



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** (1-800-5B-PROUD ... now 1-888-307-9275) 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

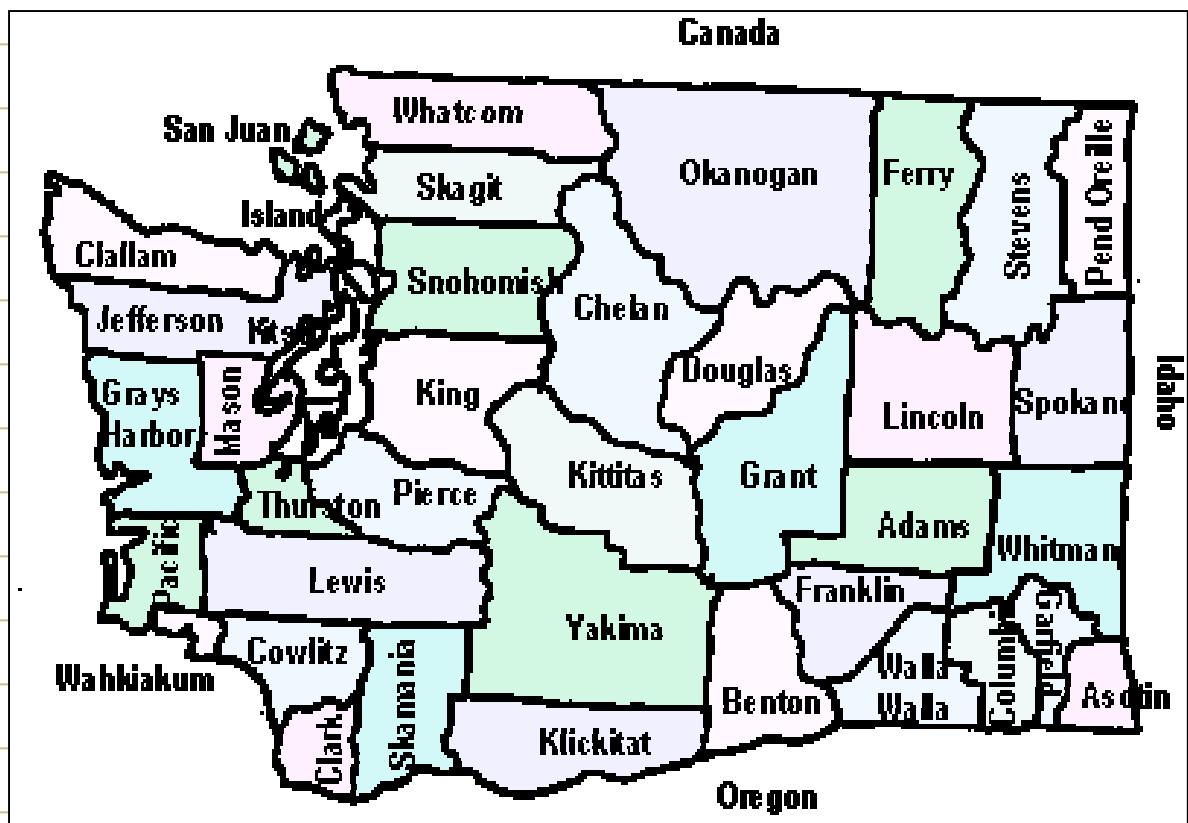
- 7 targeted educators
- 9 educator witnesses
- 16 professionals who learned about an incident after the fact

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 ...

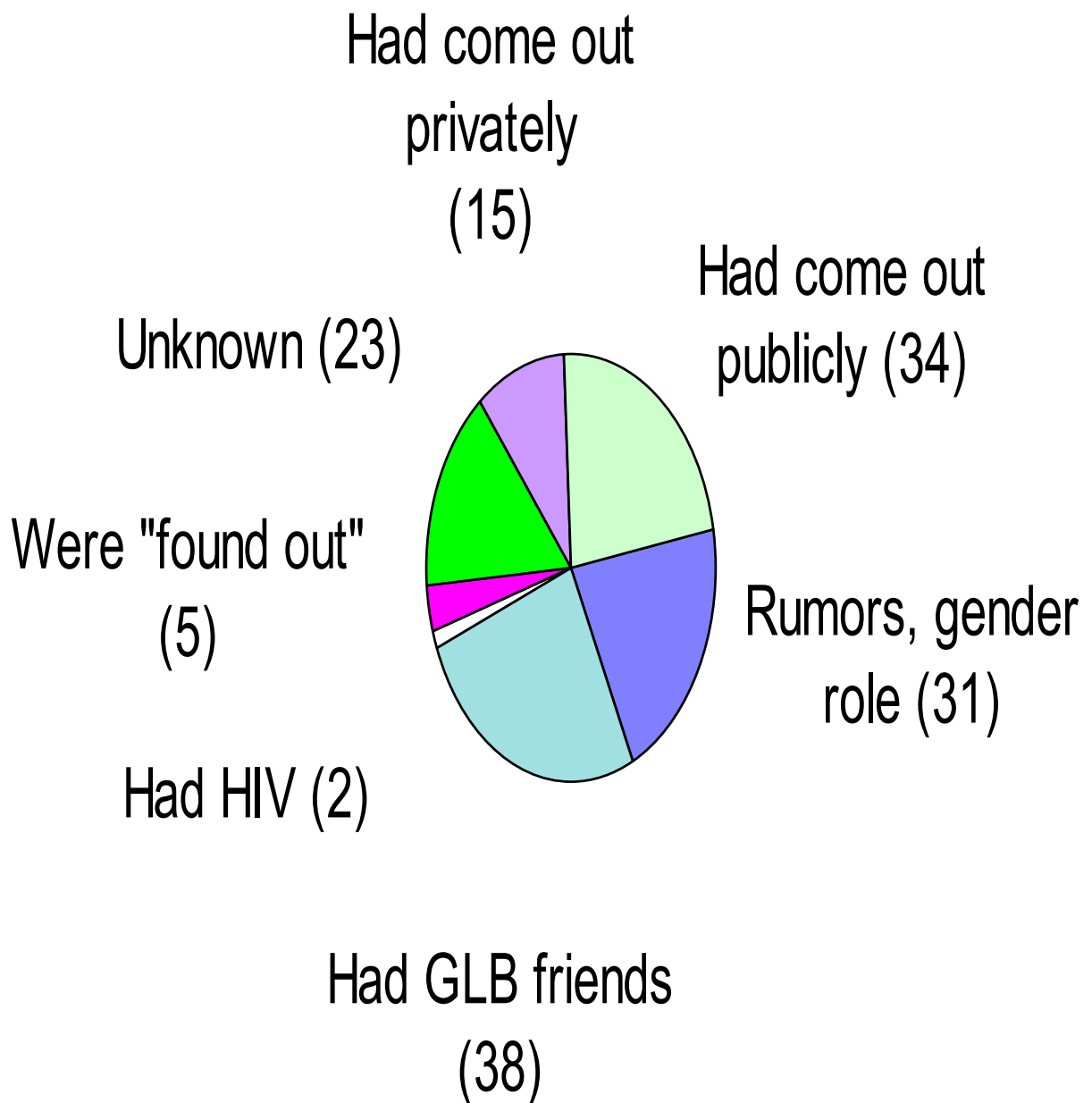
- ✓ Every month of the school year with peaks in Oct. & Jan.
- ✓ All over school, but especially in classrooms, halls and the locker room or in or near the gym
- ✓ Throughout the school day, with most rapes between 3 & 3:30 p.m.

