

# Gender, bullying, and harassment



Strategies to end sexism and homophobia in schools  
Elizabeth J. Meyer, Ph.D.

- Intro: Why study bullying & harassment?
- Clarifying the terms: bullying vs. harassment
- Why is gender an important factor to address?
- Understanding teacher identity
- Understanding school culture
- California legal & policy context
- Transforming school cultures
- Conclusion & Q&A

# Why study bullying & harassment?



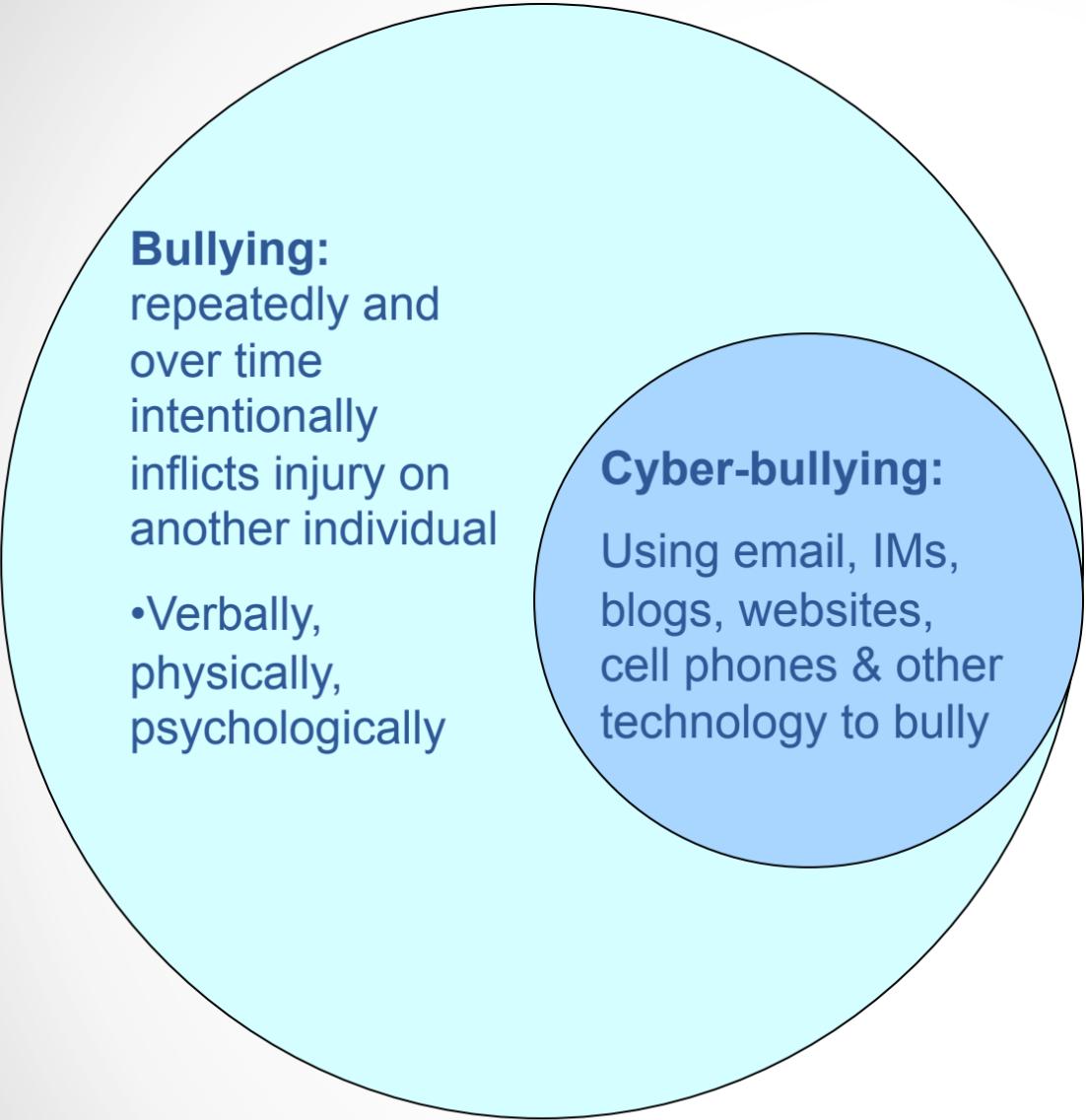
# Clarifying the terms

Bullying  
Harassment  
Bias



**Bullying:** repeatedly and over time intentionally inflicts injury on another individual

- Verbally: threatening, taunting, teasing, and calling names.
- Physically: hits, pushes, kicks, pinches or restrains another
- Psychologically: making faces or dirty gestures, excluding someone, or refusing to comply with another person's wishes (Olweus, 1993, 9).



A Venn diagram consisting of two overlapping circles. The larger circle on the left is light blue and contains the text for 'Bullying'. The smaller circle on the right is a darker shade of blue and contains the text for 'Cyber-bullying'. The two circles overlap, indicating that cyber-bullying is a specific type of bullying.

**Bullying:**

repeatedly and  
over time  
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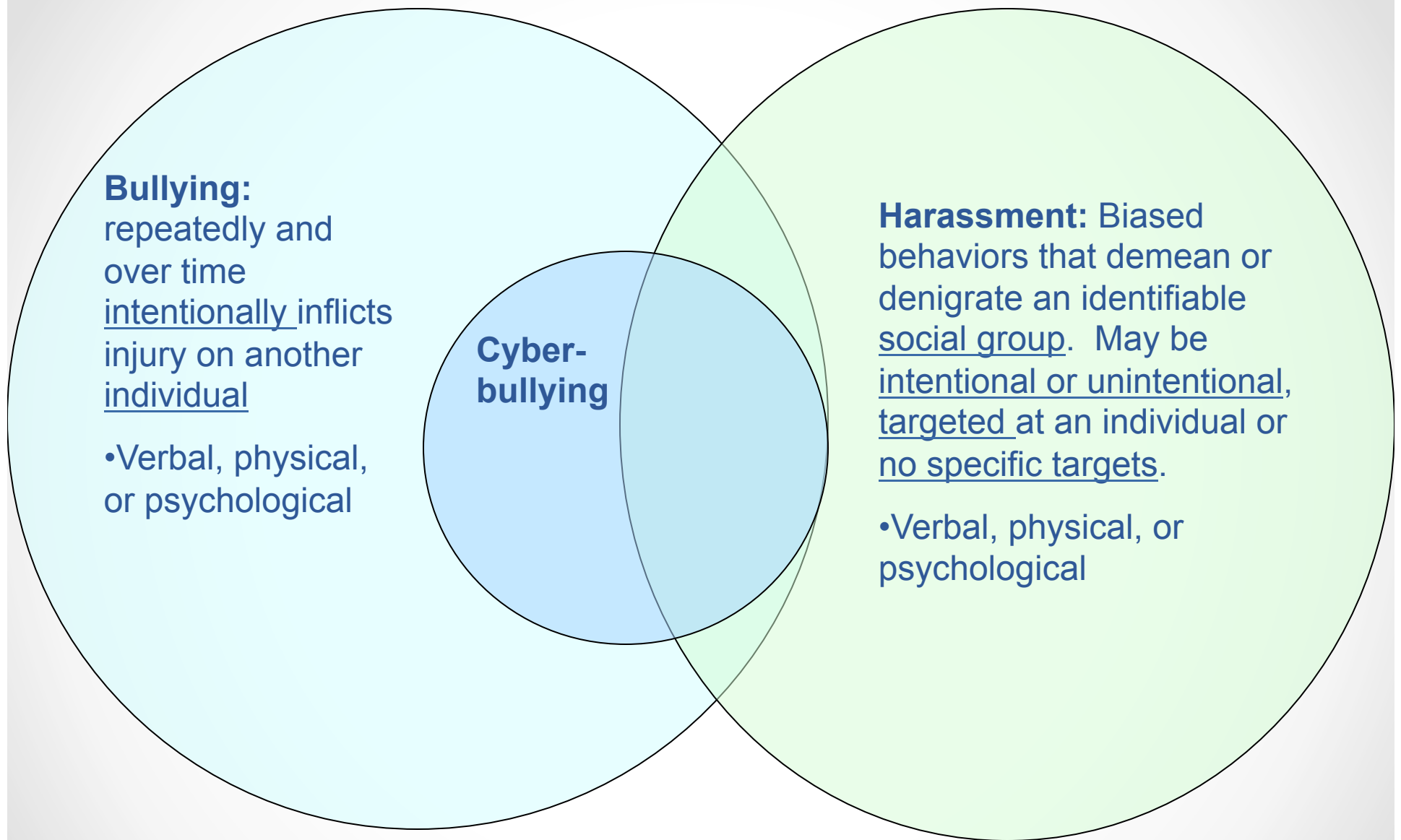
- Verbally,  
physically,  
psychologically

