

# Homophobic Language and Banter:

## Its Development and How it Hurts Everyone

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# Bullying and Prejudice Research

- Large (but largely separate) fields of research
  - Focus on similar predictors (e.g., empathy) and outcomes (e.g., mental health)
- As a consequence, fails to capture:
  - Bias/prejudice underlying bullying
  - Whether bias carries added consequences
  - Ways bias-based bullying affects everyone

# Findings on Homophobic Bullying and Discrimination

- Bias is often evident in the content of bullying episodes (e.g., use of homophobic epithets)<sup>1</sup>



Used regardless of perceived sexual orientation of target, ***more toward those perceived as lesbian, gay***

1. Kosciw et al., 2008, 2009; Poteat & DiGiovanni, 2010; Poteat & Espelage, 2005

# Findings on Homophobic Bullying and Discrimination

- Bias is often evident in the content of bullying episodes (e.g., use of homophobic epithets)<sup>1</sup>



Used by boys and girls, but ***more often by boys***

1. Kosciw et al., 2008, 2009; Poteat & DiGiovanni, 2010; Poteat & Espelage, 2005

# Motivators of Homophobic Bullying

- What motivates homophobic bullying and language?<sup>1</sup>
  - To express prejudice, discriminate
  - To enforce gender norms
  - To establish dominance hierarchies
  - A part of peer banter
  - To gain status, attention within group

For interventions to be most effective, they must address the many factors that underlie this behavior

1. Guerin, 2003; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Phoenix et al., 2003; Poteat, 2008; Poteat & DiGiovanni, 2010; Poteat et al., 2011

# Homophobic Bullying & Gender Norms

- Homophobic language used to enforce gender normative behavior<sup>1</sup>
- Normative masculine beliefs associated with homophobic bullying and discrimination<sup>2</sup>

But consider this...

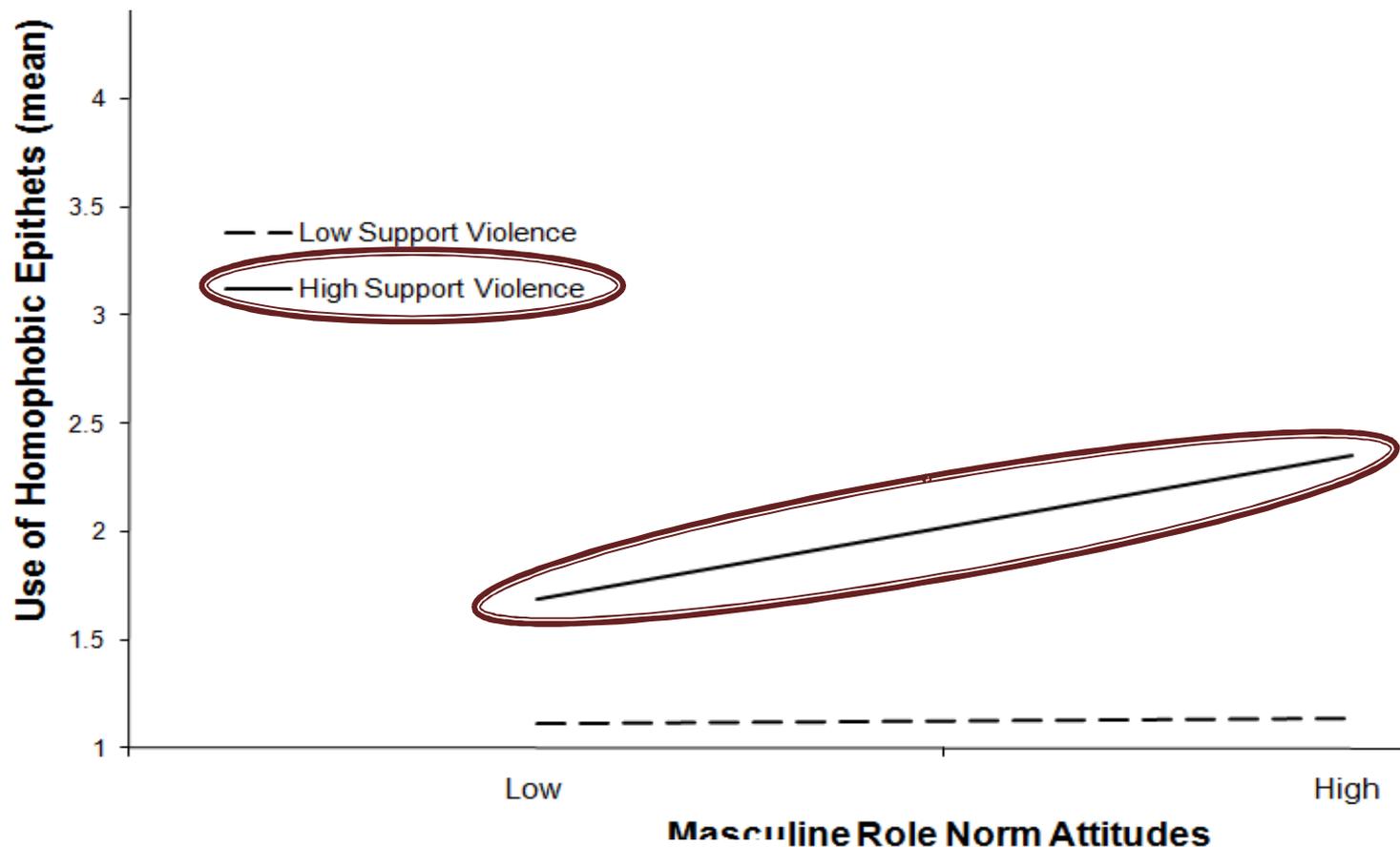
- Do some boys hold normative beliefs and *not* use homophobic language?

