



**CROSSING
THE**

LINE

**Sexual
Harassment
at School**

 **AAUW**

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L N E

**Sexual
Harassment
at School**

By Catherine Hill, Ph.D.,
and Holly Kearl, M.A.

 AAUW

Published by AAUW
1111 Sixteenth St. NW
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202/785-7700
E-mail: connect@aauw.org
Web: www.aauw.org

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Printed in the United States

First printing: November 2011

Library of Congress Control Number: 2011940886
ISBN: 978-1-879922-41-9

THIS REPORT WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY GENEROUS
CONTRIBUTIONS FROM AAUW MEMBERS AND DONORS TO

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT FUND

THE LEGAL ADVOCACY FUND

AND

THE MOONEEN LECCE GIVING CIRCLE

This giving circle honors the legacy of Mooneen Lecce, whose passion for the mission of AAUW continues to inspire volunteerism and charitable giving dedicated to improving the lives of women and girls.



Standing (left to right): Letitia Corum, Sandy DiSario, Mooneen Lecce,
Jo Harberson, Sharon Schuster, Gloria Weston. Seated (left to right):
Barbara Leonard, Jan Leyse, Karen Manelis, Rosellen Kershaw.

CONTENTS

Foreword.....	vii
Acknowledgments.....	ix
About the Authors	xi
Executive Summary	1
Chapter 1. Defining Sexual Harassment in Education	5
Chapter 2. Prevalence of Sexual Harassment at School.....	9
Chapter 3. Emotional and Educational Toll of Sexual Harassment on Students.....	19
Chapter 4. Preventing Sexual Harassment at School.....	29
References	41
Appendix A. Methodology.....	45
Appendix B. Related Resources	49

Figures

Figure 1. Students Who Experienced Sexual Harassment during the 2010–11 School Year, by Gender.....	11
Figure 2. Types of Sexual Harassment Students Experienced in Person, by Gender.....	12
Figure 3. Cyber-Harassment of Students, by Gender	13
Figure 4. Why Students Sexually Harassed Other Students	15
Figure 5. Attributes of Students Likely or Very Likely to Be Sexually Harassed at School as Identified by Peers, by Gender.....	16
Figure 6. Sexual Harassment Incidents That Had the Most Negative Effect on Students, by Gender	21
Figure 7. Student Reactions to Sexual Harassment, by Gender	23
Figure 8. Student Reactions to Sexual Harassment, by Annual Household Income	24
Figure 9. Student Reactions to Being Sexually Harassed, in Person, Online, or Both.....	25
Figure 10. Student Responses to Sexual Harassment at the Time of the Incident, by Gender.....	26
Figure 11. Actions Students Took after Being Sexually Harassed, by Gender.....	26
Figure 12. Witnessing Sexual Harassment in School, by Gender.....	27
Figure 13. Actions Students Took to Help a Student Being Sexually Harassed at School	28
Figure 14. Student Suggestions for Reducing Sexual Harassment at School, by Gender	30

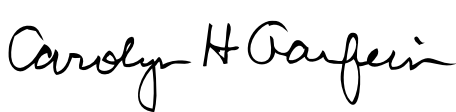
FOREWORD

For nearly two decades, AAUW has been a leader on the issue of sexual harassment in middle and high schools. The AAUW reports *Hostile Hallways: The AAUW Survey on Sexual Harassment in America's Schools* (1993) and *Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing, and Sexual Harassment in Schools* (2001) spurred national debate on the prevalence of sexual harassment at school and its negative effect on students.

Ten years have passed since the publication of the most recent *Hostile Hallways*, and youth culture has continued to evolve. Growing access to cell phone and Internet technologies has enabled sexual harassment to take off in cyberspace. Bullying has received much needed public attention, especially cyber-bullying, and many states have passed anti-bullying legislation. Yet, too often, educators and policy makers overlook sexual harassment.

Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment at School presents new evidence on sexual harassment, including cyber-harassment, in middle and high schools. It examines sexual harassment as reported in a nationwide survey of students in grades 7–12 conducted in May and June 2011. The survey confirms that sexual harassment remains an unfortunate part of school culture, affecting the educational experiences of millions of students, especially girls. Still, only a fraction of students who were sexually harassed during the 2010–11 school year reported the incident to a teacher or other adult at school. Many students told no one about their experience.

It is time to spotlight this issue again. In this report AAUW challenges educators, parents, students, and community members to tackle the continuing problem of sexual harassment at school. With fresh insights and renewed commitment, we can change the school climate to ensure that all students have a fair chance to learn unencumbered by sexual harassment.



Carolyn H. Garfein
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many AAUW staff members contributed to this report, including Christianne Corbett, senior researcher, who conducted the data analysis and significance testing, and Jill Bird-whistell, chief of strategic advancement, who supervised the project and provided thoughtful guidance throughout the process. The authors also are grateful for the exceptional work of Rebecca Lanning, director of publications; Allison VanKanegan, designer; and Susan K. Dyer, freelance editor.

Knowledge Networks conducted the survey on which this report is based. AAUW especially thanks Poom Nukulki, senior project director, and Jeffrey Shand-Lubbers, senior research analyst.

AAUW thanks the members of its Advisory Committee for their invaluable advice and guidance: Sallyann Berendsen, founder and chair of the AAUW Napa County (CA) Branch Bullying and Cyberbullying Task Force; Jackie DeFazio, former AAUW president and former chair of the AAUW Sexual Harassment Task Force; Susan Fineran, associate professor of social work and women's and gender studies, University of Southern Maine; James Gruber, professor of sociology, University of Michigan, Dearborn; Jo Harberson, member, AAUW of California Board of Directors, and former AAUW national board member; Christine Linkie, former director of school programs and program development, the Ophelia Project; Gail Nordmoe, assistant professor, Department of Education, Sacred Heart University; Bernice Sandler, senior scholar, Women's Research and Education Institute; Sharon Schuster, former AAUW president, former president of the AAUW Legal Advocacy Fund, and former president of AAUW of California; Nan Stein, senior research scientist, Wellesley College Center for Research on Women; and Riki Wilchins, director of research, TrueChild. AAUW also thanks Riki Wilchins for her work on a literature review that informed this report.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A student is groped on the way to class.

Kids call a student “gay” and “faggot” and just won’t quit.

A demeaning sexual rumor about a student goes viral in cyberspace.

Sexual harassment has long been an unfortunate part of the climate in middle and high schools in the United States. Often considered a kind of bullying, sexual harassment by definition involves sex and gender and therefore warrants separate attention. The legal definition of sexual harassment also differentiates it from bullying.

Based on a nationally representative survey of 1,965 students in grades 7–12 conducted in May and June 2011, *Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment at School* provides fresh evidence about students’ experiences with sexual harassment, including being harassed, harassing someone else, or witnessing harassment. The survey asked students to share their reactions to their experience with sexual harassment and its impact on them. It also asked them about their ideas for how schools can respond to and prevent sexual harassment.

JUST PART OF THE SCHOOL DAY

Sexual harassment is part of everyday life in middle and high schools. Nearly half (48 percent) of the students surveyed experienced some form of sexual harassment in the 2010–11 school year, and the majority of those students (87 percent) said it had a negative effect on them.¹ Verbal harassment (unwelcome sexual comments, jokes, or gestures) made up the bulk of the incidents, but physical harassment was far too common. Sexual harassment by text, e-mail, Facebook, or other electronic means affected nearly one-third (30 percent) of students. Interestingly, many of the students who were sexually harassed through cyberspace were also sexually harassed in person.

Girls were more likely than boys to be sexually harassed, by a significant margin (56 percent versus 40 percent). Girls were more likely than boys to be sexually harassed both in person (52 percent versus 35 percent) and via text, e-mail, Facebook, or other electronic means (36 percent versus 24 percent). This finding confirms previous research showing that girls are sexually harassed more frequently than boys (Sagrestano, 2009; Ormerod et al., 2008; AAUW, 2001) and that girls’ experiences tend to be more physical and intrusive than boys’ experiences (Hand & Sanchez, 2000). Being called gay or lesbian in a negative way is sexual harassment that girls and boys reported in equal numbers (18 percent of students).

Witnessing sexual harassment at school was also common. One-third of girls (33 percent) and about one-quarter (24 percent) of boys said that they observed sexual harassment at their school in the 2010–11 school year. More than one-half (56 percent) of these students witnessed sexual harassment more than once during the school year. While seeing sexual harassment is unlikely to be as devastating as being the target of sexual harassment, it can have negative effects, such as reducing students’ sense of safety. Witnessing sexual harassment at school may also “normalize” the behavior for bystanders.

The prevalence of sexual harassment in grades 7–12 comes as a surprise to many, in part because it is rarely reported. Among students who were sexually harassed, about 9 percent reported the incident to a teacher, guidance counselor, or other adult at school (12 percent of girls and

¹Of students who said that they were sexually harassed, 13 percent chose “none” when asked which experience of sexual harassment had the most negative effect on them.

5 percent of boys). Just one-quarter (27 percent) of students said they talked about it with parents or family members (including siblings), and only about one-quarter (23 percent) spoke with friends.² Girls were more likely than boys to talk with parents and other family members (32 percent versus 20 percent) and more likely than boys to talk with friends (29 percent versus 15 percent).³ Still, one-half of students who were sexually harassed in the 2010–11 school year said they did nothing afterward in response to sexual harassment.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT NEGATIVELY AFFECTS GIRLS

Girls were more likely than boys to say that they had been negatively affected by sexual harassment—a finding that confirms previous research by AAUW (2001) and others. Not only were girls more likely than boys to say sexual harassment caused them to have trouble sleeping (22 percent of girls versus 14 percent of boys), not want to go to school (37 percent of girls versus 25 percent of boys), or change the way they went to or home from school (10 percent of girls versus 6 percent of boys), girls were more likely in every case to say they felt that way for “quite a while” compared with boys. Too often, these negative emotional effects take a toll on students’ and especially girls’ education, resulting in decreased productivity and increased absenteeism from school (Chesire, 2004). Thus, although both girls and boys can encounter sexual harassment at school, it is still a highly “gendered phenomenon that is directly and negatively associated with outcomes for girls” (Ormerod et al., 2008).

“THAT’S SO GAY”

Gender harassment is a significant part of the sexual-harassment problem in schools. In this type of harassment, students are targeted for failing to follow norms

that are typical for their gender. For example, a boy who wears colorful clothing might be called gay, and a girl who plays sports might be called a lesbian. In this type of harassment, students police other students’ behavior and enforce gender stereotypes.

Boys were most likely to identify being called gay as the type of sexual harassment most troubling to them. Reactions varied, however, with some boys saying that they laughed it off, while others expressed embarrassment, sadness, or fear as a result of the experience. For girls, being called a lesbian was also a common occurrence, particularly for female athletes. Reactions to this form of sexual harassment varied as well, with some students undisturbed but others upset by the experience.

A VICIOUS CYCLE

Harassers come in all shapes and sizes, but the AAUW survey revealed overarching patterns. Nearly all the behavior documented in the survey was peer-to-peer sexual harassment. Boys were more likely than girls to say they sexually harassed other students (18 percent versus 14 percent). Most students who admitted to sexually harassing another student were also the target of sexual harassment themselves (92 percent of girls and 80 percent of boys). Almost one-third (29 percent) of students who experienced sexual harassment of any type also identified themselves as harassers. Only 5 percent of students who had never experienced sexual harassment identified themselves as harassers.

“NO BIG DEAL”

Many of the students who admitted to sexually harassing others didn’t think of it as a big deal (44 percent), and many were trying to be funny (39 percent). Only a handful of students who harassed others did so because they

²These estimates of the number of students who talked with their parents about a sexual-harassment incident may be higher than other estimates because the referenced event was the experience that had the most negative effect on the student. In other surveys, students were asked to recall the most recent experience.

³Respondents could select more than one category. For example, a student could say that she or he spoke with a parent and talked with a friend.

wanted a date with the person (3 percent) or thought the person liked it (6 percent). Thus, sexual harassment does not usually appear to be a misunderstanding. Few harassers see themselves as “rejected suitors,” and many appear to be misguided comedians or simply students who are unaware, or unwilling to recognize, that their actions may bother others. These findings suggest that prevention efforts need to address when humor crosses the line and becomes sexual harassment. Moreover, for some students, understanding that sexual harassment can indeed be a big deal for other students is a necessary first step.

STUDENTS SPEAK OUT

Students offered ideas for reducing sexual harassment in their school, including designating a person they can talk

to (39 percent), providing online resources (22 percent), and holding in-class discussions (31 percent). Allowing students to anonymously report problems was a top recommendation (57 percent), as was enforcing sexual-harassment policies and punishing harassers (51 percent). These suggestions should spur strategies and approaches for responding to and preventing sexual harassment in schools.

This report concludes with a discussion of promising practices that are making a difference in schools, along with recommendations for how administrators, educators, parents and other concerned adults, students, and community groups can contribute to efforts to make middle and high schools free from sexual harassment.

CHAPTER 1

**Defining
Sexual
Harassment
in Education**

Originally coined in reference to behavior in the workplace (MacKinnon, 1979), the term *sexual harassment* also refers to unwanted sexual conduct at school. In the school setting, sexual harassment includes unwanted sexual behavior that interferes with a student’s educational opportunities.

Sexual harassment at school can include making verbal or written comments, making gestures, displaying pictures or images, using physical coercion, or any combination of these actions. It can take place in person or through electronic means such as text messages and social media. School staff can be harassers, but student peer-to-peer sexual harassment makes up the bulk of sexual harassment at middle and high schools (Eckes, 2006). Students who sexually harass other students are likely to have been sexually harassed themselves (Fineran & Bolen, 2006).

Harassment based on a victim’s failure to conform to gender norms is recognized as sexual harassment. Anti-gay and -lesbian slurs are frequently used in gender harassment, but any student who is perceived as failing to conform to social gender norms can be the target. For example, girls may be called “lesbian” if they appear “masculine,” and boys may be called “gay” or “fag” if they seem “feminine.” Conversely, harassers may call girls

Definition of Sexual Harassment

“Sexual harassment is unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, which can include unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal, nonverbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Thus, sexual harassment prohibited by Title IX can include conduct such as touching of a sexual nature; making sexual comments, jokes, or gestures; writing graffiti or displaying or distributing sexually explicit drawings, pictures, or written materials; calling students sexually charged names; spreading sexual rumors; rating students on sexual activity or performance; or circulating, showing, or creating e-mails or Web sites of a sexual nature.”

—U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights

who mature earlier than their peers “slut” or “whore” if the harasser deems them to be “too sexual” or wants to fuel rumors about their alleged sexual behavior. Gender harassment is not necessarily sexual in intent or action, but it does address the targeted student’s sexuality and is used as a general pejorative to manipulate or control other students. While it also happens in high school, gender harassment is especially common in middle school (Lichty & Campbell, 2011). The courts have recognized gender harassment as a part of sexual harassment, and thus it is subject to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, a law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex at all schools that receive federal funding (Graves, 2011).

TITLE IX AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT SCHOOL

Considered by the courts as a form of sex discrimination under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, sexual harassment is defined as unwanted sexual behavior that interferes with a student’s right to receive an equal education. Sexual assault, rape, dating violence, and other forms of sexual violence are considered extreme forms of sexual harassment and are subject to criminal prosecution. In some areas, state or local laws prohibit sexual harassment in schools. When race and sex are involved, sexual harassment is also subject to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits racial discrimination.

A “Dear Colleague” letter from the Obama administration (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2010) made it clear to schools that any harassment motivated by a student’s gender is considered unlawful under Title IX. The directive includes harassment of students who are perceived by their peers as not conforming to stereotypical feminine or masculine behavior or attire. Harassment may involve behaviors directed toward a student of the same or different sex.