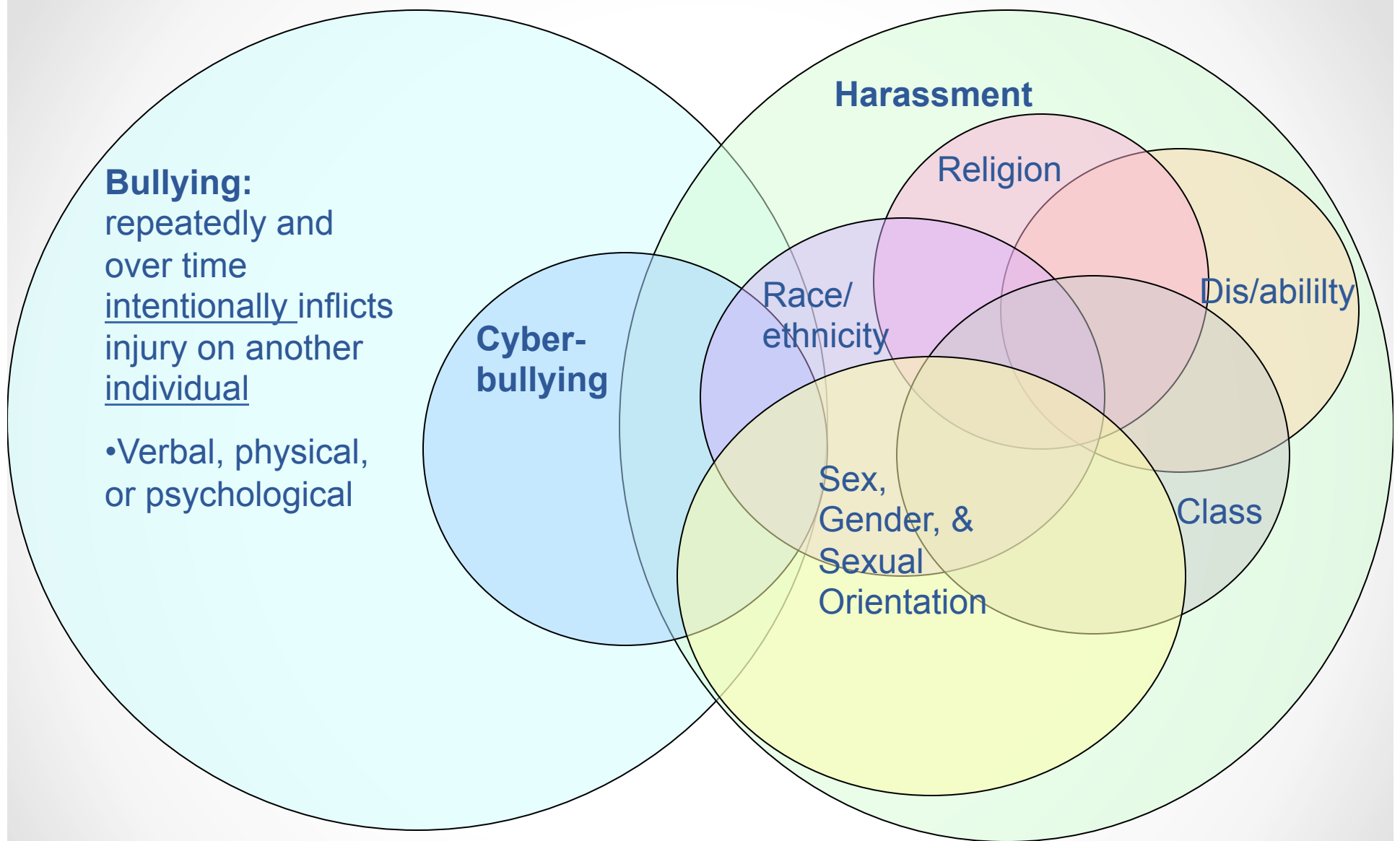
**Cyber-bullying:**

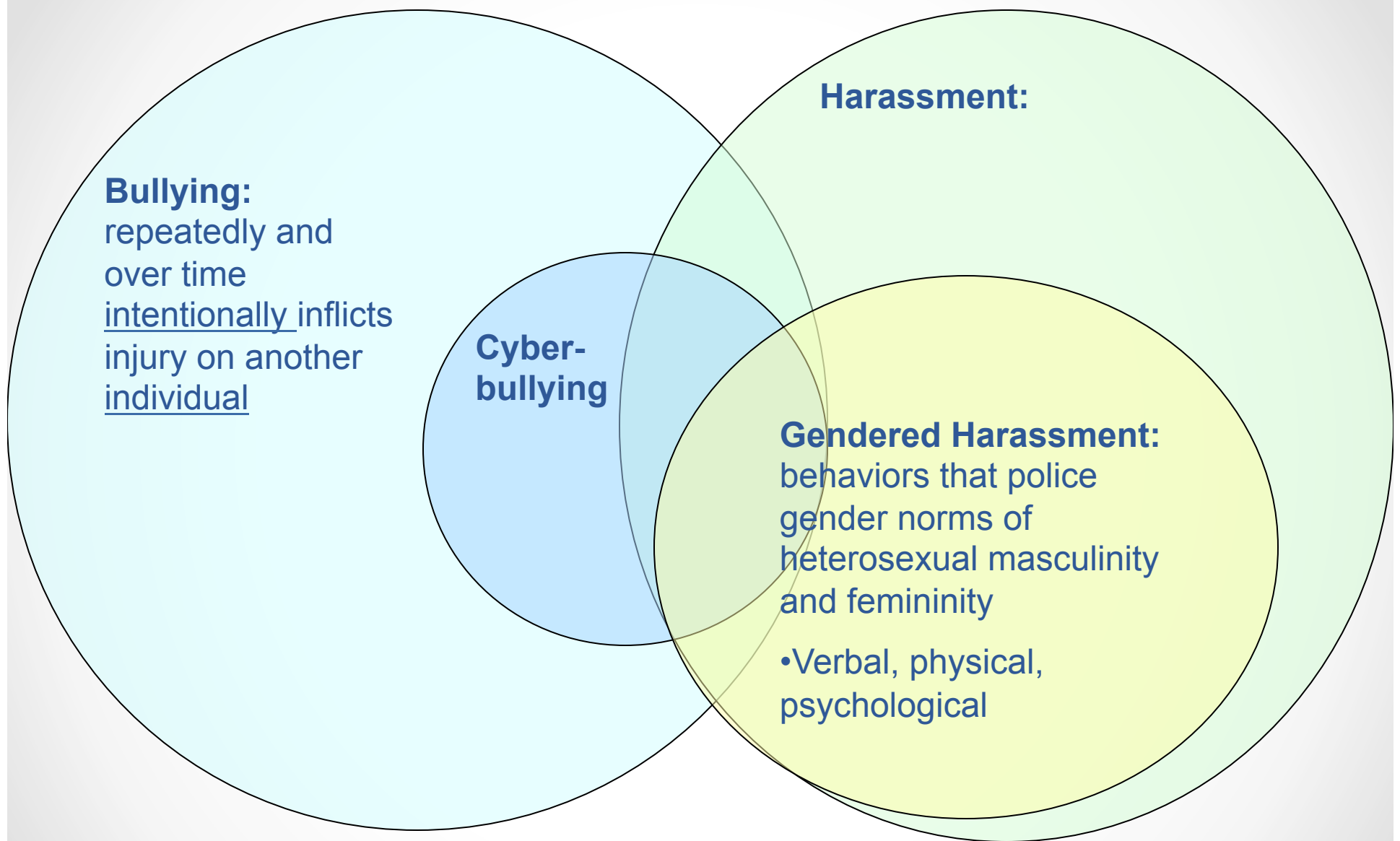
Using email, IMs,  
blogs, websites,  
cell phones & other  
technology to bully

