

Dating and sexual violence among gender and sexual minority adolescents: What we know and how we can help.

Webinar for PREVNet

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Outline for today

- Introduction to sexual and gender minority youth
 - Definitions
 - Prevalence
- Ecological context of gender and sexual minority youth
- Romantic relationships during adolescence
 - A context for resilience
 - A context for risk
- Sexual violence among sexual and gender minority youth
- Barriers to help seeking
- Recommendations for educators

Definitions

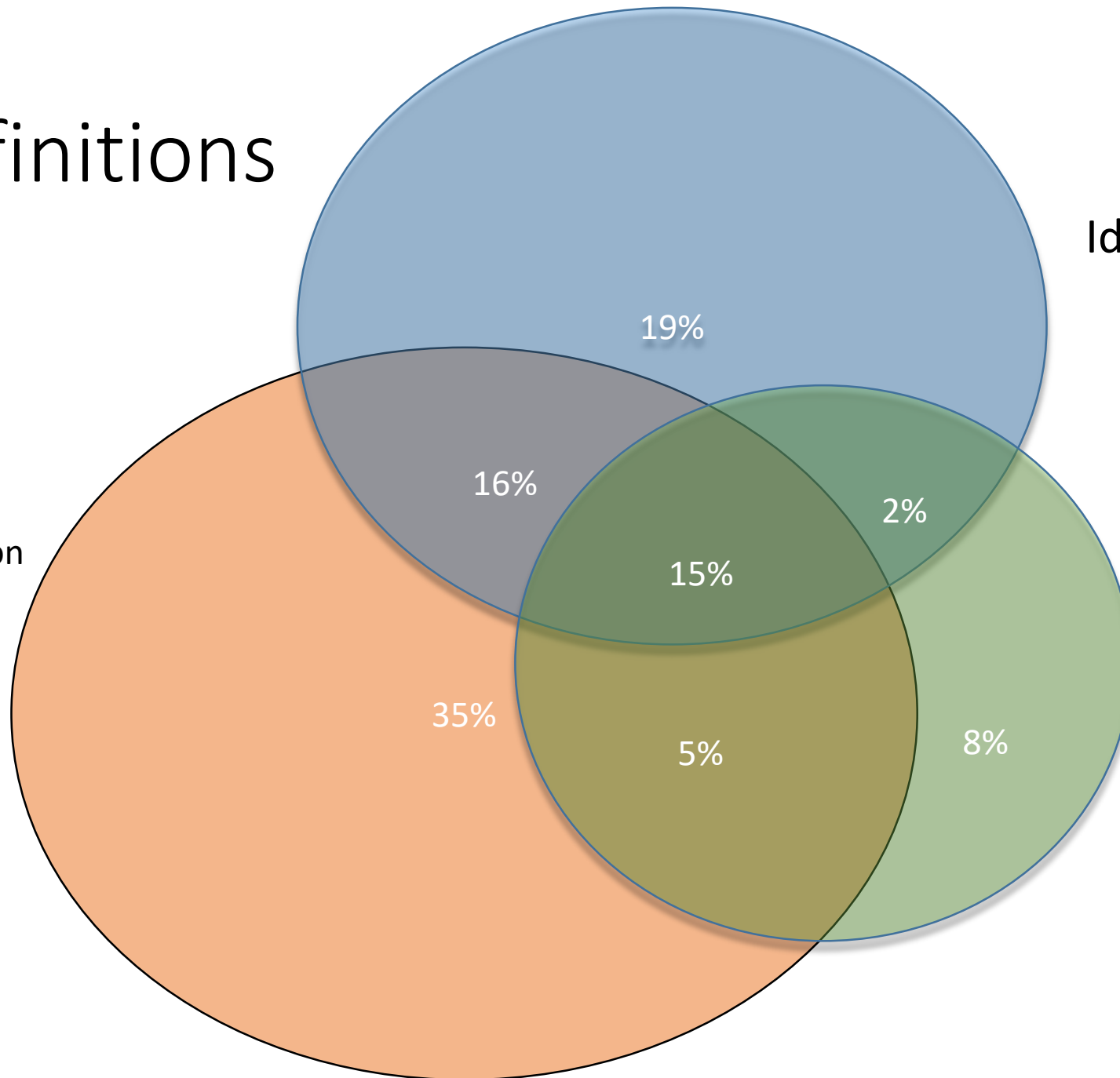
- Sexual minority is an umbrella term
 - A sexual identity other than heterosexual
 - Same-sex romantic or sexual attraction
 - Same-sex romantic or sexual partners
- Romantic relationships are central for understanding sexual minority identities

