

# Getting Serious About Preventing Bullying Among LGBT Youth



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# University of Illinois Anti-Bullying Program



- **Indiana University Teen Conflict Survey** (Bosworth, Espelage, & Simon, 1999; Espelage et al., 2000, 2001)
  
- **University of Illinois Bullying Research Program**
  - INTERVIEW STUDY (Espelage & Asidao, 2001)
  - EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE STUDY (Espelage, 1998)
  - SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS STUDY (Espelage, Holt, & Henkel, 2003; Espelage, Green, & Wasserman, 2007; Espelage, Green, & Polanin, in press)
  - SEXUAL HARASSMENT, DATING VIOLENCE, & BULLYING STUDIES (Holt & Espelage, 2003; Holt & Espelage, 2005; Espelage & Holt, 2006)
  - ATTRIBUTION, COPING STYLES, & BULLYING (Kingsbury & Espelage, 2006)
  - THEORY OF MIND, EMPATHY, & BULLYING (Espelage et al., 2004; Mayberry & Espelage, 2006)
  - HOMOPHOBIA, SEXUAL VIOLENCE, & BULLYING (Poteat & Espelage, 2006; Espelage et al., 2008)
  - Sexual Orientation, Bullying, & Mental Health Outcomes (Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008; Poteat, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009; Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009)
  
- **CDC Federally-funded Grants:**
  - Bullying & SV Overlap (2007 - 2010)
  - Randomized Clinical Trial of Middle School Second Step Program (Committee for Children, 2008) in Reducing Bullying & SV (2009-2013)

# Bullying Prevention – Meta-analysis



- **Merrell et al., (2008)**- Evaluated effectiveness of 16 bullying efficacy studies across some six countries (six studies in US).
- Only two of six US studies published.
- All showed small to negligible effects.
- Reality—No impact on bullying behaviors.
- **Farrington & Tfofi (2009)** – *programs that are effective in European country include parents, use of multimedia, and target teacher's competence in responding to bullying.* **STUDIES IN THE UNITED STATES DID NOT REDUCE BULLYING**

# Developmental Science: Research for Consideration



- ❑ Large percentage of bullying among students involves the use of homophobic teasing and slurs, called homophobic teasing or victimization (Espelage et al., 2009; Poteat & Espelage, 2005; Poteat & Rivers, 2010).
- ❑ Bullying and homophobic victimization occur more frequently among LGBT youth in American schools than among students who identify as heterosexual (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009; Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2009).
- ❑ LGBT youth report indicated 84.6% of LGBT students reported being verbally harassed, 40.1% reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010).

# 2009 Dane County Youth Assessment

(Espelage et al., 2009; Poteat et al., 2009; Robinson & Espelage, under review)



- Compared to straight-identified youth, LGBTQ are at greater risk of:
  - suicidal thoughts
  - suicide attempts
  - victimization by peers
  - high levels of unexcused absences
- The LGBTQ community is diverse in its risk profiles.
  - E.g., transgender youth appear to be particularly at risk, with many of them clustering in the most extreme categories (e.g., having suicidal thoughts almost all of the time; skipping school very often).
- On the positive side, the majority of LGBTQ are *not* at risk; however, the *disproportionate* percentages of LGBTQ students at *mid-level* and *extreme* risk suggest more needs to be done to help these students.

