

SEXUAL HARASSMENT & BULLYING OF YOUTH

SEXUAL VIOLENCE & INDIVIDUALS WHO IDENTIFY AS LGBTQ



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The risk for bullying and harassment is very high for youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ), with 90% of students reporting being harassed or assaulted during the past year, compared to 62% of students who identify as straight (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network [GLSEN], 2007). The verbal and physical attacks by fellow students or school staff on students who identify as LGBTQ create a hostile and potentially unbearable environment for them.

Youth identifying as LGBTQ may live in isolation, which can affect their well-being, as well as their ability to focus at school (Bochenek & Brown, 2001; GLSEN, 2007). Whether the message is explicit or implied, students are being taught that harassment is an inevitable consequence of identifying as or being perceived as LGBTQ (GLSEN, 2007). According to the *2007 National School Climate Survey*, 60.8% of students who identify as LGBTQ reported that they felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation, and 38% felt unsafe because of their gender expression (GLSEN, 2007).

Peer harassment and violence against youth who identify as LGBTQ is often sexualized, sometimes taking the form of unwelcome physical contact with sexual overtones (Bochenek & Brown, 2001). Girls who identify as lesbian or bisexual are more likely than other youth to experience sexual harassment: to being called sexually offensive names, having rumors told about them, being called gay or lesbian in a derogatory way, receiving sexually offensive photographs or messages, and being touched or grabbed in a sexual way (Fineran, 2002). Sexual harassment and bullying send a clear message to youth who



identify as LGBTQ that their sexuality and/or gender identity expression is in conflict with what our society considers “normal” (Gentlewarrior & Fountain, 2009), which can lead to anxiety, depression, self-mutilation and ultimately to attempted or completed suicide.

The American Association of University Women’s national survey of college students found that 73% of college students who identify as LGBTQ experience sexual harassment, as compared to 61% of students who identify as heterosexual and cisgender¹.

(Hill & Silva, 2005). This harassment is perpetrated not only by other students, but also by faculty and campus employees. In addition, students who identify as LGBTQ reported being more upset by the sexual harassment than students who identify as heterosexual and cisgender; an estimated six percent of all college students who identify as LGBTQ either change their school or their major as a result of sexual harassment (Hill & Silva, 2005). This could be because of contextual factors such as ongoing abuse, extended periods of harassment

¹ Cisgender refers to a person who was assigned female at birth and is comfortable living and presenting as female, or someone who was assigned male at birth and is comfortable living and presenting as male. It provides a name for a gender identity that society considers to match with or to be appropriate for one’s sex. For more information on terminology, see the NSVRC’s *Talking about gender & sexuality: Sexual violence & individuals who identify as LGBTQ*.

or violence, as well as other trauma. When compared to their peers, students who identify as gay, lesbian and bisexual were four times more likely to have attempted suicide and five times more likely to have missed school because of feeling unsafe, with sexual harassment being a factor for feeling unsafe (Fineran, 2002).

Sexual harassment is a concern for individuals who identify as LGBTQ in noneducational settings as well. While results vary, overall the existing research on sexual orientation discrimination provides consistent and compelling evidence that workplace discrimination against individuals who identify as LGBTQ exists (Badgett, Lau, Sears, & Ho, 2007; National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2009). For example, 97% of survey respondents from the *National Transgender Discrimination Survey* reported experiencing harassment or mistreatment on the job (National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2009). This discrimination also is reflected in salary gaps; wages of men who identify as gay are lower than wages of men who identify as heterosexual with the same personal and job characteristics (Badgett et al., 2007).

RESOURCES

Ali Forney Center

www.aliforneycenter.org

The mission of the Ali Forney Center is to protect LGBTQ youth from the harm of homelessness, and to support them in becoming safe and independent as they move from adolescence to adulthood

GLSEN

www.glsen.org

The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) is the leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all students. Established in 1990, GLSEN envisions a world in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. GLSEN seeks to develop school climates where difference is valued for the positive contribution it makes to creating a more vibrant and diverse community.





Think before you speak campaign

www.thinkb4youspeak.com

This campaign aims to raise awareness about the prevalence and consequences of anti-LGBT bias and behavior in America's schools. Ultimately, the goal is to reduce and prevent the use of homophobic language in an effort to create a more positive environment for LGBT teens. The campaign also aims to reach adults, including school personnel and parents; their support of this message is crucial to the success of efforts to change behavior.