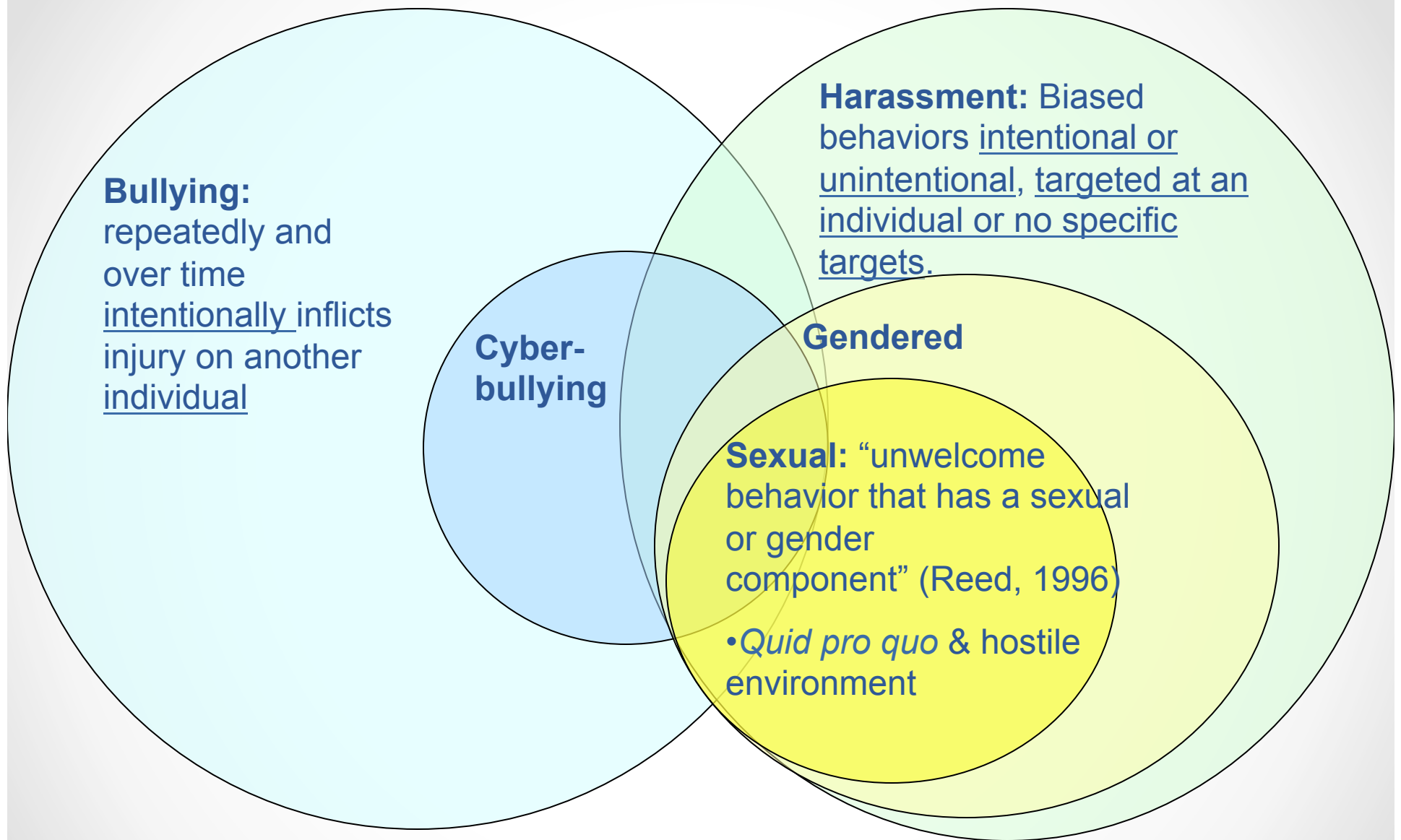
# Cyberbullying

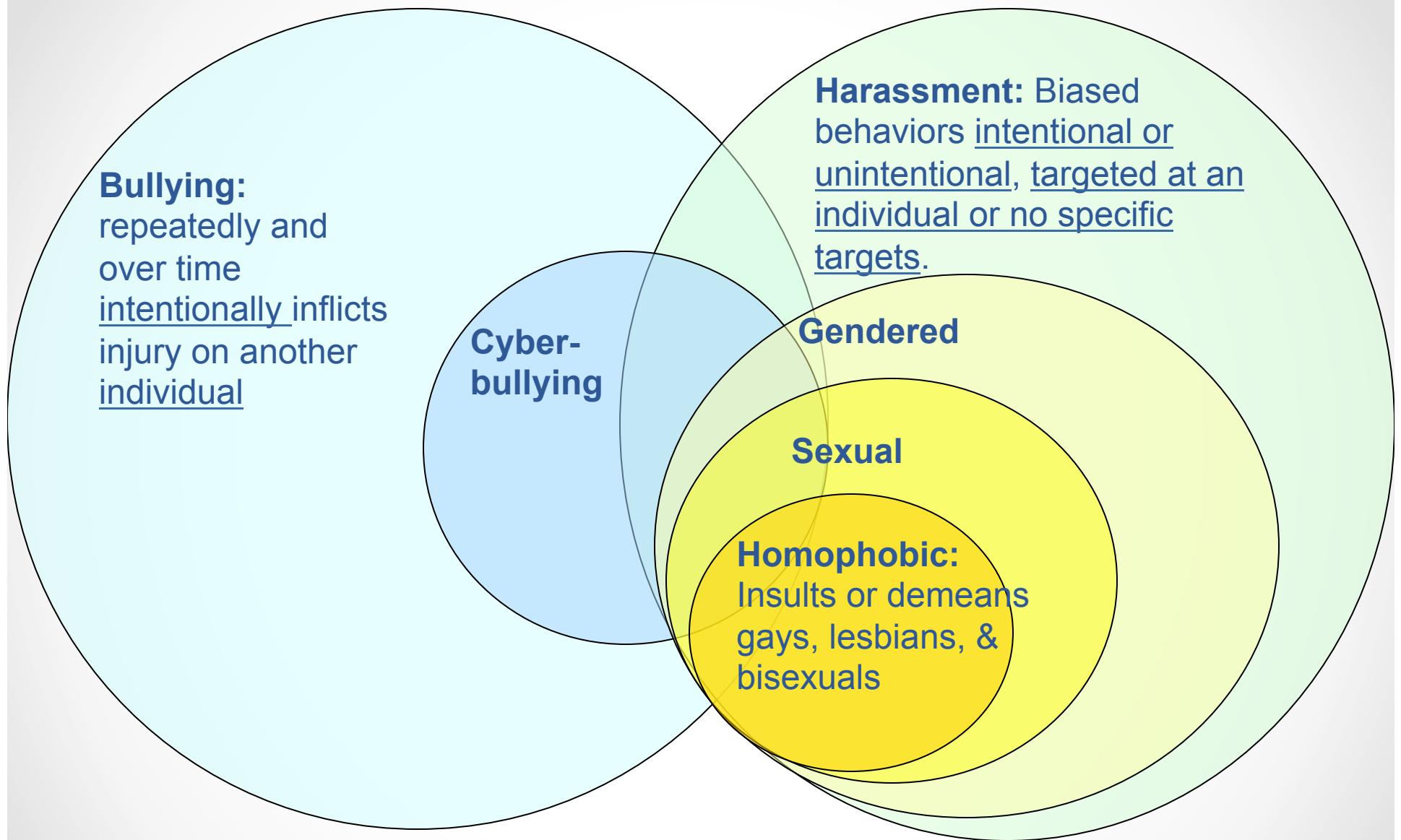
- Tends to reflect similar trends in schoolyard bullying
  - Students who were bullies or victims at school were more likely to be involved in cyberbullying (Hinduja and Patchin 2008)
  - Males more likely to be cyberbullies than females (22% v. 12%) (Li 2006)
  - Males and females reported being victimized online at similar rates (25% & 25.6%) (Li 2006)
  - 41% of LGBT students had experienced cyberbullying (GLSEN 2006)
  - Most severe cases reported by students have sexual (41%) or racial (24%) bias (Weidenbrenner, 2012)

