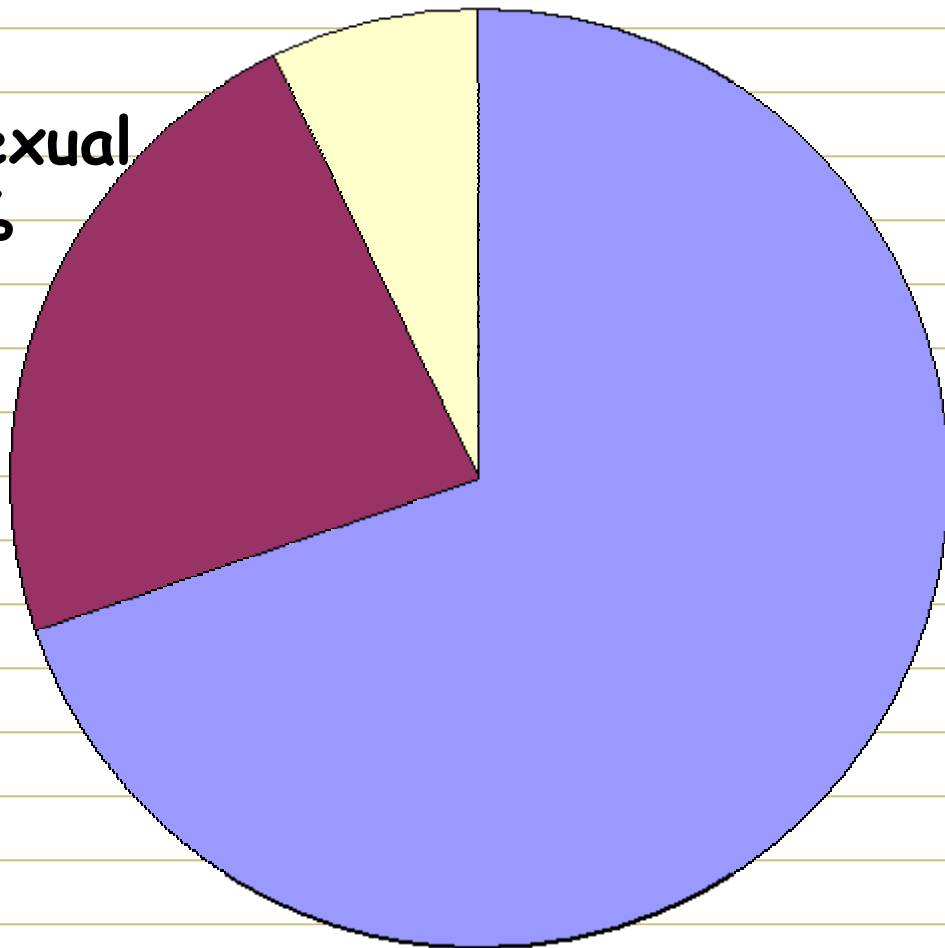
In the same study, **6% of 9-12th graders** said they had been harassed because someone thought they were **gay or lesbian**.