Title IX protects students against two types of sexual harassment: “quid pro quo” (“this for that”) and “hostile environment.” When someone with power, usually a teacher or administrator, abuses her or his power to coerce a student into sexual activity in exchange for a good grade or participation in a school activity, the behavior is considered quid pro quo harassment. This kind of exchange is unlawful whether the student resists or acquiesces.

The vast majority of sexual harassment at school falls into the category of hostile-environment harassment, which includes unwanted sexual conduct that is “sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive” to limit a student’s participation in an educational program or activity. The courts recognize school liability for peer-to-peer sexual harassment, but the standard for proving a school’s liability is high.

In *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education* (1997/1999), the U.S. Supreme Court determined that four factors are required for a finding of a Title IX violation: (1) school officials must have actual knowledge; (2) officials with the authority to take remedial action instead show “deliberate indifference,” which makes students vulnerable to harassment; (3) the harassment must have been severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive; and (4) the harassment must have had the effect of denying the victim’s participation in educational programs or activities. The right of school administrators to punish online bullying and sexual harassment by students was recently upheld in *Kowalski v. Berkeley County Schools* (2011). Thus, schools do have responsibility for school-based cyber-harassment, regardless of location; however, the courts have set the bar high for students and parents to hold schools accountable.

Title IX also requires schools to appoint a Title IX coordinator tasked with implementing sexual-harassment policies and ensuring gender equity in virtually all areas of school life, including sports.

BULLYING AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment in school is sometimes considered a form of bullying (Ashbaugh & Cornell, 2008; Brown et al., 2007). Indeed, both terms refer to harming a peer or subordinate at school or work. Both bullying and sexual harassment can have negative psychological effects that interfere with education or work, and a few behaviors, such as calling someone gay or lesbian in a negative way, are sometimes considered bullying or sexual harassment or both. Distinguishing between the terms is important because they have different definitions and are regulated by different laws. Too often, the more comfortable term *bullying* is used to describe sexual harassment, obscuring the role of gender and sex in these incidents (Stein & Mennemeier, 2011). Schools are likely to promote bullying prevention while ignoring or downplaying sexual harassment (Gruber & Fineran, 2007).

As stated before, sexual harassment at school is unwanted sexual behavior (in person and online) that interferes with a student’s education. Bullying is usually defined as repeated unwanted behavior that involves an imbalance of power through which the bully intends to harm the bullied student or students (Espelage & Swearer, 2011). Bullying is not necessarily sexual in nature, and the bully may pick a victim for any or no reason. The victim may be chosen simply because she or he is a convenient target for the bully.

Sexual harassment and bullying differ in the typical age of the involved students. Bullying occurs throughout childhood, whereas sexual harassment typically begins with adolescence. Researchers have found that sexual harassment can begin as early as elementary school, but the prevalence increases in higher grades as more students enter puberty (Petersen & Hyde, 2009). Sexual harassment at younger ages is not typically about sex itself but about gender identity. A study of middle and high school students in Canada found that sexual harassment at

school appeared to increase from 6th grade to 10th grade, after which it leveled off (Pepler et al., 2006).

Sexual harassment and bullying are also regulated by different laws. As explained earlier, sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Since Title IX is a federal law, all schools that receive federal funding are regulated by it. In contrast, no federal law exists for bullying, although most states have anti-bullying legislation.

Since state laws and their effectiveness vary, numerous organizations, including AAUW, advocate for a federal anti-bullying law. In April 2011 the Safe Schools Improvement Act was introduced in both the U.S. House (H.R. 1648) and Senate (S. 506). If enacted, this law would amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to require schools receiving federal funds to adopt codes of conduct specifically prohibiting bullying and harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity.⁴

CYBER-BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

The use of social media and texting is nearly ubiquitous among teenagers. By 2008 nearly all teenagers (93 percent) were online, and young people spent more time using media than doing any other single activity besides sleeping (Roberts & Foehr, 2008, as cited in Pascoe, 2011). Between 20 and 40 percent of youth ages 12 to 17 report having experienced some form of cyber-bullying (Tokunaga, 2010). For bullies and harassers, the Internet

and social media are attractive stomping grounds. Anonymity, instantaneousness, the ability to escalate quickly, and intrusiveness are features of the Internet and social media that can enable or increase bullying and sexual harassment (Chaffin, 2008). A lack of specific physical locale may also convince bullies or harassers that they are beyond the school's legal reach—as they sometimes are.

Sexual harassment is acknowledged to be a prevalent aspect of cyber-bullying, although it is not generally reported separately (Shariff & Strong-Wilson, 2005). Researchers have argued that the sexual (and potentially embarrassing) nature of cyber-harassment results in underreporting relative to other forms of abuse (Bhat, 2008).

SUMMARY

Sexual harassment in education defies simple definition. Legally, sexual harassment can be defined as unwanted sexual behavior that is sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive to interfere with a student's education. Yet, as discussed in the next chapter, even incidents that appear "minor," such as sexual comments and jokes or being called gay or lesbian, may have a profound impact on the emotional well-being of some students. Feeling sick to one's stomach or being unable to concentrate at school may not be sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive for legal action, but it can certainly affect the educational experience. Sexual harassment in middle and high schools can be a problem long before it reaches the level of legal action.

⁴The proposed law would require states to submit data on bullying and harassment to the U.S. Department of Education, which would provide Congress with a report every two years. Additionally, the proposed law would allow schools to use funding under the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act to provide professional development for staff to learn how to prevent bullying and harassment, how to intervene effectively when incidents occur, and how to implement student education programs.

CHAPTER 2

**Prevalence
of Sexual
Harassment
at School**

Sexual harassment is widespread in middle and high schools. Young and colleagues (2008) found that 40 to 50 percent of students had experienced some form of sexual harassment in a single school year.⁵ When a longer period of time is examined, the rates of sexual harassment are understandably higher. In AAUW's previous research, more than 80 percent of students reported that they had experienced sexual harassment at least once in their school career (AAUW, 1993, 2001). A broader definition of sexual harassment can also increase estimates of prevalence. Despite these differences, however, patterns emerge. Researchers often find that girls are more likely than boys to experience sexual harassment (Young et al., 2008). Some researchers claim that sexual harassment is so common for girls that many fail to recognize it as sexual harassment when it happens (Leaper & Brown, 2008; Pepler et al., 2006). Physical harassment is less common than verbal harassment, but it tends to have stronger negative effects on students (AAUW, 2001). Taunts about being gay are common in middle and high schools, often with negative effects on targeted youth (GLSEN, 2005).

METHODOLOGY

This report addresses the prevalence, frequency, and impact of sexual harassment in middle and high schools. AAUW commissioned Knowledge Networks to conduct

Definition of Sexual Harassment

In AAUW's survey, sexual harassment was defined as unwelcome sexual behavior that takes place in person or electronically. If everyone involved likes and agrees to the sexual behavior, it is not sexual harassment. The survey asked students whether they had experienced or witnessed sexual harassment during the 2010–11 school year.

a nationally representative online survey of students in grades 7–12 on the subject of sexual harassment. In fall 2010 AAUW created a survey based on previous surveys used for AAUW reports published in 1993, 2001, and 2005, as well as on advice from AAUW Advisory Board members.

This survey differs from previous AAUW surveys in the time period it covered and the structure of the questions about the effects of sexual harassment on students. Past surveys asked students to consider any sexual harassment that they might have encountered over their entire school

Types of Sexual Harassment

In AAUW's survey, students were asked whether they had experienced the following types of sexual harassment.

IN PERSON

- Having someone make unwelcome sexual comments, jokes, or gestures to or about you
- Being called gay or lesbian in a negative way
- Being touched in an unwelcome sexual way
- Having someone flash or expose themselves to you
- Being shown sexy or sexual pictures that you didn't want to see
- Being physically intimidated in a sexual way
- Being forced to do something sexual

THROUGH TEXT, E-MAIL, FACEBOOK, OR OTHER ELECTRONIC MEANS

- Being sent unwelcome sexual comments, jokes, or pictures or having someone post them about or of you
- Having someone spread unwelcome sexual rumors about you
- Being called gay or lesbian in a negative way

⁵AAUW (1993, 2001) previously used the time frame of the entire school career to estimate the prevalence of sexual harassment. This study uses a single school year as the duration for the study. Studies that refer to a single school year tend to have lower rates of prevalence than do studies that ask students about any experience with sexual harassment over the course of their school career.

career. This survey asked respondents to consider any sexual harassment that they might have encountered in the 2010–11 school year. This change was expected to show a reduced prevalence of sexual harassment at school.

The subject of emotional and educational impacts was also treated differently. In past AAUW surveys, questions about the impact of sexual harassment referred to the student’s most recent experience with it. This AAUW survey asked students to identify the experience that had the most negative effect on them. This change was expected to show an increase in the number of students who identified negative emotional or educational effects.

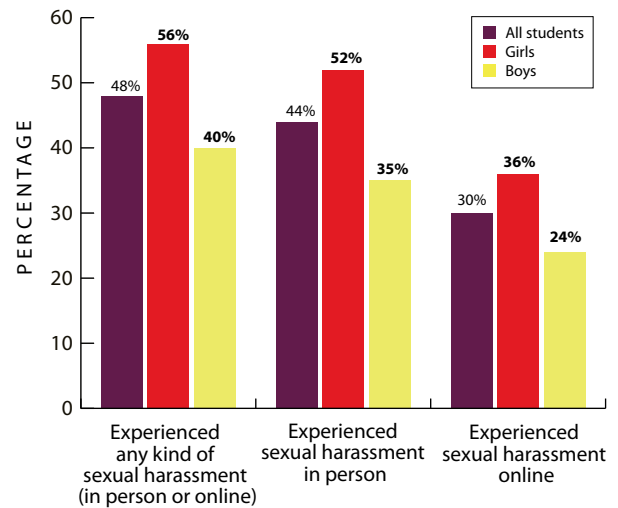
This new survey also included questions regarding sexual harassment by text, e-mail, Facebook, or other electronic means that were not included in earlier surveys. The wording of the questionnaire was also altered to reduce the time required for completion.

Knowledge Networks was selected to conduct the survey because the company has recruited the first online research panel that is representative of the entire U.S. population (see Appendix A). Documentation regarding its methodology, including address-based sampling, data-collection procedures, weighting, and Institutional Review Board-bearing issues is available on the AAUW website. Statistical significance testing was conducted at the 95 percent level of confidence for income and gender differences.

PREVALENCE

About half (48 percent) the students in grades 7–12 experienced some form of sexual harassment at school during the 2010–11 school year. Nearly half the students (44 percent) encountered sexual harassment in person,

Figure 1. Students Who Experienced Sexual Harassment during the 2010–11 School Year, by Gender



Notes: Students were asked if they had experienced any of 10 types of sexual harassment since the beginning of the school year. **Bold** numbers indicate statistically significant gender differences at the 95 percent level. Base=survey respondents (n=1,965 students), 1,002 girls and 963 boys in grades 7–12.
Source: AAUW sexual harassment survey, May–June 2011.

and 30 percent encountered sexual harassment through texting, e-mail, Facebook, or other electronic means. Many experienced sexual harassment both in person and electronically.⁶

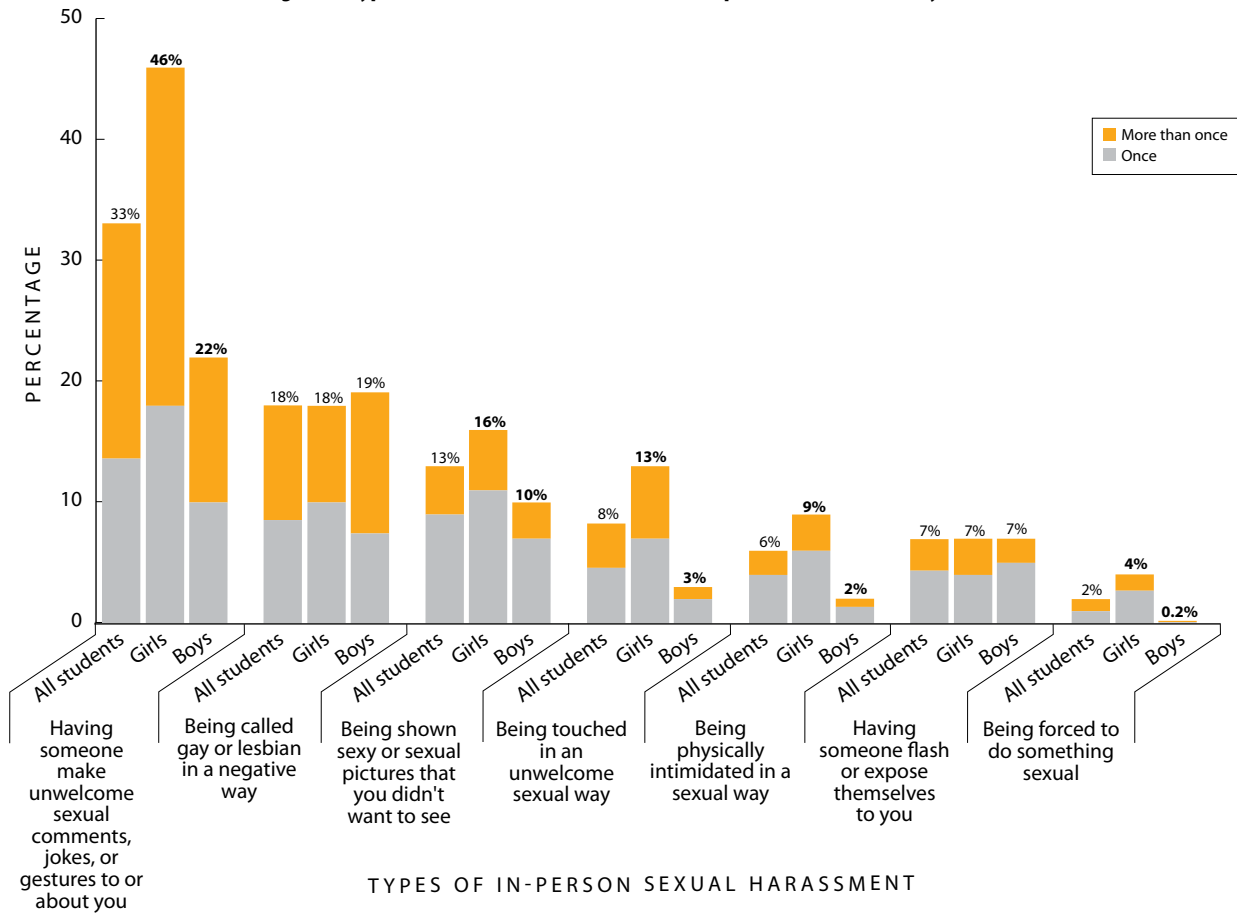
As figure 1 shows, girls were more likely than boys to experience sexual harassment (56 percent versus 40 percent). The gender gap holds true for both in-person harassment (52 percent versus 35 percent) and electronic harassment (36 percent versus 24 percent).⁷

As figure 2 shows, unwelcome sexual comments, jokes, and gestures were the most common type of sexual harassment, and one-third of students (33 percent) encountered them at least once in school year 2010–11. Almost one-

⁶Because many students experienced both in-person and online harassment, the totals cannot be added together.

⁷In May and June 2011, 1,002 girls and 963 boys completed the AAUW survey online. Responses were weighted to reflect the U.S. population for age, gender, race-ethnicity, region of the country, and other factors. The percentages shown in this report are based on weighted data.