what we learned re:
WHO is targeted ...

Everyone is vulnerable,
regardless of:

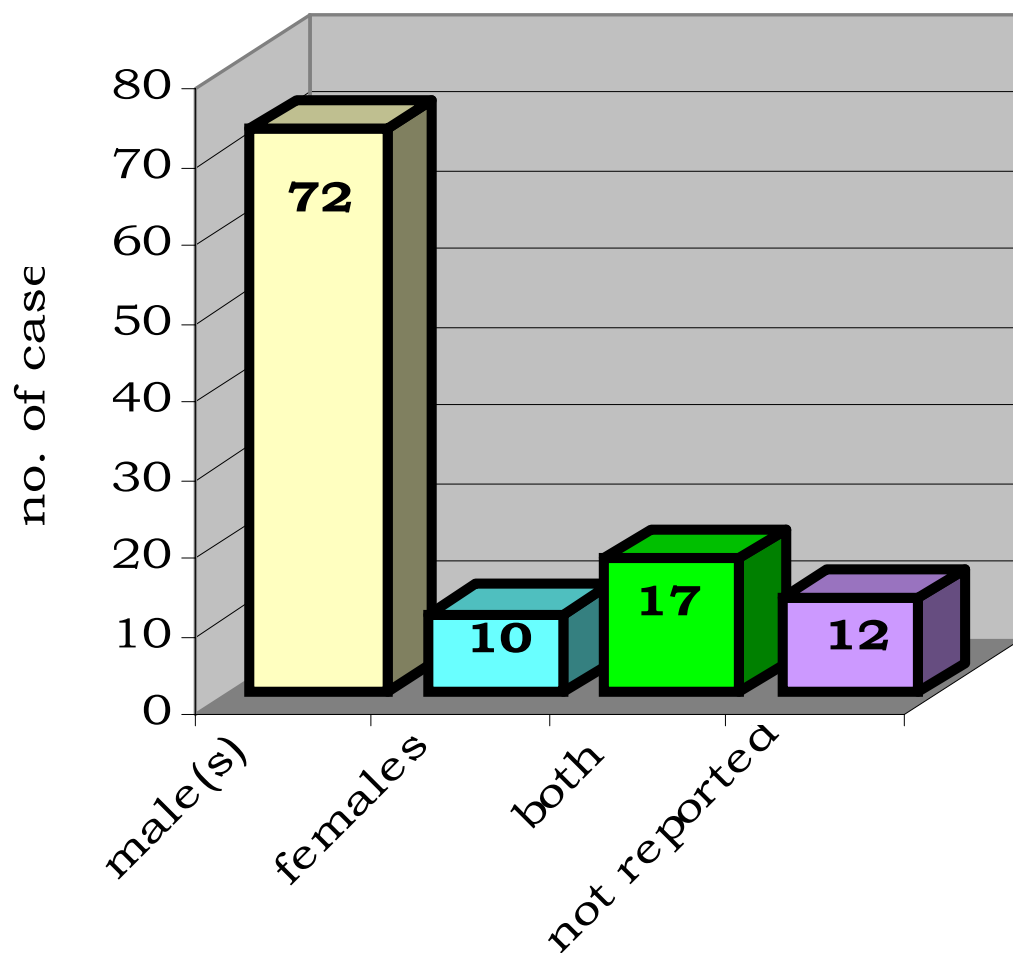
- ✓ age
- ✓ gender
- ✓ race
- ✓ where they live
- ✓ and even their
orientation