Definitions

Identity

Attraction

Behaviour



Definitions

- Importance of identity
- Variation in identities
 - Traditional identities
 - Gay
 - Lesbian
 - Bisexual
 - Newer identities
 - Queer
 - Pansexual
 - Mostly heterosexual
 - Identities reflecting patterns of attraction
 - Polyamorous
 - Demisexual
 - Asexual
 - Culturally specific identities
 - Allosexual
 - Two-spirited
- Monosexual identities vs. bisexual identities

Definitions

- Sex: an individual's biological attributes that includes chromosomes, gene expression, hormone level, and hormone function
- Gender identity: the way an individual perceives and expresses characteristics related to being a man, woman or a gender diverse person
- Cisgender: Individuals for whom sex and gender identity more or less concord
- Transgender: Individuals for whom sex and gender identity do not concord

Definitions

- Gender minority is another umbrella term that describes
 - Transgender individuals
 - Intersex individuals
 - Individuals with variations in sex characteristics at birth
- Gender identity can be binary or non binary
 - Binary
 - Nonbinary

Definitions

- Gender minority individuals may have undergone or wish to undergo gender-affirming medical treatments
- Barring specific medical needs (e.g., you are a physician with concerns about how medication may interact with hormonal treatment) it is not necessary, and can be considered quite rude to ask specific questions about a medical transition

Definitions

- In North American contexts sexual identity and gender identity are different constructs
 - Sexual identity: patterns of attraction to others
 - Gender identity: how an individual sees their own gender