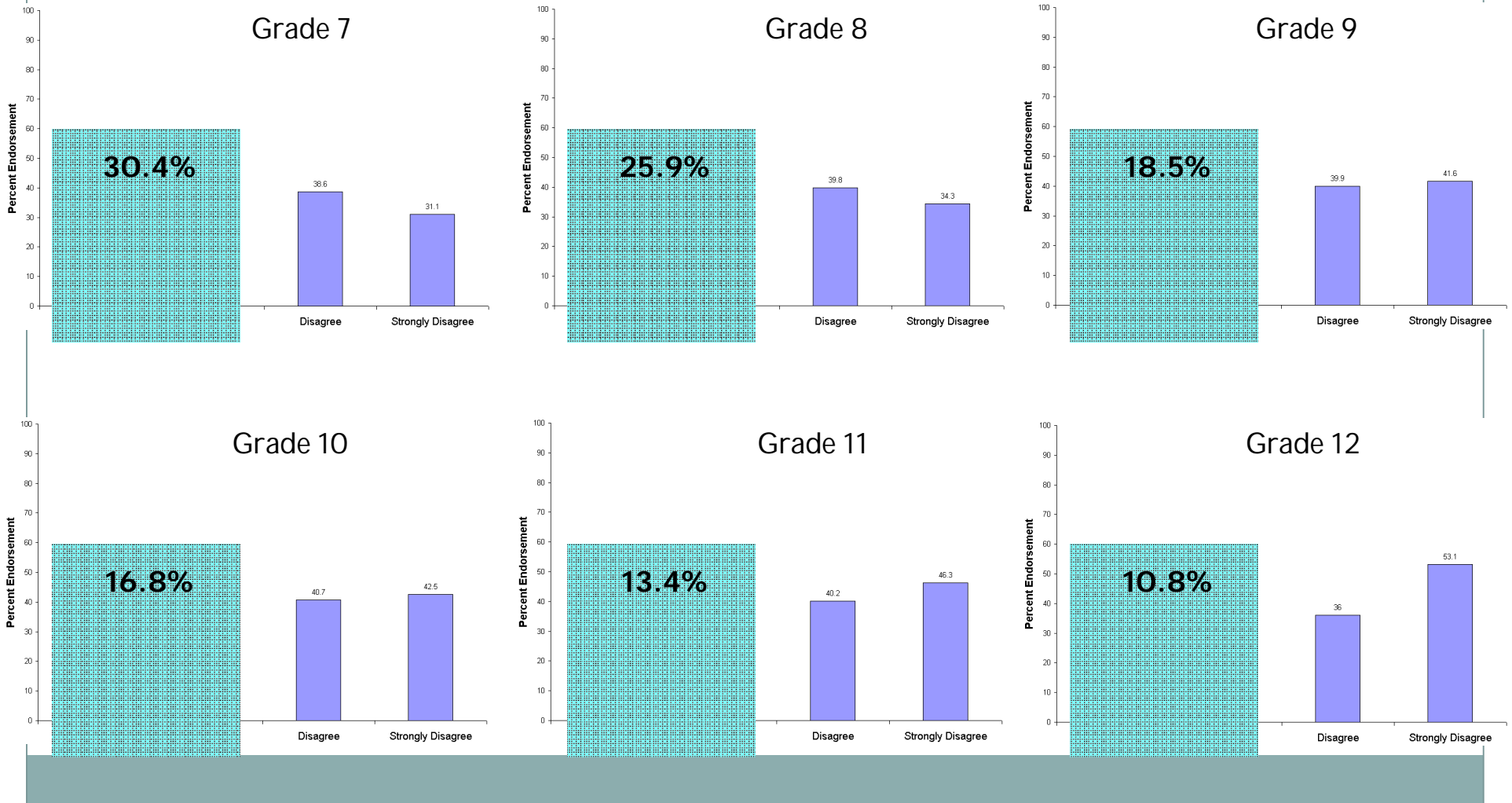
# Need to Intervene Early



- While some developmental patterns are common to straight- and LGBTQ-identified students, there are significant differences between these students in developmental trends related to school belongingness and unexcused absences, with LGBTQ youth at early risk.
- By raising awareness of educational inequities related to LGBTQ identification, this study lays the descriptive groundwork for interventions aimed at improving psychological and educational outcomes for these students. (Robinson & Espelage, under review)