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

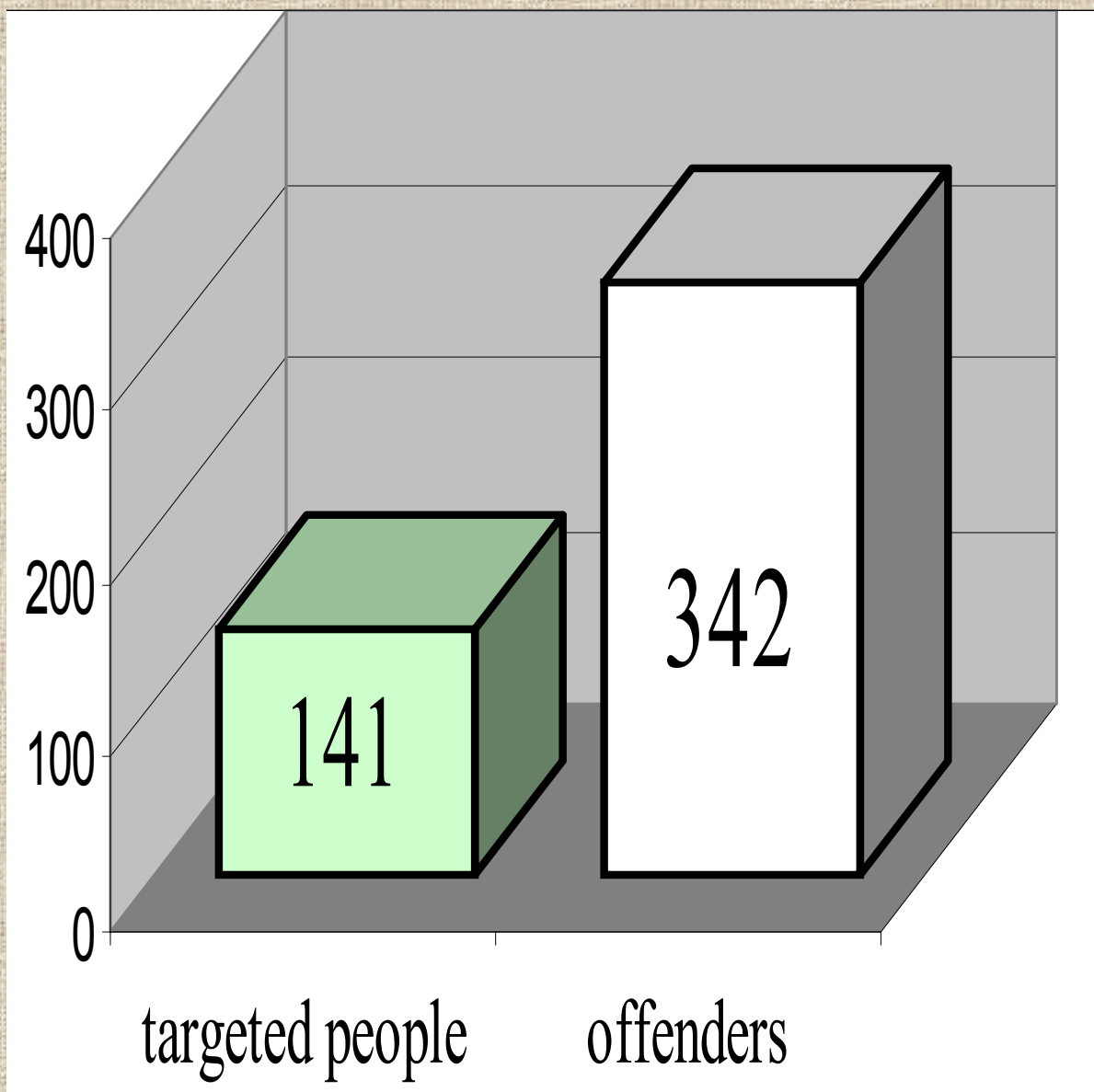


what we learned re: WHO offends ...

- ✓ 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 ...

X Some were offenders

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

X Some did or said nothing

X Some intervened

X Some intervened and educated

X Some intervened, educated,
and supported the target

X Some removed the offender(s)

X 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)



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

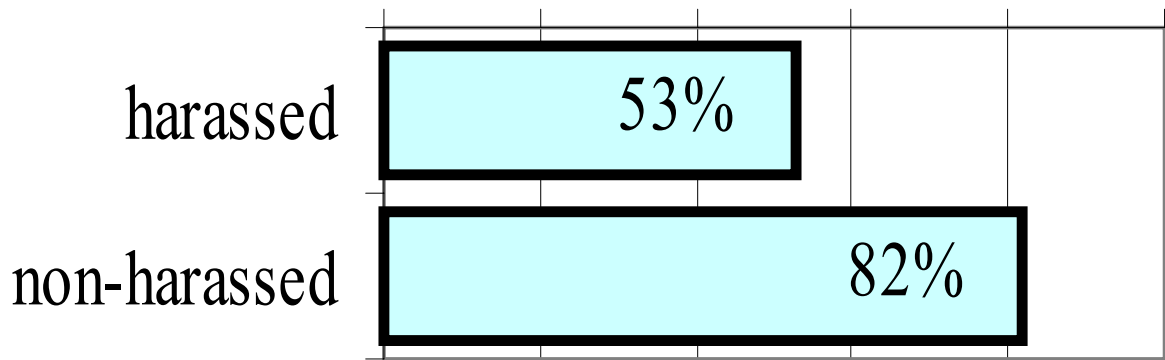
Harassed because someone thought they were gay ...