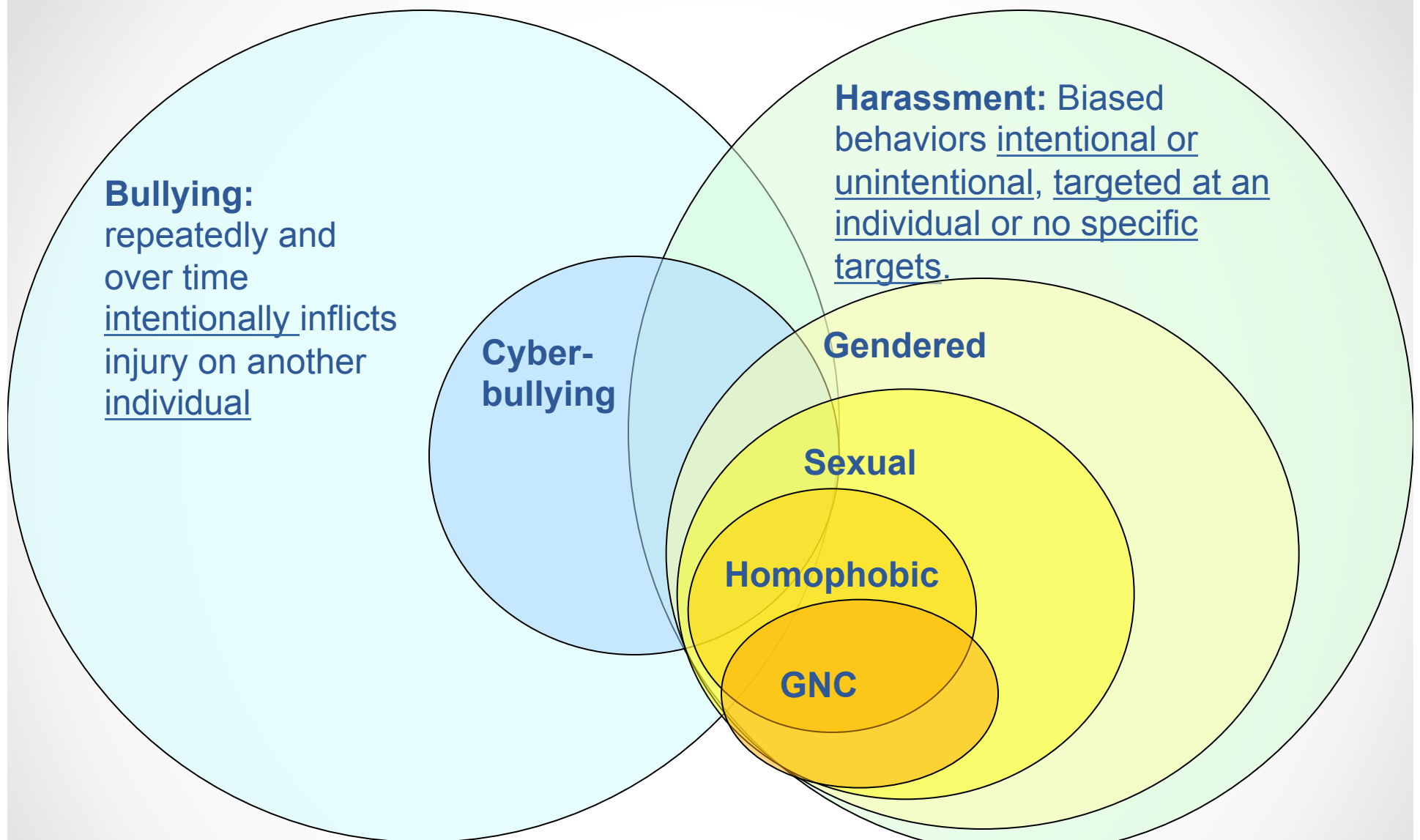










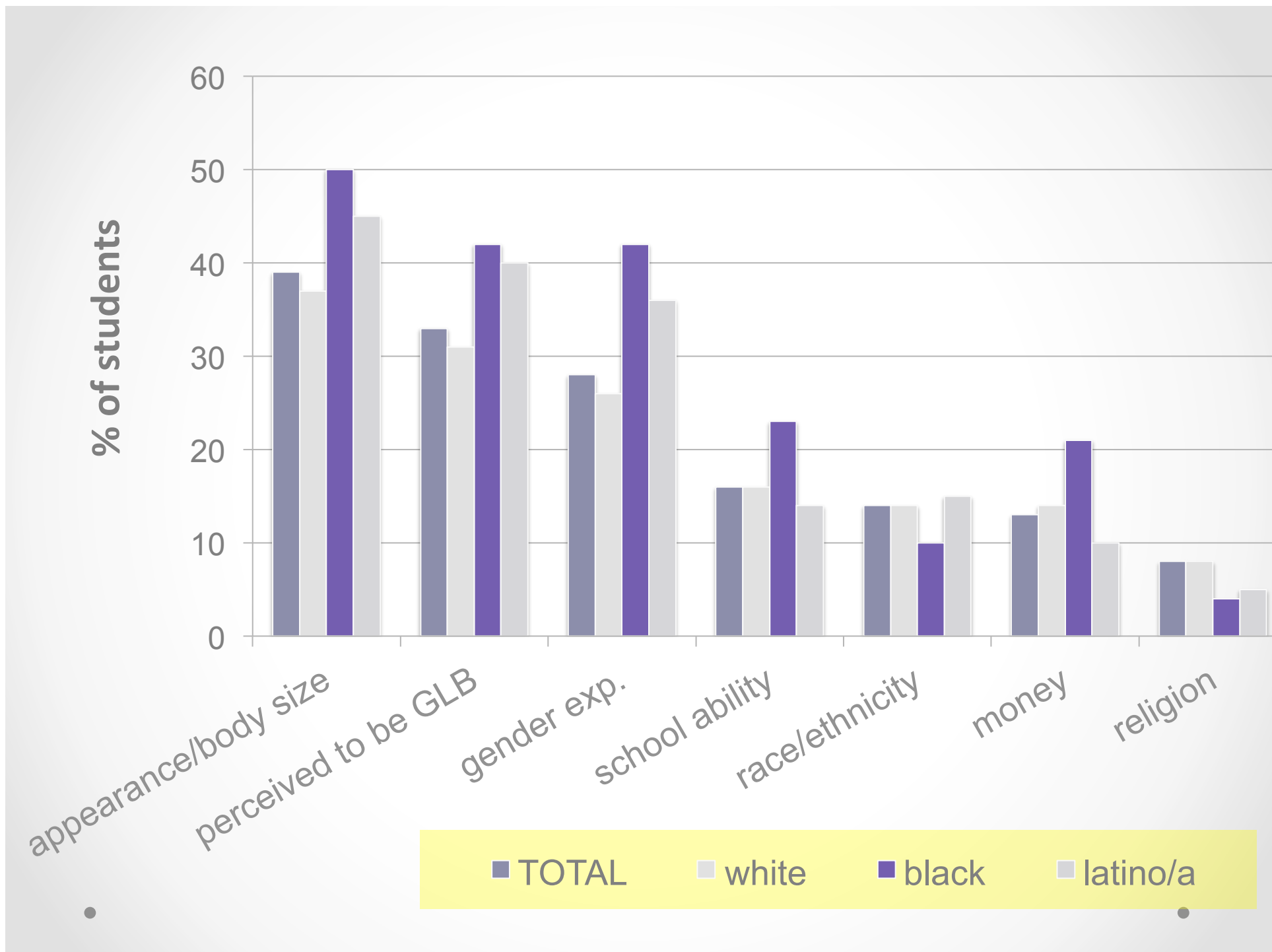


**Harassment for Gender Non-Conformity:** insults or demeans gender identities and expressions that vary from hegemonic masculinity for males and femininity for females. Also related to transphobia.