Figure 2. Types of Sexual Harassment Students Experienced in Person, by Gender



Notes: **Bold** numbers indicate statistically significant gender differences at the 95 percent level. Base=survey respondents (n=1,965 students), 1,002 girls and 963 boys in grades 7–12. Source: AAUW sexual harassment survey, May–June 2011.

fifth of students (18 percent) were called gay or a lesbian in a negative way, and 13 percent said that they had been shown sexy or sexual images that they didn't want to see.

Girls were more likely than boys to encounter most forms of sexual harassment. Girls were much more likely to experience unwanted sexual jokes, comments, or gestures (46 percent versus 22 percent). Girls and boys were about equally likely to be called gay or lesbian in a negative way (18 percent of students). Girls were more likely to say that they were shown sexy or sexual pictures that they did

not want to see (16 percent of girls versus 10 percent of boys) and that they had been touched in an unwelcome sexual way (13 percent of girls versus 3 percent of boys). Girls were also more likely to say that they had been physically intimidated in a sexual way (9 percent of girls versus 2 percent of boys) and were forced to do something sexual (4 percent of girls versus less than 1 percent of boys). Girls (7 percent) and boys (7 percent) were equally likely to say that someone flashed or exposed him- or herself to them.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT BY AGE, RACE, AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

About 48 percent of 7th graders—both girls and boys—who took AAUW’s survey reported facing sexual harassment during the 2010–11 school year. With age, however, a gender gap emerges. For 12th graders who took the survey, a 23 percentage point gender gap existed between girls and boys, with 62 percent of girls but only 39 percent of boys reporting that they had experienced sexual harassment during the school year.

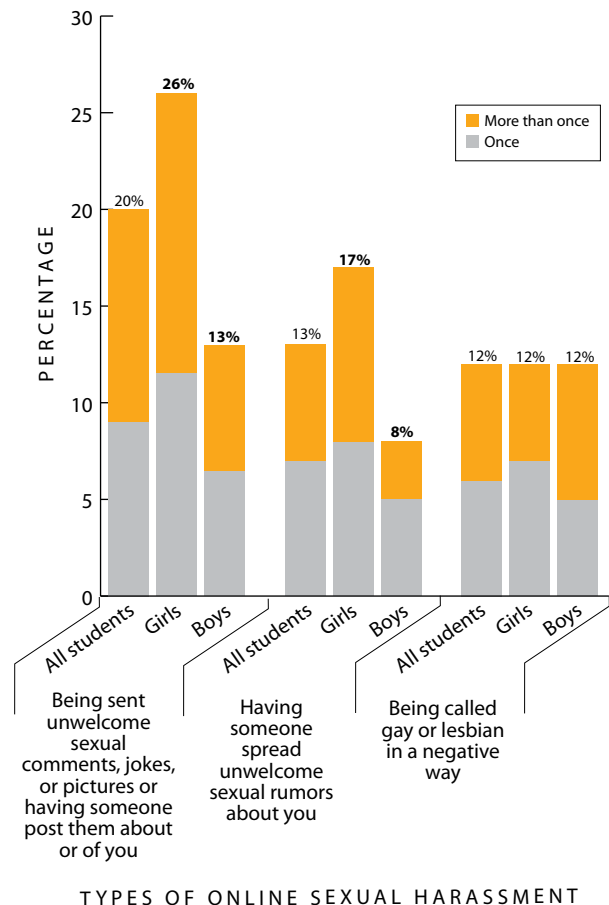
AAUW found no statistically significant differences in prevalence of sexual harassment among students of different racial-ethnic groups, which may be due to the limited sample size. In terms of socioeconomic status, students from upper-income households (with an annual income of \$60,000 and more) and students from lower-income households (with an annual income of less than \$60,000) were equally likely to report each type of sexual harassment, with one exception: Students from lower-income families were more likely to report being touched in an unwelcome way than were their peers from higher-income households.

CYBER-HARASSMENT

Overall, cyber-harassment was less prevalent than in-person sexual harassment. More than one-third of girls (36 percent) and nearly one-quarter of boys (24 percent) reported experiencing cyber-harassment (see figure 1). Twenty percent of students received a text message, e-mail, or post with unwelcome sexual comments, jokes, or pictures during the 2010–11 school year (see figure 3). Twelve percent of students were called gay or lesbian in a negative way through texting, e-mail, Facebook, or other electronic means. Thirteen percent of students had sexual rumors spread about them through electronic means.

Many students who were sexually harassed online were also sexually harassed in person. Students who were sexually harassed both in person and electronically were most

Figure 3. Cyber-Harassment of Students, by Gender



Notes: **Bold** numbers indicate statistically significant gender differences at the 95 percent level. Base=survey respondents (n=1,965 students), 1,002 girls and 963 boys in grades 7–12.
Source: AAUW sexual harassment survey, May–June 2011.

likely to be negatively affected by their experiences with sexual harassment.

STUDENT HARASSERS

A majority of harassed students (54 percent) identified one male student as their harasser, and 12 percent of harassed students said that they were harassed by a group of male students. In contrast, only 14 percent of students said the harasser was one female student, and 5 percent said that they were harassed by a group of female students.

Eleven percent of harassed students said that their harassers were a group of both female and male students.

Not surprisingly, most students don't see themselves as harassers; however, 16 percent of students surveyed (14 percent of girls and 18 percent of boys) admitted that they had sexually harassed another student, either in person or online. Fifteen percent of students had sexually harassed someone in person, and 10 percent had sexually harassed another student through texting, e-mail, Facebook, or other electronic means.

The majority of male harassers said that they had sexually harassed a male student; more than two-thirds (72 percent) indicated that they sexually harassed a boy, and less than one-fifth (19 percent) said that they sexually harassed a girl.⁸ Among female harassers, the difference

is closer. One-half of female harassers (50 percent) said that they sexually harassed a boy, and 41 percent said that they sexually harassed a girl. Because girls reported higher rates of sexual harassment than boys did, this finding raises questions. Why didn't boys or girls admit to sexually harassing girls when more girls than boys said they had been sexually harassed? Why does it seem to be more acceptable to sexually harass boys? These questions are critical to developing new strategies for prevention of sexual harassment for both genders.

Students who admitted to sexually harassing other students said that they were most likely to sexually harass other students verbally. Calling someone gay or lesbian in a negative way was the most frequently mentioned type of sexual harassment, with 12 percent of students committing it in person and 7 percent of students committing it through text, e-mail, Facebook, or other electronic means.

Student Voices: What Happened

"A boy tried to unzip my pants."

—8th-grade girl, Mexican-Native American

"A friend of a friend said I was known to give oral sex to any male who wanted or needed it because everyone knows and suspects I am gay."

—10th-grade boy, Hispanic

"They spread rumors I was gay because I played on the basketball team."

—8th-grade girl, African American

"I was called a whore because I have many friends that are boys."

—9th-grade girl, white

"They had a picture of my face attached to an animal having sex and had the words WHO'S NEXT written next to it . . . referring to my girlfriend."

—12th-grade boy, white

"They tried to corner me in the soccer goal to touch my [private parts]."

—7th-grade girl, white

"I was told I was gay because of the way I had dressed for a school spirit week event."

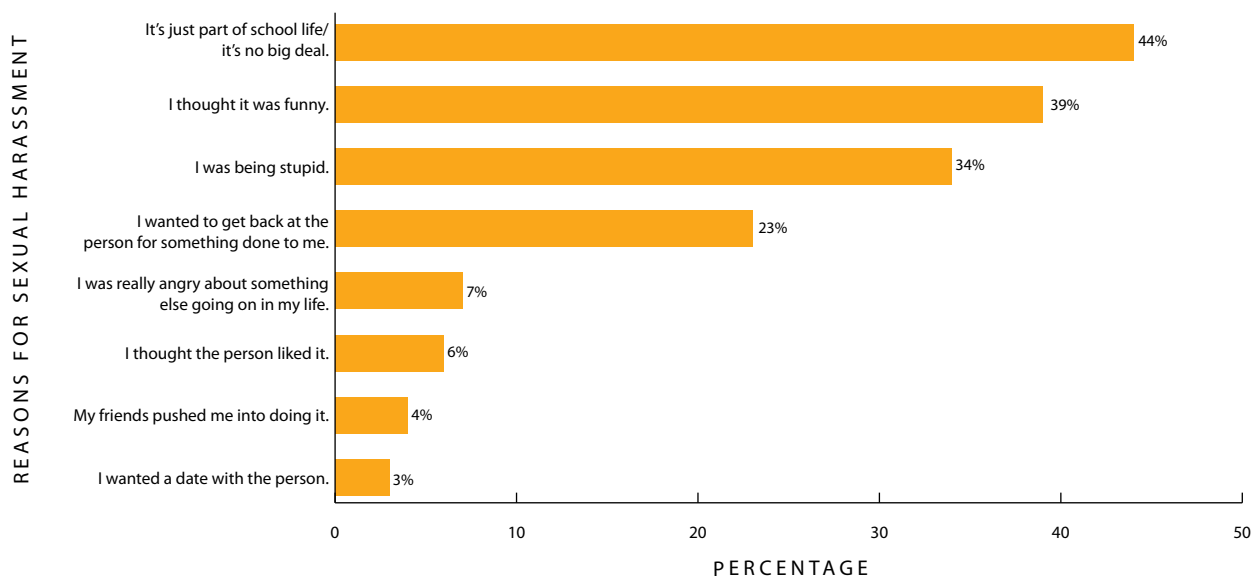
—8th-grade boy, Asian American

"Someone had lewd photos on their phone—they asked if I wanted to see them and even though I said no, they showed them to me anyway."

—12th-grade girl, African American

⁸These numbers do not equal 100 percent due to rounding and the inclusion of categories other than a male or female student. Additional options included harassing a group of students (mixed-sex, male, or female) as well as an "other" category. A small number of students did not answer the question.

Figure 4. Why Students Sexually Harassed Other Students



Notes: Base=survey respondents who indicated that they had harassed someone in person or online since the beginning of the school year (n=290 students), 135 girls and 155 boys in grades 7–12. Categories were not mutually exclusive, and students could choose more than one reason.
Source: AAUW sexual harassment survey, May–June 2011.

Sexual harassment is not simply a matter of perpetrators and victims. Of the 16 percent of students who admitted to sexually harassing others, the vast majority said they had been sexually harassed themselves (92 percent of girls and 80 percent of boys). Asked why they sexually harassed another student, about 23 percent said they were retaliating for something that had been done to them.

These results confirm previous research on student harassers. For example, Fineran and Bolen (2006) found that about half of the girls who were sexually harassed were also harassers themselves. Espelage and Holt (2007) found that bullies who are also victims were more likely than other students to report high levels of anxiety and depression. These studies indicate that bullying has adverse effects not only on victims and witnesses but on perpetrators as well. Although harassers and victims may be well defined in a particular incident, over the course of a school year, many students will be both harassed and harasser.

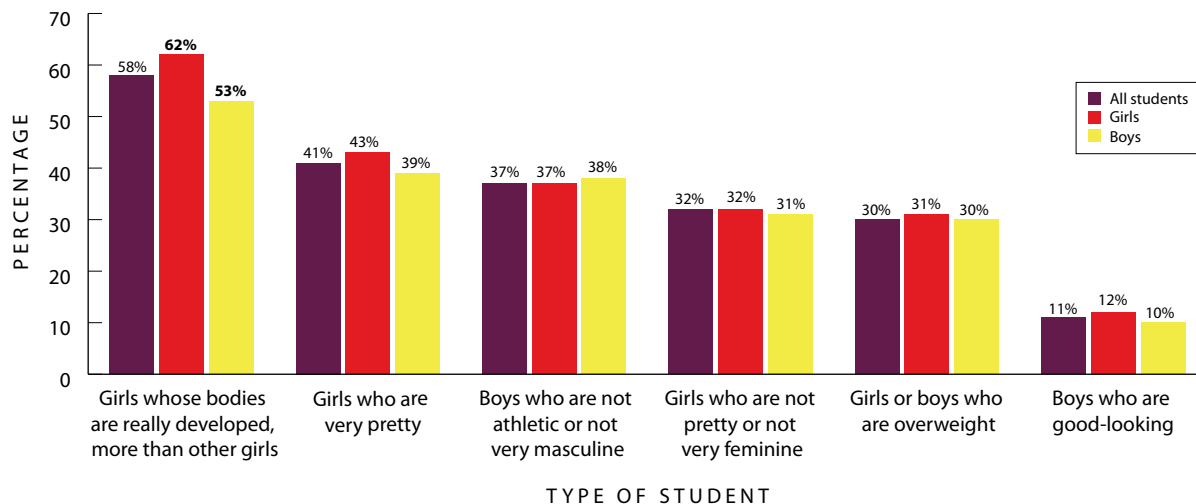
REASONS FOR SEXUAL HARASSMENT

As figure 4 shows, many students who admitted to sexually harassing others didn't think of it as a big deal (44 percent), and many were trying to be funny (39 percent). Revenge or getting back at the person for something done to them earlier was a rationale offered by 23 percent of students. Only a handful of students said they wanted a date with the person (3 percent) or thought the person liked it (6 percent). Few harassers appeared to be "rejected suitors," and many seemed to be misguided comedians or simply students who were unaware, or unwilling to recognize, that their actions may have been a big deal to others. At least one-third (34 percent) of harassers described their past behavior as stupid, suggesting that they might not intend to repeat it in the future.

STUDENT ATTITUDES

According to survey respondents, what types of students are most at risk for sexual harassment at school? Respondents considered boys who are not athletic or not

Figure 5. Attributes of Students Likely or Very Likely to Be Sexually Harassed at School as Identified by Peers, by Gender



Notes: **Bold** numbers indicate statistically significant gender differences at the 95 percent level. Base=survey respondents (n=1,965 students), 1,002 girls and 963 boys in grades 7–12. Source: AAUW sexual harassment survey, May–June 2011.

very “masculine” more likely to be sexually harassed (37 percent) than boys who are considered “good-looking” (11 percent).

For girls, those who stand out as “too sexual” or “too masculine” are at risk for sexual harassment, according to their peers. More than half the students (58 percent) said that girls whose bodies are more developed than those of other girls are likely or very likely to be sexually harassed at school. Pretty girls were considered to be at high risk by 41 percent of students, and 32 percent of students believed that girls who are not pretty or not very “feminine” are sexual-harassment targets at school. About 30 percent of students believed that girls and boys who are overweight would be likely or very likely targets.

As figure 5 shows, only boys who are considered good-looking by their peers are at relatively low risk for sexual

harassment. Girls, however, find themselves in an even more precarious position. Those who fulfill feminine standards of beauty are at high risk for sexual harassment, yet girls who are viewed as too masculine or not pretty are also at risk. These results reinforce the complexity of predicting who may be the victim of sexual harassment in middle and high schools, as unwanted sexual attention and the policing of gender norms are both part of sexual harassment.

Finally, students were asked their opinions about sexual harassment. Generally, students appear to know right from wrong. The vast majority of students know that it is not okay to tease girls who act masculine (90 percent) or boys who act feminine (89 percent). They know that students don’t bring sexual harassment on themselves (91 percent). Girls and boys agree with these principles in equal numbers, and the recognition of these basic values is heartening.

SUMMARY

Sexual harassment is widespread, with nearly half (48 percent) of the students surveyed encountering some form of sexual harassment during the 2010–11 school year. Sexual harassment by texting, e-mail, Facebook, and other forms of electronic communications affected almost one-third of students (30 percent), and many of these students were also subjected to in-person sexual harassment. In other words, sexual harassment appears to be a normal, albeit undesirable, part of school.

A sizeable minority (18 percent of boys and 14 percent of girls) admitted that they sexually harassed another student during the 2010–11 school year. Most harassers felt that their actions were no big deal, and many were trying to

be funny. Many stated that they were being stupid, which suggests that they view their actions as a mistake. Yet, students who admitted to being harassers are only a subsection of students who sexually harass others. The majority of sexual harassment remains unclaimed, suggesting either that the harassers are unaware of how others perceive their behavior or that they are unwilling to admit to it, even in an anonymous online survey.