# Sexual Orientation of Students Reporting Orientation-Based Harassment

Gay/Lesbian 7%

Bisexual  
23%



Heterosexual  
70%

# So what?

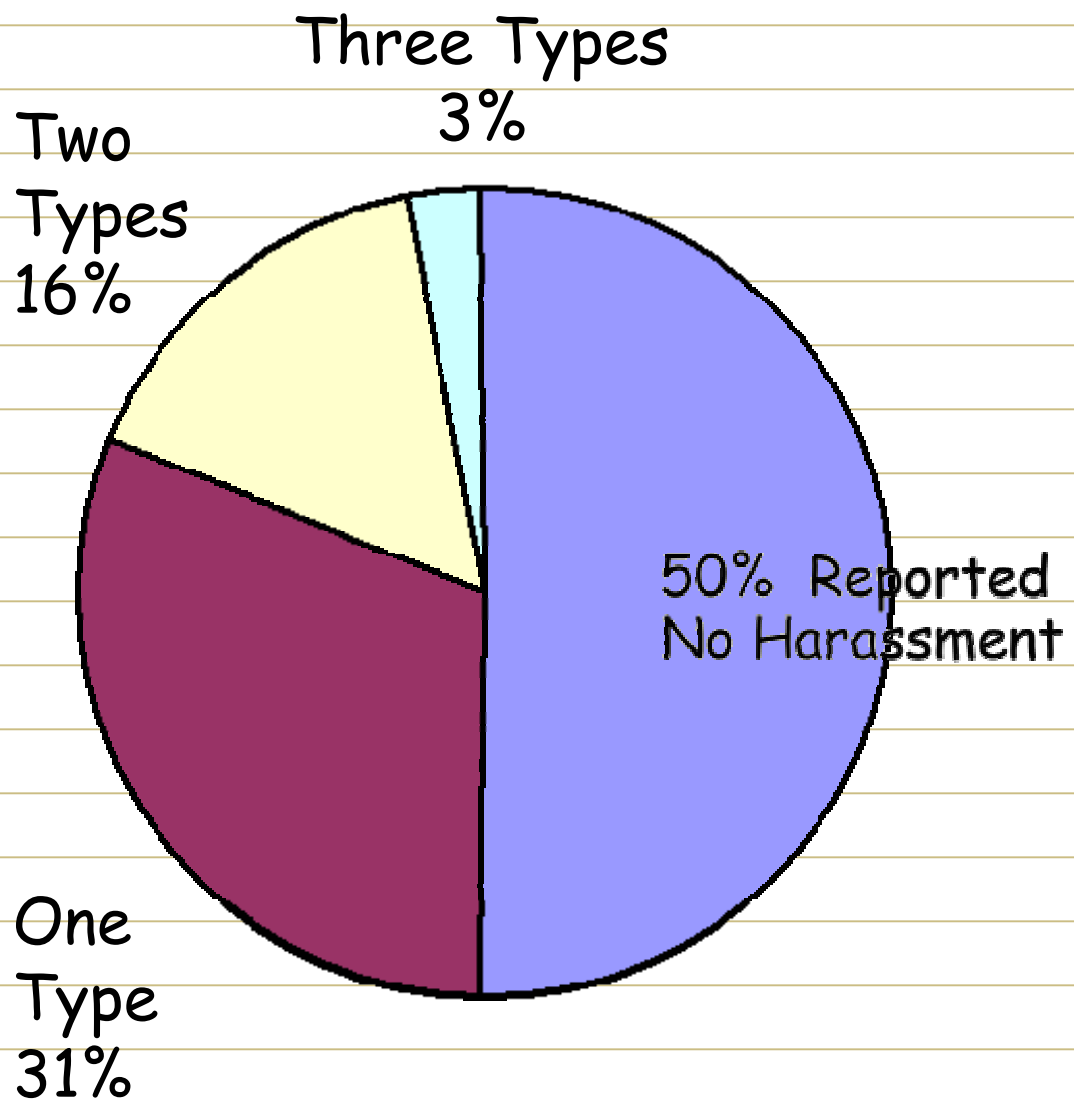
Even *heterosexual* youth who had been verbally or physically gay-bashed were at increased risk.

They were *three times* as likely as their non-harassed, heterosexual peers *to report having skipped at least one whole day of school* in the past month out of fear.

***“Many people call me gay even though I am not and they keep on accusing me of watching porn, even though I don’t.”***

-- anonymous student  
comment on the open-ended  
part of the survey

# Harassment in Seattle High Schools, 1999





**Other forms of  
malicious  
harassment  
commonly reported  
(anecdotally)  
in schools:**

**disability-based**

**ancestry/national origin-based**

**religion-based**

# QUIZ:

"Kids are just mean  
and there's nothing we  
can do about it."

True or False?

A spiral-bound notebook with a textured, light brown cover. The spiral binding is on the left side. The text "What can we do about it?" is printed in a bold, black, sans-serif font in the upper right quadrant of the cover.

**What can we do  
about it?**

# What can we do about it?

- #1: Policies & contract language
- #2: Hiring
- #3: Training
- #4: Library Collection
- #5: Student Activism
- #6: Curriculum
- #7: Modeling Respect & Consideration
- #8: Requiring Respect & Consideration
- #9: Intervention
- #10: Reporting Procedures
- #11: Discipline
- #12: Support for GLBT & harassed youth

**Safe Schools Coalition:**  
**[www.safeschoolscoalition.org](http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org)**

**crisis: 1-877-SAFE-SAFE**  
**(1-877-723-3723)**

**[intervention@safeschoolscoalition.org](mailto:intervention@safeschoolscoalition.org)**  
**Washington state only**

**info: 206-632-0662 ext. 49**  
**[membership@safeschoolscoalition.org](mailto:membership@safeschoolscoalition.org)**  
**[publications@safeschoolscoalition.org](mailto:publications@safeschoolscoalition.org)**  
**[training@safeschoolscoalition.org](mailto:training@safeschoolscoalition.org)**  
**[questions@safeschoolscoalition.org](mailto:questions@safeschoolscoalition.org)**



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and resources for  
educators.

Tax deductible donations may  
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online: [www.safeschoolscoalition.org](http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org)

or by mail:

**c/o Lifelong AIDS Alliance**

**1002 E. Seneca**

**Seattle, WA 98122-4203**

**Phone: 206-957-1621**

**TTY/TDD: 206-323-2685**

**Fax: 206-325-2689**

*"We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence of the good people."*

**Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

**My personal pledge:**  
**"To make our schools  
safer,  
I will ..."**