

Frequently Asked Questions: LGBT STUDENTS OF COLOR

Are there any special concerns for LGBT students of color?

When a student is both a person of color and an LGBT person, he/she may feel that only one part of his/her identity can be primary. Often, LGBT people of color feel pulled by each of their cultures to primarily identify with one culture. Because the LGBT identity is often invisible, it is easy to deny or ignore that aspect of the self. For many it is difficult to strike a balance that allows them to be empowered and liberated in both (or all of) their identities.

Multiple oppression affects one's life because:

- A person may feel they do not know who they are.
- A person may not know which part of them is most important to embrace.
- A person may not know how to deal with one part of their identity oppressing another part of their identity.
- A person may not have anyone to talk to about the split they feel in their person.
- A person may feel misunderstood by each group as they consider both parts equally important.

The experience of each racial/ethnic group is different depending on cultural values and beliefs about LGBT people. Each person should be considered individually for the effects on his or her life of having multiple identities.

Do LGBT students of color experience higher rates of harassment and discrimination?

LGBT students of color face unique and diverse challenges regarding victimization at school, according to Shared Differences: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender students of Color in Our Nation's Schools, a report released today by GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network. This report looked at the experiences of 2,000 lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) middle and high school students of color who were African American or Black, Latino/a, Asian or Pacific Islander, Native American, and multiracial as part of their National School Climate Survey.

The report found that:

- Across all groups, sexual orientation and gender expression were the most common reasons LGBT students of color reported feeling unsafe in school. More than four out of five students, within each racial/ethnic group, reported verbal harassment in school because of sexual orientation and about two-thirds because of gender expression. At least a third of each group reported physical violence in school because of sexual orientation.
- More than half of African American/Black, Latino/a, Asian/Pacific Islander, and multiracial students also reported verbal harassment in school based on their race or ethnicity. Native American students (43%) were less likely than other students to report experiencing racially

motivated verbal harassment.

- About a quarter of African American/Black and Asian/Pacific Islander students had missed class or days of school in the past month because they felt unsafe. Latino/a, Native American, and multiracial students were even more likely to be absent for safety reasons – about a third or more skipped class at least once or missed at least one day of school in the past month for safety reasons.
- Native American students experienced particularly high levels of victimization because of their religion, with more than half reporting the highest levels of verbal harassment (54%), and a quarter experiencing physical violence (26%).
- Less than half of students of color who had been harassed or assaulted in school in the past year said that they ever reported the incident to school staff. Furthermore, for those students who did report incidents to school staff, less than half believed that staff’s resulting response was effective.
- Native American (57%) and multiracial (50%) students were more likely than other students of color in our survey to report incidents to a family member.
- Performance at school also suffered when students experienced high levels of victimization. Students’ overall GPA dropped when they reported high severities of harassment based on sexual orientation and/or race/ethnicity. Students experiencing high severities of harassment also reported missing school more often.
- The report also looks at differing experiences based on the racial/ethnic make-up of students’ schools. For all groups, LGBT students of color who were minorities in their school were much more likely to feel unsafe and experience harassment because of their race or ethnicity than those who were in the racial/ethnic majority.

To learn more about this study and report visit: www.glsen.org/research