Understanding the prevalence of different types of sexual harassment is essential for crafting efforts to respond to and prevent it. Yet sexual harassment is also defined by the reactions of targeted students and by its short- and long-term effects.

CHAPTER 3

**Emotional
and
Educational
Toll of
Sexual
Harassment
on Students**

Understanding the impact of sexual harassment on students is helpful in determining where to focus prevention efforts. It is also critical in legal contexts, since establishing an impact on the student's educational experience is a required first step in any Title IX action.

THE MOST NEGATIVE EFFECTS

To understand the effect of sexual harassment on students, the AAUW survey asked students who had experienced sexual harassment to identify one incident during the 2010–11 school year that had the most negative effect on them. This experience was then used as the reference for questions about students' reactions to sexual harassment and its impact on them. Verbal and written forms of sexual harassment were more common than physical harassment, however, so most students listed them as the experience that had the most negative effect. Several gender differences were clear in the responses.

As figure 6 shows, girls were more likely than boys to identify unwelcome sexual comments, jokes, or gestures as having had the most negative effect on them (36 percent versus 16 percent). In part, this is because more girls than boys faced that type of sexual harassment (46 percent versus 22 percent). Having sexual rumors spread electronically about them had the second most negative impact on girls (17 percent versus 11 percent of boys), and that behavior was the fourth most common form of sexual harassment experienced by girls (17 percent versus 8 percent for boys).

Boys were most likely to cite being called gay in a negative way in person as their most negative experience of sexual harassment. Girls and boys were equally likely to experience this type of sexual harassment (18 percent of students surveyed), but 21 percent of boys and only 9 percent of girls identified being called gay or lesbian as their worst experience of sexual harassment.

Boys appear to be less affected than girls by sexual harassment. Seventeen percent of boys who had been sexually

harassed selected "none" when indicating what form of sexual harassment had the most negative effect on them. In comparison, only 10 percent of sexually harassed girls said that none of their experiences with sexual harassment had a negative effect on them. This finding is supported by other studies. For example, Young and colleagues (2008) found that boys were more likely than girls to say that sexual-harassment incidents did not bother them. The difference may be attributed to the types of sexual harassment that girls and boys experience. The intensity of these experiences may also vary. Finally, for girls, sexual harassment often reinforces or subtly reminds them of the gender-power imbalance that exists in most societies (Ormerod et al., 2008; Gådin & Hammarström, 2005; Lichty & Campbell, 2011).

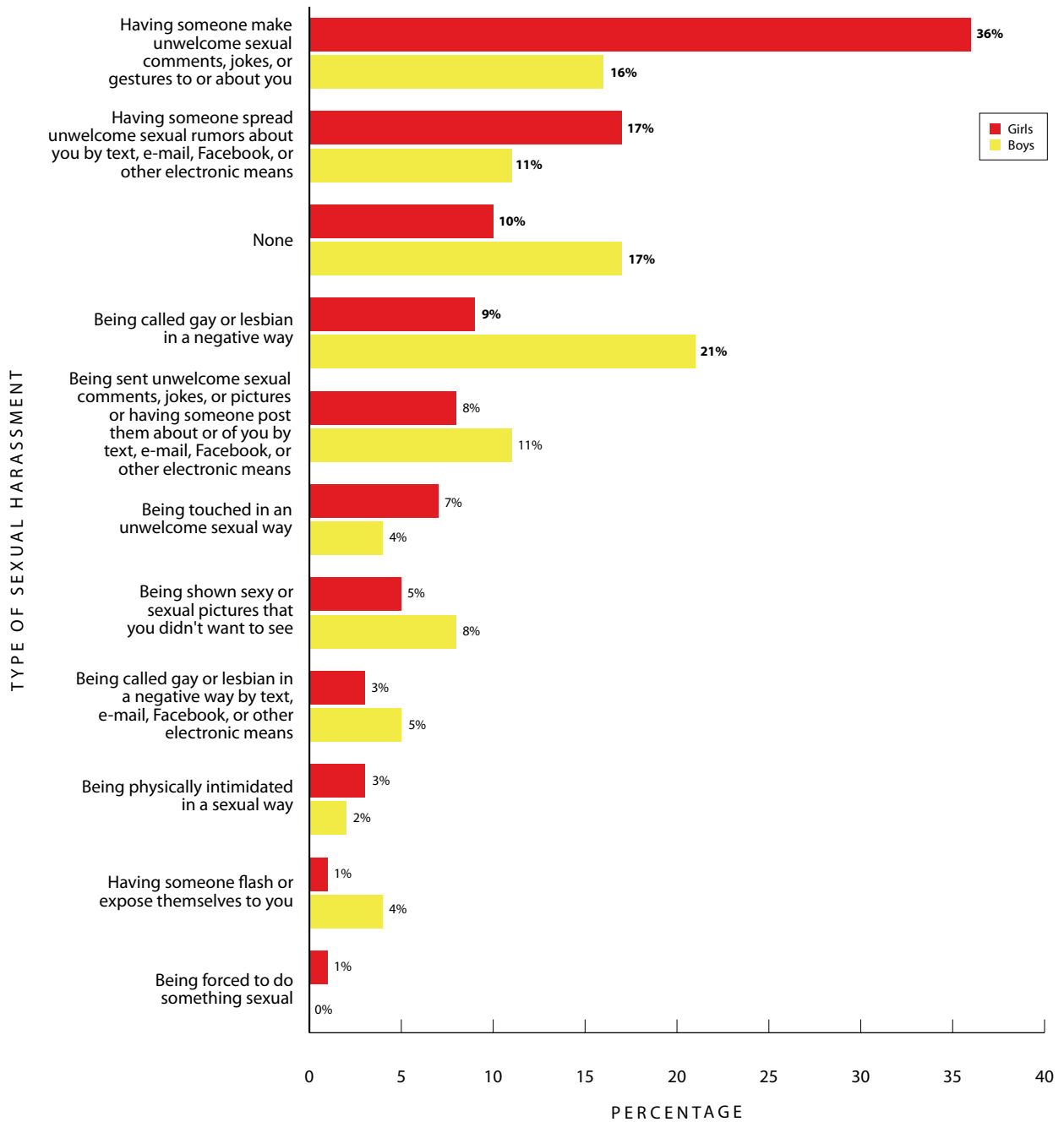
IMPACT: GENDER DIFFERENCES

Individuals have different emotional responses to sexual harassment, in part due to differences in the kind of sexual harassment they encountered. Differences in personality, culture, and gender also affect students' response. For some student victims, sexual harassment may be no big deal, whereas others might find the experience embarrassing, upsetting, or worse.

Girls are more likely than boys to say that they have been negatively affected by sexual harassment (AAUW, 1993, 2001; Fineran & Bolen, 2006), although the 2009 National School Climate Survey, by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (Kosciw et al., 2010), found that the emotional toll can be high for boys who are not straight.

The gender of the harasser also affects outcomes. Felix and McMahon (2006) found that being sexually harassed by a boy was more strongly related to behavior problems for both male and female victims than was being sexually harassed by a girl. These emotional impacts often lead to educational problems, such as difficulty concentrating on schoolwork, absenteeism, and poor academic performance (Cheshire, 2004).

Figure 6. Sexual Harassment Incidents That Had the Most Negative Effect on Students, by Gender



Notes: **Bold** numbers indicate statistically significant gender differences at the 95 percent level. Base=survey respondents who indicated that they had experienced sexual harassment in person or online since the beginning of the school year (n=931 students), 541 girls and 390 boys in grades 7–12.
 Source: AAUW sexual harassment survey, May–June 2011.

Student Voices: How Harassed Students Felt

"I was sent a website to look up and I did and it was to a porn site. It was very upsetting to me."

—7th-grade girl, white

Being called gay by other students made a student "feel bad and I tried to get away anyway I could. I felt threatened for my personal safety."

—9th-grade boy, white

A student was shown sexual photos she did not want to see. She said, "I felt bad for my friend who was in the pictures and uncomfortable that the pics were sent around."

—11th-grade girl, Asian American

Being called a lesbian was "very hurtful."

—12th-grade girl, Mexican American

"Everyone was saying I was gay, and I felt the need to have to run away and hide."

—9th-grade boy, white

Being touched in an unwelcome, sexual way made a student "feel sad and very scared."

—10th-grade girl, Asian American

After being the target of sexual rumors, a student said she "tried to ignore it" but then "thought of suicide."

—8th-grade girl, white

"I didn't like [being the target of unwelcome rumors]. It hurt me. Some of my friends still question me about the rumors."

—10th-grade boy, African American

"An 8th-grade guy passed by me and said, really softly, 'What's up, sexy?' and then kept on walking. It really creeped me out."

—7th-grade girl, white

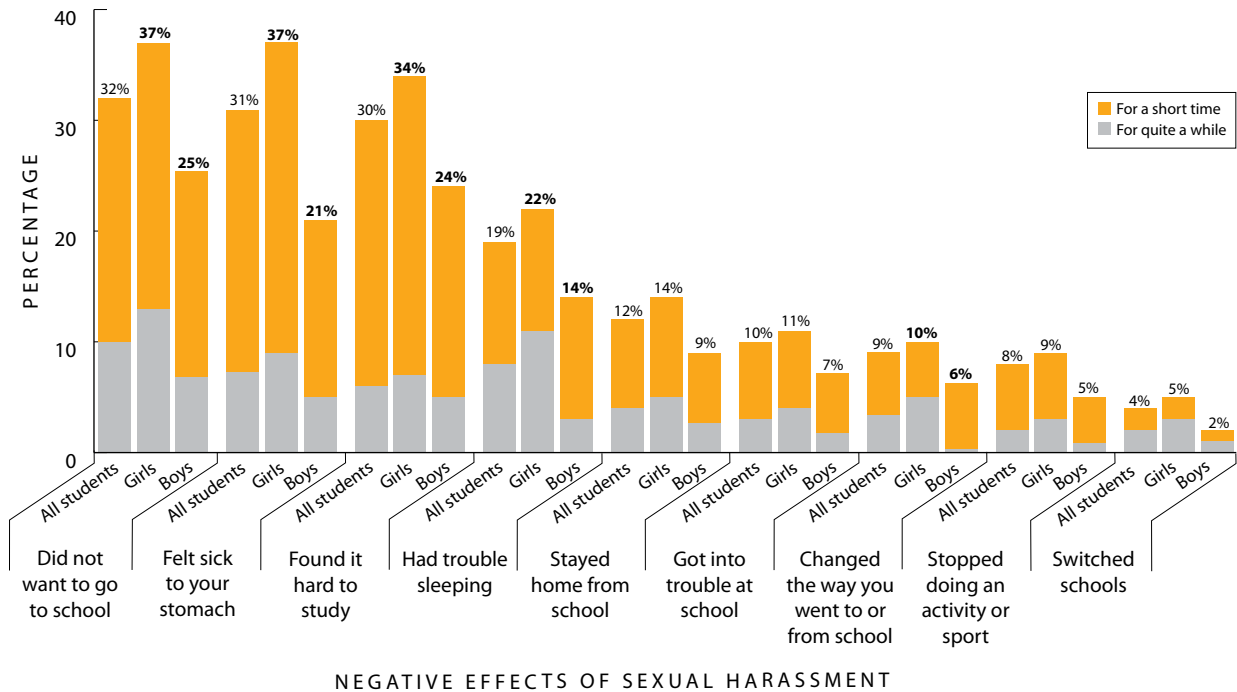
The AAUW survey found that nearly half of all students (48 percent) in grades 7–12 experienced sexual harassment during the 2010–11 school year, including 56 percent of girls and 40 percent of boys, and for most of them, the incident or incidents had a negative effect.

The emotional toll of sexual harassment was the most noticeable (see figure 7). One-third (32 percent) of harassed students said they did not want to go to school as a result of the sexual harassment, including 37 percent of girls and 25 percent of boys. Another third (31 percent) of students said they felt sick to their stomach as a result of the sexual harassment (37 percent of girls and 21 percent of boys). Thirty percent of students said sexual harassment caused them to have a hard time studying (34 percent of girls and 24 percent of boys). Trouble sleeping was a problem for 19 percent of students, including 22 percent of girls and 14 percent of boys. Girls were more likely than boys to say they had a hard time sleeping for quite a while, rather than a short time.

For many students, sexual harassment also affected their school experience. Getting into trouble at school as a result of sexual harassment was the outcome for 10 percent of students. Nine percent of students said they changed the way they went to or from school (10 percent of girls and 6 percent of boys). Eight percent of students quit an activity or sport. When a boy in 8th grade was called gay multiple times, he "stopped middle school hockey." A 10th-grade girl who was called a lesbian, among other forms of sexual harassment, said, "I take different hallways in school to avoid people."

A small but important minority of students said that sexual harassment significantly affected their education. Twelve percent of students said they stayed home from school because of sexual harassment. Four percent of students changed schools. Verbal as well as physical harassment can lead to educational impacts. For example, after being called a whore by "almost everyone" at her school and being sexually harassed both online and in person, an 8th-grade girl said she "looked into switching schools."

Figure 7. Student Reactions to Sexual Harassment, by Gender



Notes: **Bold** numbers indicate statistically significant gender differences at the 95 percent level. Base=survey respondents who indicated that they had experienced a negative impact from being sexually harassed since the beginning of the school year (n=804 students), 484 girls and 320 boys in grades 7–12.
Source: AAUW sexual harassment survey, May–June 2011.

IMPACT: INCOME DIFFERENCES

The impact of sexual harassment appears to vary by income as well as gender (see figure 8). In nearly every category, students from moderate- or low-income homes were significantly more likely to say sexual harassment had a negative impact on them than were students from homes in which income was \$60,000 and higher.⁹ For example, 38 percent of lower-income students but only 27 percent of higher-income students said they did not want to go to school because of a sexual-harassment experience. Of the 12 percent of students who said they stayed home because of a sexual-harassment experience, two-thirds were from a household with an income under \$60,000. The connection between socioeconomic status

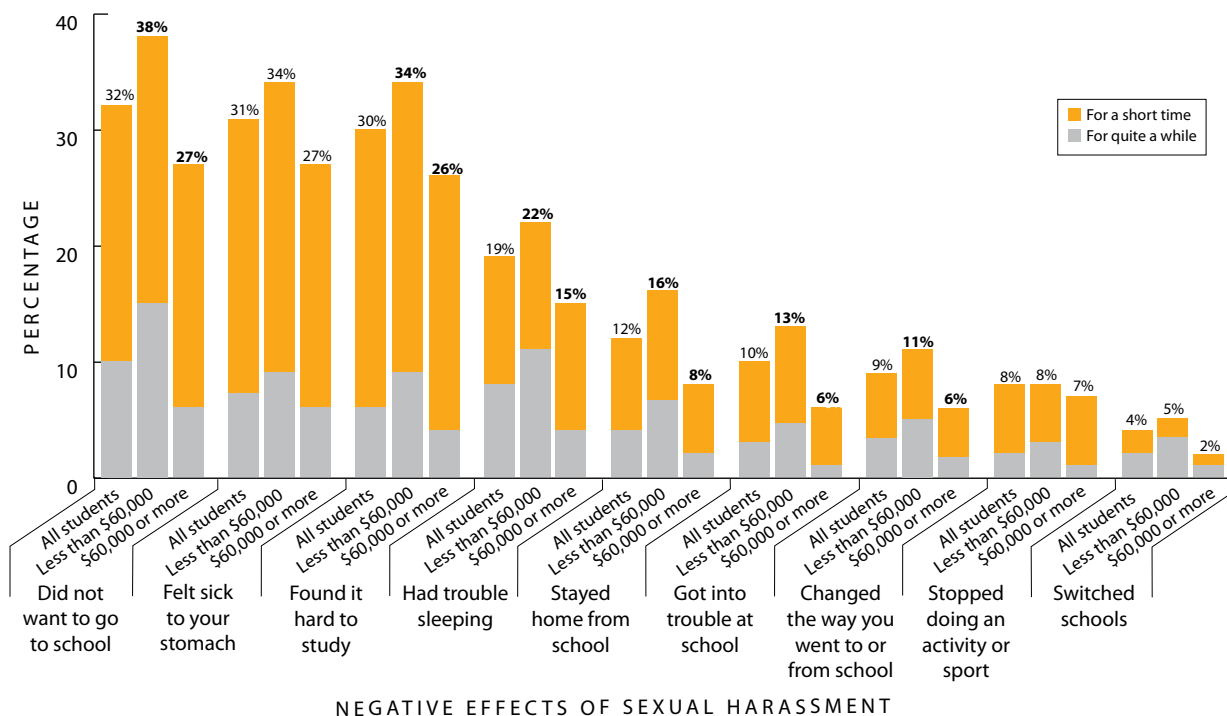
and sexual harassment is an area in which further research and analysis are necessary.