1. Pascoe, 2003; Phoenix et al., 2003

2. Bernat, Calhoun, Adams, & Zeichner, 2001; Poteat et al., 2011

# Homophobic Bullying & Gender Norms

- Masculine norms and homophobic language
  - The role of beliefs about the use of violence in conflict<sup>1</sup>

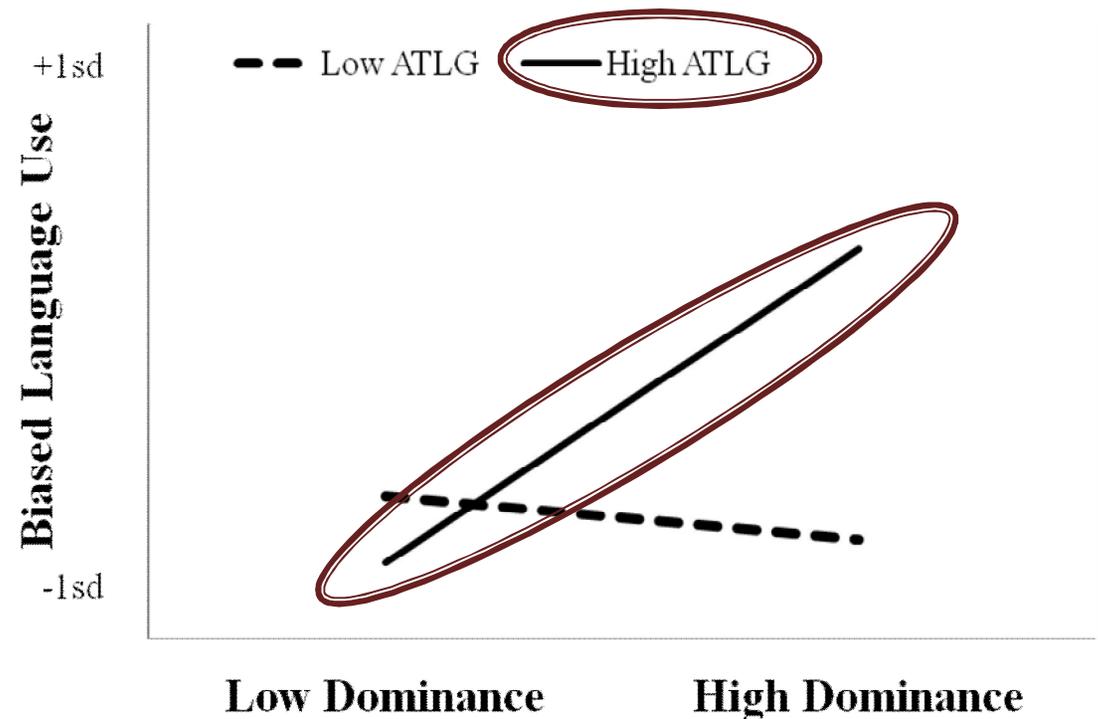


1. Poteat et al., 2011

# Homophobic Bullying & Dominance

- Homophobic language used in relation to dominance-promoting behavior among peers<sup>1</sup>

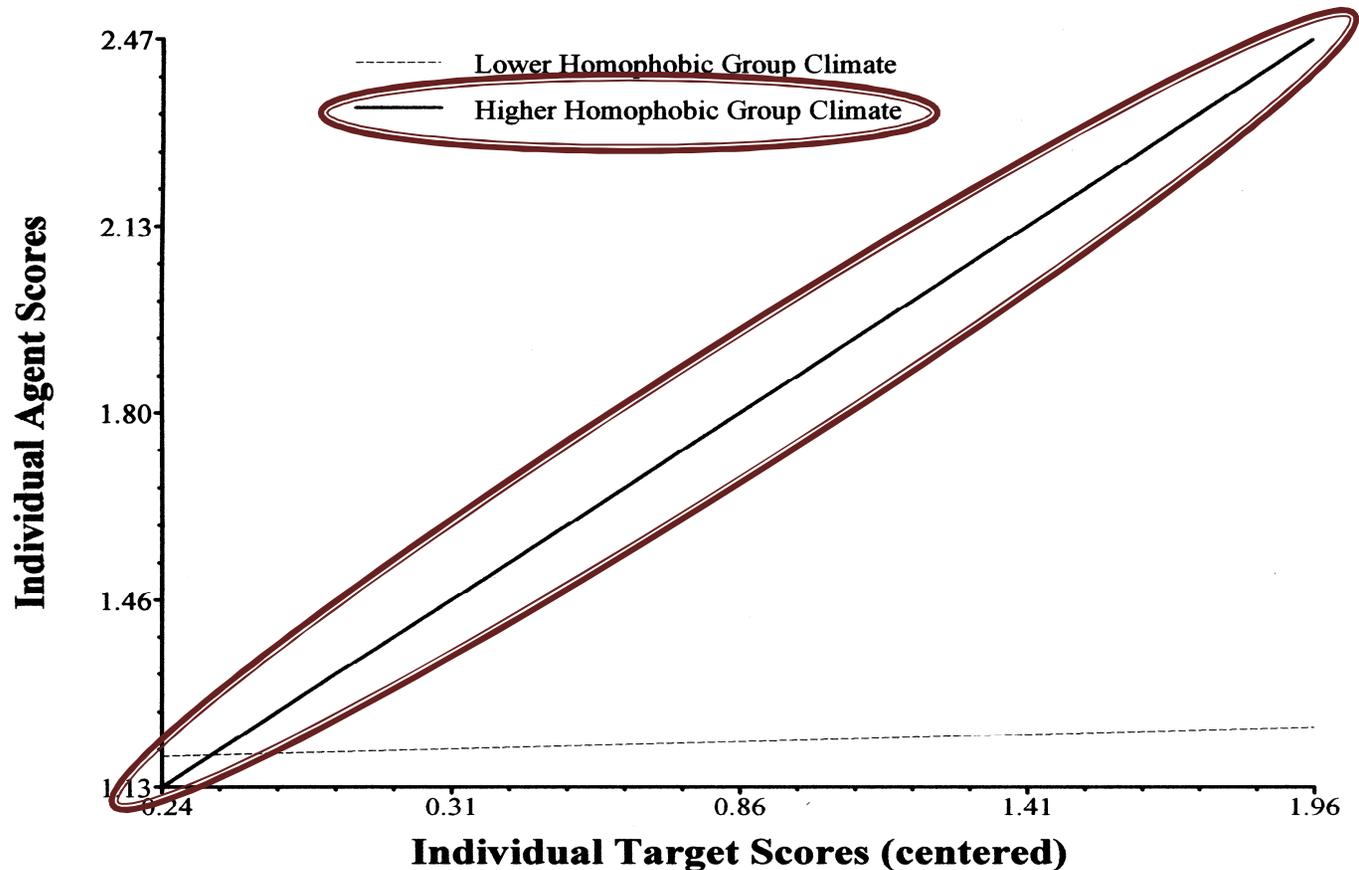
With some nuance for boys:



1. Poteat & DiGiovanni, 2010

# Homophobic Banter among Peers

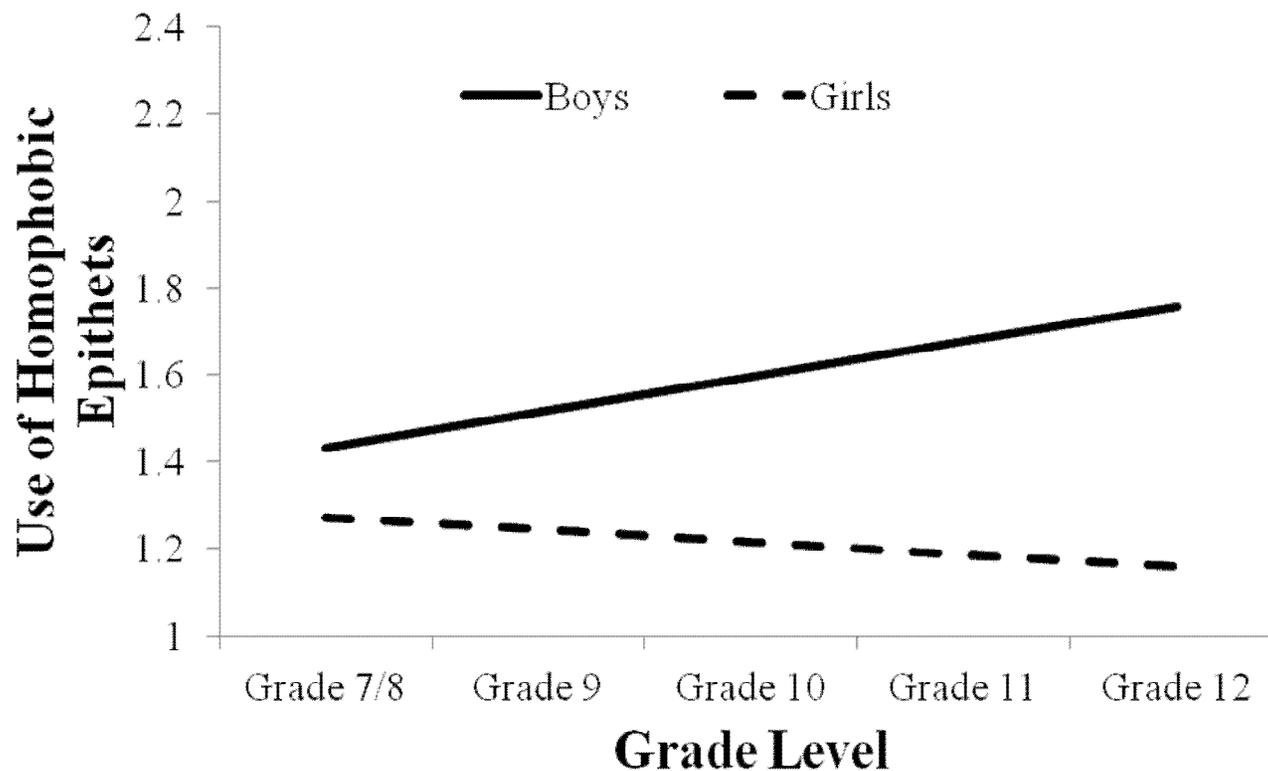
- More likely to use banter in homophobic peer groups<sup>1</sup>



1. Poteat, 2008

# Homophobic Language Over Time

- Peers influence use of this language over time<sup>1</sup>
- Change in use across high school period<sup>2</sup>



1. Poteat, 2007

2. Poteat et al., 2011

# Consequences of Biased Bullying

- Associated with *psychological, social, and academic concerns*<sup>1</sup>
  - Anxiety, depression, traumatic stress, suicidality
  - Social withdrawal, isolation, lower school belonging
  - Poorer grades, higher truancy

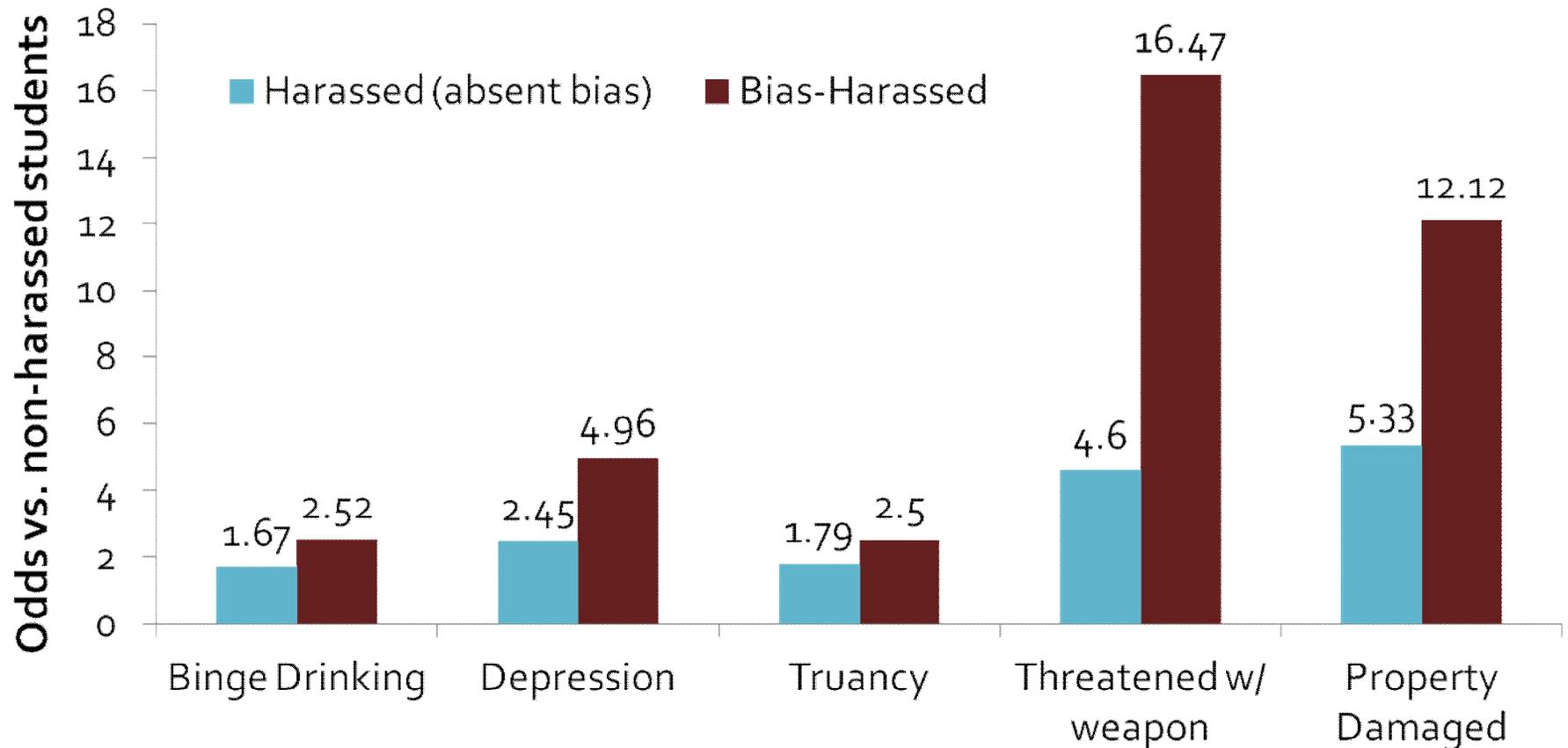
1. Clark et al., 2004; D'Augelli et al., 2002; Flores et al., 2010; Grossman & Liang, 2008, Polo & López, 2009; Poteat et al., 2011; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010