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

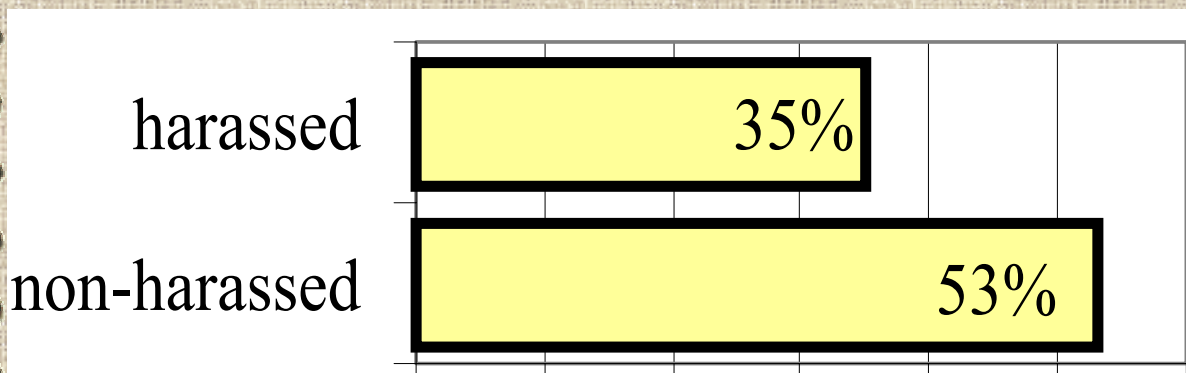
Wisconsin: 5% of sample of students grades 9-12

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

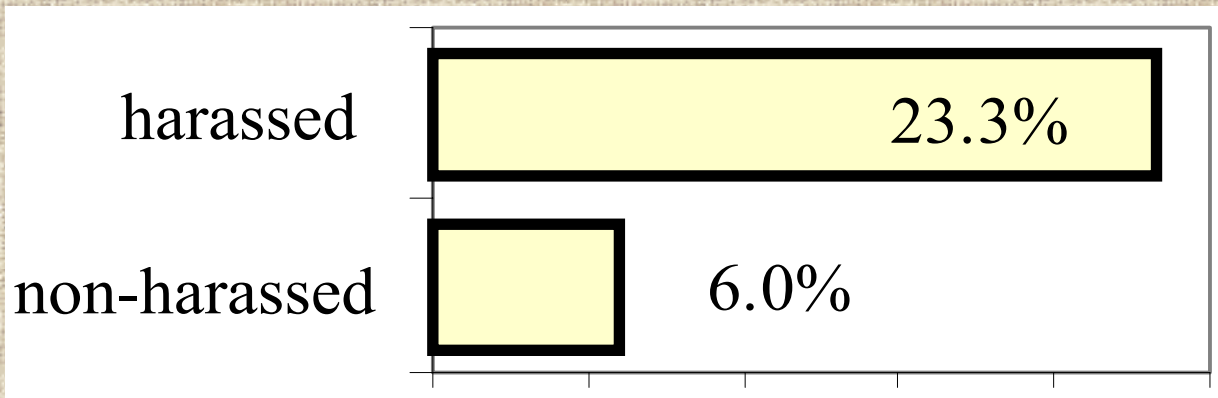
"My family loves and supports me."



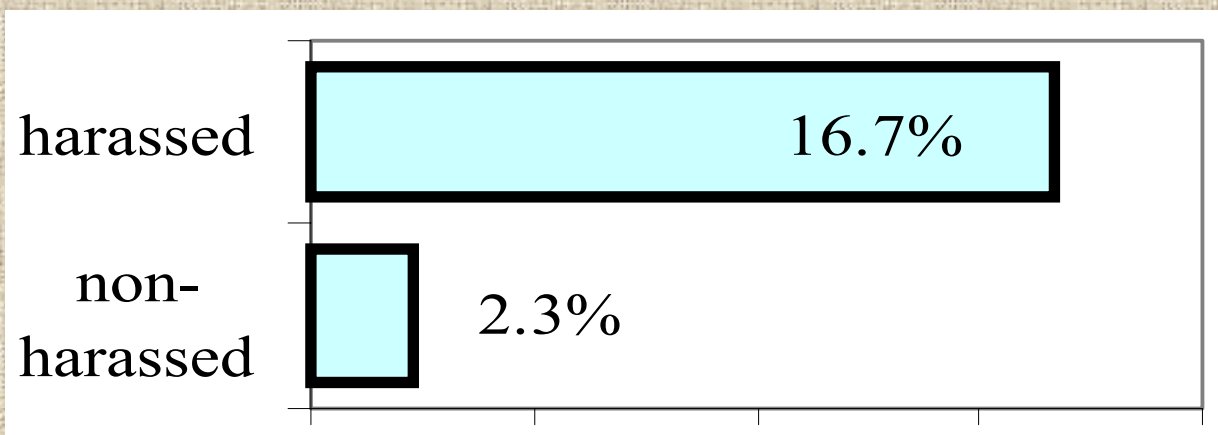
"My teachers really care about me and encourage me."



"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."