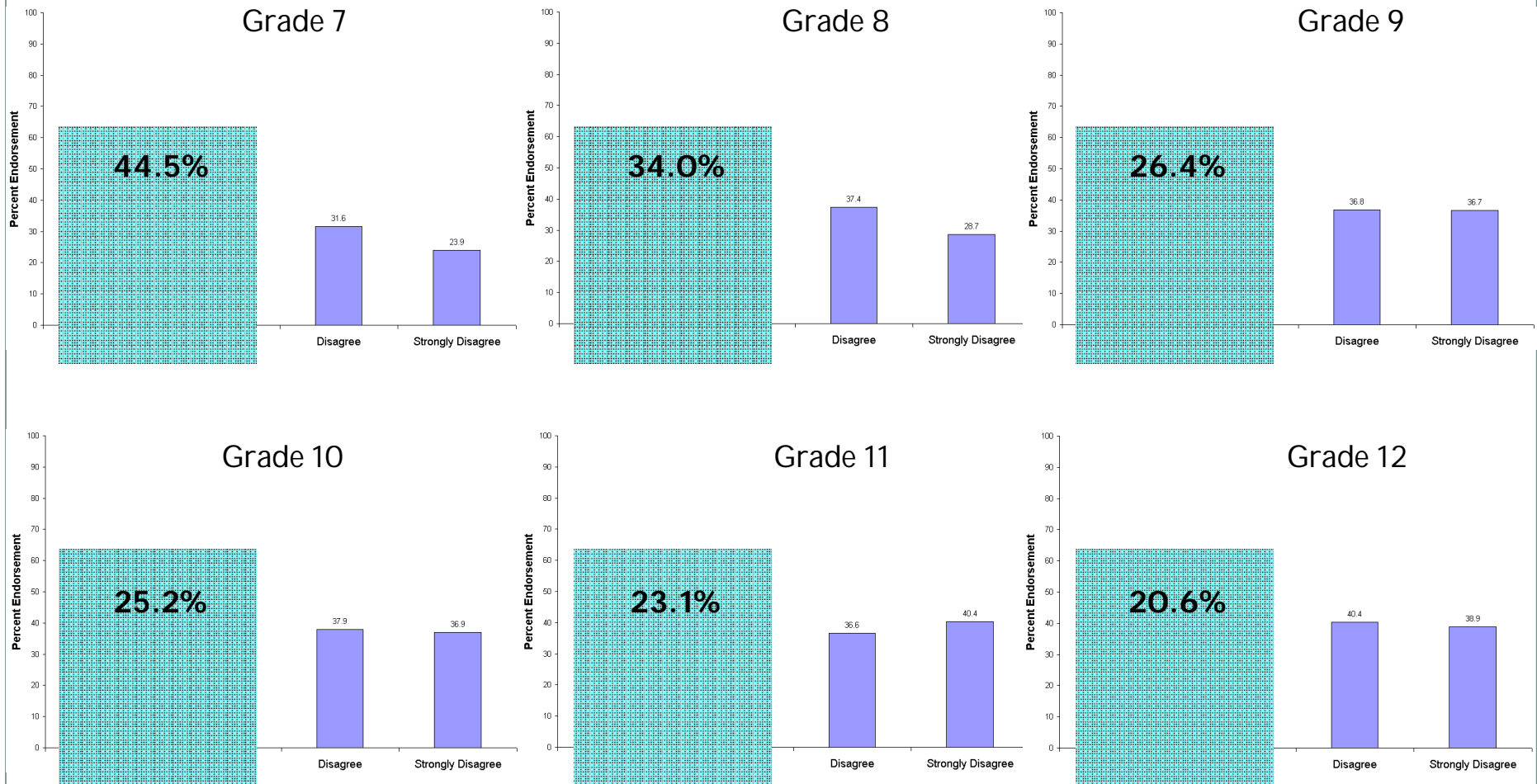
# "I could never stay friends with someone who told me he/she was gay/ lesbian"

(Poteat, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009)