IMPACT: RACIAL DIFFERENCES

The sample sizes for African American and Hispanic students are too small to make definitive conclusions about how sexual harassment affects different racial groups, but the findings suggest that students of color may be affected more than white students are. Notably, African American students were more likely than their white counterparts to stop doing an activity or sport, get into trouble at school, and find it hard to study because of sexual harassment. Hispanic students were more likely than white students to stay home from school because of sexual harassment.

⁹Low- and moderate-income households are defined as those with incomes below \$60,000; moderate-high-income households are defined as those with household incomes of \$60,000 or higher. Knowledge Networks collected income information in increments of \$10,000. The figure of \$60,000 was selected as closest to the national median income for a family with children in 2010 (\$57,085) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Questions about family income were posed to parents, not to students.

Figure 8. Student Reactions to Sexual Harassment, by Annual Household Income



Notes: **Bold** numbers indicate statistically significant differences between higher-income and lower-income students at the 95 percent level. Base=survey respondents who indicated that they had experienced a negative impact from being sexually harassed since the beginning of the school year (n=804 students), 378 students from households with an annual income of less than \$60,000 and 426 students from households with an annual income of \$60,000 or more in grades 7–12.
Source: AAUW sexual harassment survey, May–June 2011.

Student Voices: Responses to Sexual Harassment

“A guy sent me a picture of his butt with no clothes on it. I just ignored it and then blocked him from my Facebook account.”

—11th-grade girl, white

“The person made a comment that he would like to see me naked but I told him that was not funny and not to say that again.”

—10th-grade girl, African American

A student who was called gay wrote, “I can’t tell teachers, they don’t care.”

—8th-grade boy, white

“This boy who was my friend kept touching my butt and I kept telling him to stop. Then he touched my boob and I went to the office and told them.”

—7th-grade girl, white

When random people ran up to him and called him gay, a student said, “I told my friends and laughed it off.”

—8th-grade boy, Asian/white

After experiencing unwanted touching, a student told her mom and said, “My mom called the school.”

—7th-grade girl, Hispanic

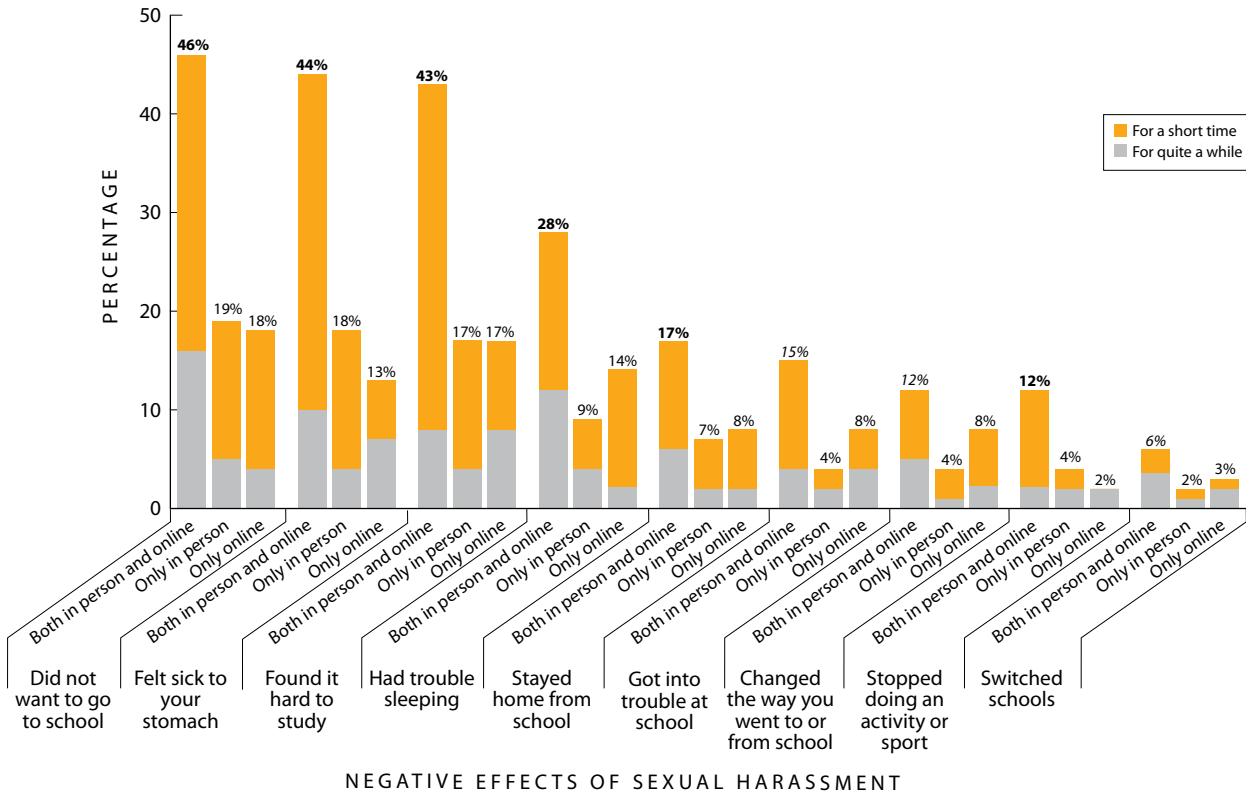
“The person sent me a Facebook chat saying I was gay and stupid and I told my mom and deleted the person from my friends list.”

—7th-grade girl, white

A student who was the target of a homophobic slur said, “I just deal with it and make a joke. If someone says, ‘Are you in the closet?’ I’ll say, ‘How did you know I was in the closet getting dressed?’”

—11th-grade boy, white

Figure 9. Student Reactions to Being Sexually Harassed, in Person, Online, or Both



Notes: **Bold** numbers indicate statistically significant differences between students who experienced sexual harassment both in person and online and the other two categories at the 95 percent level. *Italicized* numbers indicate statistically significant differences between students who experienced sexual harassment both in person and online and students who experienced harassment only in person at the 95 percent level. Base=survey respondents who indicated that they had experienced a negative impact from being sexually harassed since the beginning of the school year (n=804 students), 383 students who had been sexually harassed both in person and online, 340 students who had been harassed in person only, and 81 students who had been harassed online only in grades 7–12. Source: AAUW sexual harassment survey, May–June 2011.

African American and Hispanic students were more likely than white students to change the way they go to or from school and switch schools in response to sexual harassment. This suggests a need for further research on the intersection of race and sexual harassment.

IMPACT: ONLINE AND IN-PERSON SEXUAL HARASSMENT

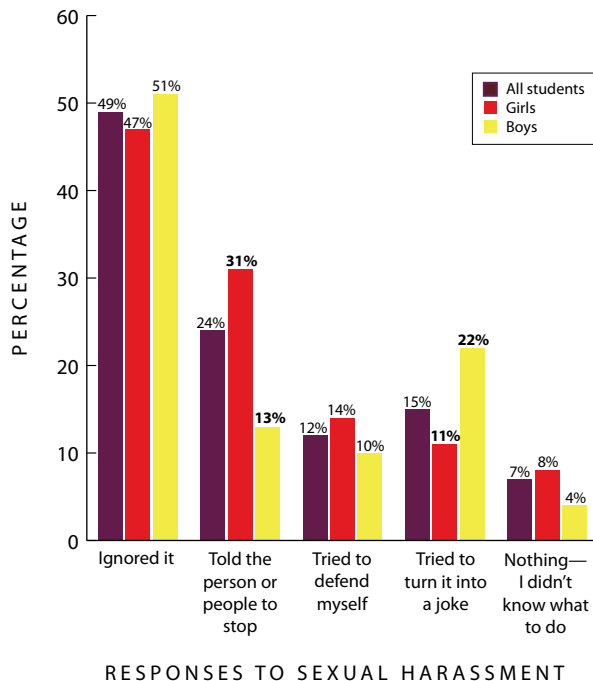
Students who faced sexual harassment both online and in person were much more likely than those who faced it only online or only in person to say it affected them (see figure 9). For example, 46 percent of students who had experienced sexual harassment both online and in person said they did not want to go to school as a result of the

sexual harassment, compared with 19 percent who were sexually harassed only in person and 18 percent who were sexually harassed only online. Of students who were sexually harassed both online and in person, 43 percent found it hard to study, compared with 17 percent of those who had been sexually harassed only in person or only online. Thus, facing sexual harassment through multiple avenues increased the likelihood that it would affect a student’s ability to learn.

RESPONDING TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Students had different reactions when they experienced sexual harassment (see figure 10).¹⁰ About half of both girls and boys reported that they ignored it (49 percent).

Figure 10. Student Responses to Sexual Harassment at the Time of the Incident, by Gender



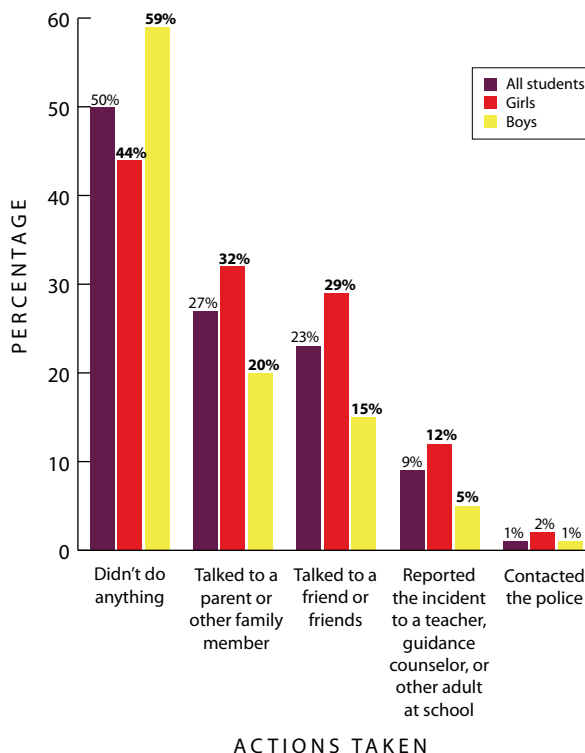
Notes: **Bold** numbers indicate statistically significant gender differences at the 95 percent level. Base=survey respondents who indicated that they had experienced a negative impact from being sexually harassed since the beginning of the school year (n=804 students), 484 girls and 320 boys in grades 7–12.
Source: AAUW sexual harassment survey, May–June 2011.

This is unsurprising since ignoring a harasser may feel like the easiest response or the default response for students who are unsure what to do. Many parents and teachers even counsel students to ignore harassers.

The next most common responses to sexual harassment varied. Almost one-third of girls (31 percent) but only 13 percent of boys told the harassers to stop. Nearly one-fourth of boys (22 percent) but only 11 percent of girls said they tried to turn the sexual harassment into a joke.

The difference in these responses likely reflects the differences in the kinds of sexual harassment experienced

Figure 11. Actions Students Took after Being Sexually Harassed, by Gender



Notes: **Bold** numbers indicate statistically significant gender differences at the 95 percent level. Base=survey respondents who indicated that they had experienced a negative impact from being sexually harassed since the beginning of the school year (n=804 students), 484 girls and 320 boys in grades 7–12.
Source: AAUW sexual harassment survey, May–June 2011.

by girls and boys. A higher percentage of girls than boys encountered unwanted sexual attention, such as unwelcome sexual touching and unwelcome sexual comments, jokes, or gestures. It's logical then that more girls would have a forceful response, like telling someone to stop. Many boys listed being called gay in a negative way as having the most negative effect on them. Boys might use humor to try to deflate or deflect that unwanted behavior.

Statistically similar percentages of girls and boys said they tried to defend themselves against the harasser, yelled for help, or did nothing when the sexual harassment occurred, because they didn't know what to do.

¹⁰Students could select more than one response on the survey.

AFTER SEXUAL HARASSMENT

After being sexually harassed, 50 percent of students did nothing about it, including 44 percent of girls and 59 percent of boys (see figure 11).¹¹ Girls were much more likely than boys to talk with someone about what happened or to report it. Nearly one-third of girls (32 percent) but only 20 percent of boys said they talked to a parent or other family member. Twenty-nine percent of girls but only 15 percent of boys talked to their friends about what happened.

Only 9 percent of students (12 percent of girls versus 5 percent of boys) reported the incident to a teacher, guidance counselor, or other adult at school. The differences by gender may be attributable to the differences in the type of sexual harassment that girls and boys experienced. Boys may also feel less comfortable seeking help or talking about their experiences than girls do.

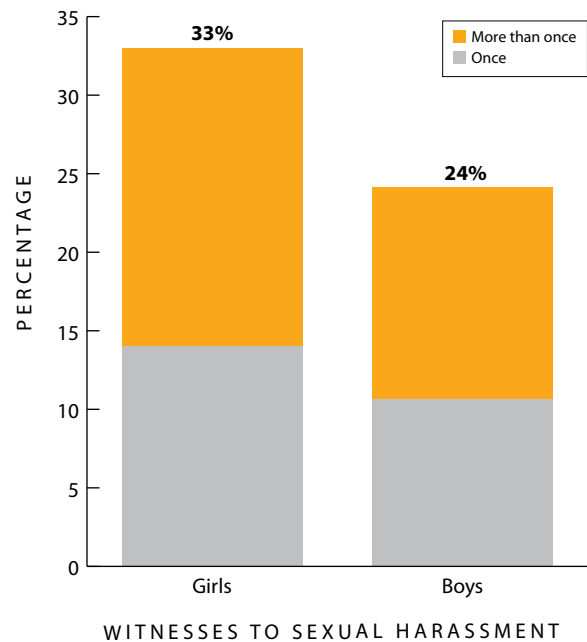
The AAUW findings confirm previous research about students' reporting of sexual harassment. Kosciw et al. (2010) found that more than half of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students who had experienced sexual harassment in the prior year did not report it to school staff or parents.¹² Students' reasons included doubts that anything would change, fears that they would make the situation worse, concerns about the staff member's reaction, and beliefs that the incident was not severe enough to report.

WITNESSING SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment often takes place where other students are likely to be witnesses. One-third of girls (33 percent) and almost one-quarter of boys (24 percent) said that they had witnessed sexual harassment at school (see figure 12).

More girls than boys tried to help another student who was being sexually harassed (24 percent of girls versus

Figure 12. Witnessing Sexual Harassment in School, by Gender



Notes: **Bold** numbers indicate statistically significant gender differences at the 95 percent level. Base=survey respondents (n=1,965 students), 1,002 girls and 963 boys in grades 7–12.