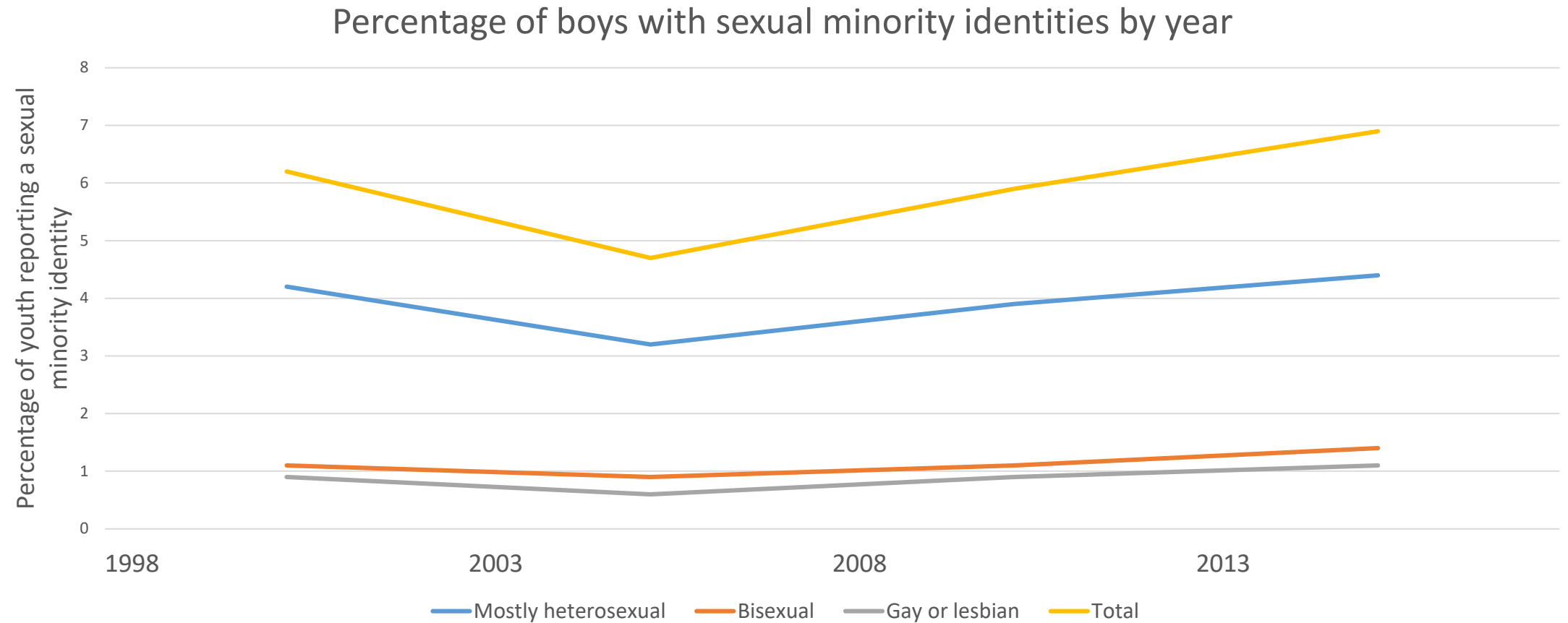
Definitions: Takeaways

- Adolescents are increasingly finding new ways to describe their sexual and gender identities (Watson et al., 2019)
- It is normal for the terms that individuals use to describe themselves to change during adolescence (Katz-Wise, 2015)
- Your understanding of what an identity means may differ from how a young adult understands that identity
 - If you are confused about an identity, it may be useful to ask
- Asking about and using an individual's preferred pronouns, and not making assumptions about their sexual or gender identity can help develop trust

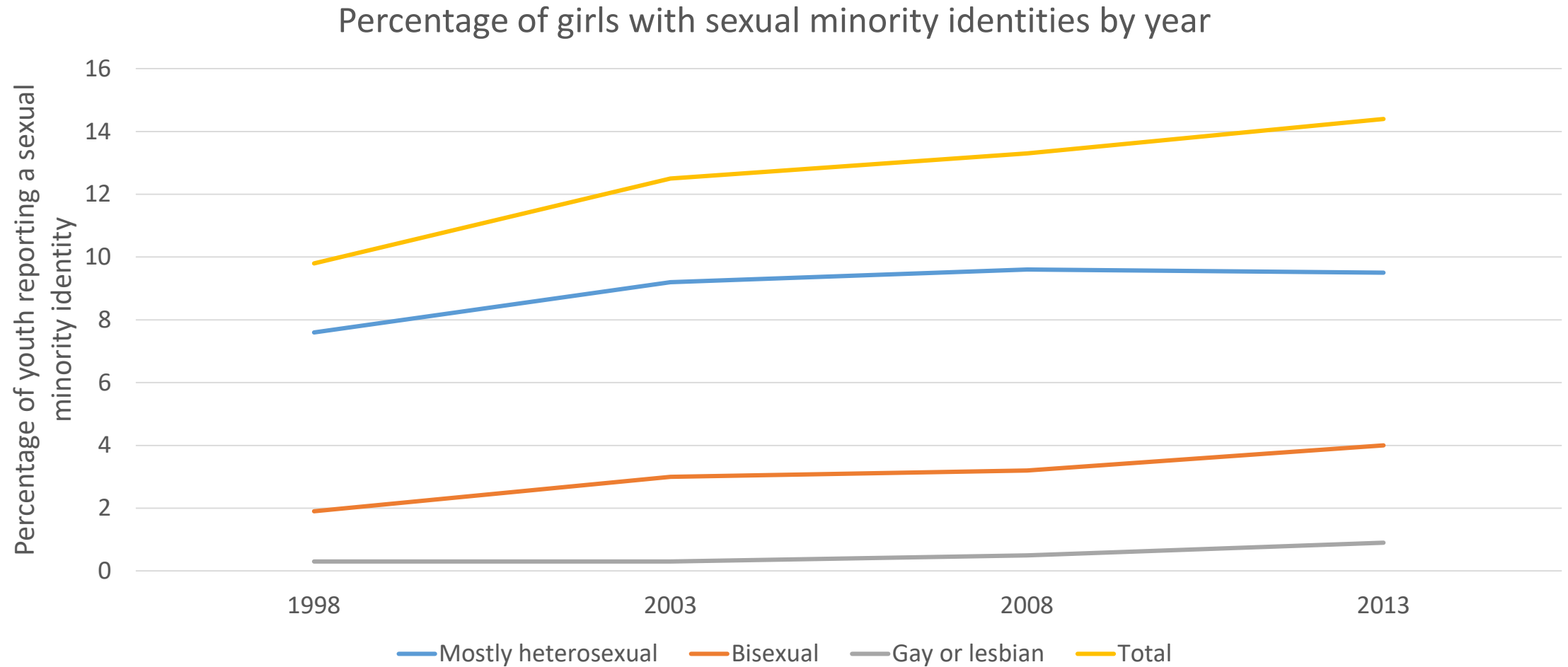
Prevalence

- The percent of individuals reporting a sexual minority identity or a gender minority identity varies according to where and how these two identity constructs are measured
- Within Canadian samples, prevalence of sexual minority youth varies (Cénat et al., 2015; Peter et al., 2017)
 - 1% gay or lesbian
 - 1-11% bisexual
 - 4-10% mostly heterosexual
 - 6% uncertain
- Among students in grades 9-12 in the United States (Johns et al., 2019)
 - 2% reported being transgender
 - 2 % reported being unsure if they were transgender

