



Sexual Harassment of Sexual Minority Adolescents

Study Guide: What Teachers Should Know

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Sexual Harassment of Sexual Minority Adolescents

What teachers should know about sexual harassment of sexual minority adolescents in the school setting

Adolescents in middle school and high school search within themselves and within their peer groups to find the answers to many questions about their ongoing identity development. In their search they try on and experiment with many different roles and personalities in order to define themselves and to connect with peer groups. These actions cause adolescents to take risks that can be helpful or harmful to their physical and mental health. One characteristic of an adolescent emerging self is their sexual orientation. Many adolescents choose to connect intimately with members of the opposite sex but a smaller percent of teens experience same-sex attractions. Same-sex attraction in the schools is not readily accepted and can bring unwanted attention to the students who exhibit same-sex attractions. Students spend a large amount of their time in school and sexual minority adolescents may experience sexual harassment, victimization, and bullying because of their attraction to the same sex. The sexual harassment directed at gay students during school increases their chances of suffering negative physical and mental health outcomes. Sexual harassment of sexual minority students in school is common and research indicates that nine out of ten lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning students reported being harassed. The Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Title IX, is in place to protect all students from sexual harassment and discrimination. However, many sexual minority students do not report their assaults because they do not believe the school staff will take action.

Glossary

Bisexual

Attracted to persons of both sexes.

Butch

A common term used to describe both males and females who act and dress in stereotypically masculine ways. This term has traditionally been used as a pejorative term to refer to lesbians who do not conform to traditional notions of femaleness.

Closeted

The experience of living without disclosing one's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Coming Out

Becoming aware of one's sexual orientation or gender identity and beginning to disclose it to others. A person may be selectively *out* in some situations or to certain people without generally disclosing his or her sexual orientation or gender identity. *Coming out* is a process that takes place over time, in some cases over many years.

Cyberbullying

This act occurs when one student or a group of students targets another student with aggressive behavior using interactive technology.

Fruitcake or Femme

A common term used to describe both males and females who act and dress in stereotypically feminine ways. This term has traditionally been used as a pejorative term to refer to gay men who do not conform to traditional notions of maleness.

Gay

A person whose sexual orientation is to persons of the same sex.

Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA)

A student club for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and straight youth.

Heterosexual

Attracted exclusively to the opposite sex, also referred to as being straight.

Homophobic

Being biased towards homosexual people.

Homosexual

Same sex attraction. Most lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons in the United States prefer the more contemporary terms lesbian and gay.

Intersex

An individual displaying sexual characteristics of both male and female.

Intervention Plan

The components include behavioral objectives, what will be done, who will do it, how it will be

done, when it will be done, when it will be reviewed, who will review it, and what will be done if the plan is ineffective (Kerr & Nelson, 2010).

Lesbian

A female who is sexually attracted to other females.

LGBTQ

A common acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and *questioning*. The acronym may include a *Q*, for *questioning*.

Out

The experience of living openly as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender individual. There are many degrees of being "out"; for example, one may tell one's friends, family, coworkers, neighbors, or the public.

Outing

The threat of revealing your sexual identity, lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual, or intersex to family, friends, coworkers neighbors, or the public.

Queer

Often used as a slur to refer to a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender person. The term *queer* has been reclaimed by many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals in the United States, particularly by youth, as an expression of pride in one's sexual orientation and gender identity.

Questioning

Uncertain of one's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Post Traumatic Stress

An anxiety disorder that is triggered by a traumatic event. The disorder can cause fear, depression, substance abuse, and suicide in affected individuals.

Sexual Minority Students

A group of students whose sexual identity is different than others, usually in reference to lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender, questioning, and intersex youth.

Straight

Attracted exclusively to the opposite sex, heterosexual.

SWPBS (School Wide Positive Behavior Support)

A systems wide application of teaching positive behaviors using research-validated practices for a school or school district (Kerr & Nelson, 2010).

United States School Grades

Elementary school is composed of grades K-5 with students of ages five through twelve. Middle school is composed of grades 6-8 with students aged twelve through fourteen. High school is composed of grades 9-12 with students aged fourteen through eighteen.