Source: AAUW sexual harassment survey, May–June 2011.

17 percent of boys). Students were more likely to take action if they also had been sexually harassed. In fact, two out of three students (68 percent) who tried to help another student who was being sexually harassed had experienced sexual harassment themselves.

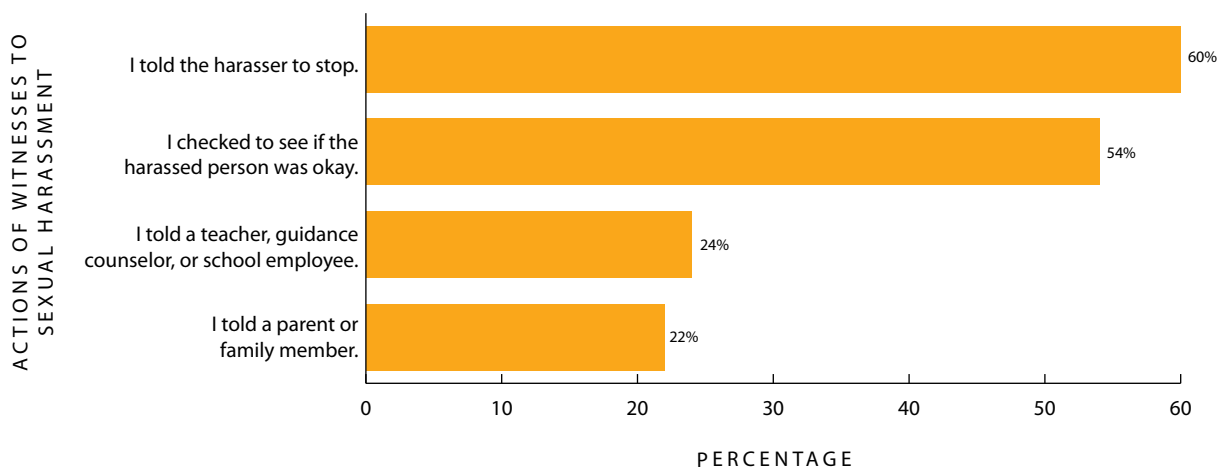
Among students trying to help, 60 percent told the harasser to stop (see figure 13). Just over half of the students (54 percent) checked to see if the sexually harassed person was okay. Slightly less than one-quarter of students (24 percent) who tried to help someone reported the harasser to a teacher, guidance counselor, or school employee, and 22 percent told their parents or a family member.¹³

¹¹Students taking the survey could select more than one response.

¹²Kosciw et al. used a sample consisting of 7,261 students between the ages of 13 and 21. Students were from 2,783 unique school districts in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The largest number of students were in grades 11 and 12.

¹³Students taking the survey could select more than one response.

Figure 13. Actions Students Took to Help a Student Being Sexually Harassed at School



Notes: This question was posed only to students who said that they had tried to help another student who was being sexually harassed at school. Base=survey respondents who said they tried to help another student (n=380 students), 227 girls and 153 boys in grades 7–12. No statistically significant gender differences existed in the percentage of students who chose each of these answers.

Source: AAUW sexual harassment survey, May–June 2011.

Of students who witnessed sexual harassment but did nothing (12 percent of the total students surveyed), the most common reason for not intervening was being unsure what to do (36 percent). Twenty-eight percent of students who witnessed sexual harassment but did nothing said they did not think they could make a difference. Just over one-quarter (26 percent) said that they didn't think of it as sexual harassment at the time. Thirteen percent of students worried that they would be sexually harassed if they did something, while 9 percent of students were afraid of being physically hurt. Girls and boys were about equally likely to give these reasons for not acting.

SUMMARY

Most students who experienced sexual harassment felt that it had a negative effect on them. Many students said that they felt sick to their stomach or had trouble sleeping. Some students had trouble concentrating on their homework, and others said that they missed class, quit a school activity, or changed schools. Children from moderate- or low-income families were more likely than children from higher-income families to experience these negative effects.

Girls were more likely than boys to experience physical and emotional symptoms as a result of sexual harassment. For girls, unwelcome sexual comments, jokes, or gestures, as well as sexual rumors on the Internet, had the most negative effect. For boys, the incident that caused the most negative effect was being called gay in a negative way in person, followed by unwelcome sexual comments, jokes, or gestures.

Very few students talked to teachers or other adults at school about sexual harassment. When faced with sexual harassment, most students did nothing at the time or afterward. Responses by those who did take action included talking to a teacher, guidance counselor, friend, or family member about what happened.

When students witnessed sexual harassment and stepped in to help, they were most likely to tell the harasser to stop or to see if the sexually harassed person was okay. Many students who witnessed sexual harassment did nothing simply because they did not know how to respond, did not think it would make a difference, or feared that they would become targets themselves.

CHAPTER 4

Preventing
Sexual
Harassment
at School

Sexual harassment continues to be a common problem in middle and high schools, affecting the educational experience of millions of children. Sexually harassed students who took part in the AAUW survey reported having trouble studying, not wanting to go to school, and feeling sick to their stomach. Some students stayed home from school. Sexual harassment led others to skip classes, drop activities, or even change schools. Girls were especially negatively affected because they faced a higher rate of sexual harassment than boys did, including the most physical forms of sexual harassment.

Fortunately, everyone can help address and prevent sexual harassment. Students surveyed offered ideas for reducing sexual harassment, from allowing students to report problems anonymously to holding school-based workshops on the topic (see figure 14). This chapter contains specific guidance about what school administrators, teachers, parents and other concerned adults, students, and community members can do to prevent and address

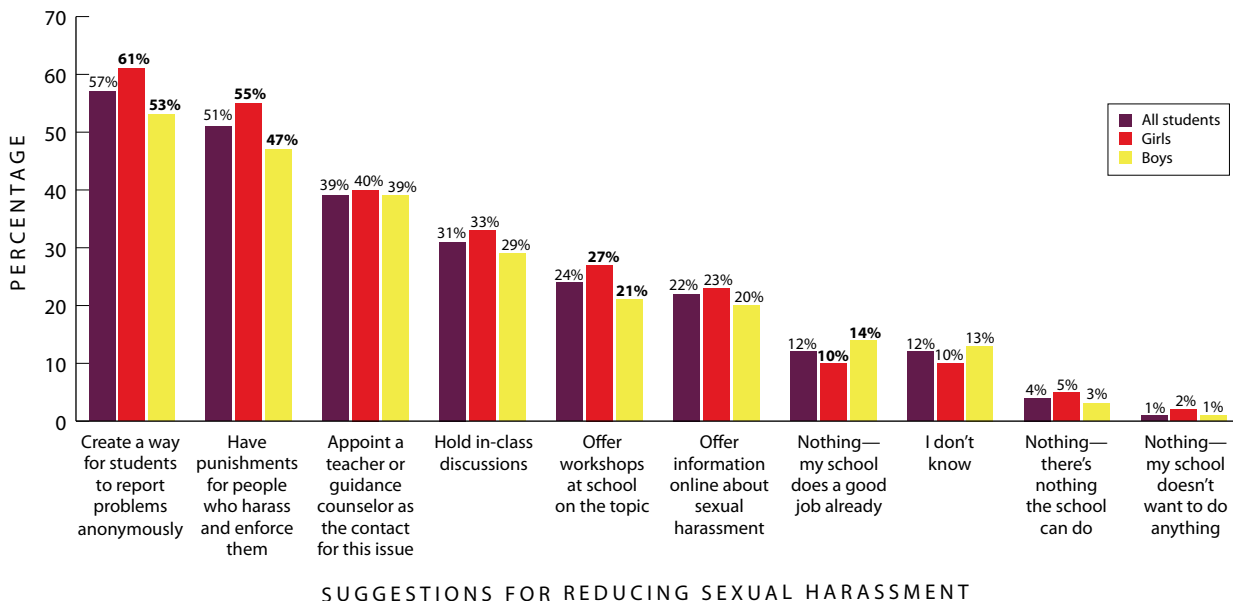
sexual harassment. A few promising practices for stopping sexual harassment are also highlighted. Appendix B lists organizations and government agencies that address sexual harassment.

ADMINISTRATORS: MAKE PREVENTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT A PRIORITY

Only 12 percent of students surveyed felt that their school did a good job addressing sexual harassment, and more than two-thirds of those students had not been sexually harassed during the 2010–11 school year. Of the remaining students, nearly all thought that their schools could and should do something about sexual harassment.

Strategies for addressing sexual harassment at school are most effective when they come from the top. Studies show that if administrators such as principals tolerate sexual harassment or do nothing to address it, teachers and students have less incentive and less support to do anything about it (Lichty & Campbell, 2011; Meyer, 2008).

Figure 14. Student Suggestions for Reducing Sexual Harassment at School, by Gender



Notes: **Bold** numbers indicate statistically significant gender differences at the 95 percent level. Base=survey respondents (n=1,965 students), 1,002 girls and 963 boys in grades 7–12. Source: AAUW sexual harassment survey, May–June 2011.

Administrators can make a difference by ensuring that their school enforces Title IX and that students are aware of the protections the law provides.

Under Title IX, each school should have a designated coordinator to handle official sexual harassment complaints and other Title IX violations. The first step for administrators is to appoint a Title IX coordinator. More than one-third of students (39 percent) said it would be useful if schools had such a person assigned to help with sexual harassment. Most students (57 percent), especially 12th graders, also wanted a way to anonymously report sexual harassment problems. Creating a reporting mechanism would increase students' willingness to report the problem. A Title IX coordinator could help create such a system.

To be effective, the Title IX coordinator needs training, time, and resources to handle sexual-harassment complaints and other gender equity issues. The coordinator's name and contact information must be posted and easily accessible to students. The Title IX coordinator must provide appropriate help to students who contact her or him. Schools must have a clear policy regarding sexual harassment and published procedures that automatically occur when sexual harassment is reported. This policy should make clear the school's commitment to report to authorities the sexual harassment that appears to violate a student's civil rights under Title IX or that otherwise may reflect criminal behavior. Without this component, students will lose faith in the system, and administrators have no guidance on appropriate intervention. More than half the students (51 percent) advocated for enforced punishments for harassers.

Studies show that changing the cultural norms about sexual harassment at a school can take years (Pepler & Craig, 2008). Consequently, administrators must have patience if they see no immediate evidence that the sexual-harassment initiatives are working.

What School Administrators Can Do

- Enforce Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972.
- Address sexual harassment in the school's official agenda.
- Create and publicize a sexual-harassment policy, and send a copy of it to parents.
- Provide clear guidelines about how staff should handle sexual harassment when it is reported to them.
- Provide staff with the time and financial resources necessary to follow school sexual-harassment guidelines.
- Organize a school assembly on sexual harassment, and involve students in the planning and implementation.
- Post or distribute information about sexual harassment, including what it is, what the school's policy is, and what students can do if they experience or witness it. Invite students to create posters, or use the ACLU's fact sheet "Gender-Based Violence and Harassment: Your School, Your Rights."
- Designate a person to administer the school's sexual-harassment policy and receive complaints. Let all students know who the person is, and tell students what to do if they experience or witness any kind of sexual harassment.
- Provide training on sexual harassment for both staff and students.

Source: Sandler & Stonehill, 2005; Kallestad & Olweus, 2003; Cross et al., 2004.

EDUCATORS: RESPOND AND EDUCATE

One of the main ways teachers and guidance counselors can help students is by learning how to respond appropriately to sexual harassment when they witness it and when students report it.

Teachers can use simple methods to address and prevent sexual harassment in their classrooms. They can serve as role models for students by exhibiting nonharassing, respectful behavior and by challenging discriminatory comments and behavior exhibited by anyone in school, including harmful gender stereotyping and discriminatory jokes. They can create a code of conduct for their classroom that prohibits sexual harassment and hold students accountable for adhering to that code. They can also incorporate sexual-harassment issues into the curriculum.

Respond

Very few students reported sexual harassment to their teachers, guidance counselor, or Title IX coordinator. During the 2010–11 school year, fewer than 10 percent of students said they reported sexual harassment to educators when they experienced it, and only 24 percent reported it when they witnessed it. When students report sexual harassment, they are showing great faith in the educators with whom they choose to speak. Educators must respond appropriately, with sensitivity and patience, and they must provide students with information about their rights.

Of course, educators need to lead by example. In several studies, students noted that even when sexual harassment happens right in front of teachers, few teachers do anything about it. When educators ignore their personal and professional obligations as adults and as school authorities, they create a culture in which sexual harassment is acceptable and students feel that they cannot trust teachers to help them (Sandler & Stonehill, 2005). As one survey respondent, an 8th-grade girl, said, “The teachers need to notice more. They sometimes see [sexual harassment], but they don’t do anything.” A 9th-grade girl who experienced unwanted touching said, “Teachers should pay attention in class and believe students when they ask to be moved.”

Educators can respond in many ways when they observe sexual harassment. As long as they do not ignore the

situation, treat it as a joke, or encourage the harasser, their response will likely make a difference in stopping the situation and preventing future instances of sexual harassment.

How Educators Can Respond When Students Report Sexual Harassment

- Listen to the students carefully and respectfully.
- Avoid voicing judgment or using victim-blaming language.
- Answer questions fully. Freely acknowledge when an answer is unknown, and then find the answer and share it with the students.
- Advise students to record the incident in writing, including as much detail as possible about what happened and listing anyone who saw the incident (or offer to transcribe what they dictate).
- Advise students about their rights and options.
- Assist students as necessary if they choose to report the harasser to school officials.
- Assist or check up on students as they take the next steps and remind them to report any future sexual harassment.

Source: Smith et al., 2011.

How Educators Can Respond When They Observe Sexual Harassment

- Name the behavior, and state that it must stop immediately.
- Suggest an appropriate alternative to an offensive word or phrase and advise students to use it going forward.
- Use the incident as a reason for talking to students about sexual harassment, what it is, and why it’s not okay.
- Follow the school policy for handling sexual harassers.

- Send the person to the principal or guidance counselor, and notify the families of the students involved as necessary.

Source: Sandler & Stonehill, 2005.

Educate

Teachers have a unique opportunity to prevent sexual harassment at school.¹⁴ When asked what their school could do about sexual harassment, many students liked the idea of class discussions (31 percent), workshops (24 percent), and information on the school website

(22 percent). Two ways to address the issue are to educate students about sexual harassment—what it is, what its effects are, and what the punishments for harassers are—and to stress that trying to be funny and acting stupid are not excuses for sexual harassment (Sjostrom & Stein, 1996; Martin, 2008).

Educators can also teach students how to handle sexual harassment when they experience it and when they witness it. In the AAUW survey, half the students (49 percent) who experienced sexual harassment ignored the harasser

Promising Practice: High School Women’s Studies

Jennifer Martin heads the English department at a public alternative high school for at-risk students in Michigan. Soon after she started teaching, she realized that most of her female students experienced or witnessed sexual harassment, but few knew what to do about it, and they felt helpless. She decided to do something.

In 2003 Martin created and taught an 18-week, single-sex, women’s studies course to help the girls. The course covered a variety of topics, including gender roles, notable women, gender equity, sexual harassment, and female friendship. Students heard guest speakers from places such as the local domestic violence shelter and received assertiveness and self-defense training.

Surveys taken before and after the course showed that girls’ knowledge of sexual harassment increased. Measurements of the girls’ locus of control—their beliefs about whether they can control and respond to events in their lives—before and after the course also increased and showed that the girls felt more self-empowered to respond to incidents of sexual harassment.

As a result of the course, many students spoke up when they faced sexual harassment or when they witnessed it. Martin writes, “It was clear that the [girls] began to value not only themselves more as a

result of being in the class but also each other. This heightened sense of personal self-worth may have contributed to their unwillingness to tolerate harassing behavior from others after participating in the women’s studies intervention.”

