

Do TV Shows and Movies Make Sexual Harassment a "Normal" Part of the School Experience?



What do current studies "say" about sexual harassment?

The American Association of University Women surveyed students from grades 7-12 about their experiences with sexual harassment during the 2010-2011 school year.

Make an educated guess about the occurrence of sexual harassment in U.S. schools.

- 1. Take an educated guess:** Read the statements below and make an educated guess for each statement about students' experiences with sexual harassment in schools.

Statement about sexual harassment in school	My guess	Correct answer
What percent of students experienced some form of sexual harassment?		
What percent of sexual harassment was experienced by text, email, Facebook or other electronic means?		
What percent of students witnessed sexual harassment more than once during the school year?		
What percent of students who admitted to sexually harassing others didn't think it was a big deal?		
Who is more likely to be sexually harassed in school? (boys or girls)		
Who is more likely to be sexually harassed via text, email, Facebook or by other electronic means? (boys or girls)		
Who is more likely to witness sexual harassment in schools? (boys or girls)		
Who is more likely to say they sexually harassed other students? (boys or girls)		
What percent of girls and boys who admitted to sexually harassing another student said they were also a target of sexual harassment?		

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2. Educate yourself: While many instances of student-to-student harassment occur on school grounds, many students experience harassment through text, email and other electronic means. Read USA TODAY's article *States look to enact cyberbullying laws* to discover how local and state officials are responding to this form of harassment. After reading the article, respond to the questions below and be prepared to share your responses.

After reading the article excerpts, how would you define cyberbullying?

Why do you think states are passing laws that make cyberbullying a criminal offense?

Do you think students who sexually harass and bully through electronic venues should be charged with a crime? Explain.

What do TV and Film "say" about sexual harassment?

Think about the TV shows, music videos and movies you have viewed in the past 6-12 months. Place a check in the box next to each scene you have witnessed while viewing one of these media sources. Write the name of the TV show, music video or movie below each box you check.

- Someone receiving an unwelcomed sexual comment.
- Someone being called gay or lesbian in a negative way.
- Someone being touched in an unwelcomed, negative way.
- Someone sending or receiving a sexually explicit text, tweet or email message.
- Someone being shown sexual pictures he or she did not want to see.
- Someone being the subject of unwelcomed sexual rumors.

Do TV shows and movies promote sexual harassment as being "normal"? Explain.

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Lawmakers in at least five states aim to stiffen or enact cyberbullying laws as national concern grows over electronic harassment and its deadly consequences.

The states — Delaware, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine and New York— want to put penalties on the books for the types of digital bullying that led students in several states to commit suicide. Among the victims was Tyler Clementi, an 18-year-old Rutgers University freshman who jumped to his death in 2010 after his roommate used a webcam to spy on his gay encounter. The roommate, Dharun Ravi, was convicted on 15 counts in a case that drew national attention.

North Carolina passed a law in 2009 to criminalize cyberbullying, making it a misdemeanor for youths under 18.

The trend in legislation is “bringing our laws into the digital age and the 21st century,” said New York state Sen. Jeffrey Klein, sponsor of a bill to criminalize cyberbullying. “When I was growing up, you had a tangible bully and a fight after school. Now you have hordes of bullies who are terrorizing over the Internet or other forms of social media.”

Under Klein’s proposed law, anyone found guilty of using electronics to stalk or harass someone could face a misdemeanor or felony charge that could carry a prison sentence.

Forty-eight states have anti-bullying laws, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. The move now is to strengthen those laws and add specific consequences for electronic intimidation and harassment:

- ▶ **In Indiana**, a proposed bill would give schools more authority to punish students for off-campus activities such as cyberbullying from a computer not owned by the school.
- ▶ **In Maine**, a proposal would define bullying and cyberbullying, specify responsibilities for reporting incidents of bullying and require schools to adopt a policy to address bullying.
- ▶ **In Delaware**, meetings are underway to decide how a new cyberbullying policy would regulate off-campus behavior.

Legal experts say the laws can possibly infringe on free speech, particularly if a student is accused of using a computer that is not on school grounds. Five states — Arizona, Delaware, Florida, Georgia and Illinois — limit school jurisdiction over cyberbullying behavior to acts that are committed using school-owned or -leased computers, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

Opponents of cyberbullying legislation in Indiana, South Dakota and Montana have criticized the laws as vague, too punitive and counterproductive.

Frank LoMonte, executive director of the Student Press Law Center, based in Arlington, Va., said the movement in the legislatures and the courts is focusing on the disciplinary system and is shortsighted. “You’re not going to be able to punish people into being more tolerant,” he said.

Source: *States look to enact cyberbullying laws*, March 19, 2011. *USA TODAY*

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What do I “say” about sexual harassment?

impact of particular issues. Many times PSAs encourage people to take action or do something to change the current situation.

Your voice matters, especially when there is a social issue that impacts you and your school community. One way to share your message is to create a public service announcement (PSA). PSAs inform or caution the public about the

impact of particular issues. Many times PSAs encourage people to take action or do something to change the current situation.

Think about what you would want students and adults in your school community to know and do about sexual harassment in your school. Follow the steps below to create your own PSA and **share what you have to say** about sexual harassment in your school.

CREATE A PSA

Step 1: Determine your audience: Who is your target audience?

(For example, do you want to reach girls, boys, students, adults, athletes or freshmen?)

Step 2: Develop your message: What is your message?

(What do you want people to know, understand or do about sexual harassment in school?)

Step 3: Design your poster: How will you communicate your message?

On a separate sheet of paper or electronically, create a poster that communicates your message. Use key words in a simple, clear manner. Think about how you will use color and images to make your point and move people to action.

Step 4: Display your PSA: Where will it make the most impact?

Share your PSA with students in your class and your school community. Work with your teacher or sponsor to find a location where your PSA can display your message about sexual harassment in school.

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Extend Your Learning

Want to find out more? Check out the following websites:

- ▶ Based on findings from a nationally representative survey conducted in May and June 2011, Crossing the Line presents the most comprehensive research on sexual harassment in grades 7-12 and reveals statistics about the prevalence of sexual harassment and the negative impact it has on students' education. Find out more about how sexual harassment may be having a negative impact in your school: www.aauw.org/learn/research/crossingtheline.cfm
- ▶ The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media has gathered the largest body of research on gender prevalence in family entertainment, spanning more than 20 years. Research findings reveal evidence of gender inequality and stereotyping in film and television. Explore the research data and determine whether the media has a positive or negative impact on sexual harassment in schools: www.seejane.org/downloads/GDIGM_Gender_Stereotypes.pdf
- ▶ Find out more about how you can take action to prevent bullying in your school: www.stopbullying.gov
- ▶ USA TODAY's article referred to the federal gender-equality legislation known as Title IX. Find out more about this legislation and explore the history of Title IX: www.now.org/issues/title_ix/history.html
- ▶ Find out more about Teen Voices and how you can amplify your voice and create social change through media: www.teenvoices.com/about-us
- ▶ View this video about the problem with sexual harassment in school: www.usatoday.com/video/survey-sexual-harassment-pervasive-in-schools/1263666087001