# Prevalence and Magnified Risks

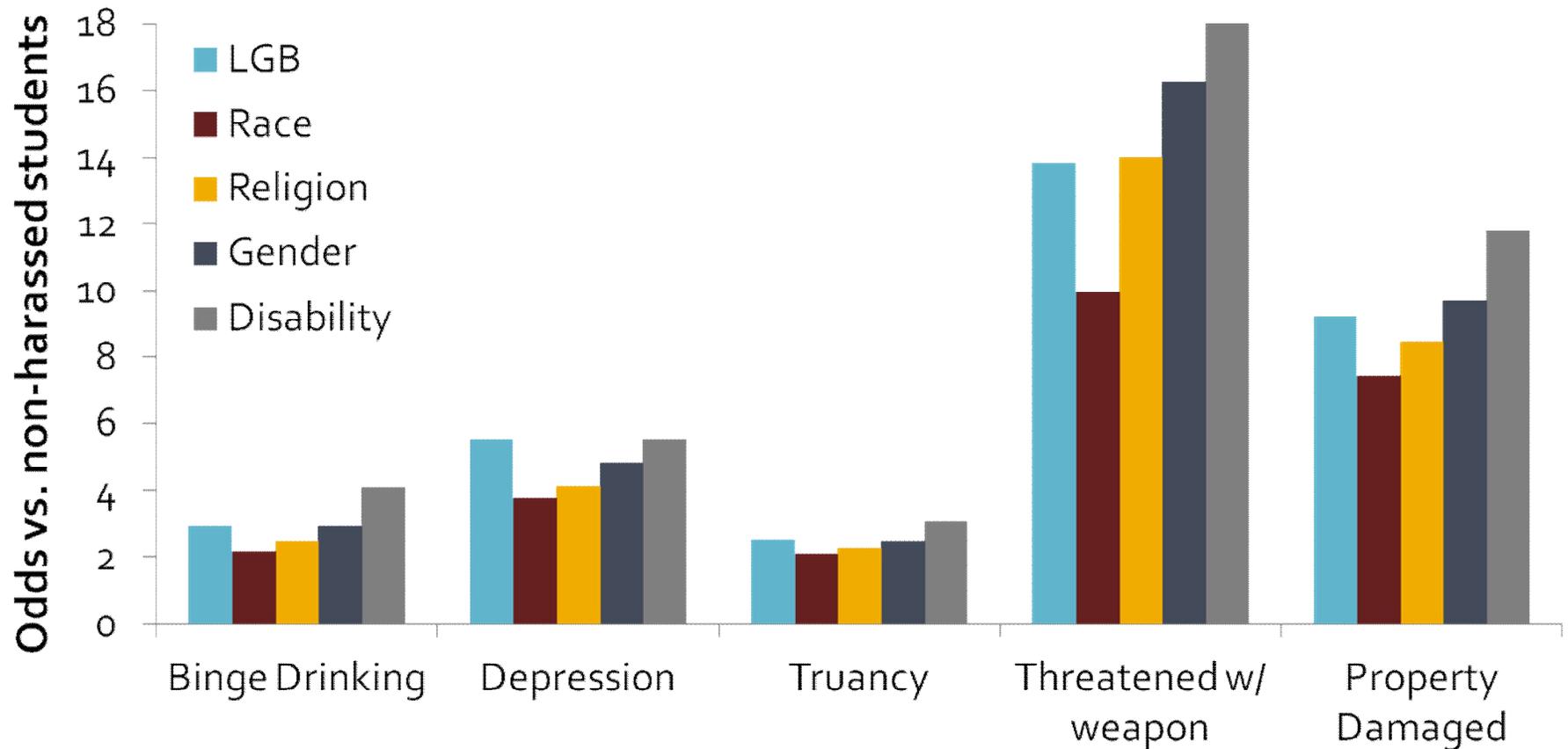
- Prevalence and magnified risks of bias<sup>1</sup>
  - **35-40% of those harassed** perceive it as bias-based (disability, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation)
  - Bias-harassed youth report ***higher risks than non-harassed and harassed youth (absent of bias)***

1 Russell Sinclair Poteat & Koenig 2011

# Magnified Risks of Biased Bullying



# Magnified Risks of Biased Bullying



# Making Sense of these Findings

- Why are risks so magnified when victimization involves bias?
  - Invokes larger societal marginalization, discrimination
  - A denigration of their identity and their larger group



A Part of Minority Stress Theory  
(Meyer, 2003)

# How do these Experiences Connect?

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- How does this fit within a broader model?
  - How do these experiences relate to various outcomes?
  - Does parent support buffer these effects?
  - Patterns across race/ethnicity and sexual orientation: Implications of multiple minority identities?

# Are Parents a Source of Resilience?

## ARGUMENTS FOR<sup>1</sup>:

- Many parents support their LGBTQ children
- Parents foster overall health of LGBTQ youth

