

Trends & TudesSM

Keeping you informed of current topics in youth and education research.

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Campus Learning Environments

By Dana Markow, Ph.D.; Vice-President, Youth and Education Research

Harris Interactive has a long history of conducting research on school climate issues. In 1993 and 2001, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) Educational Foundation commissioned Harris Interactive to conduct groundbreaking research documenting the extent and effects of sexual harassment in public school.^{1,2} The studies revealed that a majority of secondary school students have experienced sexual harassment at some time during their school lives. In addition to feeling upset by these experiences, many students reported consequences that were more directly tied to their education, such as avoiding a class, skipping school or finding it difficult to pay attention. Recently, Harris Interactive conducted a survey on behalf of the AAUW that extends this research to the college setting. The issue of sexual harassment has special implications for college students. In addition to the traditional school environments like the classroom, library, gym, etc., many students also live on campus. For many, this marks the first time that they are living on their own.

The survey found that sexual harassment is widespread on college campuses. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of undergraduate students in the United States say they have encountered some type of sexual harassment related to their college lives. The survey also revealed that the most common response to experiencing sexual harassment is avoiding the person that bothered or harassed them (38% of those who have experienced harassment) and staying away from particular buildings or places on campus (19% of those who have experienced harassment). The combination of these two findings indicates that many students may not be able to fully participate in all the educational experiences that their campuses have to offer because of sexual harassment on campus.

Harris Interactive conducted the *Drawing the Line: Sexual Harassment on Campus* study online on behalf of the AAUW Educational Foundation in May 2005 among 2,036 U.S. undergraduate college students ages 18 to 24. Students were asked about their college-related experiences with a range of behaviors that were **unwanted**. These behaviors included non-physical (e.g. sexual comments, jokes, the spreading of sexual rumors, etc.) as well as physical (e.g. touching or grabbing in a sexual way, being forced to do something sexual, etc.) situations. Sixty percent of college students have experienced non-physical sexual harassment and one-third (32%) have experienced physical sexual harassment related to their college life.

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¹ *Hostile Hallways: The AAUW Survey on Sexual Harassment in America's Schools* (1993). AAUW Educational Foundation

² *Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing and Sexual Harassment in America's Schools* (2001). AAUW Educational Foundation

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Editorial: Our Take On It

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Ah, the college years. Many adults look back upon that time in their lives with fondness. But, remember the interesting dichotomy that college presented when one was first entering that life stage? New college students are trying to create their own independent adult identities by breaking away from family influences, often moving away from home, and forming career interests that will affect life-long paths. But at the same time they are facing unparalleled pressure to fit in with their peers (e.g., community housing, "Greek" life, and peer learning communities).

Living in campus housing is an expectation of three-quarters of college-bound high school students. This November 2004 finding is from Hobsons CollegePulse, powered by Harris Interactive, a survey of 2,244 college-bound high school students. Furthermore, these high schoolers felt that meeting new people (54%) and having fun socially (48%) were extremely/very important reasons why they decided to go to college. It is no wonder that the majority of high schoolers feel that living in campus housing is part of the "college experience" that they look most forward to. Perhaps many recognize that the college dorm environment provides the opportunity for increased social support and communication among peers. The close-knit dorms provide an atmosphere in which help coping with the new environment and expectations of college life is literally right next door.