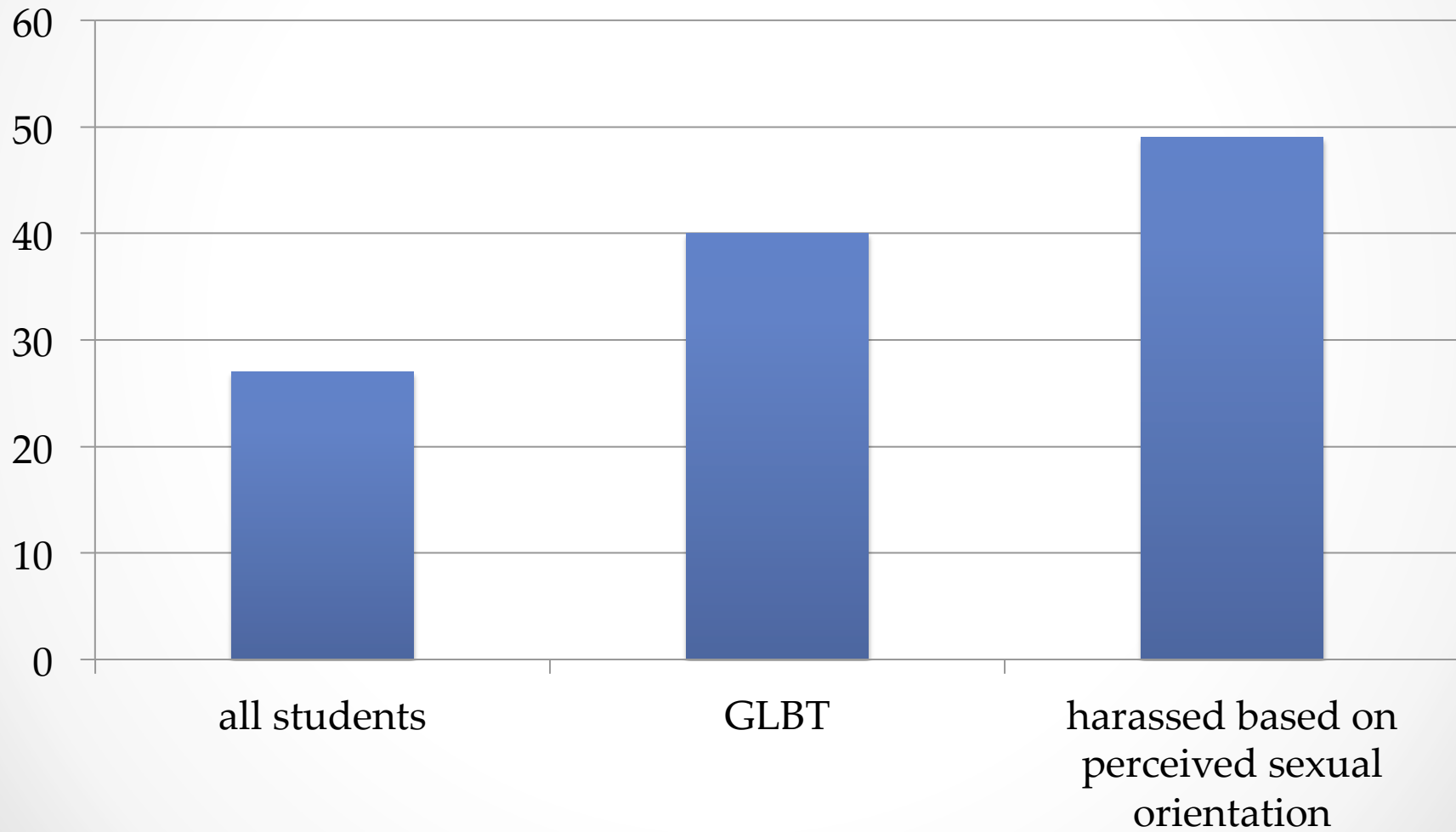
# Research on bullying & harassment

How do kids bully? What words do they  
use?





# % students reporting harassment based on gender non-conformity (CSSC 2004)



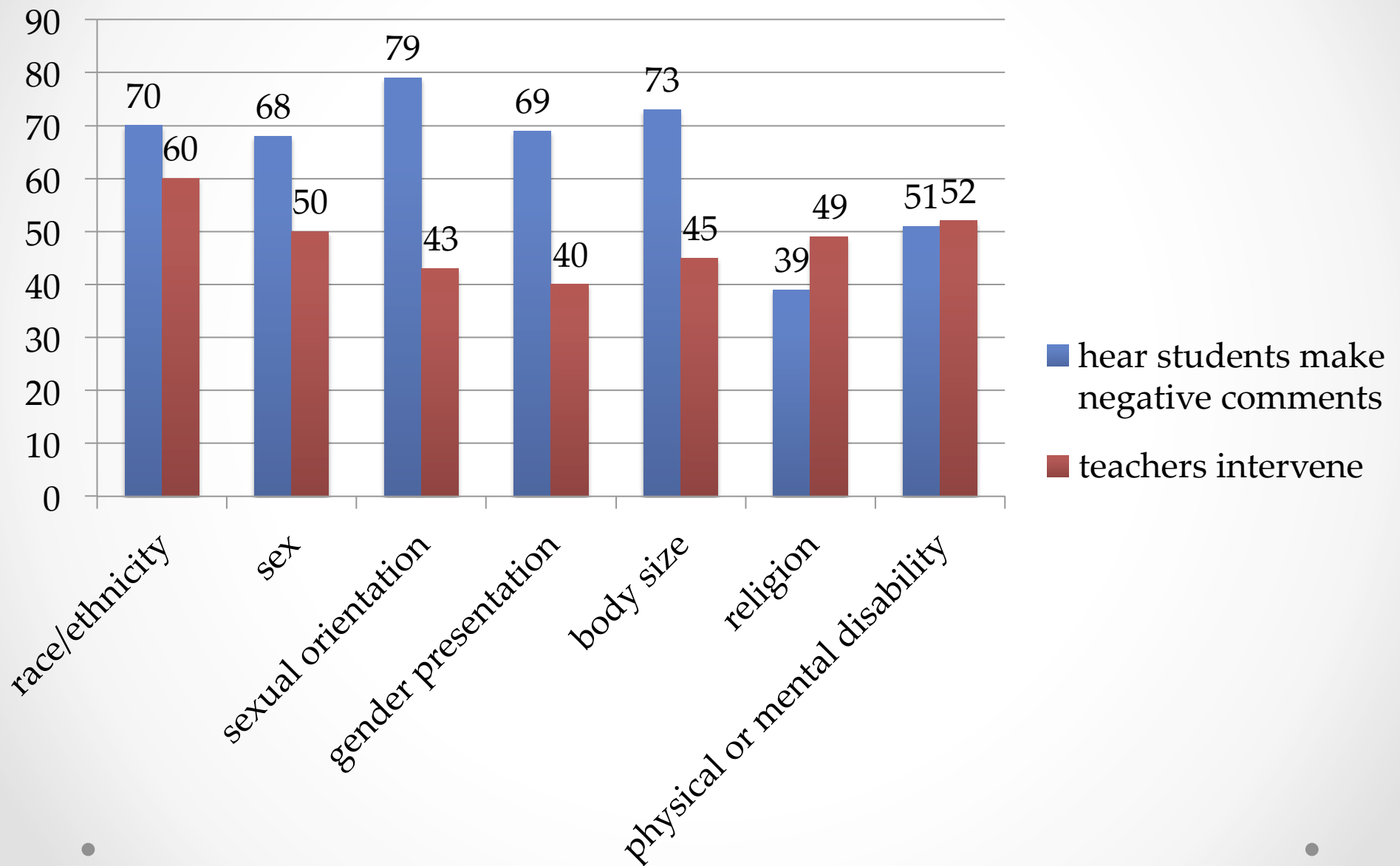
# Transgender students are disproportionately targeted

- **89% of** transgender students had been verbally harassed (e.g., called names or threatened) in the past year at school
- **55%** of transgender students had been physically harassed (e.g., pushed or shoved) in school in the past year
- **28%** of transgender students had been physically assaulted in school in the past year (Greytak et al, 2009)