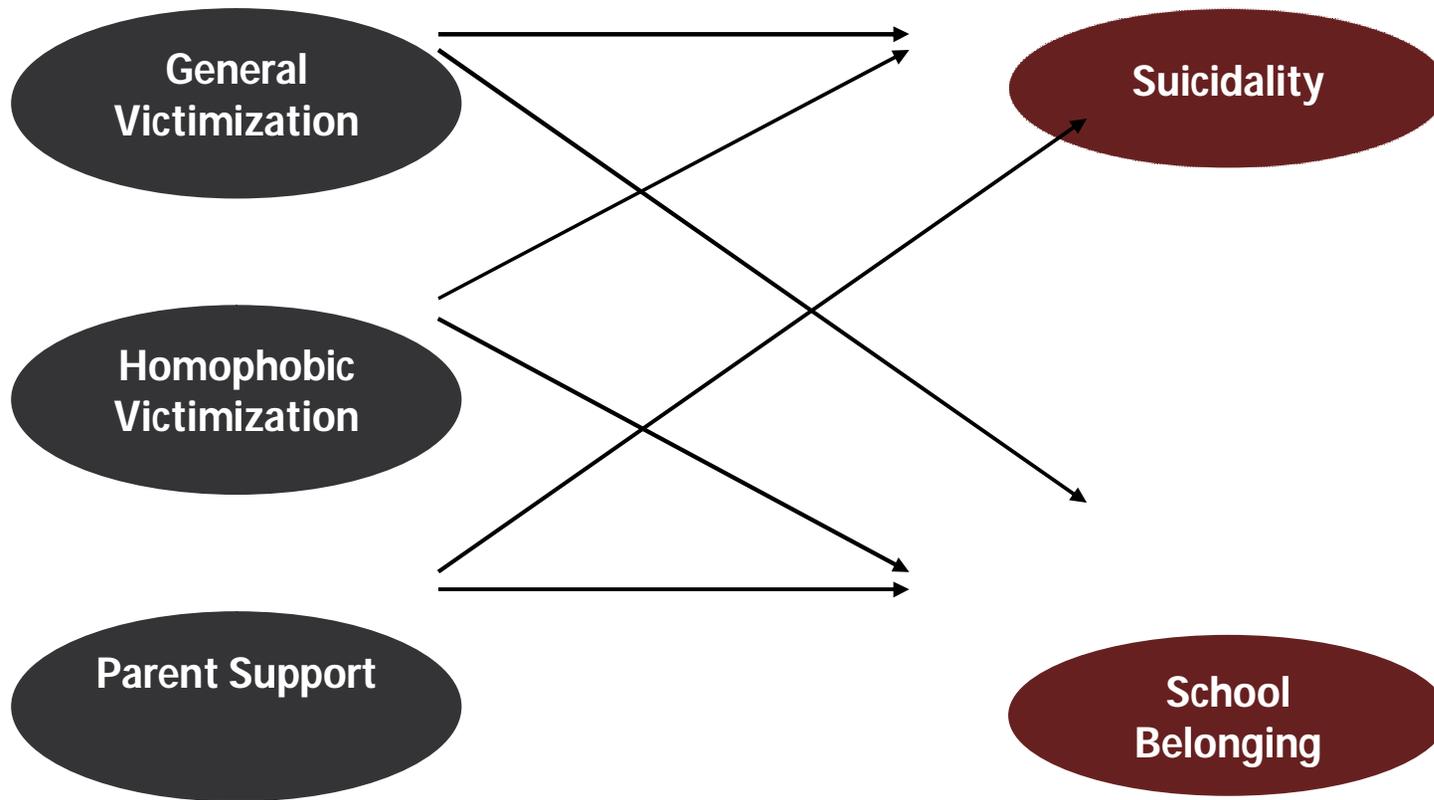
1. Hershberger & D'Aquila. 1995; Willoughby et al., 2006

## ARGUMENTS AGAINST<sup>2</sup>:

- Risk of unintended disclosure
- Fear of parent rejection
- Reliance on peers more than parents

2. Muñoz-Plaza et al., 2002; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003

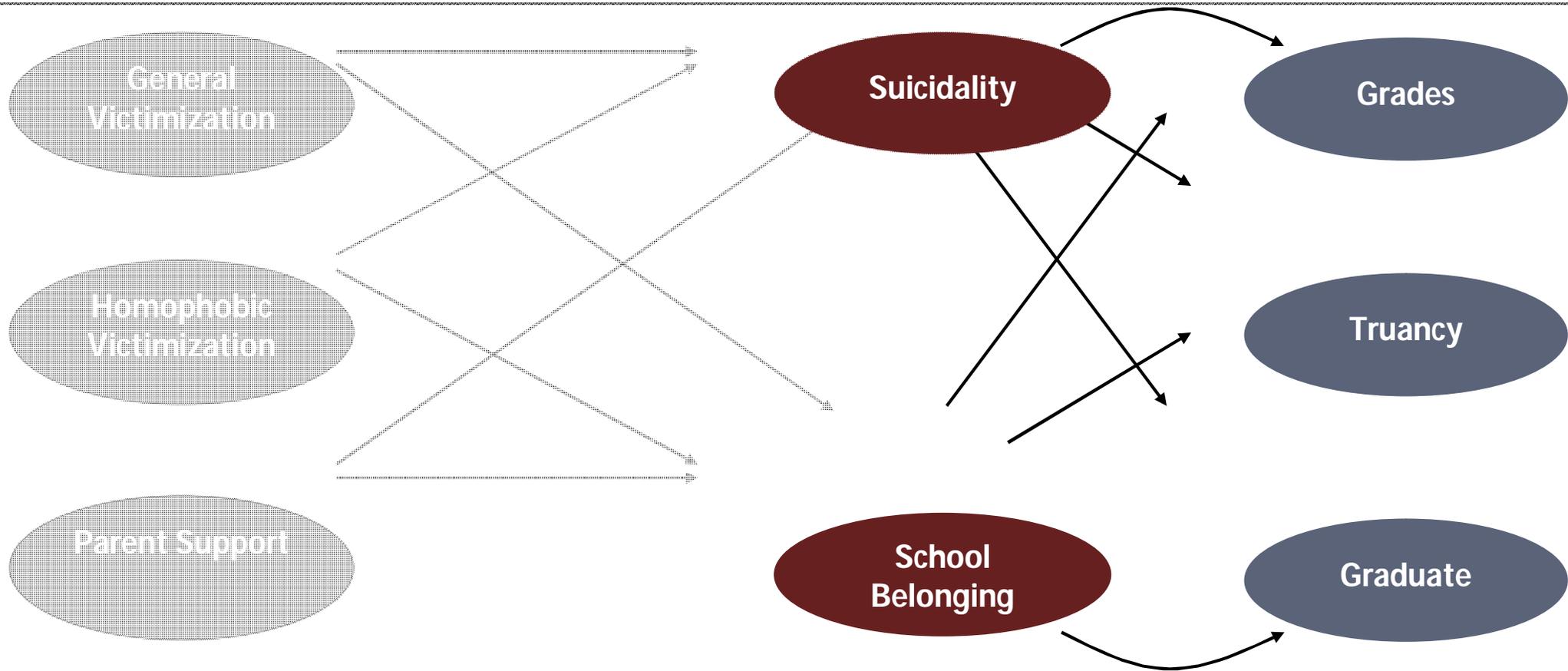
# How do these Experiences Connect?