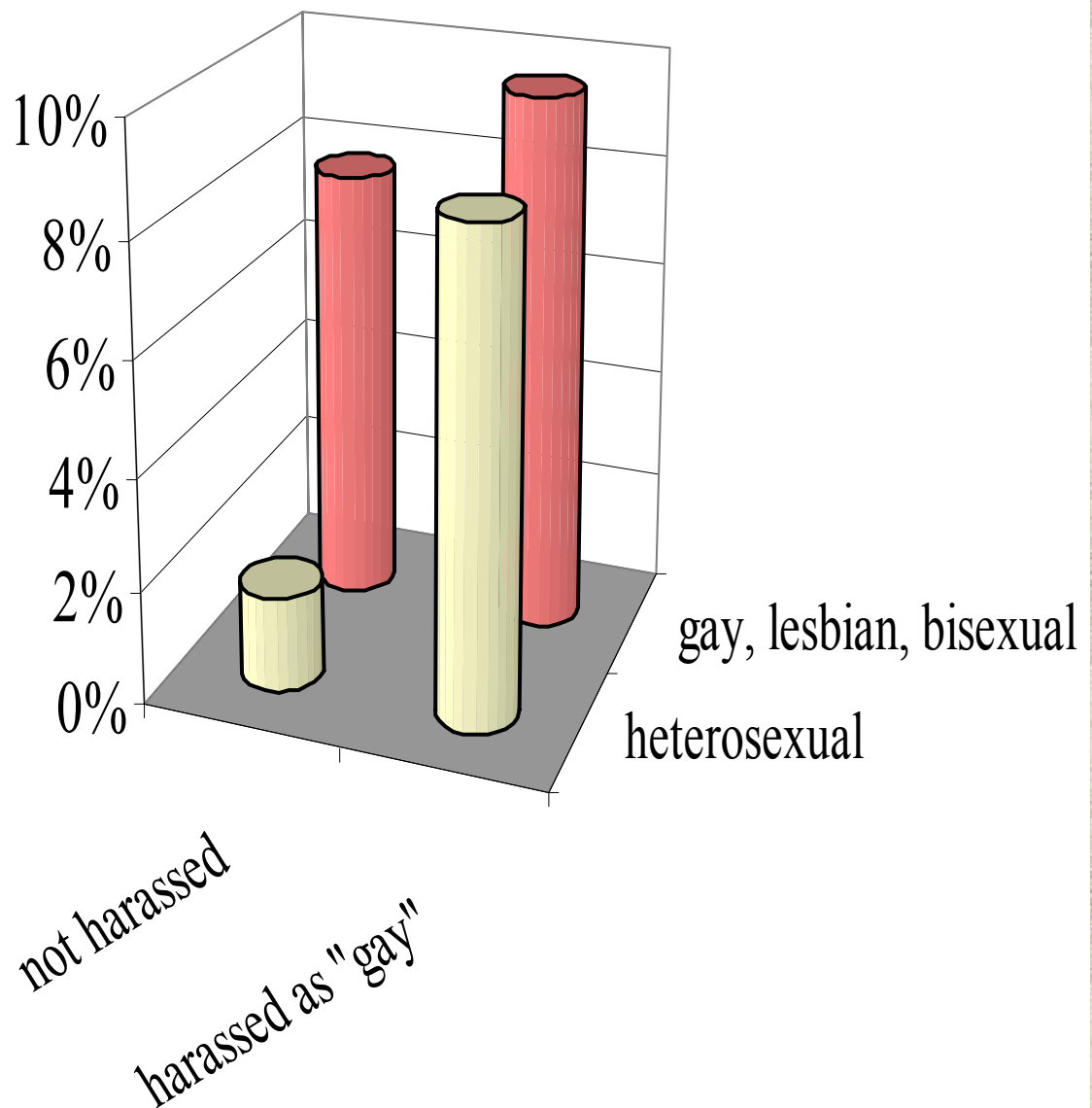
Described themselves as
gay, lesbian or bisexual ...

**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:

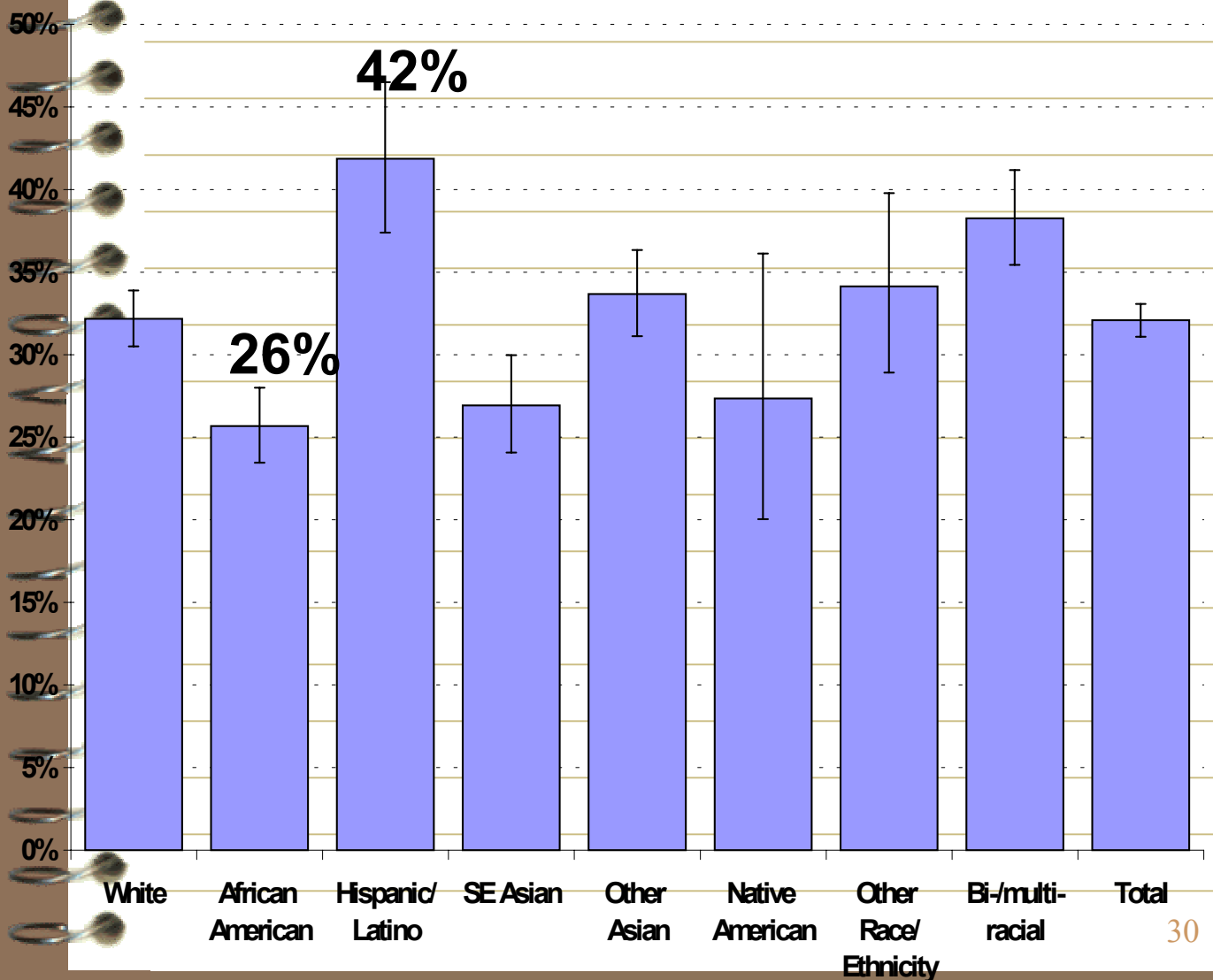
- having been victimized and threatened.
- fearing for their safety.
- *self-endangering*:
 - ▽ heavy alcohol or other drug use,
 - ▽ anorexia/bulimia,
 - ▽ having been (or having gotten someone) pregnant,
 - ▽ having made a serious suicide attempt.