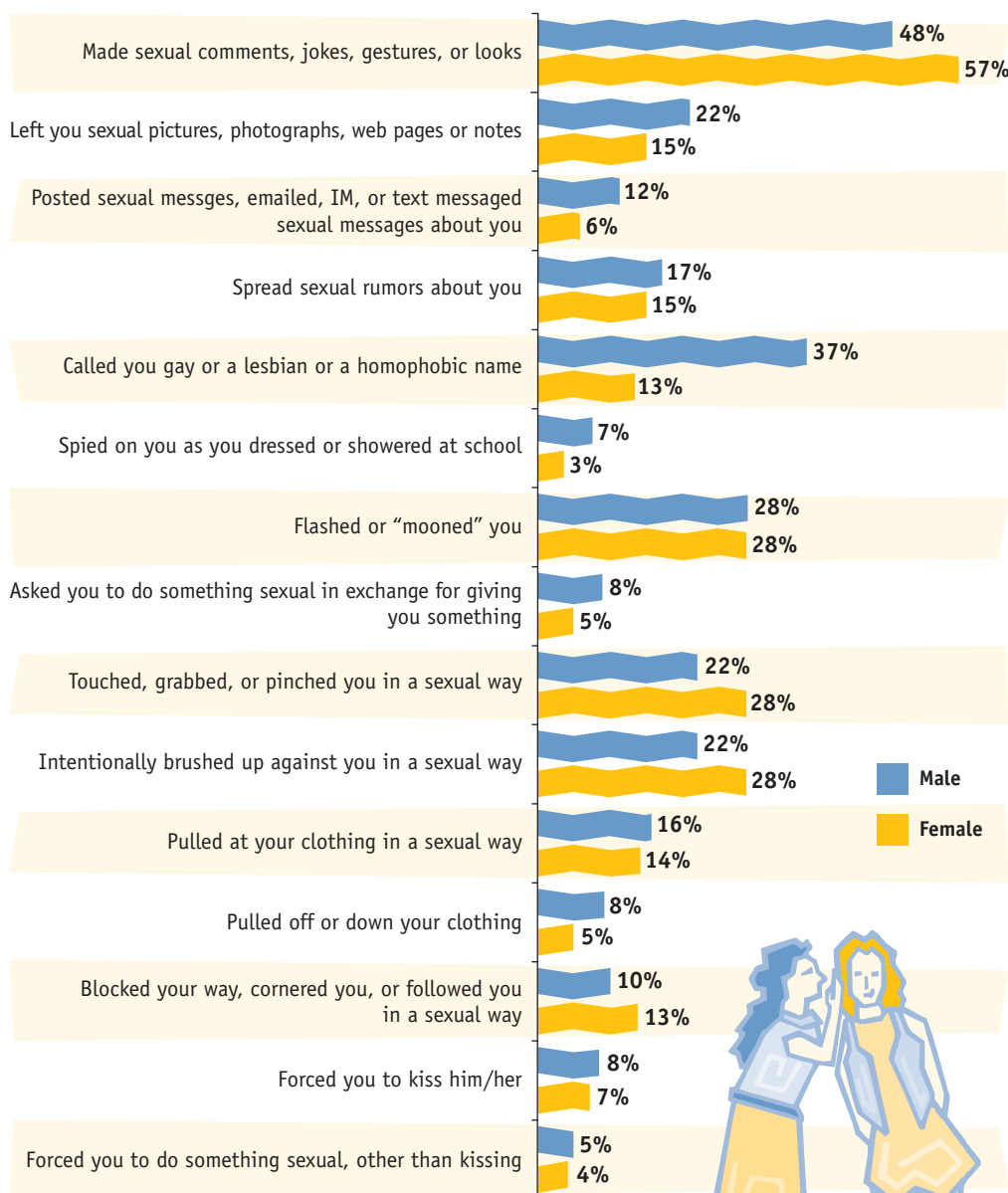
College housing systems often create environments where students take cues

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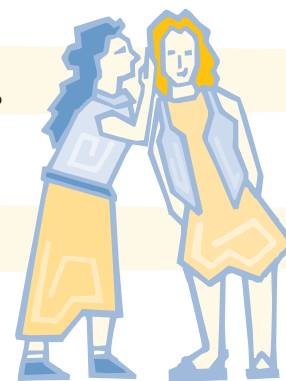
Experiences of Sexual Harassment

"During your whole college life, how often, if at all, has anyone (this includes students, teachers, or other college employees, or anyone else) done the following things to you when you did not want them to?"

% Ever Experienced



Source: "Drawing the Line: Sexual Harassment on Campus," AAUW Educational Foundation, Fielded May 5-25, 2005; n=2,036 U.S. college students aged 18 through 24; 940 males and 1,096 females.



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from their peers — whether it is in the domain of technology and communications (e.g., text messaging, blogs), fashion, or entertainment and pop culture. On the one hand, this is music to marketers' ears because if they are able to infiltrate this captive audience, trends can spread like wild fire in close-quartered campus housing. On the other hand, the ability of inappropriate behaviors to spread and become ingrained as a part of campus culture also exists.

One example of such a negative outcome is highlighted in *Drawing the Line: Sexual Harassment on Campus*, the recent survey Harris Interactive conducted on behalf of the AAUW Educational Foundation. We found that the majority of college undergraduates (aged 18-24) had experienced some form of sexual harassment related to their college lives (62%). Among those students who have been harassed, the dorm or student housing is cited most frequently as the location of the harassment (39%), followed by 37% who mention outside on campus grounds and 24% who mention common areas of campus buildings.

But campus living does offer many positive opportunities as well. Going off to college and living in the close quarters of campus housing also provides a place where students can quickly establish relationships with their new peers because of their close proximity. Perhaps the cohesive nature of this environment is also the key to spreading communication messages of safety and respect. Researchers have found a relationship between the effectiveness of peer support programs and other examples of social support in campus dormitories in increasing student involvement and smoothing adjustment to college (Crouse, 1982; Schwitzer, 1993). Campus living can also provide opportunities for students to share information on helpful resources. In addressing the issue of sexual harassment in particular, participants in the *Drawing the Line* study supported the

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Students' own descriptions of their most recent experiences with sexual harassment reflect the diversity of these behaviors:

- "A girl grabbed my bottom at a dance party." — *Male, 4th Year*
- "A girl kept trying to show off her breasts to get my attention, despite my being engaged." — *Male, 3rd Year*
- "I have a teacher [who] is continuously asking me out. He makes me uncomfortable, but I don't want to tell anybody other than my close friend, who wouldn't say anything either." — *Female, 2nd Year*
- "Someone tried to force me to kiss them and pushed me into a room." — *Female, 4th Year*
- "Getting whistled and/or had sexual related comments made to me outdoors on campus grounds." — *Female, 2nd Year*
- "Somebody sent me a[n] explicit sexual message over the internet." — *Male, 4th Year*
- "One of my teaching assistants forced me to have sex with him to boost up my grade." — *Female, 5th Year*
- "Immature kids telling crude jokes and me overhearing them talk about women's body parts as they passed by, intentionally making me uncomfortable." — *Female, 5th Year*

Who are the harassers? The majority (80%) of college students who have experienced sexual harassment on campus report that the perpetrator was another student. Although less common than student on student harassment, harassment by faculty or college staff against students does occur. Seven percent of college students say they have been sexually harassed by a professor or teaching assistant.



Where does campus sexual harassment occur? College students most commonly experience sexual harassment in a dorm or student housing (39%) or outside on campus grounds (37%). Sizable numbers of sexual harassment victims report that harassment has occurred in common areas of campus buildings (24%) or in classrooms or lecture halls (20%). It is interesting to note that fewer sexual harassment victims report that the incident occurred in a fraternity or sorority house (13%). Some age differences exist in college students' likely places where they have been harassed. Younger students, ages 18-21 are more likely than older students to have experienced harassment in a dorm or student housing (41% vs. 34%). Older students are more likely than younger students to have experienced harassment in the hall, lounge or common area of a campus building (29% vs. 22%).

What are the solutions? Most students (79%) say their college has a policy on sexual harassment issues and complaints. Booklets and handouts on sexual harassment, though somewhat less prevalent, are also widely available at colleges. Six in ten (60%) report their college gives out booklets, handouts, and other literature. However, about one in six (18%) are unsure if a policy exists at their college. Despite the awareness of campus policies related to sexual harassment, 35% of those who have experienced sexual harassment (44% of males and 27% of females) have told no one about the event. Only 7% have told a school employee, while the most common response is to tell a friend (49%).

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following solutions: a web-based confidential method for reporting sexual harassment, a designated contact person or office for sexual harassment victims, and making the school's sexual harassment policy readily accessible on the school's website.

Most colleges and universities have some, if not all, pieces of the aforementioned solutions already in place (e.g., policies against sexual harassment and established procedures for filing and dealing with a complaint). For example, the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) publishes a handbook that is available on its website that outlines what qualifies as sexual harassment and the appropriate way to deal with it through the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity Programs. Penn also has several student groups that allow victims of harassment to reach out to their own peers: for example, the R.A.P. line is a 24-hour anonymous help line, Students Together Against Acquaintance Rape, the Queer Student Alliance, and the Penn Women's Center. These groups provide information for preventing and coping with harassment on campus as well as tools for reporting and handling harassment, including links to Philadelphia community organizations that provide support. While it may be clear that universities understand the importance of dealing with sexual harassment in an appropriate way, it is unfortunate and potentially harmful if these resources are underutilized. Students should be made aware of the resources that are available to them and encouraged to employ them in order for these measures to be effective and meaningful resources to college students. The key to resource utilization is dissemination at the peer level.

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College students are supportive of ways for their college to raise awareness about and deal effectively with sexual harassment issues and complaints. Six in ten (57%) would like their school to offer a confidential, web-based method for submitting complaints about sexual harassment. Half of college students would like their school to have a designated person or office to contact if someone is the victim of sexual harassment (47%) or to provide information about the school's sexual harassment policy on the school's website (47%). The combination of these methods could allow the exchange of information between colleges and their students to create a safer learning environment on campuses.

More information on the study is available on the AAUW's website:
<http://www.aauw.org/research/dtl.cfm>.

Ask a Question...

And get some answers. Have a burning question you would like to ask kids and teens? **YouthQuery** is your chance to ask one or a series of questions of 1,100 young consumers nationwide, and get accurate, projectable answers within days. To learn more about **YouthQuery**, contact us at 877.919.4765.

It's 8 a.m.—do you know what American kids are doing?

YouthPulseSM 2005 Released

You need to know almost as much about the youth market as you would if they were all your own children. How they spend their time, how they spend their money, their hopes, fears and aspirations and which parts of the kid experience are totally different today than they were a decade—or even a year—ago. **YouthPulseSM** is the only study covering these topics and hundreds of others for kids from age 8 to 21, and the 2005 study has recently been released. To learn more about YouthPulse, contact us at 877.919.4765.

Trends & Tudes Poll Vault

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Get Smart!

Did you know that Harris Interactive conducts up to five free webinars a month? Spanning a variety of business issues facing a handful of industries, these one-hour interactive sessions allow you to catch up on the latest research advancement, proprietary industry findings, and best practices. Register for one or more sessions at <http://harrisinteractive.webex.com>. Visit often as our schedule changes weekly.

Contact Us

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