G. & H. Victim: Negative effect for **LGBTQ, heterosexual youth**

P. Support: Positive effect for **LGBTQ, heterosexual youth**

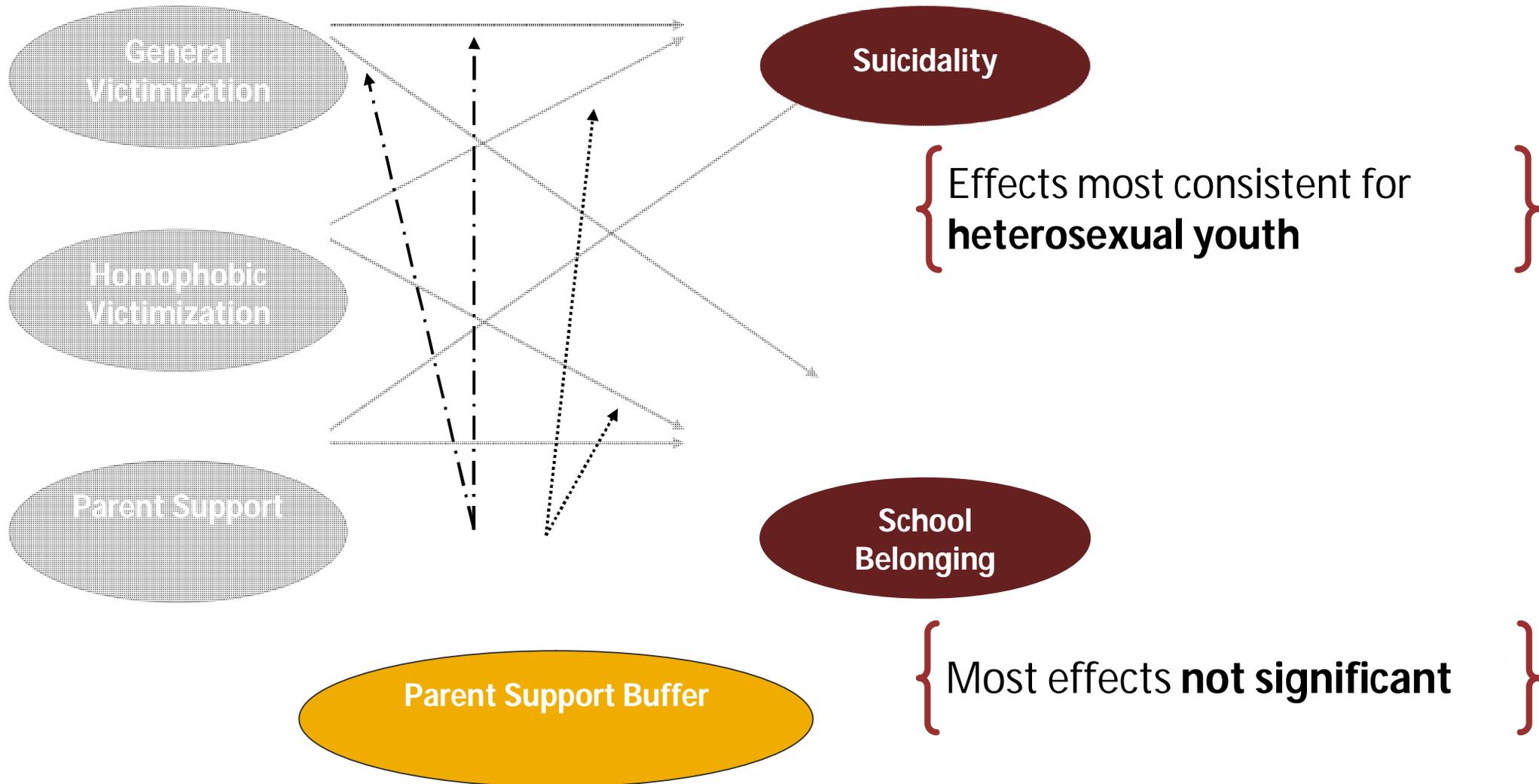
# How do these Experiences Connect?



{ Suicidality: Negative effects **especially** for LGBTQ youth }

{ S.Belong: Positive effects **especially** LGBTQ youth of color }

# How do these Experiences Connect?



# What are Some Immediate Implications?

- Bias can have negative effects ***on all youth***
- Failure to assess for bias in bullying ***masks its added impact*** on youth
- ***Mental health, school climate are integral*** to predicting academic outcomes

# What are Some Immediate Implications?

- Implications for Parent Support Findings
  - Support may need to be specific to youths' sexual orientation (e.g., affirmation of identity)
  - Some LGBTQ youth may not yet be out to parents
  - Parents may feel less equipped to provide support related to homophobic victimization
  - For school belonging, adults at school may have greater contribution

# What works? What can we do?

## ■ Systemic Level:

- Support diverse student organizations, programs
- Enforce anti-bullying policies, protection of minority groups
- Integrate diversity issues in curriculum

## ■ Interpersonal Level:

- Teacher, parent, and peer support all significant
- Peers can establish positive norms, influence others
- Classroom prosocial norms (e.g., for respect, justice, fairness, inclusivity)

**\*All are empirically-supported recommendations\***

# The Roles of GSAs in Schools

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- Provide safe, supportive environments, resources
- Social club for extracurricular activities, interaction
- Activism and events to promote awareness, social justice, and address school climate

# Differences in Schools with GSAs

- Do students in schools **with** GSAs differ from those in schools **without** GSAs?