Prevalence



Prevalence



Prevalence: Takeaways

- A significant and increasing number of youth are reporting sexual and gender minority identities

Ecological context of sexual and
gender minority youth

Ecological context

- Stigmatized identities are identities that are devalued
- Individuals with stigmatized identities experience worse treatment from individuals and institutions
- Internalizing the negative messages from these experiences leads to poorer self-concept and worse mental health

Ecological context

- The stigma surrounding sexual and gender minority status has consequences for the social world across childhood and adolescence
 - Higher rates of peer victimization (Collier et al., 2013; Martin-Storey & Fish, 2019)
 - Higher rates of parental rejection (Needham et Austin, 2010)
 - Higher rates of homelessness (Rosario et al., 2012)
 - Higher rates of childhood maltreatment and abuse (Friedman et al, 2011)
 - Greater likelihood of punishment by teachers and other educators (Poteat et al., 2016)

Ecological context

- Despite improvements in the last several decades, sexual and gender minority youth in Canada still experience more difficulties compared with their peers
 - 70% of transgender youth reported peer victimization and 66% reported verbal victimization from their parents (Raymond et al., 2015)
 - 69% of sexual minority high school students experienced at least one incidence of homophobia in the past 6-8 months (Chamberland et al., 2013)

Ecological context

- As the social context of sexual and gender minority youth becomes more accepting, youth are coming out at earlier and earlier ages
- Developmental collision theory suggests that youth are more likely to come out during early adolescence (Russell & Fish, 2019)

Ecological context: Takeaways

- The vulnerability among sexual and gender minority youth comes from stigma
- Features of adolescence make having a stigmatized identity particularly challenging during this period
- Social norms around sexual and gender minority status are improving but youth still face barriers

Romantic relationships: A context for resilience

Romantic relationships: Context for resilience

- Romantic relationships define what it means to be a sexual minority adolescent
- Social support is one of the most important protective factors for sexual and gender minority individuals (Rostosky & Riggle, 2017)
 - Romantic relationships are an important source of social support
- Romantic relationships as protective for sexual minority youth/young adults
 - Being in a relationship buffers against perceived rejection (Baams et al., 2014)
 - Relationships can be a source of support for family rejection and discrimination (Rostosky & Riggle, 2017)

Romantic relationships: Context for resilience

- Being in a romantic relationship during adolescence and emerging adulthood was associated with
 - Lower levels of alcohol and drug use for sexual and gender minority youth and young adults (Whitton et al., 2018a)
 - Lower levels of distress for some sexual minority youth and young adults (Whitton et al., 2018b)
 - Higher levels of self esteem and lower levels of internalized homophobia (Bauermeister et al., 2010)

Romantic relationships: Context for resilience

- Like romantic relationships for adolescents in general, romantic relationships for sexual and gender minority youth occur within a broader ecological context
 - Parental acceptance is associated with better relationship quality among sexual minority youth (Starks et al., 2015)
 - Peer attachment is associated with longer romantic relationships among sexual minority youth (Starks et al., 2015)
 - Social support is associated with better relationship quality among sexual minority individuals (Rotosky & Riggle, 2017)

Romantic relationships: Context for resilience takeaways

- A romantic relationship is an important source of support for sexual minority young adults
- Being in a relationship is associated with lower levels of many negative health behaviors, and better mental health
- Romantic relationships for sexual minority young adults are shaped by their experiences in other relationships

Romantic relationships: A context
for risk

Romantic relationships: Contexts for risk

- The impact of the ecological context on relationship quality has serious consequences for the romantic relationships of sexual and gender youth(Rostosky & Riggle, 2017)
 - Discrimination is associated with lower relationship quality
 - Internalized homophobia is associated with lower relationship quality

