



2006 STRAIGHT STUDENT ALLY REPORT:

PROFILE OF STRAIGHT STUDENT ALLIES & THEIR EXPERIENCES OF HOMOPHOBIA IN IOWA HIGH SCHOOLS

Introduction

The Iowa Pride Network's Straight Student Ally Report is the second component to its recently released Iowa School Climate Survey, which detailed the life experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students in our state. The Straight Student Ally Report is a report on the life experiences of straight students who are friends or allies of LGBT students in Iowa's high schools.

Straight student allies mirror LGBT students' reports of hearing homophobic remarks and confirm that LGBT students are the targets of such remarks, harassment and assault in Iowa's high schools. The report indicates that straight student allies face a more threatening environment than their straight peers who do not consider themselves allies of LGBT students: **43%** of straight allied students reported some incident of having their property stolen or deliberately damaged, such as their car, clothing or books, compared to only **18%** of the general student population (2002 Iowa Youth Survey). However, it is clear that LGBT students are the ultimate target of harassment as nearly **60%** of LGBT students face the same type of threats.

Beyond hearing biased language at school in the form of homophobic, racist and sexist remarks, the similarities between LGBT and straight student allies end. The report shows that LGBT students are significantly more likely to be the target of threats, harassment and assault than are straight student allies. Straight student allies are more likely to have higher grades and are more likely to pursue higher education, whereas LGBT students have lower educational achievement and aspirations, likely due to the ongoing harassment they receive.

This report indicates that "out" LGBT students automatically become the target of threats, harassment and violent physical assault. It also suggests that straight student allies may achieve more because they are not the target of anti-gay attacks, even though they lament that their school climate is not safe for their LGBT friends.

The results from this survey are intended to inform educators, policymakers and the public at large about how violence, bias and harassment of Iowa's LGBT students continue to be the rule and not the exception. This survey demonstrates that this hostile school climate has a direct and measurable link to Iowa LGBT students' ability to learn, their academic performance and educational aspirations, and ultimately their ability to build successful futures.

Methodology

The students for this survey were obtained primarily from school based organizations serving lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning or straight allied (LGBTQA) students. The students came from 48 schools across the state. Only Iowa high school students and first year college freshmen who had attended an Iowa high school within the past year were allowed to participate in the survey. The Iowa Pride Network School Climate Survey was also available on the internet via prideNet's website: www.iowapridenetwork.org. Notices about our on-line survey were emailed out to Gay-Straight Alliances and youth advocacy organizations. Data collection occurred from October 2004 through March 2005.

A total of 175 lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning or straight allied students completed the survey. This report focuses on the 68 participants who identified themselves as straight students who consider themselves allies of their LGBTQ peers (4 students did not indicate their sexual orientation). Experiences of the 103 LGBTQ students are not included in this report, but are detailed in the 2005 Iowa Pride Network School Climate Survey, which can be found at www.iowapridenetwork.org.

The majority of the straight student allies identified as White or European-American (86.80%); over two-thirds identified as female and all identified as heterosexual. Straight student allies also self-reported having attended Gay-Straight Alliance meetings as frequently or often as their LGBT peers. Over half the students reported being in 10th-11th grade during the 2004-2005 school year.

Special Thanks

Dr. Peggy Fitch, Professor of Psychology at Central College and her team of students, for compiling the data and statistical information. To Iowa's supportive teachers and administrators and specifically advisors of Gay-Straight Alliances, who work endlessly to ensure the safety and affirmation of all students. And, finally, to Iowa's LGBTQA students who took this survey to help us better understand what it is like to be LGBTQA in Iowa's high schools.

KEY FINDINGS:

- 1) **Straight student allies' experiences confirm that LGBT students are frequently the target of homophobic remarks in school.**
 - 2) **Straight student allies are significantly less likely to be the target of threats, harassment and assault than LGBT students.**
 - 3) **Straight student allies are more optimistic about their futures and have higher expectations and achievement levels, quite possibly because they are not the primary targets of harassment.**
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1) **Straight student allies experiences confirm that LGBT students are frequently the target of homophobic remarks in school:**

- **94%** of straight allies in Iowa reported hearing homophobic remarks frequently in their schools.
- **72%** of straight allies report that teachers only some of the time or never intervened when homophobic remarks are made in their presence.
- **57%** of straight allies reported they were pretty much or extremely upset when hearing the words “gay” or “queer” used in a derogatory way (such as, “That’s so gay”).
- **18%** reported hearing homophobic remarks from teachers or school staff some of the time.

2) **Straight student allies are significantly less likely to be the target of threats, harassment and assault than LGBT students.**

- **43%** of straight allies reported some incident of having their property stolen or deliberately damaged, such as their car, clothing or books, compared to **59%** of LGBT students.
- **38%** of straight allies reported some incident of having had mean rumors or lies spread about them in their school, compared to **91%** of LGBT students.
- **25%** of straight allies reported some incident of sexual harassment (such as sexual remarks made toward them or someone touching their bodies inappropriately) at their school, compared to **67%** of LGBT students.
- **12%** of straight allies experience some verbal harassment because of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity, compared to **83%** of LGBT students.
- **10%** of straight allies experience some incident of physical harassment (being punched, kicked or injured with a weapon) because of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity, compared to **34%** of LGBT students.
- **No** straight allies reported incidents of physical assault based on real or perceived sexual orientation, while **18%** of LGBT students were victims of such assault.