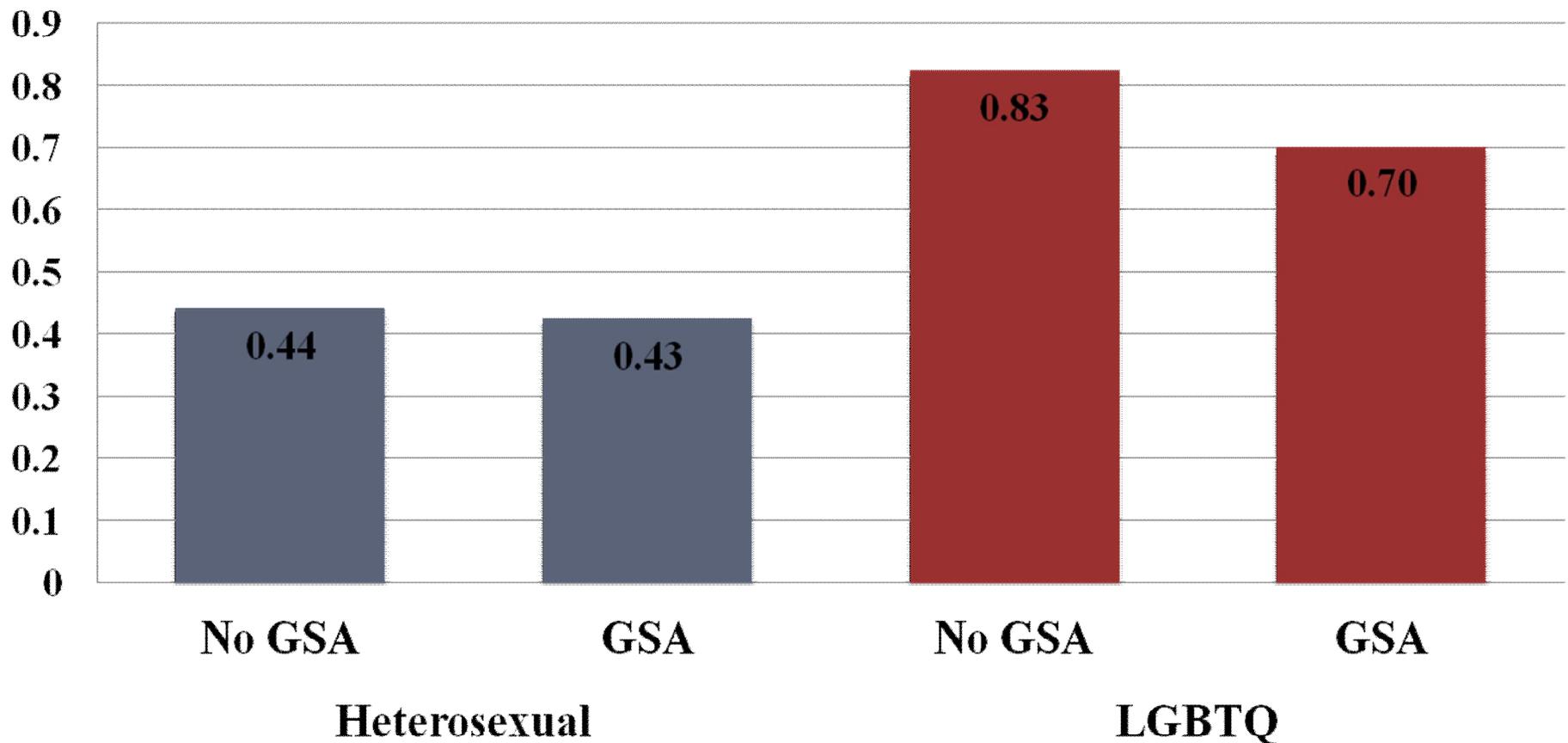


- Will differences be **even greater** for LGBTQ students?

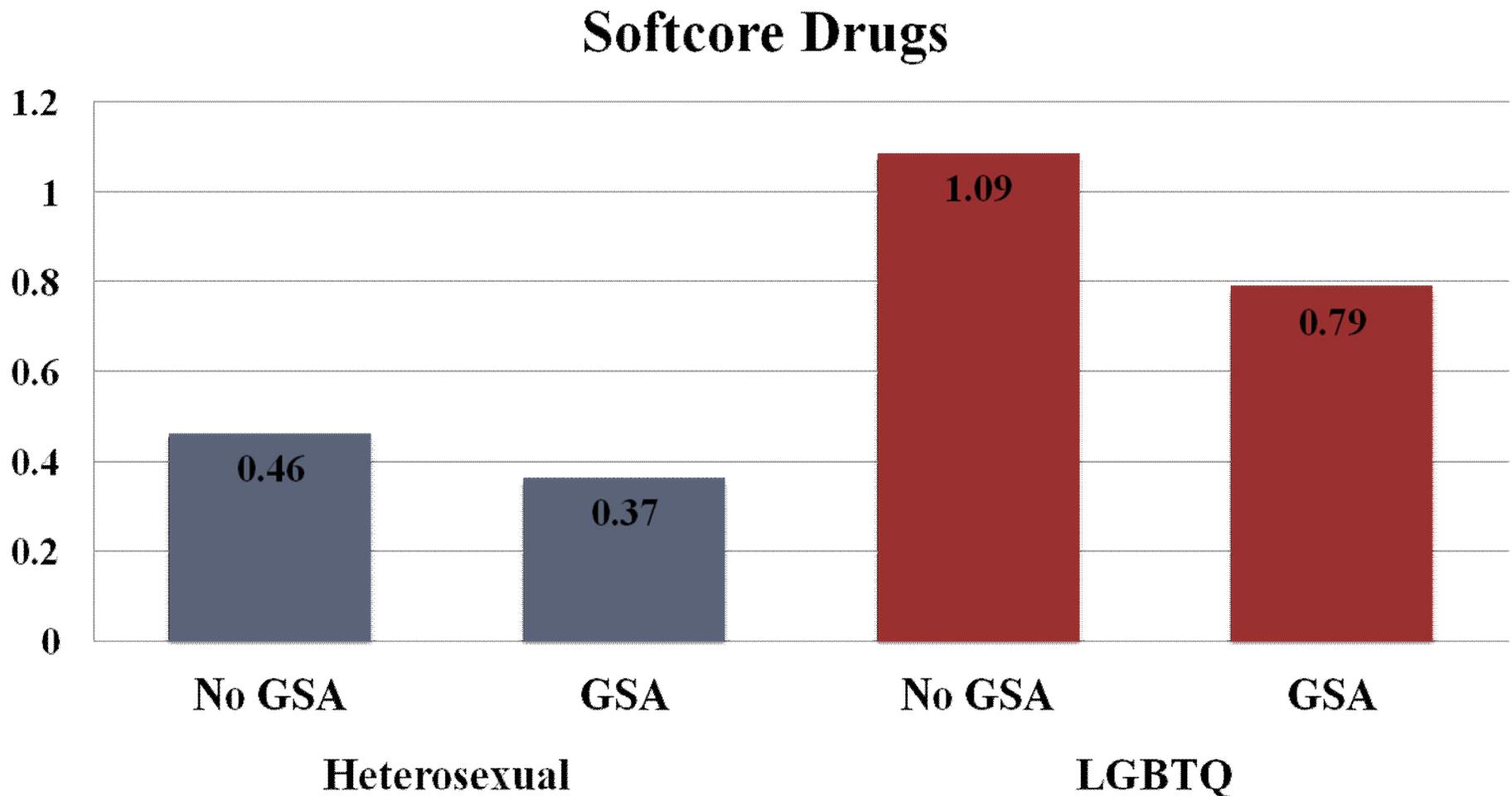
{ After accounting for factors such as school size, school diversity, middle vs. high school, SES }