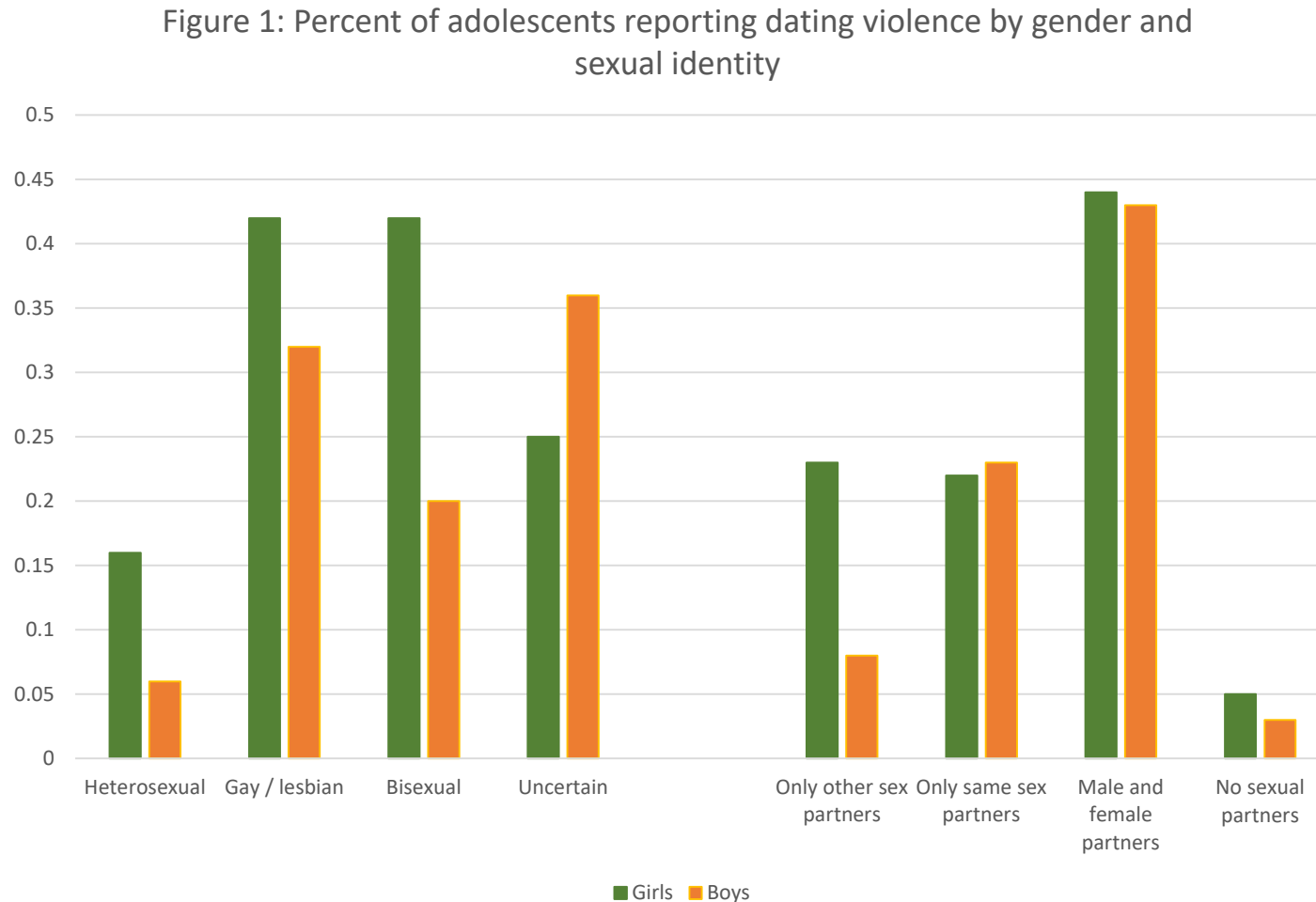
Dating violence: Definitions

- Dating violence: perpetration or threat of an act of violence occurring within a romantic or dating relationship (CDC, 2009)
 - Psychological or emotional
 - Verbal
 - Physical
 - Sexual