The change in how the girls handled sexual harassment led to its decrease, with one-third fewer incidents occurring at the school the following semester. When the girls challenged the sexual harassment, many of the harassers who did not know their behavior was unacceptable stopped harassing, and those who knew it was unacceptable lessened the sexual harassment when they realized that they had a heightened risk of being caught.

Martin has taught the course every year since 2003 and has expanded it to include boys. After a few years, she observed that the culture of the school had become intolerant of sexual harassment and that students regularly policed each other to check the behavior. While the intervention was successful at her school, she acknowledges that her setting is different from that of most high schools, since her students are at-risk youth and the school has fewer girls than boys. The concept of teaching women’s studies and empowerment classes to girls and boys, however, is a promising practice for combating sexual harassment at school.

¹⁴The ACLU’s “Gender-Based Violence and Harassment: Your School, Your Rights” fact sheet and the book *Hey, Shorty! A Guide to Combating Sexual Harassment and Violence in Schools and on the Streets* (Smith et al., 2011) are excellent resources for teachers.

or harassers at the time, and half the students (50 percent) did nothing after the incident. Providing students with assertiveness and self-defense training could empower and equip them to challenge the behavior of harassers and stand up for each other, as could informing them how and to whom to report harassers (Martin, 2008).

In addition to teaching students about sexual harassment, teachers can work to build a culture of respect in the classroom as a prevention method. One way to do this is by

promoting activities that encourage friendship, cooperation, and sharing among all students, particularly among those who may not otherwise interact. Students are less likely to sexually harass people they respect, and they will be more likely to stand up for someone they know and like (Sandler & Stonehill, 2005).

Teachers can also incorporate subjects that encourage respect and tolerance for all individuals, such as studying the contributions of women and various racial-ethnic and

Promising Practice: Mapping Safe Middle Schools

Nan Stein of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women and Bruce Taylor of the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago are experts on the subject of sexual harassment in school, especially as a precursor to dating violence. Since 2005, they have taught a youth dating-violence prevention curriculum and implemented school-wide interventions that have proved successful in reducing sexual harassment in middle schools. Their work is funded by the National Institute of Justice.

Stein and Taylor's curriculum, *Shifting Boundaries*, features detailed instructions for teachers and handouts for six sessions for grades 6 and 7. The lessons discuss setting boundaries, measuring personal space, and determining appropriate and inappropriate behaviors at school, which covers what sexual harassment is, how to respond, the consequences for harassers, and mapping safe and unsafe spaces at school. Each lesson includes discussion questions, group work, and personal reflection.

The mapping project is especially useful for teachers. For the activity, students list and mark on a school map the areas that make them feel unsafe (red), somewhat unsafe (yellow), and safe (green). The curriculum suggests that teachers then collect the maps and present the findings to a school safety committee to generate ideas for steps the committee can take to make their school safer.

Intervention measures include assigning faculty and school safety personnel to monitor the unsafe areas identified through the student

maps and using posters to increase awareness and reporting of sexual harassment.

To test the effectiveness of the curriculum and interventions, Stein and Taylor randomly selected 30 middle schools in New York City and studied two 6th-grade and two 7th-grade classrooms at each school (120 classrooms). From fall 2008 until fall 2010, some of the classroom teachers implemented the *Shifting Boundaries* curriculum, and some of the schools used the school-wide intervention methods. Stein and Taylor conducted surveys three times—before the lessons began, immediately after the lessons concluded, and six months after the lessons ended—to measure the effectiveness of the lessons and interventions on the participants compared with students in the control groups. Around 2,700 students completed the surveys.

When compared with the control groups, students who participated in Stein and Taylor's initiatives had successful outcomes, especially when they took part in the building interventions or building interventions combined with the *Shifting Boundaries* curriculum. Participating students demonstrated an increased knowledge about laws and the consequences of sexual harassment and dating violence. Most impressive were a reported 26 to 34 percent decrease in sexual harassment and a reported 50 percent reduction in dating violence. Stein and Taylor plan to continue testing their materials and expand the interventions and lessons to 8th-grade students, but their initiatives already suggest promising practices that other schools can follow.

sexual-orientation identity groups. In 2011 California became the first state to add lessons about gays and lesbians to social studies classes in public schools. State Senator Mark Leno sponsored the bill to help promote more tolerance in schools in light of the bullying that lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and transgender students often face there. California is one of the only states that require schools to teach students about the contributions of women, African Americans, Native Americans, and Mexican Americans (Lin, 2011).

PARENTS AND OTHER CONCERNED ADULTS: PREVENT AND SUPPORT

Parents and other concerned adults can help prevent sexual harassment among children by being good role models.¹⁵ Simply practicing what you preach can be a good first step, because children are as likely to learn from your actions as from your words. Many students face gender harassment for not conforming or for being perceived as not conforming to gender norms. Positive, respectful behavior can go a long way toward instilling in children tolerance and respect for others, without regard to gender presentation or sexual orientation.

Parents and other concerned adults should respond sensitively and appropriately when students tell them about a sexual-harassment incident. Here are some suggestions for handling such discussions:

- Listen to the students carefully and respectfully.
- Avoid voicing judgment or using victim-blaming language.
- Answer questions to the best of your ability.
- Advise students to record the incident in writing, including as much detail as possible about what happened and listing anyone who saw the incident (or offer to transcribe what they dictate).

- Advise students what their options are for next steps (look them up in the school's policy manual or on the U.S. Department of Education's website if you are unsure).
- Assist students as necessary if they choose to report the harasser to school officials.
- Provide continual emotional support for students, no matter what course of action they choose to pursue.

Source: Smith et al., 2011.

How to Prevent Sexual Harassment and Help Your Children

- Foster feelings of empathy and respect for others in your children.
- Talk to your children about what healthy friendships and dating relationships look like.
- Explain what sexual harassment and sexual assault are.
- Take an interest in your children's day, their friends, and the activities they're involved in at school.
- Encourage your children to know how to stand up for themselves and teach them assertiveness and self-defense.
- Find out what your school's sexual-harassment policy is, and make sure your children understand it.

Source: Smith et al., 2011.

Cyber-Harassment

Parents are in the best position to help their children deal with cyber-harassment, since it usually occurs outside school hours and off school grounds on computers and cell phones owned or purchased by parents. During the 2010–11 school year, most students who faced sexual harassment experienced it in person, but 30 percent said they experienced it online (36 percent of girls and 24 percent of boys).

¹⁵The "parent" category includes relatives and guardians who play a major role in a child's upbringing.

Parents should talk with their children about appropriate online etiquette and how to interact with others respectfully in that environment. Parents should also learn as much as they can about the technology their children are using so that they can help when problems arise and make sure their children understand potential dangers.

Recommendations for Families Concerned about Cyber-Harassment

- Keep an open dialogue with children about their online activities.
- Make sure children know that their computer or phone privileges won't be revoked if they tell you they are experiencing cyber-harassment.
- Keep the computer in a busy area of the home so that it's easier to see what children are doing.
- Set rules about which websites and online activities children can participate in.
- Learn about your children's online friends.
- Create an action plan detailing what children should do if they become the target of sexual harassment by someone they know or by someone they do not know.

Source: AAUW Napa County (CA) Branch, 2008.

STUDENTS: SPEAK UP, TAKE ACTION

Students can be change makers at their schools. From challenging sexual harassment to making sure their school is taking the issue seriously, students can help create a more civil and tolerant climate.

Most students respond to sexual harassment by ignoring it when it happens and, afterward, by taking no action. Some students' lack of action may reflect their uncertainty about what they can do about sexual harassment; other students may have been advised to ignore it. Usually, however, ignoring harassers disempowers sexually harassed students and does nothing to let the harasser know that

the sexually harassed student doesn't like the behavior. Ignoring the behavior also means losing an opportunity to challenge the harasser and reduce the chance for future sexual harassment. One survey respondent, an 11th-grade boy, advised that the best way to reduce sexual harassment in schools is for students to "take a stand against the person doing the harassing and don't let them get away with it. If more students would fight for their rights instead of being scared, stand up to the abuser, life would go a lot smoother."

Looking out for each other is very important and can go a long way toward stopping sexual harassment at school (Lichty & Campbell, 2011). Telling the harasser to stop, creating a distraction, reporting the harasser, and seeing if the sexually harassed student is okay are all good responses.

Students can also help prevent sexual harassment by stopping the cycle of harassment, that is, by not sexually harassing other students in retaliation for sexual harassment. Most students who admitted to being harassers said they had been sexually harassed themselves (92 percent of girls and 80 percent of boys). Seeking help, reporting harassers, or assertively standing up to them without sexually harassing them are more appropriate responses.

Students can take action to prevent sexual harassment at school in many ways, including the following:

- Find out what the school's sexual-harassment policy is and who the Title IX coordinator is, and share that information with friends and classmates. If the school does not have a policy or a Title IX coordinator, work with a trusted teacher or staff member to find out why not and how to ensure that one is designated. Title IX requires schools to have a coordinator.
- Learn what rights students have and the definition of sexual harassment and post the information around school or online or both.

- Create a “respect for all” or “stop sexual harassment” campaign by collecting students’ stories and posting them on bulletin boards, on blogs, or in e-zines.
- Survey classmates to find out where sexual harassment occurs and what students think could prevent it. Take the findings to the principal or another staff person at school.
- Ask parents to review the school’s sexual-harassment policies and procedures and, if these are not available or appropriate, to insist that they be rectified.
- Request a workshop or school assembly on sexual harassment or request class time to discuss sexual-harassment issues.

The most important thing students can do is to simply break the silence about sexual harassment in schools.

How to Respond to a Harasser

There is no one “right” way to respond to a harasser, but here are some suggestions:

- In a strong, firm tone of voice and with a serious face, tell the person to stop, and point out exactly what behavior needs to stop. For example, say, “Please stop telling sexual jokes in front of me; it makes me feel uncomfortable,” or “Calling someone gay as a put-down is really offensive. Please stop.” Not everyone recognizes that sexual harassment is inappropriate behavior, so let harassers know that they’ve crossed the line.

Promising Practice: Training Youth Leaders

Programming by Girls for Gender Equity Inc. (GGE), a small nonprofit organization in Brooklyn, New York, demonstrates a promising model of how community groups can work to address sexual harassment in local schools. GGE engages in many girl-centered empowerment programs, including addressing sexual harassment both in schools and on the streets. The organization’s work from 2001 to 2011 is covered in the book *Hey, Shorty! A Guide to Combating Sexual Harassment and Violence in Schools and on the Streets* (Smith et al., 2011).

During the 2007–08 school year, GGE worked with students to design and conduct a sexual-harassment survey with more than 1,100 youth respondents in grades 6–12. GGE found that nearly one in four students faced sexual harassment daily, yet only 3 percent of students reported it and less than 2 percent of them felt that the perpetrator was dealt with appropriately. After presenting the survey findings to 60 community groups and educators, GGE and its supporters formed the Coalition for Gender Equity in Schools to educate people about sexual harassment and investigate whether schools are appropriately enforcing existing laws, including Title IX.

GGE youth organizers designed and conducted workshops across New York City on sexual harassment and students’ rights in school. Students and several organizations worked together to produce Know Your Rights pamphlets, a fast-facts sheet, and related tool kits for dissemination throughout the schools.

GGE youth also testified at a hearing held by the New York City Department of Education and suggested making the city’s discipline code more youth-friendly. They argued for education rather than immediate suspension for first infractions of sexual harassment, which they believe would increase reporting of sexual harassment and decrease the frequency of it.

Additionally, GGE is working on a campaign to identify the Title IX coordinators assigned to city schools. GGE plans to ask the Department of Education to require that coordinators’ names be listed on school websites. In 2011 GGE produced a public service announcement that encourages students to find out who their school’s Title IX coordinator is. For more information visit www.ggenyc.org.

- Tell someone trustworthy about the sexual harassment. She or he may be able to offer advice or help stop the sexual harassment and provide emotional support. Dealing with sexual harassment can be draining and upsetting.
- Report the sexual harassment, especially if it involves touching or repeated comments, to a trustworthy teacher, a guidance counselor, or the Title IX coordinator at the school.
- Don't respond to harassing or threatening text messages, e-mails, or social media messages. Instead, save the messages and show them to a trusted adult.

Source: Sandler & Stonehill, 2005; AAUW Napa County (CA) Branch, 2008.

COMMUNITY GROUPS: TAKE ACTION

Community groups can play a role in addressing and ending sexual harassment. Many community groups already

work with teenagers, and such groups can contribute in many ways to efforts to combat sexual harassment, including contacting local schools and offering assistance.

Here are some actions that community groups can take:

- Give a guest lecture or facilitate a workshop on sexual harassment for different classes or during a school-wide assembly.
- Meet with administrators and teachers to cover topics such as what Title IX is and the obligations it places on school officials, the school's liability if sexual harassment occurs, the need for clear school sexual-harassment policies and procedures, how to respond to or handle sexual-harassment complaints, and how to set a tone of respect for all students.
- Create an after-school program in which students can discuss, learn about, and take creative action to

Promising Practice: Conducting a Safety Audit

The work of the Toronto nonprofit, community-based organization Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence against Women and Children (METRAC) offers a promising model for how a community group can help address sexual harassment in local schools.

METRAC's mission is to prevent and end violence against diverse women, youth, and children. Since 1989 one of its main programs has been conducting community safety audits. Through the audits, individuals assess their communities and identify which areas make them feel safe or unsafe and why. They then make recommendations for stakeholders and work collaboratively with them to create safer communities. The United Nations and many groups around the world have adopted this model. The model has also been used to audit university and college campuses.

In 2009 METRAC began working with youth groups at a few schools in Toronto to conduct safety audits of the areas around their schools. The number of participants in each program has ranged from five to 15

students from middle and secondary schools. The youth safety audit process consists of three training sessions. The first session looks at different forms of violence and oppression that students may face. During the second session, students conduct a safety audit of an area in their community. In the third session, students review the audit results and create an action plan. This may include working with local decision makers such as elected officials, police, and community leaders to improve safety.

METRAC works with school leaders from the beginning to make sure they support the audit and will listen to and implement the students' recommendations. The audit model works well for schools that want to address safety issues but aren't sure how, and it often results in concrete, student-led suggestions for change.

METRAC is creating a guidebook that outlines the activities used in the workshops and the safety audit process so that others can also use the model. Visit www.metrac.org for more information.

address sexual harassment and related issues, such as dating violence.

- Create sexual-harassment materials for distribution in schools.
- Educate students about gender stereotyping and the importance of tolerance for those who don't fit the accepted standards of masculinity and femininity.
- Offer to help students survey their peers about sexual harassment, conduct a safety audit, or map out where sexual harassment occurs to better enable students and school staff to address the problem.
- Work with students on awareness-raising efforts, such as collecting student stories for a blog or e-zine, holding an art contest and displaying pieces in the school or a community space, holding an awareness-raising event, or orchestrating a campaign.
- Donate resources or time to enable students to explore sexual-harassment topics. Consider donating video-recording and -editing equipment and video-editing expertise so that students can make a public service announcement or documentary about sexual harassment at their school.

If schools aren't open to collaboration, community groups can work with students through other organizations that focus on teenagers. Examples of such groups include the Girl and Boy Scouts, YWCA and YMCA, the Boys and Girls Club, and Men Can Stop Rape's MOST Clubs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Today, too many students feel sick to their stomach, have trouble sleeping, or have trouble concentrating on their schoolwork as a result of sexual harassment. The AAUW survey findings challenge everyone to tackle sexual harassment in schools. AAUW makes the following recommendations based on the survey and on the work of researchers in the field:

Schools that do not have a sexual-harassment policy must create one, and all schools should make sure that the policy is publicized and enforced. Schools should notify parents of the policy and give them advice on how to discuss the implications of the policy with their children. Many students want this kind of information posted on the school's website and taught to them in workshops and in-class discussions. They also want to see policies enforced and harassers punished and an anonymous way to report harassers.