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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.**



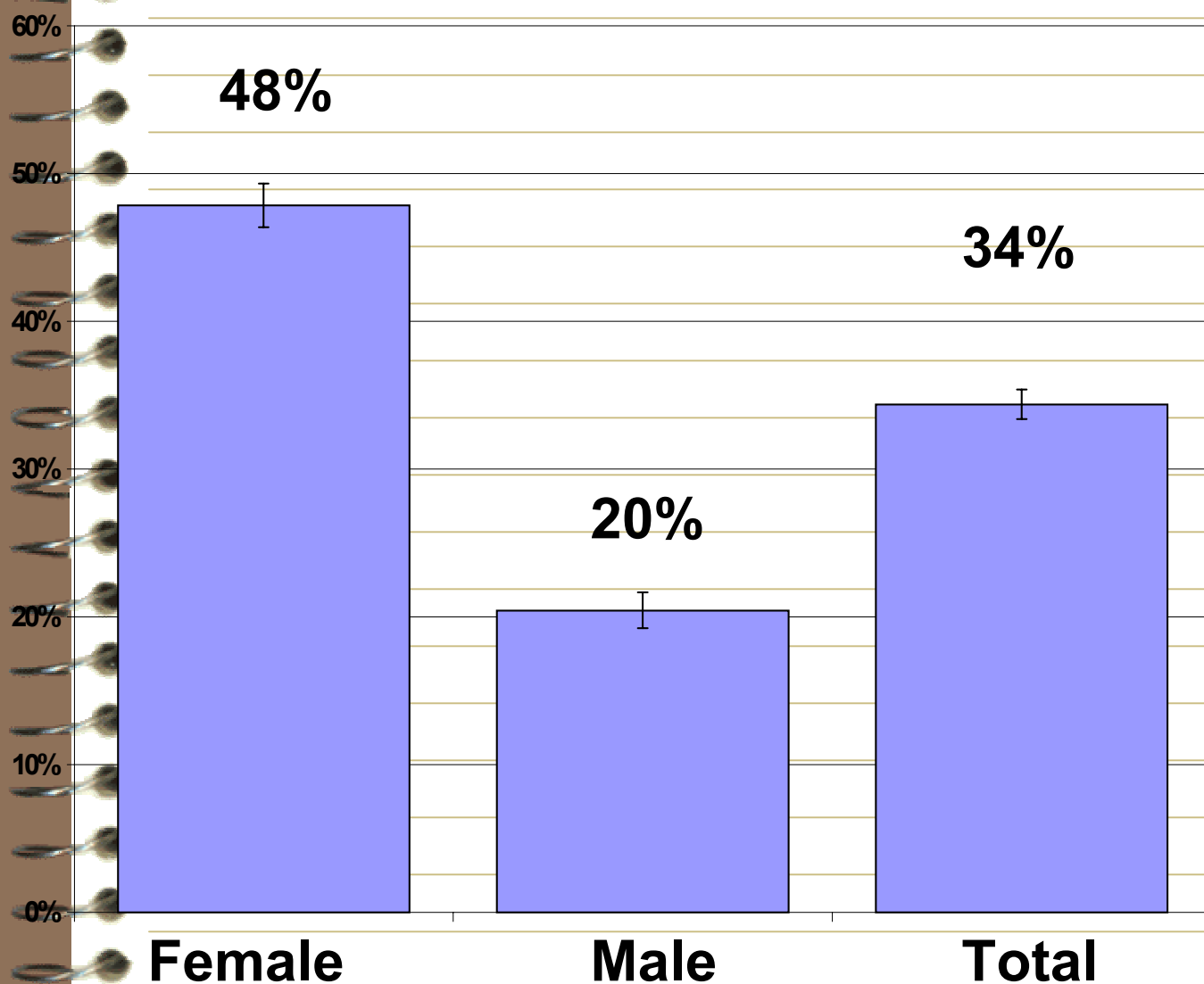
So what?