What Teachers Should Know

1. Understand the definition of sexual harassment

- Sexual harassment occurs when a teacher, student, or other school employee conditions an educational decision or benefit on the student's submission to unwelcome sexual conduct. Two examples are offering better grades in exchange for sex, and a teacher promises a starring role in the school play in exchange for sexual favors from a student.
- A second form of sexual harassment occurs when a teacher, school employee, another student, or a third party creates a hostile environment that is sufficiently serious to deny or limit a student's ability to participate in or benefit from a school program. An example would be a baseball player quits the team because her teammates tease her about her homosexuality.

2. Describe in understandable language examples of sexual harassment

- Unwanted sexual touching or hugging. Grabbing or touching of private parts.
- Sexual comments about your body.
- Sexual advances, propositions, and suggestions for good grades.
- Obscene sexual graffiti.
- Lewd or sexual gestures or touching oneself in a sexual fashion.
- Jokes, cartoons, stories, pictures, or email of a sexual nature.
- Spreading rumors about other students' sexual activity.
- Talking about one's own sexual activities in front of others.

3. Who can be sexually harassed?

- Any student can be a victim of sexual harassment.
- Studies indicate sexual minority students are more frequently harassed and bullied than heterosexual students.

4. Where can sexual harassment or bullying take place in the school setting?

- Cafeteria
- Hallways
- Restrooms
- Locker rooms
- On the school bus
- In the playground
- Cell phone text messages
- Internet chat rooms
- Facebook and MySpace web page

5. How can a teacher recognize the negative consequences of bullying or sexually harassment?

- Student appears depressed.
- School absenteeism increases.
- Low self-esteem.
- Involvement in physical assaults or fighting.
- Increase in substance abuse.
- Loss of appetite. Not eating in cafeteria.
- Feeling afraid in school.

- Classmate asks teacher to become involved because of the harassment.
- Student talks of suicide.

6. Locate school district administration's policy on sexual harassment.

- Teachers need to know the school districts policies and procedures on sexual harassment.
- Posted the policies and procedures in public locations throughout the school district's facilities.

7. Provide confidentiality in reporting sexual harassment.

- Require the school district and the school to set up a confidential reporting system.
- Advise the students their confidentiality will be protected.
- Have the students discuss sexual harassment and bullying with the school counselors, psychologist, social worker, or teacher.
- Create on-line internet reporting form.
- Use suggestion boxes.

8. What does the teacher do if they suspect a student is being sexually harassed?

- File an incident report according to the school district's sexual harassment policy.
- Tell the harasser to stop.
- Require the harasser to speak with a counselor, social worker, or psychologist.
- If the harasser is another student, let the parent know.
- If the harasser is a teacher or staff member, follow the policy and procedure dictated by the school district.
- Instruct the victim to file an incident report.
- Advise the victim to keep the offending material and make a record of dates, events and witnesses of the harassment and bullying.
- Many sexual minority students do not report their assaults because they do not believe the school staff will take action.

- Many sexual minority students do not report their assaults because they fear they will be assaulted or harassed more.

9. Teachers must promote diversity.

- Promote and encourage a positive school climate. A safe school climate increases student learning and reduces absenteeism.
- Adequately train all staff members and students on issues of diversity and discrimination.
- Create teaching lesson plans to include exploration of diversity and non-discrimination.
- Promote cultural diversity in all school activities.
- Insist upon a zero tolerance policy for anti-gay and anti-hate language in the school and extracurricular activities.
- Teach respect.
- Be a role model against LGBT discrimination.
- Dispel false information about LGBT issues.

10. Provide social support networks for sexual minority youth.

- Create clubs in the school such as the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA)
- Create Safe Space for LGBT students. In school this is a welcoming, safe, and supportive environment.
- Provide counseling services or for victims of sexual harassment.

11. Know the penalties of sexual harassment

- School district punishment can consist of verbal reprimand, position reassignment, demotion, suspension, or termination.
- Persons found in violation of criminal laws are subject of the municipality and state where the violation occurred.

Case Study Part 1

Hannah has always played sports since she can remember. Her parents recognized early that she preferred and enjoyed throwing and catching a softball to playing with dolls and tea sets. Athletics became her forte. Through elementary school and middle school Hannah enjoyed her extracurricular sports activities. She enjoyed being the girl who was always picked first to be on the team by the boys in gym class. This gave her an elevated feeling and a sense of belonging to the group.

Hannah's mother was transferred to a new job in a rural community. That year Hannah would start tenth grade in a new high school. She always dressed in jeans, t-shirts and baseball cap, and kept her hair short to keep it out of her eyes when playing sports. When the school year began she tried out for the girls' soccer team. Her skills were far above those of her teammates. The boys' soccer coach heard of her skills and asked that she play on the boys' team. Hannah accepted his offer and played on the team through the season.