Schools must ensure that students are aware of and educated about what sexual harassment is, what their rights are under Title IX, and how to respond if they experience or witness sexual harassment. Most students do nothing when they experience or witness sexual harassment, in large part because they do not know what to do or do not think doing anything will help. Since most student harassers reported that they were sexually harassed themselves, teaching students appropriate responses is crucial in ending the cycle of sexual harassment.

Schools must train their staff and faculty to recognize and respond to sexual harassment, to know how to help students who come to them, and to know their obligations if they witness sexual harassment.

Most harassed students do not turn to anyone for help—especially not to their teachers, counselors, or other school staff. Some students stated that they did not ask because those educators were unhelpful. Staff and faculty training can help build students' confidence in the ability and willingness of school personnel to assist them.

Schools must work to create a culture of respect and gender equality. Girls are sexually harassed more than boys are, especially in upper grade

levels. Girls face more forms of physical harassment, and overall, sexual harassment has a greater negative impact on them. Therefore, girls especially should be taught how to respond assertively to sexual harassment and where they can find help.

Schools must teach all students that sexual harassment is not funny. While both girls and boys can be harassers, boys are most often the harassers of both girls and boys. Many male harassers claimed they were just being funny. Teaching kids that sexual harassment crosses the line and is not humorous could be a crucial lesson.

Schools must create a culture of acceptance and tolerance for all, without regard to gender presentation or sexual orientation, and must reinforce that culture by the attitudes, words, and actions of school officials, faculty, and staff. Incidence rates remain high for sexual harassment based on a student's actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender expression. Boys in the survey particularly reported being negatively affected by this type of sexual harassment.

Schools must recognize and address how the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation can cause some students to fare worse than others when they experience sexual harassment. Schools should offer targeted help for these more vulnerable groups. Surveyed students from nonwhite racial-ethnic groups and those from families of lower socioeconomic status reported more negative effects from sexual harassment than did students in other groups.

Schools must teach students about cyber-harassment, what their rights are, and how to respond to or report instances. Students who are sexually harassed both online and in person are much more negatively affected than students who face sexual harassment only online or only in person. While much cyber-harassment does not take place on school grounds, it can affect students' ability to learn, thereby falling under the school's Title IX responsibilities.

By undertaking these efforts, all individuals concerned with creating a harassment-free school climate can collaboratively achieve a more equitable learning environment for all students.

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APPENDIX A

Methodology

OVERVIEW

This report is based on a nationally representative online survey conducted by Knowledge Networks in May and June 2011. The questions in the survey referred to the 2010–11 school year.

SAMPLE SELECTION

Knowledge Network selected a sample of 1,965 students—1,002 girls and 963 boys—for the study. All students attended school (were not homeschooled), and all were in grades 7–12. No distinction between public and private schools was made. Households were selected through probability sampling covering both the online and offline populations in the United States. Panelists were recruited through national random samples, originally by phone or by postal mail. Knowledge Networks recruited through a dual-sampling frame, including listed and unlisted telephone numbers, households without telephones, cell-phone-only households, and households with and without Internet access. Households were provided with access to the Internet and hardware if needed. Knowledge Networks also operated a modest incentive program to encourage participation. In this case, a \$10 incentive was offered for completed surveys.

SURVEY PROCESS

Parents received the initial e-mail invitation for the survey. If the parent consented to the survey, Knowledge Networks randomly chose one of the eligible children in that family for the study. The student received the survey by e-mail, with an assurance of confidentiality. Knowledge Network used a strongly worded caution to parents, inferring that the topics covered in the survey could involve

topics such as drug use, relationship with parents, alcohol consumption, and sexual activity. The actual topic of the survey was not disclosed to the parents to avoid selection bias. The language of the parental permission screen may have contributed to lower completion rates.

The typical length of the survey was eight minutes; in part, this brevity reflects the experience of the majority of students who were not sexually harassed in school year 2010–11. These students were not asked any of the questions about their reactions to their experience. The survey for students who experienced sexual harassment was longer because they were asked about their reactions and the emotional impact of the incident. Students could pause the survey and come back to it later, so the average length of time for survey completion is not available.

WEIGHTING

Knowledge Networks used a base weight and a demographic poststratification weight to adjust for the various sources of survey error including noncoverage and nonresponse. Data for weights came from the Current Population Survey (April 2011) and the Current Population Survey Supplement on Computer Use (2009). Knowledge Network participants were representative in terms of age, race, and ethnicity.

STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE

All surveys are subject to sampling error (the potential difference between results obtained from the sample and those that would have been obtained if the entire population had participated). Statistical significance was calculated at the 95 percent confidence level.

Selected Survey Characteristics

	Field Start	Field End	N Fielded	N Completed	Completion Ratio	N Qualified	Qualification Rate
Pretest	4/8/11	4/26/11	168	98	58%	36*	38%
Main	5/2/11	6/15/11	6,009	4,139	69%	1,965	48%

* Although 36 qualified pretest cases were collected, 30 were included in the deliverable dataset.

USE OF ONLINE METHODOLOGY

The case for an online format for this survey was particularly strong, given the age of respondents and the subject matter. Middle and high school students are generally well versed in computer use. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, an online process where questions are asked on a screen rather than by a person is preferable. An online format has an added positive feature in that the gender of the “interviewer” is not apparent; hence respondents are not swayed by the gender of their interviewer. Sexual harassment can be a difficult topic, so privacy and confidentiality are essential.

COMPARISON WITH HOSTILE HALLWAYS

The 2001 and 2011 AAUW surveys document the prevalence of sexual harassment and its negative impact on students. Results are not directly comparable, however, because different questions were asked and a somewhat

different methodology was used. The time period referenced is one of the most important differences in the two surveys. The 2001 survey asked students about sexual harassment that might have occurred at any time during their entire school careers. The 2011 survey asked students about incidents that occurred during the 2010–11 school year.

The 2011 survey varied significantly from the survey used for *Hostile Hallways*. Questions about sexual harassment through cell phones and computers were added. Questions about how students define sexual harassment and how they respond to hypothetical situations were dropped. Questions on attitudes were added. Overall, changes were made to reflect best practices in survey methodology and changes in student life, including access to cell phones and computers.

APPENDIX B

**Related
Resources**

ORGANIZATIONS

American Association of University Women

www.aauw.org

With its nationwide network of more than 100,000 members and donors and 1,000 branches, AAUW has been a leading advocate for equity for women and girls since 1881. AAUW plays a vital role in supporting gender equity for women and girls through research, fellowships and grants, public policy, college leadership programs, and assistance to individuals challenging sex discrimination in the workplace. AAUW's research and related programs promote a climate free from gender bias and sexual harassment at every level of education.

American Civil Liberties Union

www.aclu.org

The ACLU works daily in courts, legislatures, and communities to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties that the Constitution and laws of the United States guarantee everyone. The 2011 online section “Gender-Based Violence and Harassment: Your School, Your Rights” has useful and important information relating to sexual harassment in grades K–12. Visit www.aclu.org/womens-rights/gender-based-violence-harassment-your-school-your-rights.

Feminist Majority Foundation

www.feminist.org/911/harass.html

The Feminist Majority Foundation is a membership-based organization committed to achieving political, economic, and social equality for women. It provides information about legislation concerning equity issues in education, a list of national and state hotline numbers for sexual harassment and sexual assault, and links to websites about sexual harassment in schools and the workplace.

Girls for Gender Equity

www.ggenyc.org

Girls for Gender Equity, a nonprofit organization based in Brooklyn, New York, is committed to improving the

physical, psychological, social, and economic development of girls and women. Through education, organizing, and physical fitness, GGE encourages communities to remove barriers and create opportunities for girls and women to live self-determined lives. Since its inception, GGE has worked to address sexual harassment in schools. In 2011 it published a guide for others interested in doing the same: *Hey, Shorty! A Guide to Combating Sexual Harassment and Violence in Schools and on the Streets* (Feminist Press, 2011).

Men Can Stop Rape

www.mencanstoprape.org

This international organization mobilizes men to use their strength for creating cultures free from violence, especially men's violence against women. MCSR provides agencies, schools, and organizations with direct services for youth, public service messaging, and leadership training. Through the Men of Strength (MOST) Club, MCSR provides boys in middle and high school with a structured and supportive space to learn about healthy masculinity and translate learning into community leadership.

Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence against Women and Children

www.metrac.org

METRAC is a nonprofit, community-based organization that works to prevent and end violence against diverse women, youth, and children in Toronto. METRAC's Community Safety Audit is a tool to help people assess the safety of spaces they use. It has been used to assess communities, and an audit has been tailored for youth. The audit model recognizes that women and youth most often feel unsafe and helps people to come up with safety-enhancing ideas.

National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence

www.ncdsv.org

The National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence trains and consults with organizations on domestic and

sexual violence. It also has resources for individuals, including 24-hour hotlines for those in immediate danger.

National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs

www.avp.org/ncavp.htm

NCAVP is a coalition of more than 20 lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender victim advocacy and documentation programs located throughout the United States. The website includes reports on hate crimes and domestic violence.

National PTA

www.pta.org

The largest volunteer child advocacy association in the nation, National PTA reminds our country of its obligations to children and provides parents and families with a powerful voice to speak on behalf of every child while providing the best tools for parents to help their children be successful students. It works to address and stop sexual harassment in schools and offers resources on its website, including “Safeguarding Your Children from Bullying, Gangs, and Sexual Harassment,” available at www.pta.org/3560.htm.

National Women’s Law Center

www.nwlc.org

This nonprofit legal advocacy organization is dedicated to the advancement and protection of women’s rights and the elimination of sex discrimination from all facets of life. Its website provides information on Title IX.

Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network

www.rainn.org

RAINN, the nation’s largest anti-sexual-assault organization, operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800/656-HOPE. RAINN carries out programs to prevent sexual assault, help victims, and ensure that rapists are brought to justice. Its website provides contact information for local rape crisis centers and state coalitions against sexual assault.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Federal law protects students’ right to learn and work in a safe environment free from harassment. The U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Justice, and U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission play a role in protecting these rights and ensuring safe and harassment-free schools and workplaces.

U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights

www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr

OCR is charged with enforcing compliance with Title IX, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, including sexual harassment, at educational institutions that receive federal funding (and nearly all do). OCR requires that these educational institutions designate one or more employees—administrators, coaches, teachers, guidance counselors, or other school employees—as Title IX coordinators. OCR provides sexual harassment resources at www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/sexharassresources.html.

U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division

www.usdoj.gov/crt

The Civil Rights Division is responsible for enforcing federal statutes prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, disability, religion, familial status, and national origin. Its Educational Opportunities Section (www.justice.gov/crt/about/edu) covers legal issues involving elementary and secondary schools and institutions of higher education, including initiating enforcement activities under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 when a referral is received from the U.S. Department of Education. The Federal Coordination and Compliance Section (www.justice.gov/crt/about/cor) provides technical and legal assistance to ensure that federal agencies are effectively enforcing various statutes that prohibit discrimination, including Title IX.

U.S. Department of Justice Office on Violence against Women

www.usdoj.gov/ovw

OVW handles legal and policy issues regarding violence against women and provides resources and publications on sexual violence.

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

www.eeoc.gov

People who experience harassment while working in a school should contact EEOC. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin. Under Title VII, just like Title IX, sexual harassment is prohibited as a form of sex discrimination. EEOC is responsible for handling charges of discrimination filed against employers.

AAUW RESEARCH REPORTS

Recent AAUW reports may be downloaded for free at www.aauw.org/research.



Why So Few? Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (2010)



Harassment-Free Hallways: How to Stop Sexual Harassment in Schools (2002)



Where the Girls Are: The Facts About Gender Equity in Education (2008)



Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing, and Sexual Harassment in School (2001)



Behind the Pay Gap (2007)



The Third Shift: Women Learning Online (2001)



Drawing the Line: Sexual Harassment on Campus (2006)



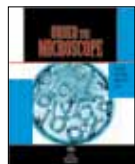
Beyond the "Gender Wars": A Conversation About Girls, Boys, and Education (2001)



Tenure Denied: Cases of Sex Discrimination in Academia (2004)



¡Si, Se Puede! Yes, We Can: Latinas in School (2000)



Under the Microscope: A Decade of Gender Equity Projects in the Sciences (2004)



Tech-Savvy: Educating Girls in the New Computer Age (2000)



Women at Work (2003)

JOIN AAUW

YES! I want to join AAUW's community and help break through educational and economic barriers so that all women have a fair chance.

Join online at www.aauw.org or use this form.

The AAUW community is powerful and influential!

- Our members share a strong commitment to educational and economic equity for women and girls.
- We are well known on Capitol Hill and in the civil rights and women's advocacy communities, especially in the areas of K-12, undergraduate, and graduate education.
- We have been working to advance women's equity for more than 130 years, integrating our time, our energy, and our philanthropy.

Who can join?

If you hold an associate or equivalent or higher degree from a regionally accredited college or university, you can join AAUW as an individual national member or as a member of one of AAUW's 1,000 branches. Branch members also belong to the national organization.

If you are an undergraduate in a two- or four-year regionally accredited educational institution, you can join as a student affiliate of a branch or as a national student affiliate.

Join today!

Support AAUW initiatives at the national level by joining as a national member. National member dues are \$49* annually. Dues for student affiliates are \$17** annually.

To become a branch member or a branch student affiliate, join at the local level. Visit www.aauw.org, e-mail connect@aauw.org, or call 800/326-AAUW (2289) to locate a branch in your area.

Please allow up to four weeks for receipt of your new member packet. AAUW does not share e-mail addresses with third parties.

Occasionally AAUW's membership list is made available to carefully screened companies and organizations. Check here if you do not want your name included on the list.

*AAUW national individual membership dues are \$49. Of that amount, \$46 is tax deductible as a charitable contribution, and \$3 is not deductible because it supports the AAUW Action Fund's section 501(c)(4) Lobby Corps and get-out-the-vote activities.

** The AAUW national student affiliate fee is \$17. Of that amount, \$16 is tax deductible as a charitable contribution, and \$1 is not deductible because it supports the AAUW Action Fund's section 501(c)(4) Lobby Corps and get-out-the-vote activities.



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Personal Information

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I wish to join as an

(W) (_____) _____

AAUW National Member (\$49) M12MWSFW

AAUW Student Affiliate (\$17) M12SWSFW

Fax (_____) _____

You may qualify for FREE e-student affiliate membership. Visit svc.aauw.org/join/value/aauw_cu.cfm to see if your school is an AAUW partner member. If yes, contact AAUW at 800/326-2289 for your school representative.

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Mail completed membership application to **AAUW, P.O. Box 96974, Washington, DC 20077-7022.**

WE NEED YOUR HELP

Please give today!

Founded in 1881, AAUW has championed the rights of women and girls in education and the workplace for more than 130 years. Hundreds of thousands of women and men have contributed their time and financial resources to help AAUW break through educational and economic barriers so that all women and girls have a fair chance. Today, our message remains as true as ever: Educating women and girls helps individuals, their families, and society. With 100,000 members and donors, 1,000 branches, and 500 college and university partners, AAUW provides a powerful voice for women and girls—in Washington, D.C., our state capitals, and our communities. AAUW's work would not be possible without generous contributions from people who share our commitment to education, passion for equity, and unwavering belief that women are an instrumental part of leadership, change, and growth. With your support, AAUW can continue its research and scholarship on issues of importance to women and girls.

Yes! I support the work of the AAUW community. Please accept my tax-deductible contribution of
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