***Exert from Think B4 You Speak***

esbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) teens in the U.S. experience homophobic remarks and harassment throughout the school day, creating an atmosphere where they feel disrespected, unwanted and unsafe. GLSEN’s

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*2007 National School Climate Survey* found that nearly three-quarters (73.6%) of LGBT students hear homophobic language, such as “faggot” or “dyke,” and more than nine in ten (90.2%) hear the word “gay” used in a negative way frequently or often at school. Though many play down the impact of expressions like “that’s so gay” because they have become such a common part of teens’ vernacular and are often not intended to inflict harm, 83.1% of LGBT students say that hearing “gay” or “queer” used in a negative manner causes them to feel bothered or distressed.

Studies indicate that youth who regularly experience verbal or physical harassment suffer from emotional turmoil, low self-esteem, loneliness, depression, poor academic achievement and high rates of absenteeism.1 Research also shows that many of the bystanders to acts of harassment experience feelings of helplessness and powerlessness, and develop poor coping and problem-solving skills.2 Clearly, homophobic and all types of harassment—and the toxic effects they produce—are whole school problems that all educators must confront.

*DID YOU KNOW?*

9 out of 10 LGBT students hear the word “gay” used in a negative way often or frequently in school and nearly 3 out of 4 LGBT stu- dents report hearing their peers make homophobic remarks, such as “dyke” or “faggot,” often or frequently in school.

To address this disconcerting reality, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Net- work (GLSEN) together with The Advertising Council has created the first national multimedia public service advertising (PSA) campaign designed to address the use of anti-LGBT language among teens. The campaign aims to raise awareness among straight teens about the prevalence and consequences of anti-LGBT bias and behavior in America’s schools. Ultimately, the goal is to reduce and prevent the use of homophobic language in an effort to create a more positive environment for LGBT teens. The campaign also aims to reach adults, including school personnel and parents, because their support of this message is crucial to the success of efforts to change teens’ behavior.

**a note about language**

There are many terms that are used to describe what is commonly known as the “gay community.” Since the word “gay” most often refers to homosexual men, we have chosen to use the more inclusive “LGBT,” which means lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. Though this term may sound unfamiliar at first, we encourage you to use it consistently with *others* and to avoid reflexively using “gay” to describe the broad spectrum of sexual and gender identities. There are many people within the LGBT communities who use a variety of other terms to describe themselves, including queer, questioning, and same-gender loving. Though we have chosen to use LGBT consistently here, we encourage you to respect the terms that individuals in your community have chosen to describe themselves.

Much of this guide is aimed at increasing young people’s awareness about the damaging effects of expressions like “that’s so gay” and other terms that are (intentionally or unintentionally) derogatory. While it is critical to discourage the negative use of words like “gay” and “queer,” it is also important to reinforce that these are not “bad” words in and of themselves and are perfectly acceptable when used in appropriate contexts.

# **Definitions**

**bisexual:** A term given to people who are attracted sexually/erotically and emotionally to both males and females.

**gay:** A term given to males who are attracted sexually/erotically and emotionally to some other males.

**gender attribution:** How your gender is perceived by others.

**gender expression:** How you want to display your gender.

**gender identity:** How you identify (see yourself).

**lesbian**: A term given to females who are attracted sexually/erotically and emotionally to some other females.

**questioning:** A term that refers to people who are uncertain as to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

**queer:** An umbrella term used by many for anyone whose sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression is not considered “standard.”

**sex assigned at birth**: What the medical community labels you.

**transgender:** A broad “umbrella” term that can be used to describe people whose gender expression is nonconforming and/or whose gender identity is different from their gender assigned at birth.

*DID YOU KNOW?*

Almost 90% of LGBT students are verbally harassed, 44% are physically harassed and nearly 1/4 are physically assaulted at school because of their sexual orientation. And 2/3 of LGBT students are verbally harassed, 30% are physically harassed and 14% are physically assaulted at school because of their gender expression.

1 See, for example, Widmeyer Communications for the Health, Resources and Services Administra­tion of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *National Bullying Prevention Campaign Formative Research Report* (2003); Doris Rhea Coy, Bullying, ERIC Digest (2001); and Tonja R. Nansel, Mary Overpeck, Ramani S. Pilla, W. June Ruan, Bruce Simons-Morton, Peter Scheidt, *Bullying Behaviors Among US Youth: Prevalence and Association With Psychosocial Adjustment*, JAMA, 285:2094-2100 (2001)

2 Tonja R. Nansel, Mary Overpeck, Ramani S. Pilla, W. June Ruan, Bruce Simons-Morton, Peter Scheidt, *Bullying Behaviors Among US Youth: Prevalence and Association With Psychosocial Adjustment*, JAMA, 285:2094-2100 (2001)

Adapted from *"Think B4 You Speak" Guide for Educators* and *GLSEN Gender Terminology* [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org/)