# Impacts of bullying & harassment on targeted students:

- Poor academic performance (Sharp 1995, Kosciw 2001, CSSC 2004)
- Chronic absenteeism (Sharp 1995, Kosciw 2001, Coggan 2003, CSSC 2004)
- Emotional problems
  - Depression & anxiety (Slee 1995, Bond 2001)
  - Loneliness (Bond 2001)
  - Low self-esteem (Coggan 2003, Bond 2001)
  - Suicidal ideation (Slee 1995, Kosciw 2001)
- Poor physical health (Slee 1995)
- Substance abuse (Kosciw 2001, CSSC 2004)

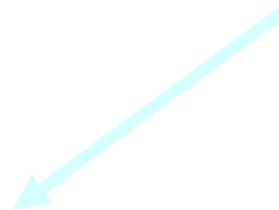
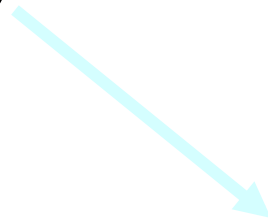
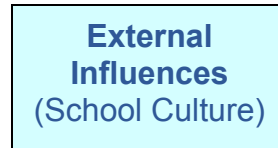
- Bias-related comments & staff response



# Understanding teachers' non-intervention

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Barriers & Motivators for action



# Administrators

- “As far as discipline, how it’s handled, I had to push for action when another kid called a kid ‘faggot’ . However, I know that in my school a racist comment was certainly not tolerated and it was dealt with immediately.” (MT05)

# Education & Training

- “[I never got any] training in school [on] bullying. I do not think that we ever studied anything related to that...I don’t know if I was really attuned to [sexual harassment] – to be quite honest. Maybe that’s why I wasn’t so aware that it was going on because as a part of my training it had never really been brought up as an issue to be concerned with.” (FT02)

# Policy

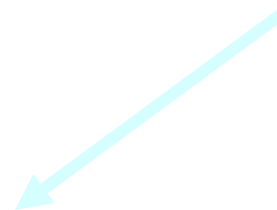
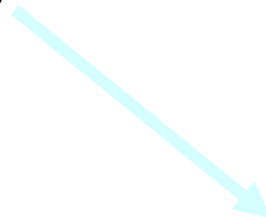
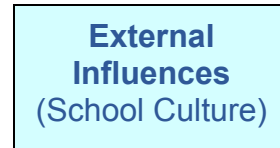
- “I just think it’s so interesting that I could walk into this [school district] and not be informed of specific things that I need to follow. Nothing was verbally gone over with me. I did all the research on my own, the handbooks, all that stuff. I just think it’s really unfortunate that there are not specific policies or regulations that we follow when it comes to verbal harassment.” (FT03)

# Workload

- “[I don’t stop name-calling] if I’m too tired, if there are set things I need to get through in a lesson. I know my lesson is going to take 60 minutes, I’ve only got 70 minutes to deliver it, I’ve got 10 minutes to waste. Right now my job is being a teacher and I have to get through the math before the end of the year. It’s not on my priority list.” (MT01)
- “It just happened so much that to try and police that would take up 50% of my time because it was such a problem.” (FT02)

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# Administrators - values

- “Our administrator who dealt with disciplinary problems was a real jock and the real ‘man’s man’ ...I feel that the administration didn’t want to get involved because they were these [European ethnicity] men and, if they were to come into a staff meeting and say, ‘we need to address some of the homophobic attitudes,’ I could never hear them talking about something like that. So maybe that’s part of the problem; even the administrators had that [European ethnicity] kind of mentality.” (FT02)

# Administrators - style

- “I always find that when I’ m working with principals and vice principals that its their own morals and their own beliefs that come through and if its something that they don’t really think is a big issue, then why are they going to be proactive about it? Or just the gender of the administrator, I think that plays into it as well.” (FT03)

# Policy implementation

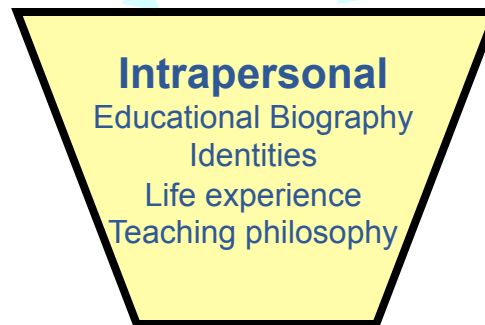
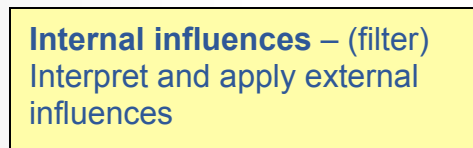
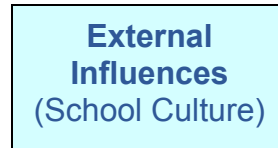
- “In the two high schools I’ve been it really depends on your Vice Principal. They basically set up according to their beliefs. Their policies reflect a lot about them and how they deal with it.” (FT03)

# Interpersonal Relationships

- “Eventually I told [my principal] that I was going to tell the kids [that I’m gay]. She said, ‘if you come out to those kids I will not guarantee your safety at this school’. She didn’t like me because I was gay. That was clear.” (MT05)
- “Teachers are educated the exact same way students are, you're observing everything around you. As the new teachers, that's your job, to keep your eyes and ears open, and usually, what I do, is for the first month, I just do a lot observing, and I do a lot of talking to teachers, and seeing what's acceptable, what's not, and how we deal with things here at that individual school. So, you're learning everything from the environment around, which is what we do everyday. Unfortunately, that's how you pick up bad habits.” (FT03)

# Community values and youth culture

- “I think [the homophobia] must have been coming from the community, from outside the school.” (FT02)
- “The culture of the school was homophobic. Its what kids call each other now, ‘fag’ and ‘gay’ .” (MT05)
- “What I notice a lot is the comment ‘fag’ being thrown around casually...you know the big thing to push a kid around by saying, ‘he’s a fag, he’s a fag’ .” (MT06)



**Steve Pyre**

You are a role model.  
Am I more vigilant because I'm gay?  
Probably, but  
It's the right thing to do.  
I'm willing to deal with  
the backlash.

**Jessica Crosby**

I was interested in  
social change  
I felt like an  
outsider.  
I was a woman.  
You worry.  
Until your job is  
secure.

**Sam Kaye**

Be a role model.  
have my students be in a safe spot  
When you yourself are gay, you're  
even more scared  
I'm so sensitive.  
It pertains to me.

## **Anita Day**

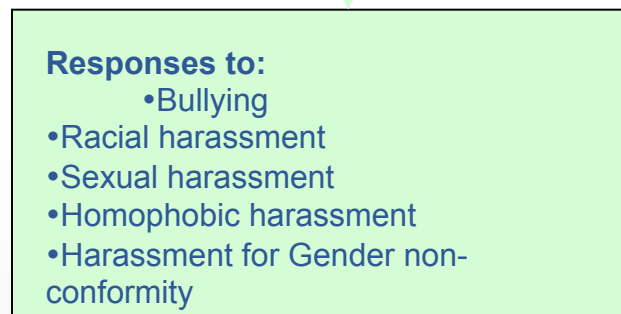
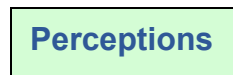
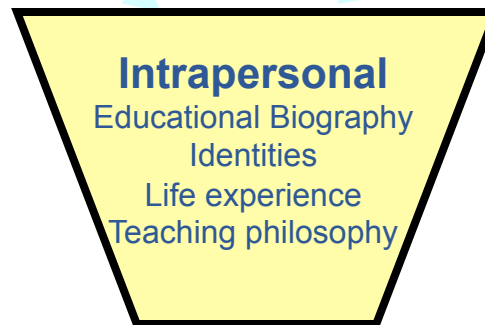
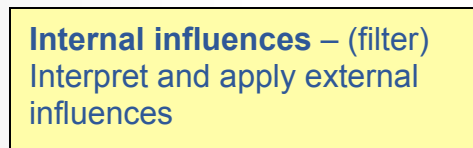
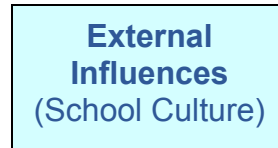
It's tough as a teacher of color.  
I have very little room  
to slip up.  
Is that really about race?  
Yeah, maybe.  
You get desensitized.  
I consciously make an effort.  
to get at my own prejudice.  
my dad was outright discriminated against

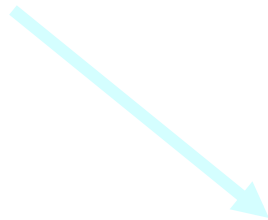
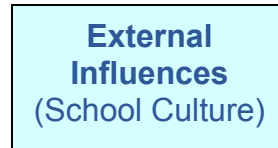
## **Pierre LeSage**

I got called fag  
I'm more sensitive.  
I was always afraid.  
Being a gay man,  
having experienced harassment,  
made me define my role  
as a teacher.