# Differences in Schools with GSAs

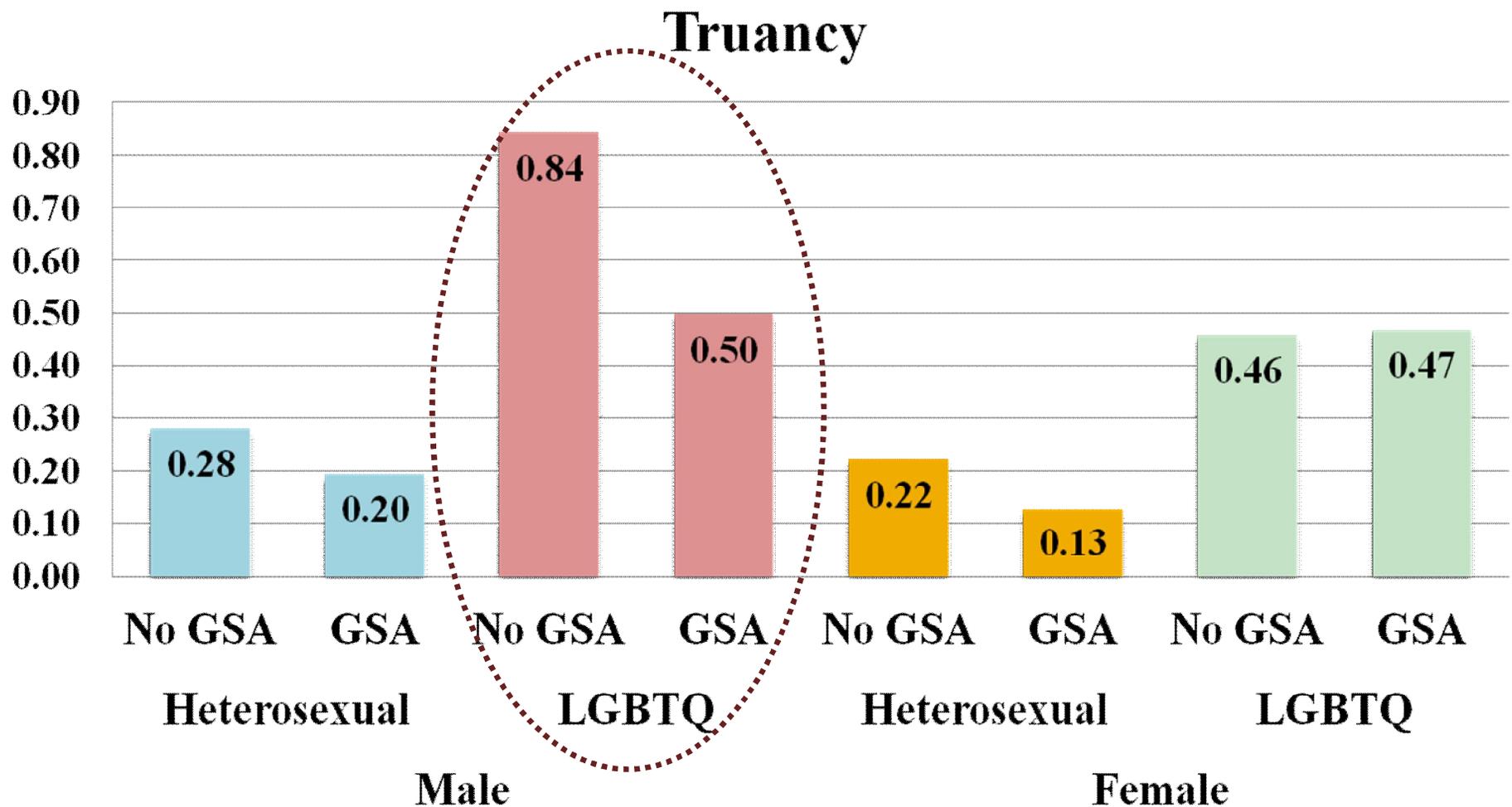
## Victimization



# Differences in Schools with GSAs



# Differences in Schools with GSAs



# Importance of Adults at School

- Students more likely to challenge prejudice of peers when they perceive adult support<sup>1</sup>

In what ways can we show support to students?



# Diversity Issues in Curriculum

- Imperative for minority youth to find themselves ***represented in curriculum***
- Important for students from majority groups to ***learn about other communities***
- Students in schools with LGBT issues in curriculum report ***greater sense of safety***<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Russell, Kostroski, McGuire, Laub, & Manke, 2006

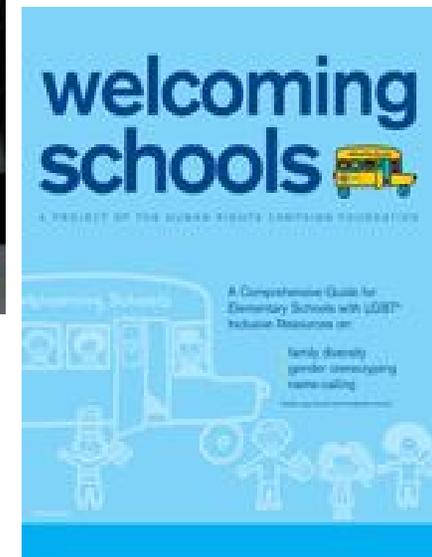
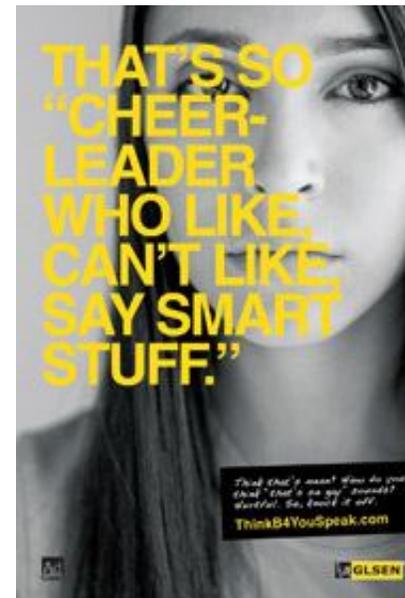
# Diversity Issues in Curriculum

- What works in diversity curriculum?<sup>1</sup>
  - ***Interactive, experiential activities*** have greater effects than didactic, less participatory approaches
  - ***Cognitive focus***: how we categorize others, interpret situations, counter stereotypes
  - ***Social focus***: social contact, interaction through cooperative learning or group projects

1. Aboud & Doble, 1996; Aboud & Fenwick, 1999; Molina & Wittin, 2006; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000; Turner et al., 2007

# Materials for LGBT Issues

- Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network
  - [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)
  - No Name-Calling Week
  - ThinkB4YouSpeak
  - Day of Silence, Ally Week
- Human Rights Campaign
  - [www.welcomingschools.org](http://www.welcomingschools.org)
  - Welcoming Schools Guide



# Take Home Points...

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- Anti-bullying programs must address issues of diversity and prejudice
- Bias-based harassment is especially serious for all youth
- There are multiple ways to counter prejudice and discriminatory behavior in schools

# For Additional Information:

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