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.**



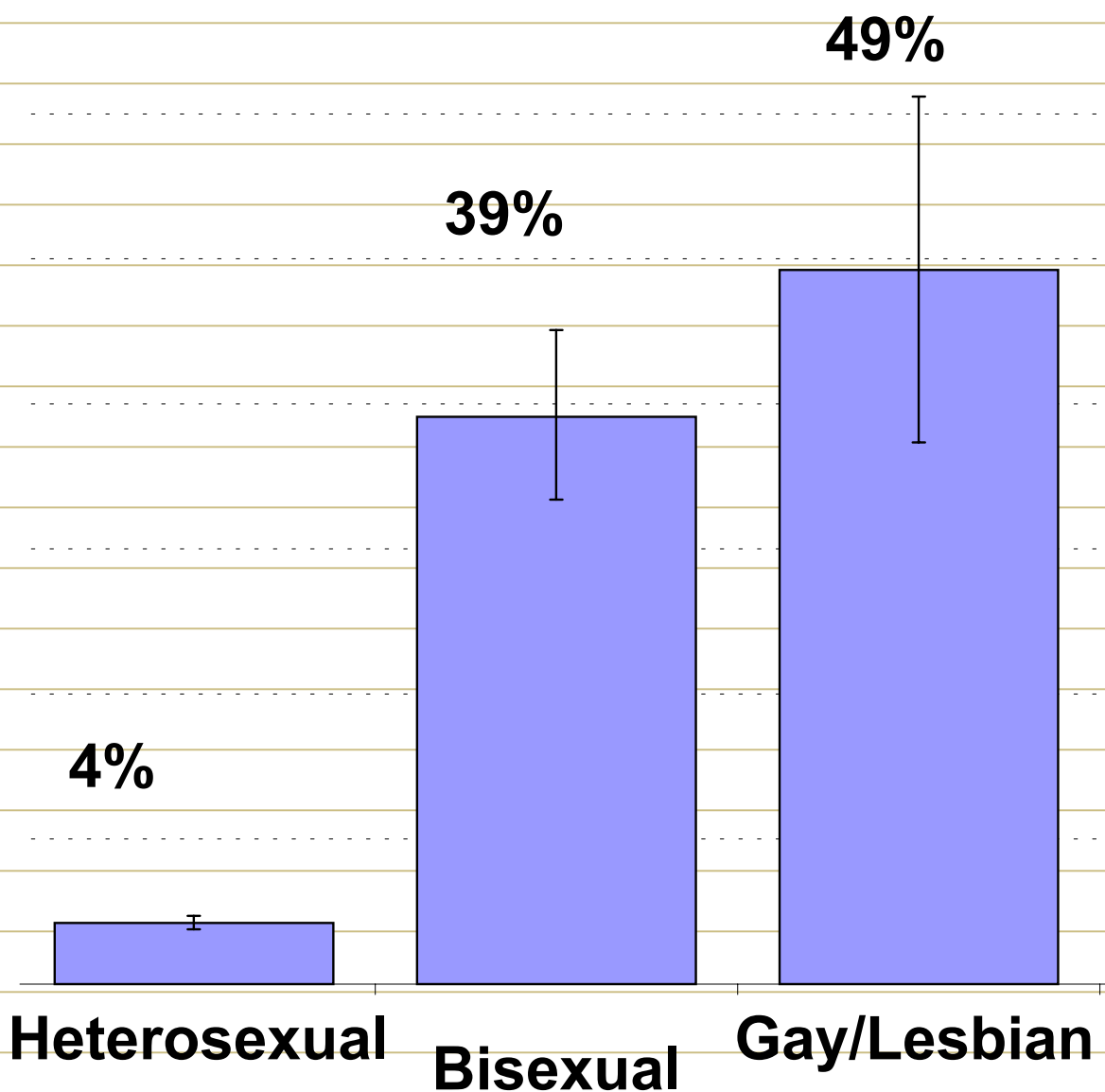
So what?

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

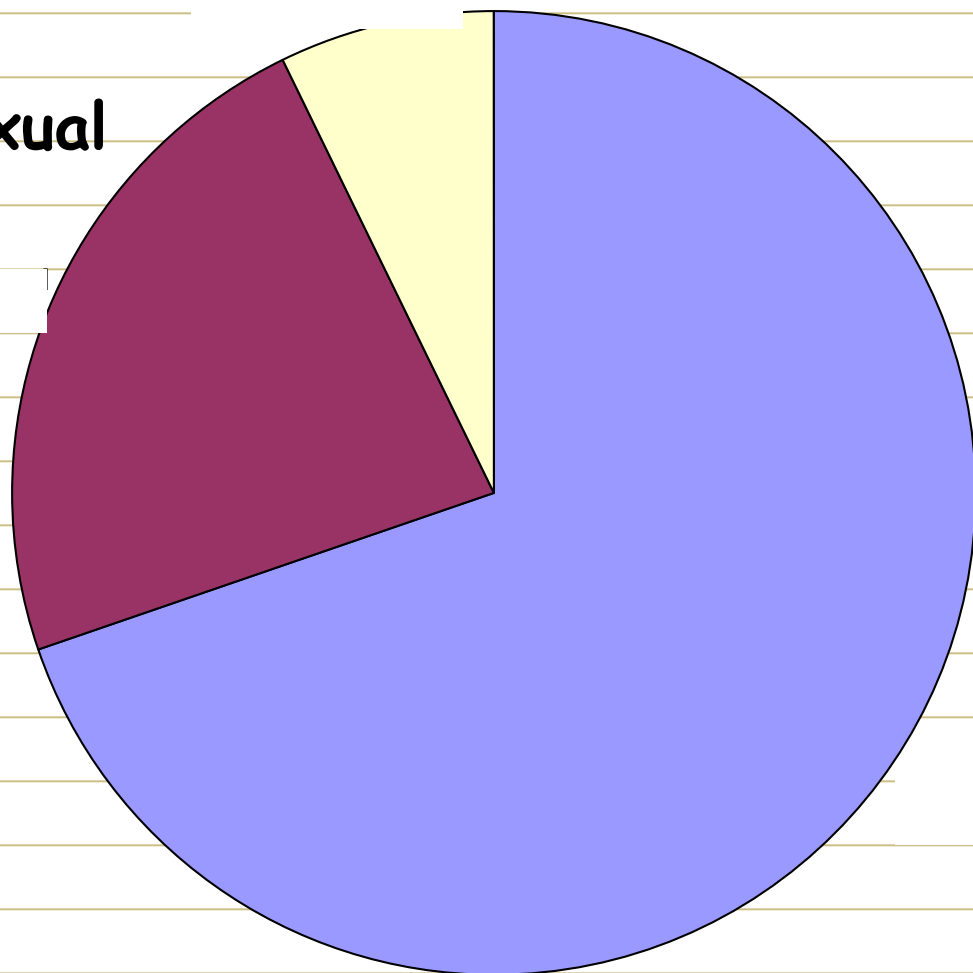
In the same study, **6% of 9-12th graders** said they had been harassed because someone thought they were **gay or lesbian**.