## **Homer**

I want students to feel  
welcome.  
We were the only minority group.  
I got incredibly bullied.  
I catch myself saying,  
'oh that's so gay,'  
what did I just do?  
I'm conscious of what I'm doing,  
I'm trying to correct myself.





# Institutional

- **Administration:** Discipline by administration is seen as insufficient
- **Workload:** Pressure to cover the curriculum, large classes, and demanding course loads = ignore certain behaviors
- **Policies:**
  - nonexistent or not clearly written
  - teachers had a limited awareness of them and their roles in implementing them
- **Teacher education:**
  - Did not address incidents of bias and bullying
  - Some teachers took initiative to get training in this area
  - This was influenced by intrapersonal influences (such as: personal identity and educational biography)

# Social

- **Administrators:**
  - Issue is not important to them personally
  - Policies not implemented/emphasized
  - Model sexist, homophobic, & transphobic behaviors
- **Other teachers:**
  - model sexist, homophobic, & transphobic behaviors
  - Don't intervene
- **Families and Community:**
  - values support hegemonic masculinity, sexist, transphobic, and homophobic attitudes
- **Students:**
  - Sexist, homophobic, & transphobic language and behaviors are prevalent in youth culture

# Internal

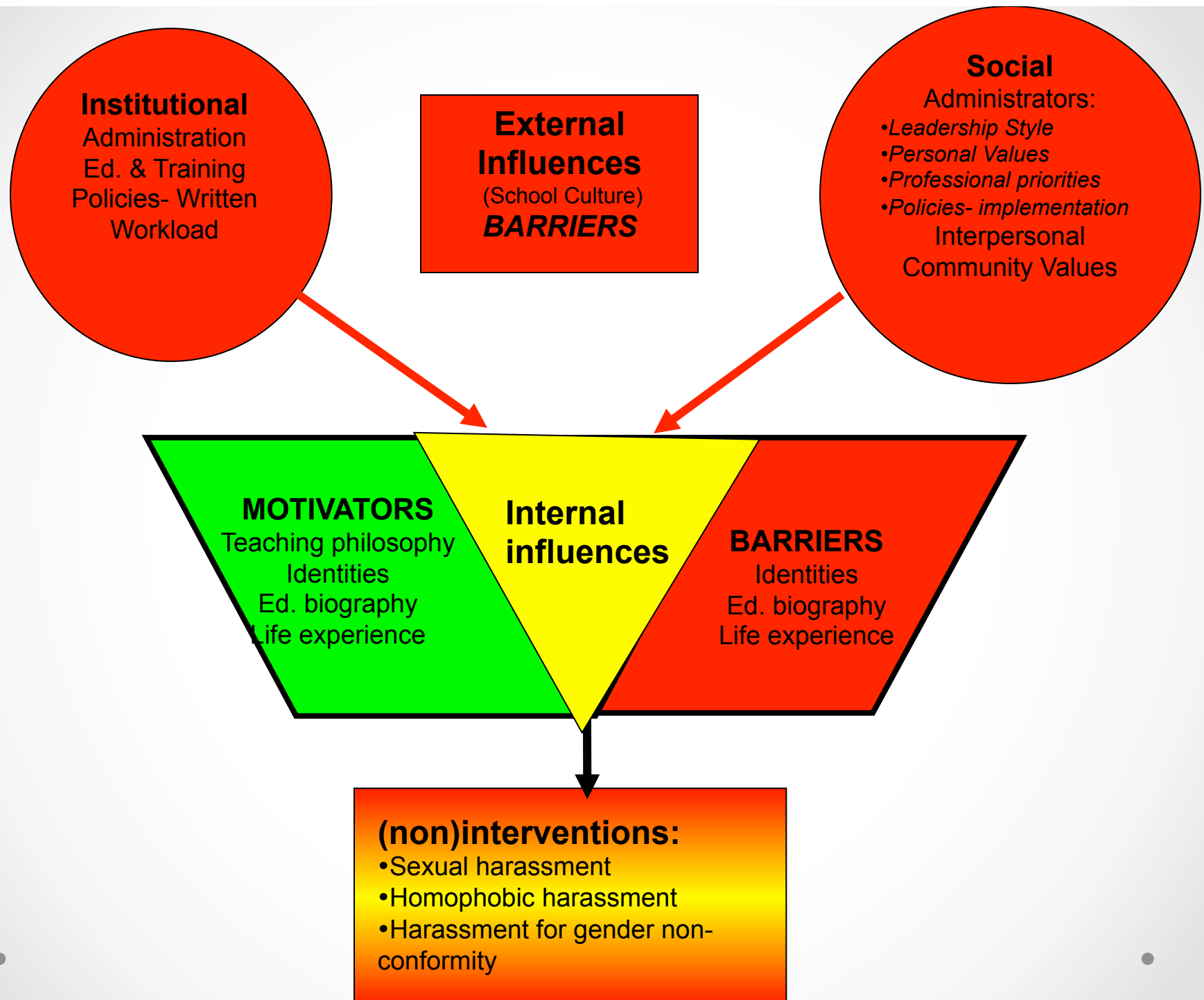
- Educational Biography & Life experience
  - Victimization, marginalization & discrimination
- Identities
  - Person of color
  - Gay, lesbian, bisexual
  - Woman
- Teaching philosophy
  - Being a role model
  - Making students feel safe & successful
  - Commitment to social justice and equity

# Internal

- Educational biography & life experience
  - Fear of backlash: from parents, colleagues, and administrators
  - Desensitization
- Identities = Vulnerability
  - new teacher
  - gay, lesbian or bisexual
  - person of color

## POTENTIAL BARRIERS (for others)

- Lack of understanding/awareness of gendered harassment
- Personal/religious values and identity
- Teaching philosophy



# Schools perpetuate gendered harassment

Seth Walsh  
Tehachapi, CA  
2010



Ceara  
Sturgis  
Mississippi  
2010



11 yr old boy, Milford, OH  
2010



Chronicle / Darryl Bush

Alana Flores,  
Morgan Hill  
School District,  
CA 2003

# California context

- The California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act (AB 537, Kuehl), - prohibits discrimination and harassment in schools based on specified categories:
  - sex, ethnic group identification, race, national origin, religion, color, or mental or physical disability
  - **2000:** amended the state Education Code by adding actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity to existing sections on discrimination

# Implementation monitoring

- **2007:** The Safe Place to Learn Act (AB 394, Levine), and the Student Civil Rights Act (SB 777, Kuehl):
- requires the California Department of Education to monitor school districts' creation and publication of anti- harassment policies and complaint procedures and updated the list of prohibited bases of discrimination and harassment.

# Seth's law – AB 9

- **2011:** Passed by the Assembly on September 7, 2011 on a 53-26 vote. Signed by Governor Jerry Brown.
- requires each school district to include in its non-discrimination policy an enumerated list of the bases on which discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and bullying are prohibited under existing law:
  - actual or perceived sexual orientation,
  - gender, gender identity expression,
  - race or ethnicity,
  - nationality,
  - religion,
  - disability,
  - or association with a person or group with one or more of these actual or perceived characteristics.

# Seth's Law – in practice

- AB 9 requires schools to include in their complaint procedures:
  - a method for receiving and investigating discrimination and harassment complaints.
  - Schools would be required to act on discrimination and harassment complaints expeditiously so that investigation and resolution may be reached quickly.
  - Faculty and staff working on school campuses would be required to intervene when they witness acts of bullying.