Hannah, however, began experiencing problems in school. On her locker someone spray painted the word "dyke." The girls in her gym class nicknamed her "Butch." A couple of times several classmates surrounded her, gesticulated in a lewd manner, asked if she was a "lesbo," and chanted "It's time you came out of the closet Butch!"

Hannah went to the principal's office and looked for a solution to the abuse from her classmates. Nothing about harassment or bullying was posted on any of the bulletin boards. She also searched the school district's web site for any information that might help resolve her problem. Unable to locate a policy or procedure, Hannah decided to speak with her soccer coach.

She spoke with Coach Lytle about how to handle the girls who were spreading sexual rumors about her but throughout their conversation he always deferred to it as girls being jealous and said that they would quit eventually. Hannah's school attendance suffered. She missed ten days that semester. She made sure that she went to school on soccer game days. Her grades were dropping in all her courses because she was not going to class because of the abuse she was enduring in school. When Hannah did go to school, Coach Lytle noticed Hannah was not outgoing. She had lost the smile from her face. Her interest of sporting events was absent from their conversations after practices. Last week at practice Coach Lytle thought he smelled the odor of alcohol on Hannah's breath.

Discussion Questions

1. How can teachers, staff, administrators, and parents recognize sexual harassment or bullying of sexual minority students?
2. Who is responsible for stopping sexual harassment or bullying?
3. Why did Hannah wait to talk with Coach Lytle about the harassment?
4. What should Coach Lytle have done when Hannah discussed her problem with him?
5. Would you report sexual harassment or bullying if the report was not confidential?
6. Why should administrators post policies and procedures related to sexual harassment and bullying in public locations throughout the school?
7. Which overt characteristics of Hannah are indicative of her sexual orientation?
8. List several locations where sexual harassment and bullying can occur in the school setting.
9. What are the common methods that students use to cyberbully their classmates?
10. Give several examples of sexual harassment.
11. Who is the Title IX coordinator for your school district?

12. Can a student from your school district file a sexual harassment report on line?
13. Have your faculty and staff ever discussed sexual minority issues in professional development sessions?
14. Is there a sexual harassment or bullying problem in your school?

Case Study Part 2

Coach Lytle knew all the signs indicated that something was wrong with Hannah. Hannah failed to show up for practices even though she loved the game. Her lack of interest sports and sad look on her face disturbed Coach Lytle. After smelling the odor of alcohol on her breath he thought the time was right to talk with her about experimenting with drugs and alcohol. He thought all these issues may just be normal teenage development. Coach Lytle then recalled the conversation he had with Hannah several weeks ago about some teasing she was receiving from other students. He spoke with Hannah the next time she came to practice. Hannah told Coach she has been feeling sad and started drinking alcohol to drown out the noise from the verbal harassment Hannah again told her story of the verbal abuse to the coach. She had kept notes on who had taunted her and what was written about her on an anonymous *Facebook* web page. Hannah told the coach that there were also other girls and boys who were the recipients of the taunting and abuse.

Coach recognized then that he had to begin an investigation to find the root of the problem. Coach Lytle first spoke with the school counselor, Ms. Simto, to get her thoughts and feedback on the problem. She said Hannah was not the only student being harassed. Several students and their parents had contacted her to voice their dissatisfaction with the school climate. Ms. Simto said, “There’s too much hate going on in this building. It is a good time to change the

attitude and climate in this school.” Both of the educators agreed that a school wide positive intervention strategy was needed.

The two teachers together initiated a school wide intervention strategy to end the harassment and bullying and bring about a positive school climate. Coach Lytle contacted the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) for help with the bullying and harassment problem. Ms. Simto contacted www.PBIS.org (Positive Behavior Intervention Support) in search for a school wide solution to the problem.

FAQ

1. What is the difference between sexual bullying and sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment is an unwanted sexual contact or touching or the granting of educational opportunities for giving sexual favors *quid pro quo* (An equal exchange or substitution). Sexual bullying is a term created to mislead, to possibly skirt the law.

2. What is bullying?

Bullying is an imbalance of power where the more powerful child or group of children attack another child by using negative acts of violence. Bullying can be physical, verbal, and psychological.

3. What is sexual bullying?

Sexual bullying is a misnomer. Sexual harassment is a violation of the law. Bullying is not a violation of the law. This label is used to avoid prosecution for sexual harassment under Title IX laws. This is a term some use used to mislead students and parents.