Sexual Orientation of Students Reporting Orientation-Based Harassment

Gay/Lesbian 7%

Bisexual
23%



Heterosexual
70%

So what?

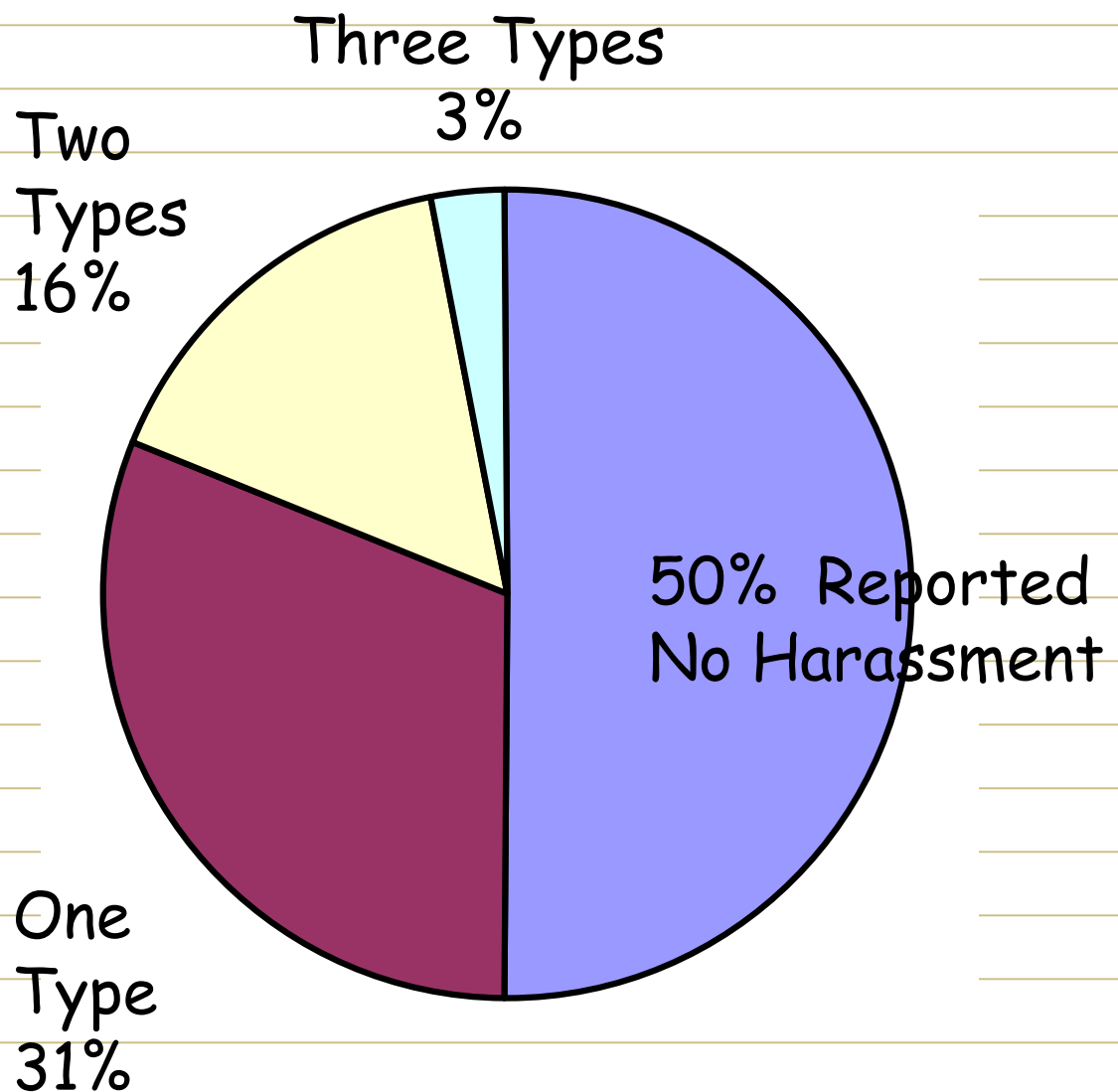
Even *heterosexual* youth who had been verbally or physically gay-bashed were at increased risk.

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 brown cover and a light beige, textured fabric-like surface. 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.

**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

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training@safeschoolscoalition.org

questions@safeschoolscoalition.org



Help us provide training
and resources for
educators.

Tax deductible donations may
be made payable to

"Safe Schools Coalition"

online: 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 ..."