Romantic relationships: Contexts for risk

- Sexual and gender minority youth can also experience specific types of dating violence in their romantic relationships (Woulfe & Goodman, 2018)
 - Non-consensual disclosure of a partner's sexual or gender identity
 - Undermining or attacking a partner's sexual or gender identity
 - Isolating a partner from other members of the sexual or gender minority community
- The greater risk for dating violence may not entirely reflect greater vulnerability within same-sex relationships, especially for girls (Martin-Storey et al., 2020, Messinger, 2011)

- Sexual minority young adults report significantly higher rates of dating violence than their heterosexual peers starting during adolescence (Martin-Storey, 2015)



Romantic relationships: Contexts for risk

- Greater vulnerability to dating violence among sexual minority youth is explained by
 - Discrimination (Martin-Storey & Fromme, 2017)
 - Peer rejection and victimization (Edwards et al., 2015)
 - Poorer relationships with parents (Edwards et al., 2015)
 - Homelessness and housing insecurity (Edwards et al., 2015)
 - Internalized homophobia (Edwards & Sylaska, 2013)

Romantic relationships: Contexts for risk

- Transgender adolescents report significantly higher rates of dating violence than cisgender adolescents (Espelage et al., 2018; Martin-Storey et al., in press)
 - Gender minority youth report higher levels of many of the same ecological factors that predispose sexual minority youth to higher rates of dating violence (Hughto et al., 2015)
 - Peer victimisation
 - Parental rejection
 - Homelessness
 - Gender minority youth are less likely to report adolescent romantic relationships than cisgender youth (Bungener et al., 2017)

Romantic relationships: Contexts for risk

important takeaways

- Both sexual and gender minority youth are at increased risk for dating violence
- This risk varies within sexual and gender minority populations
- This elevated risk can be partially explained by the higher levels of environmental risk experienced by sexual and gender minority young adults

Sexual violence and sexual and
gender minority youth

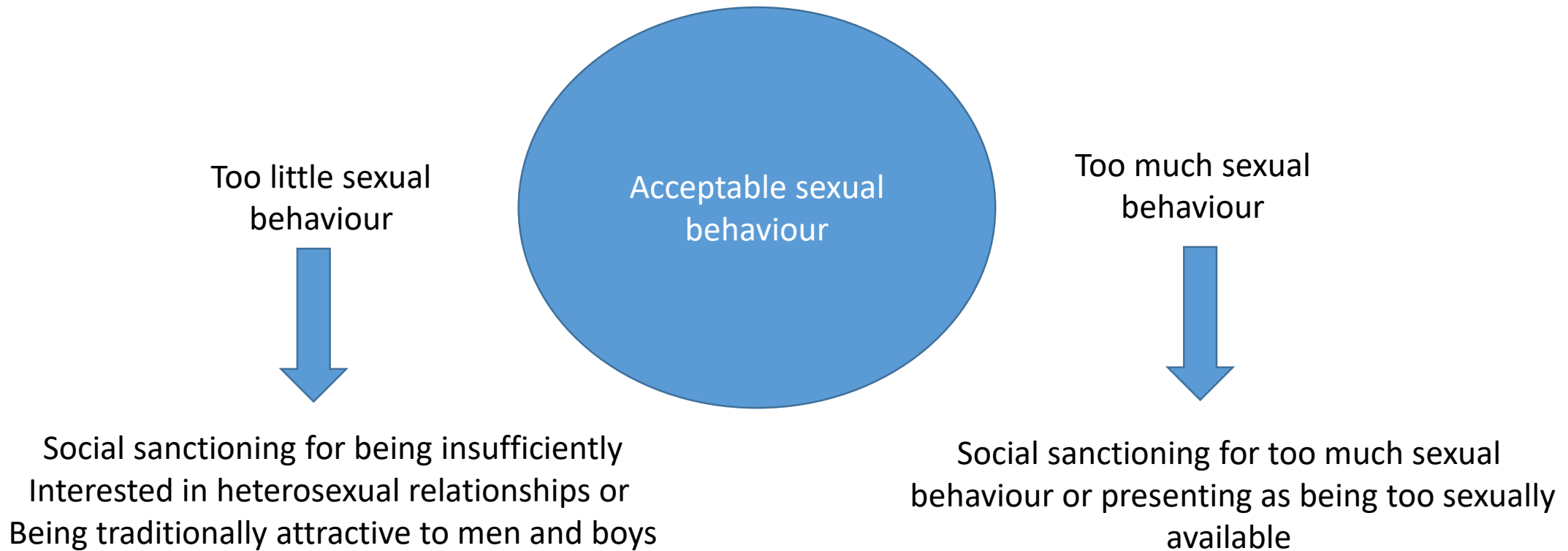
Definitions: Sexual violence

- Sexual violence is an umbrella term that reflects different concepts (Bergeron et al., 2016)
 - Sexual harassment
 - Unwanted sexual behavior
 - Sexual coercion