4. Can a person be arrested for sexual harassment?

Yes. Sexual harassment is a violation of federal law.

5. Who can be contacted if they are being sexually harassed at school?

Go to a teacher, school counselor, or social worker and discuss the problem with them. The school should have a policy outlining procedures to follow when sexual harassment occurs. Each school district is required to have a Title IX officer who coordinates the district’s efforts to comply with the laws against sexual discrimination and disability discrimination.

6. How can a student confidentially submit a report of sexual harassment and bullying?

Create anonymous tip lines or suggestion boxes for students to inform administrators and staff of sexual harassment and bullying.

7. After a complaint of sexual harassment has been filed, how can the school help the student?

The school should provide resources of support for victims of sexual harassment and bullying.

8. Where should the administration post policies and procedures for sexual harassment?

Post policies and procedures for sexual harassment and bullying in public places throughout the school buildings and the school district. Each school district is required to have a Title IX officer who coordinates the district's efforts to comply with the laws against sexual discrimination and disability discrimination.

9. How long should a student wait to report violent acts of sexual harassment or bullying?

Report violent incidents of sexual harassment or bullying immediately to law enforcement officials.

10. "Am I the only student in school who is being picked on?"

No. More than 68% of LGBT students reported feeling unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation.

11. The school district is requesting bids for a sexual harassment and bullying prevention program. One bidder offers the unique feature in their program of changing the sexual orientation of LGBT students. Can this be done?

Be aware and wary of interventions to change an individual's sexual orientation. There is no scientific evidence to support them.

12. Are there any clubs that will provide social support needs to sexual minority students?

Organizations such as the Gay Straight Alliance serve as a source of support for LGBT students. SAFE SPACES are places in the school where educators create a safe place and act as an ally for sexual minority students.

13. Should sexual harassment and bullying policies include examples of sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment policies should give examples of sexual harassing behaviors that can be easily understood by elementary school students.

14. List several examples of situations that are sexual harassment and examples that are not sexual harassment?

The following examples are from the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, *Sexual harassment: It's not academic*, Washington D.C. 2008.

Example 1: Throughout the football season, a male member of the high school football team makes unwelcome sexual advances toward another member of the football team who is a homosexual male. As a result, the victim quits the football team. This conduct is sexual in nature, unwelcome, and has denied the victim the ability to participate on the school football team. This is sexual harassment covered by Title IX.

Example 2: A female high school student willingly kisses a male student on one occasion. When the student subsequently attempts to kiss her again, she objects, but he kisses her anyway. This subsequent kiss is considered to be unwelcome despite the welcomeness of the first kiss. This is sexual harassment covered by Title IX.

Example 3: A high school athletic coach hugs a student who makes a goal. This by itself is not considered sexual conduct. However, a coach's hugging of a student could be considered sexual conduct if it is unwelcome and occurs under inappropriate circumstances. This is not sexual harassment covered by Title IX.

Example 4: Students heckle another student with comments that are based on the student's sexual orientation but are not sexual in nature (e.g., "gay students are not welcome at this table in the lunch room"). Even if these comments are unwelcome and deny the student's ability to benefit from or participate in the school's education program, the conduct is not sexual, and this is not sexual harassment covered by Title IX (U.S. Department of Education, 2008, pp. 4-8).

Resources

GLSEN Anti-Bullying Resources

<http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/antibullying/index.html>

SexEdLibrary provides access to lesson plans covering every topic related to sexuality.

<http://www.sexedlibrary.org/index.cfm?pageId=765>

F.L.A.S.H. Lesson Plans: Comprehensive sexuality education curriculum.

<http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/personal/famplan/educators/FLASH.aspx>

Affirm

A network of psychologists who are coming out in open support lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) family members. Provide information, resources, and, where appropriate, support to other psychologists.

<http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/CAS/affirm.nsf/pages/bib>

GSA Network

Helps youth create safe environments in schools and educate the community about homophobia, gender identity issues and sexual orientation issues. Supports causes to fight discrimination, harassment, and violence in schools.

<http://gsanetwork.org/about-us>

Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. Government agency that protects students against sex and disability discrimination.

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/sexharassresources.html>

SAMHSA Mental Health Information Center

This website provides information on bullying prevention for educators, parents, mental health providers, law enforcements and children.