3) **Straight student allies are more optimistic about their futures and have higher expectations and achievement levels, quite possibly because they are not the primary targets of harassment:**

- Straight allies are **50% more likely** than LGBT students to describe their grades in the past school year as mostly A's.
- Straight allies are **11% more likely** than LGBT students to plan on going to college right after high school.
- Straight allies are **22% more likely** than LGBT students to report that they expect to complete a college degree.
- Straight allies are **twice as likely** than LGBT students to report that they will be attending between two and four years of college.

Summary

The results from the Straight Student Ally Report support LGBT students reporting of verbal harassment made towards them and confirm that LGBT students are the target of homophobic remarks, harassment and assault in Iowa's high schools. Almost all straight students in Iowa (94%) reported hearing homophobic remarks frequently in their schools. The report also indicates that a majority of straight students were very upset when hearing the words "gay" or "queer" used in a derogatory way such as, "That's so gay."

The report shows that LGBT students are significantly more likely to be the target of threats, harassment and assault than are straight student allies: **43%** of straight students reported some incident of having their property stolen or deliberately damaged, such as their car, clothing or books, compared to **59%** of LGBT students; **10%** of straight students experience some incident of physical harassment (being punched, kicked or injured with a weapon) because of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity, compared to **34%** of LGBT students; and **no** straight students reported incidents of physical assault based on real or perceived sexual orientation, while **18%** of LGBT students were victims of such assault.

These results demonstrate that LGBT students are specifically singled out for verbal, physical, and sexual harassment and physical assault daily. No wonder that a majority of LGBT students feel unsafe in their schools. Clearly violence and harassment of LGBT students in Iowa schools continue to be the rule, not the exception.

Finally, straight students are more optimistic about their futures and have higher expectations and achievement levels, very likely because they are not the primary targets of harassment: straight students are **50% more likely** than LGBT students to describe their grades in the past school year as mostly A's, and **11% more likely** than LGBT students to plan to go to college right after high school. Additionally, straight students are **twice as likely** as LGBT students to report that they will attend between two and four years of college, and **22% more likely** than LGBT students to report that they expect to earn a college degree.

Conclusion:

A significant percentage of straight students are harassed and bullied simply because they have friends that are LGBT; are extremely distressed when hearing the words "gay" or "queer" used in a derogatory way (such as, "That's so gay"); and confirm that Iowa's LGBT students are being specifically targeted for harassment and assault. This hostile school climate inhibits LGBT students' achievement levels and lessens the likelihood that they will succeed in high school or thereafter.

Inclusive Policies are needed to create the kind of learning environment that allows Iowa LGBT students and those that are perceived to be to succeed academically.

Recommendations

- State legislation and school districts must adopt anti-harassment and non-discrimination policies that prohibit harassment of, and violence and discrimination against, LGBT students to insure that all students are taught with respect and have access to a quality education.
- School districts must support student efforts to create organizations, such as Gay-Straight Alliances, which seek to end violence, harassment, discrimination and isolation of LGBT students.
- Ensure supportive school staff through trainings about LGBT students and other minority populations in addition to awareness on bullying and harassment issues.

Table 1: Demographics of Survey Participants	
<i>68 Straight Students Surveyed</i>	
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>	
White	86.80%
African-American/Black	2.9
Latino/a	2.9
Asican/Pacific Islander	2.9
Native American	1.5
Multiracial	1.5
Other race/ethnicity	1.5
<u>Gender</u>	
Male	23.9
Female	76.1
Transgender	0
Other gender identities	0
<u>Sexual Orientation</u>	
Straight/Heterosexual	100
<u>Grade</u>	
8th	16.7
9th	25.8
10th	24.2
11th	28.8
12th	4.5
<u>Average Age</u>	15.9

Table 2: School Characteristics	
<u>Community Type</u>	
Urban	53
Suburban	18.2
Small Town	25.8
Rural	3
<u>School Type</u>	
Public	97.1
Religious-Affiliated	1.5
Other	1.5

About the Iowa Pride Network (*prideNet*)

The Iowa Pride Network or *prideNet*, fights bigotry and intolerance against LGBT students in Iowa. The Iowa Pride Network works directly with students, empowering them to start and enhance Gay-Straight Alliances in their high schools and colleges, while building a statewide network that offers support mentoring and educational opportunities. In addition, the Iowa Pride Network educates policy makers and educators on issues facing LGBT students and advocates for the interests of these students on state and the local levels.

Iowa Pride Network (*prideNet*) Vision

Our vision is to educate Iowa LGBT students on their rights and available resources, end the isolation that many LGBT students face, empower students to build successful futures and transform Iowa into a state that is affirming and inclusive.