# "I would rather attend a school where there are no gay or lesbian students"

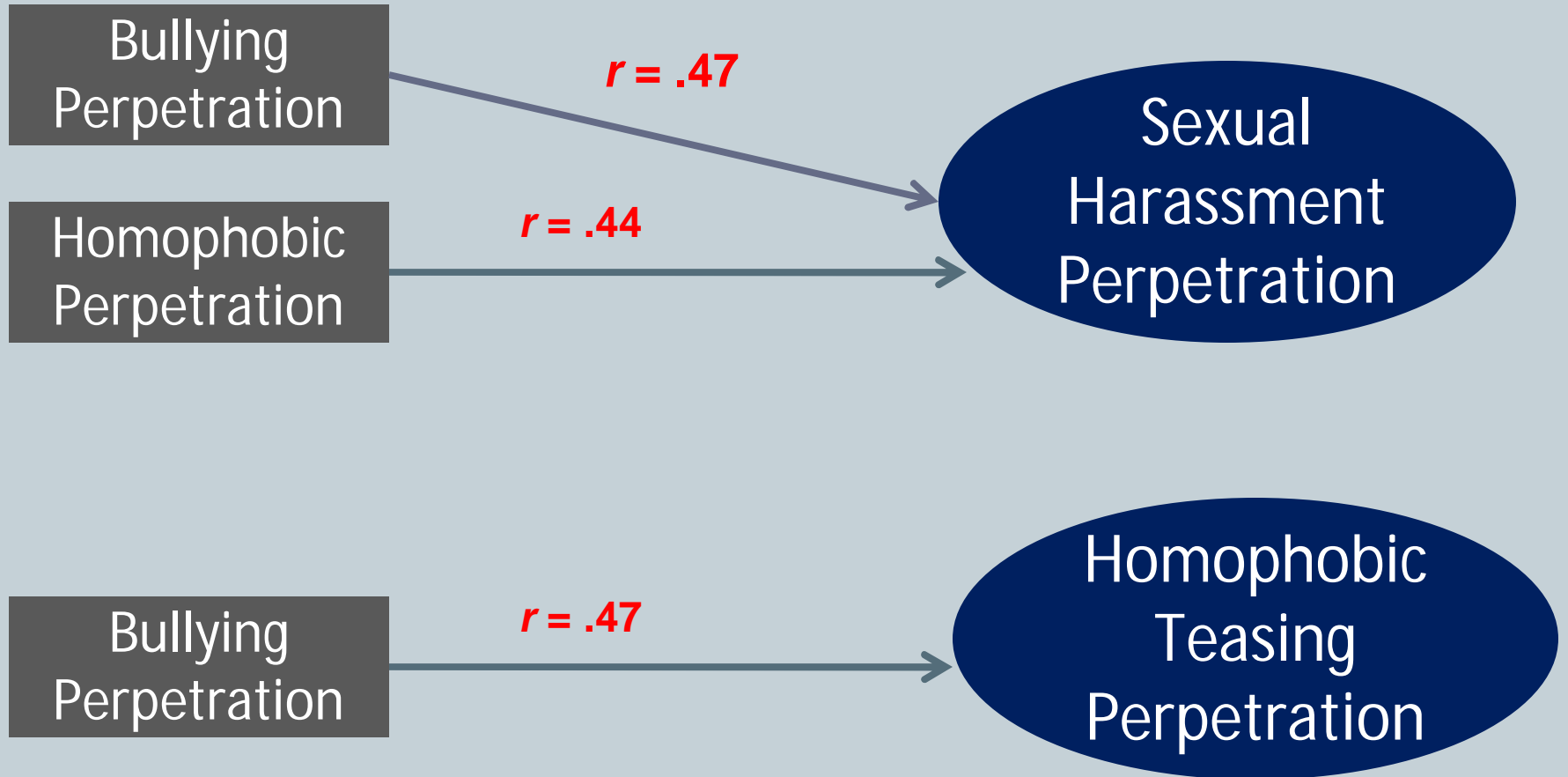
(Poteat, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009)