<http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/15plus/aboutbullying.asp>

Annotated Bibliography

Birkett, M., Espelage, D. L., & Koenig, B. (2009). LGB and questioning students in schools: The moderating effects of homophobic bullying and school climate on negative outcomes.

Journal of Youth Adolescence, 38(7), 989-1000. doi:1001007/'s10964-008-9389-1

The purpose of this research was to determine if a homophobic school environment had negative effects on the mental and physical health of sexual minority students. The authors stated that heterosexual males would experience the least amount of homophobic teasing and victimization and thus have the fewest mental and physical health problems. The data for the study was collected from 7,376 seventh and eighth grade students from Dane County WI. The results of the study indicate the school climate significantly affects the health of LGBTQ students. The study showed that *questioning* students had significantly higher rates of depression/suicide feelings than either LGBT students or heterosexual students. The higher rates of depression place sexual minority students at higher risk for mental and physical health problems. The study supports other studies on the poor health mental and physical health effects LGBT students suffer. This study demonstrates how a positive school climate can help reduce the poor health outcomes for LGBT students.

D'Augelli, A. R., Pilkington, N. W., & Hershberger, S. (2002). Incidence and mental health impact of sexual orientation victimization of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths in high school. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 17(2), 148-167. doi:10.1521/scpq.17.2.148.20854

In this study the authors researched the frequency and the impact of victimization on sexual minorities during their high school years. The 350 subjects were chosen from social and recreational youth groups from published lists and internet announcements. The authors examined two types of victimization; direct and vicarious, and how both types affected physical and mental health of sexual minorities. The more “open” students were the more they would be victimized. Many youths reported many instances of vicarious victimization (incidents to other LGB students), where two to three times more males than females were victimized. More than half of the respondents (59%) reported direct victimization in high school. The negative health effect was significant. LGB students scored higher than heterosexual students in all categories. The authors used the Brief Symptom Inventory to measure sleep, obsession-compulsion, depression, anxiety, hostility, etc. The Trauma Symptom Checklist measured dissociation, anxiety, depression, sexual abuse trauma, sleep disturbances, sexual problems, and substance abuse. Suicidality was measured by asking to respond to the question, “Have you ever seriously thought of taking your own life?” The authors concluded that there exists a serious threat of victimization to students of sexual minority from mainstream school populations. Such victimization has a negative effect on their mental and physical health. The authors also recommend solutions to promote a positive school environment.

Gruber, J. E., & Fineran, S. (2008). Comparing the impact of bullying and sexual harassment victimization on the mental and physical health of adolescents. *Sex Roles, 59*(1), 1-13. doi:10.1007/s11199-008-9431-5

The authors studied the frequency of sexual harassment compared to bullying and the impact they have on five health outcomes: self esteem, mental health, physical health,

trauma, and substance abuse. The study compared sexual harassment and bullying of adolescents in the middle school and high school. The authors reviewed the results of four national studies that showed that sexual harassment was more prevalent than bullying. The authors believe that there is a discrepancy in the national results based on the researcher's different measurements of sexual harassment and bullying. Researchers use different frequencies of victimization for the amount of harassment, different dimensions of sexual harassment, and variable time frameworks for the sexual harassment and bullying. The result of this study show bullying is more common than sexual harassment. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and questioning students are bullied more than other students. Girls and sexual minority students incur higher rates mental and physical health harm than boys.

Williams, T., Connolly, J., Pepler, D., & Craig, W. (2005). Peer victimization, social support, and psychosocial adjustment of sexual minority adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 34(5), 471-482. doi:10.1007/s10964-005-7264-x

In this study the researchers sought to establish a relationship between sexual minority adolescents' psychosocial difficulties from victimization and teen social supports available (i.e. family and peer groups) in the community. The research involved 1,598 adolescent boys and girls from five Canadian high schools in grades 9 through 12. Ninety-seven students indicated that they were gay, lesbian, bisexual or questioning in their sexual orientation. The researchers administered psychosocial inventory surveys to measure depression, externalizing symptoms, bullying, sexual abuse, and physical abuse. They used the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment to measure the quality of their relationships with their mother. To assess the quality of their peer friendships they used

the Peer Relationships Questionnaire. The results of the research show that the sexual minority adolescents had higher rates of depression, suffered significantly higher rates of bullying and sexual harassment, and exhibited less closeness with their mothers and best friends than heterosexual students. A limitation to this study was the small number of sexual minority students that participated in the study.