# Curriculum inclusion

- Education Code Sections 60040(a) and 60044(a)
- **requires social sciences instruction** of both men and women, *black Americans, American Indians, Mexicans, Asians, Pacific Island people, and other ethnic groups* to the economic, political, and social development of California and the United States of America, with particular emphasis on portraying the role of these groups in contemporary society.
- **prohibits instruction** or school-sponsored activities that reflect adversely upon persons because of their race, sex, color, creed, ability, national origin, or ancestry.
- **prohibits the adoption** of instructional materials that reflect negatively on any person because of their race, sex, color, creed, disability, national origin or ancestry.
- requires schools and governing boards to include only instructional materials that, in their determination, accurately portray the cultural and racial diversity of our society.

# FAIR education act – SB 48

- **2011:** Passed by full Assembly on July 6, 2011 on a 49-25 vote. Signed by the Governor on July 14, 2011
- The Fair, Accurate, Inclusive and Respectful (FAIR) Education Act amends the education code to require schools to integrate factual information about social movements, current events and history of:
  - people with disabilities and
  - LGBT people into existing social studies lessons.
  - It also prevents the State Board of Education from adopting instructional materials that discriminate.

# Overt v. Covert lessons in schools – “repetitions of normalcy”


## STATED POLICIES

- Everyone is equal and deserves respect
- We value diversity
- Everyone's contributions are important

## CURRENT PRACTICES

- Only dominant historical and political perspectives are presented in textbooks
- Only dominant cultural & religious traditions are observed at school
- Many schools celebrate athletic teams more publicly than other artistic or intellectual student contributions

# Cultures of power & popularity in schools

Valued	De-valued
Physically strong	
Competitive	
Dominant	
Tough	
Athletic	
Able-bodied	
White/European	
Heterosexually desirable	
Christian	
Gender conforming	

# Impacts of the dichotomies of power & popularity

<b>'Masculine'</b> <b><i>bullies</i></b>	<b>'Feminine'</b> <b><i>victims</i></b>
Physically strong Competitive Aggressive Tough Athletic Logical Dynamic Dominant Actively heterosexual •	Physically weak Collaborative Accommodating Sensitive Academic Creative Quiet Passive Perceived to be gay or lesbian •

# Challenging normalcy and codes of masculinity

- Wear Pink Day
- Day of Silence
- Mix it up at Lunch
- No Name-Calling Week



# Day of Silence April 20, 2012

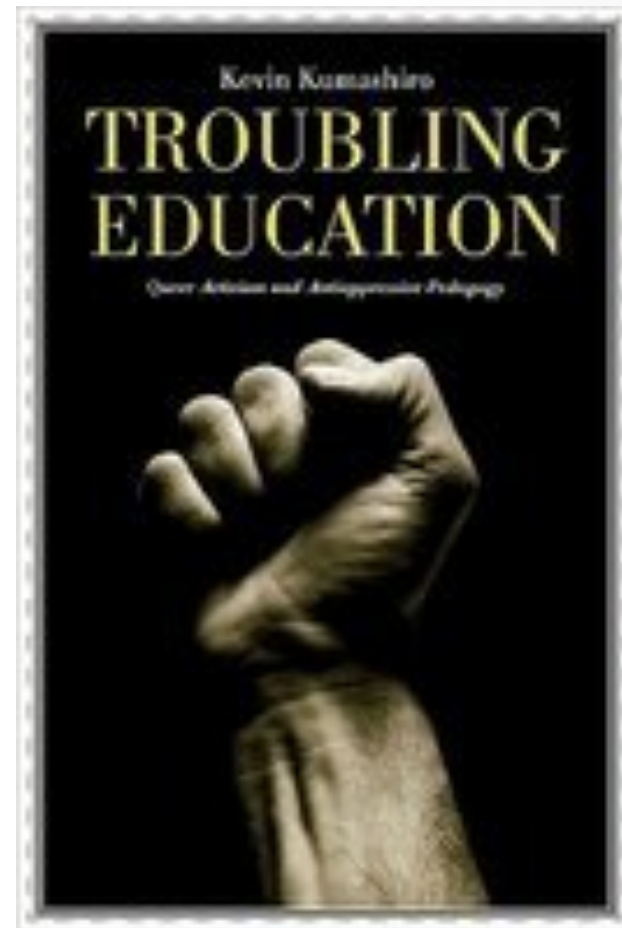


# To transform school cultures we must examine and reshape:

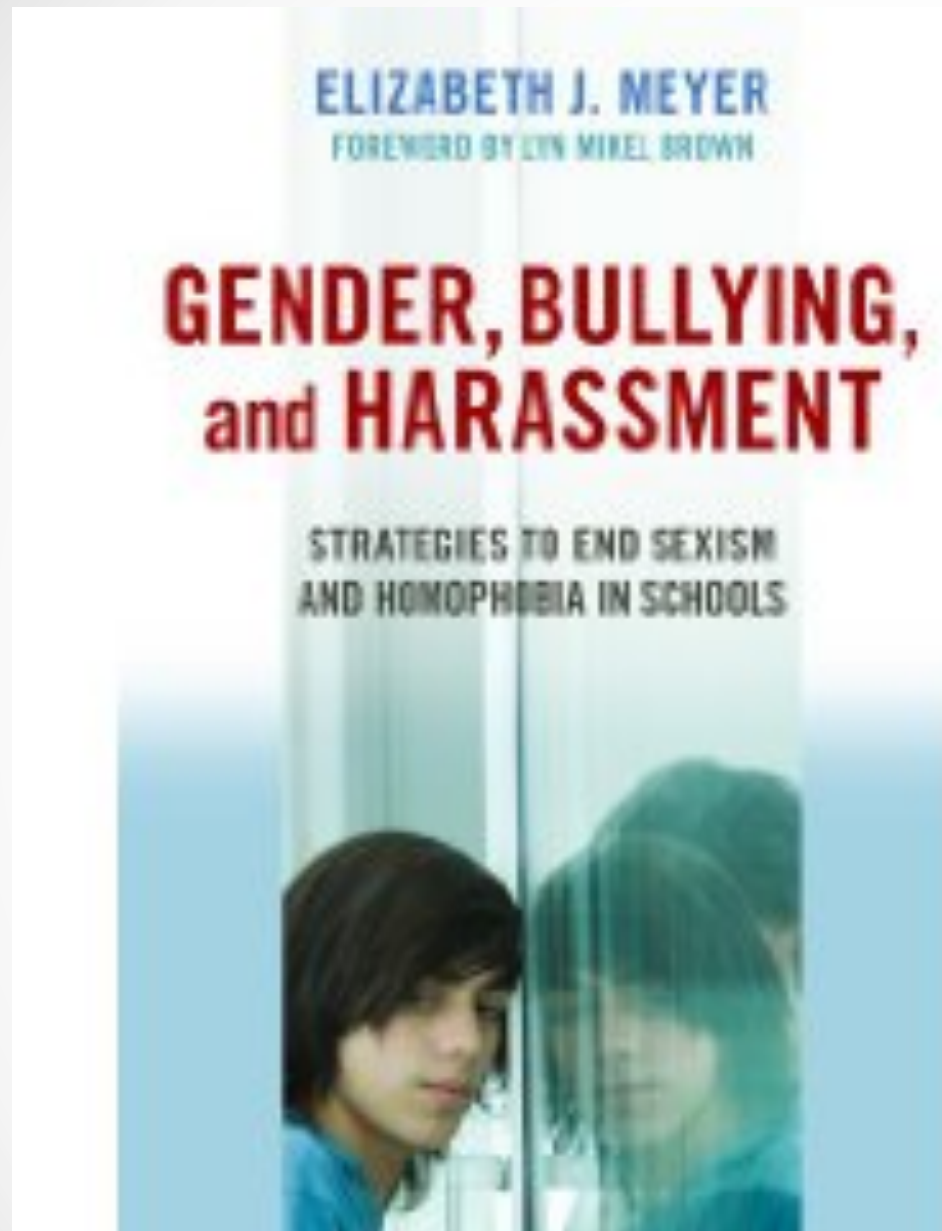
- how educators teach and support gendered practices in schools
- how schools' formal and informal structures mandate and enforce heteronormativity & gender conformity
- how certain identities, cultures and traditions are recognized as more valuable and respected than others

# Anti-oppressive pedagogy

- “learning is about disruption and opening up to further learning, not closure and satisfaction” (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 43)
- “education involves learning something that disrupts our commonsense view of the world” (p. 63).







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