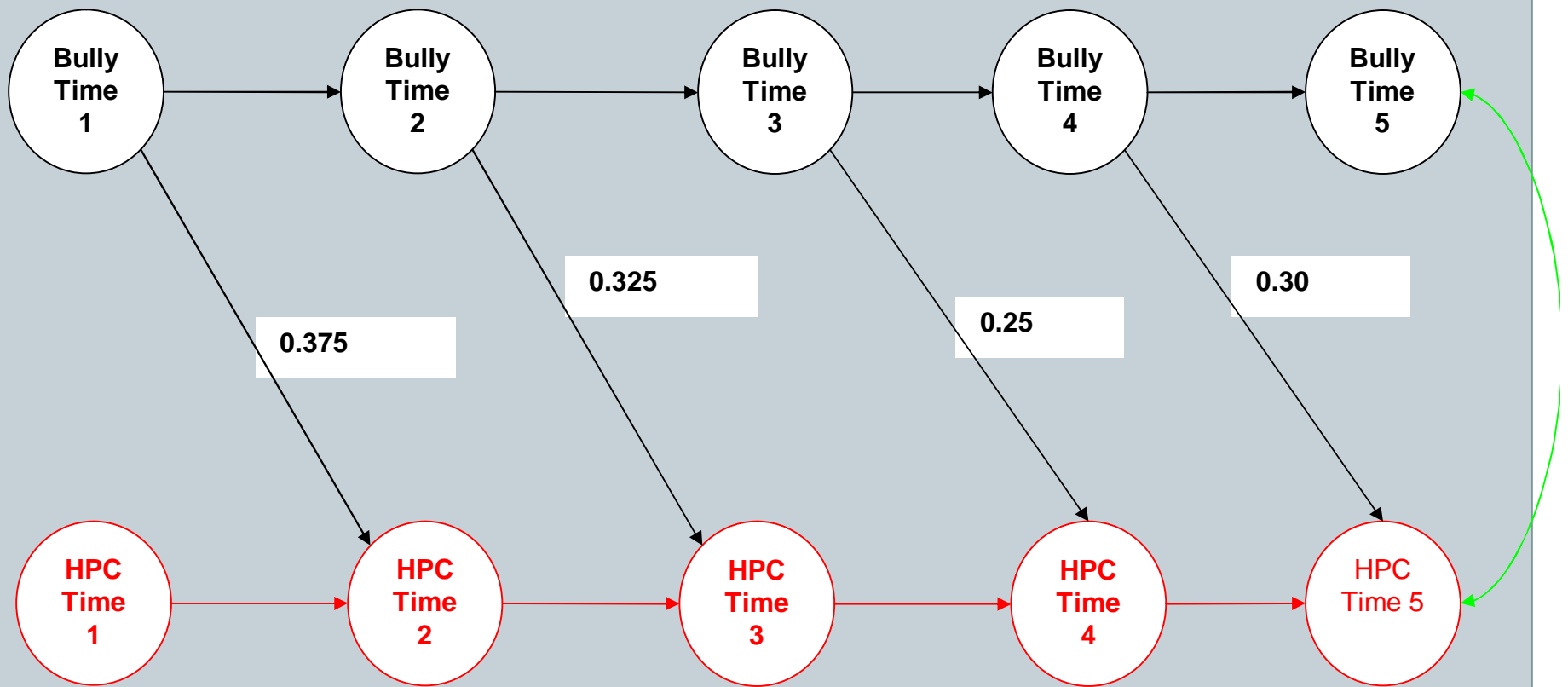
# Association between Bullying & SV

(N = 3,700 6<sup>th</sup> Graders)



Note: (Espelage & Low, 2011);  $ps < .01$

# CAUSAL LINK: Bullying – Homophobic Teasing



Model Fit:  $\chi^2_{(340, n=790)} = 1366.088$ ; RMSEA = .057<sub>(0.053 ; 0.060)</sub>; NNFI = .0985; CFI = .988; (Espelage & Rao, in prep)

# LGBT Bullying is Driven by Peers



- Adolescent peer groups play a significant role in the formation and maintenance of harmful and aggressive behaviors, particularly homophobic behavior (Espelage & Polanin, 2010; Poteat, Espelage, & Green, 2009)
- Peers influence has to be considered in developing and evaluating prevention/intervention programs
  - Only one bullying prevention program attempts to target and shift peer norms and mentions LGBT bullying.

# Why little success in preventing school bullying?



- Most frequently used bullying prevention programs DO NOT incorporate content related to use of homophobic language & bullying directed at LGBT youth.
  - 23 bullying prevention programs in US, only three mentioned LGBT bullying; and NONE did this indepth (Birkett & Espelage, 2010)
  - These include Flirting or Hurting (Stein & Sjorstrom, 1996), Step Up (Madsen et al., 2006), Second Step (CfC, 2008)
- Meta-analyses do not include evaluation of GLSEN's programs or Groundspark videos: Let's Get Real (2003), Straightlaced (2009).
- SOLUTION: Bully State Laws should require bully prevention plan to include LGBT related material (GSA, lessons, academic content)