Trevor Project

www.thetrevorproject.org

The Trevor Project is determined to end suicide among LGBTQ youth by providing life-saving and life-affirming resources, including our nationwide, 24/7 crisis intervention lifeline, and digital community and advocacy/educational programs that create a safe, supportive and positive environment for everyone.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarah Dawgert, MSW, is a consultant to organizations working to empower communities and increase awareness of issues surrounding women's health and wellness. Sarah has worked in the anti-poverty and anti-sexual violence movements since 1996. Prior to launching her current consulting firm, Sarah managed the education and volunteer programs at the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center. She also spent several years working with homeless and low-income women and families in San Francisco's Tenderloin neighborhood. Sarah has trained and coordinated community educators, developed and implemented needs/strengths assessments for service organizations, and facilitated state certification training for rape crisis counselors. She has trained on a range of issues related to sexual violence, has spoken at national and local conferences, and has been cited and published in dozens of regional and national media outlets. Sarah has a Bachelor's Degree in Human Development from Boston College and a Masters of Social Work from Boston University.

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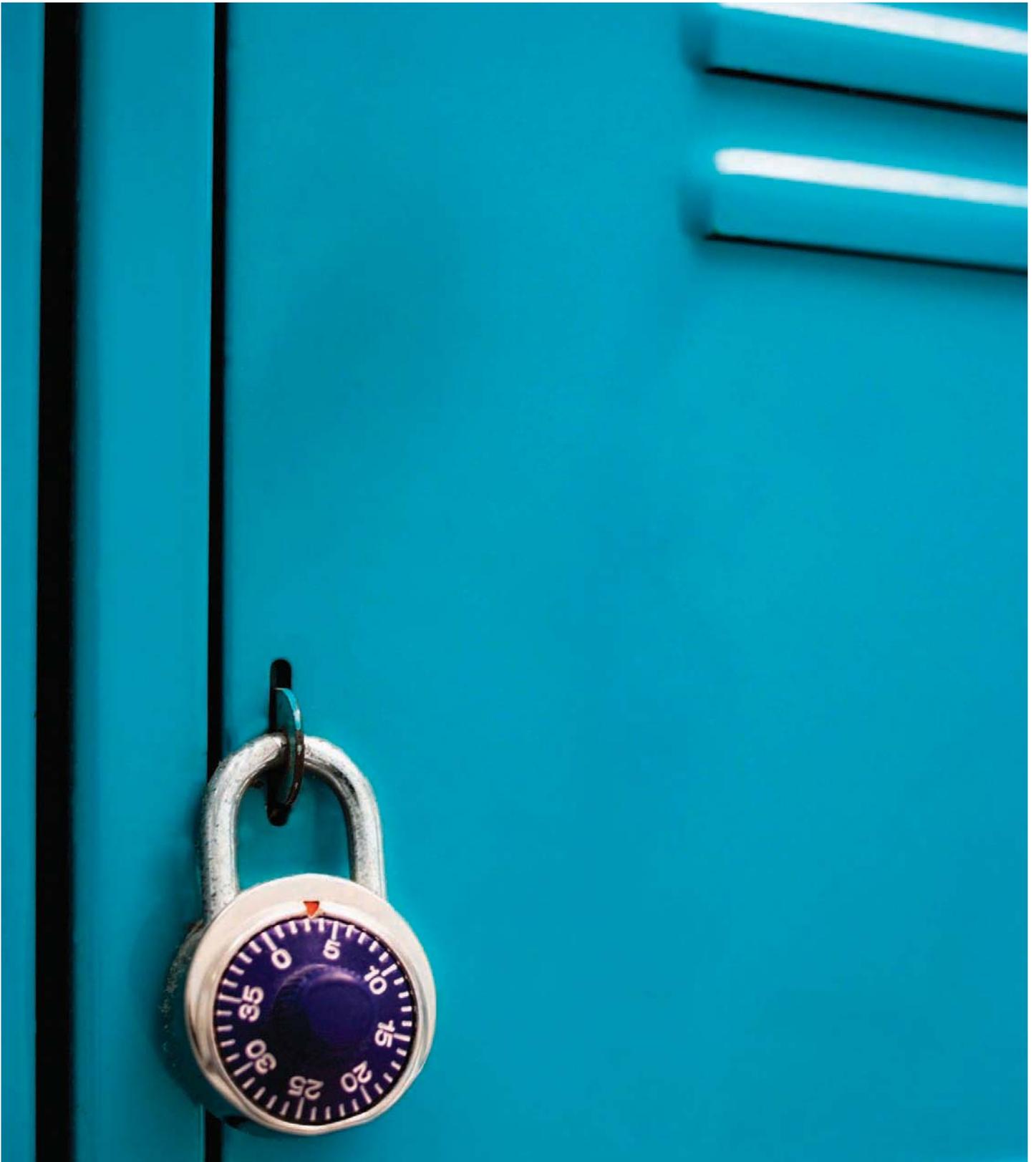
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NSVRC: 123 North Enola Drive, Enola, PA 17025, Toll free 877-739-3895
www.nsvrc.org • facebook.com/nsvrc • twitter.com/nsvrc

PCAR: 125 North Enola Drive, Enola, PA 17025, Toll free 800-692-7445
www.pcar.org • facebook.com/PCARORG • twitter.com/PCARORG