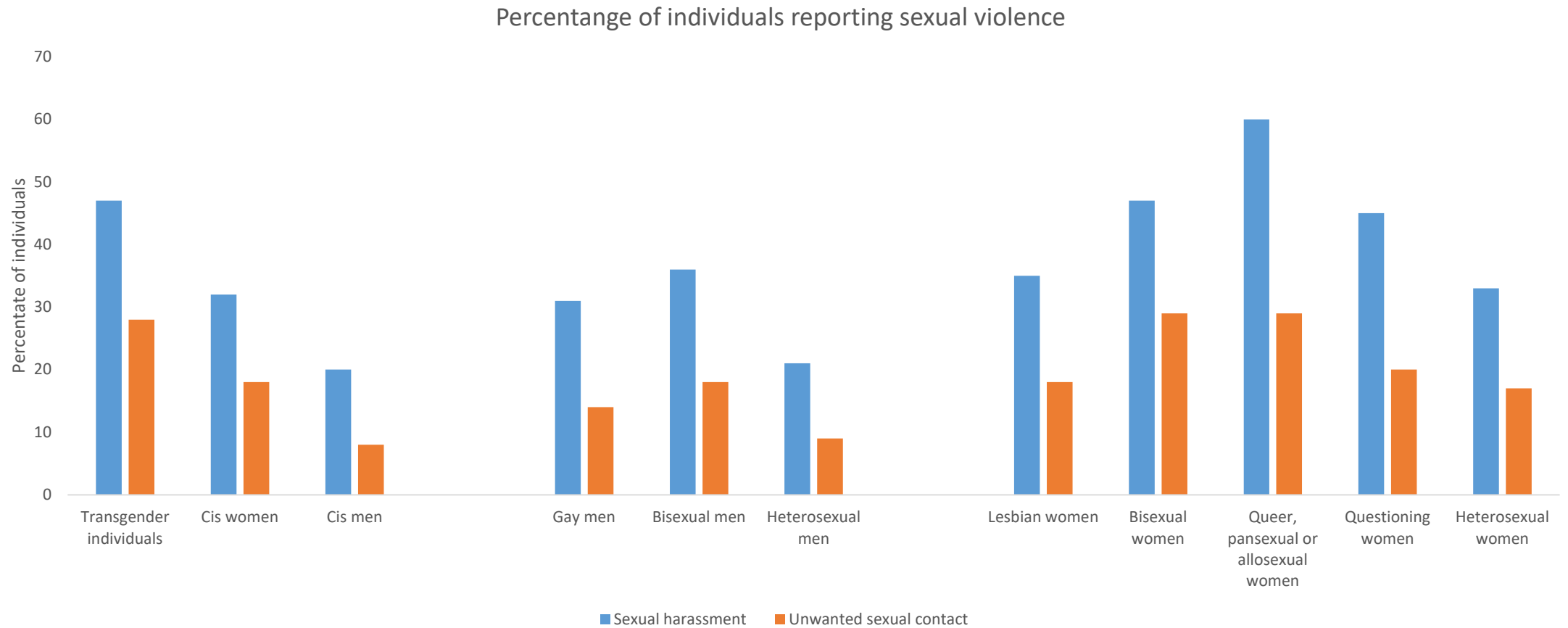
Definitions: Sexual violence

- Research has generally suggested higher levels of sexual violence among cisgender girls compared with cisgender boys
 - Higher levels of sexualization of girls compared to boys (APA, 2011)
 - Very little research on non-binary youth
- Sexual violence and the idea of the “charmed circle” (Bay-Cheng, 2015)

Definitions: Sexual violence



Sexual violence



Sexual violence

- Contexts of sexual violence for sexual and gender minority populations (Martin-Storey et al., in preparation)
 - Most sexual and gender minority victims report cisgender men as perpetrators
 - Their descriptions of sexual violence generally conforms to the types of sexual violence reported by heterosexual and cisgender women (unwanted comments, unwanted touching, etc)
 - Participants often reported homophobic and transphobic comments and behaviors as sexual violence

Sexual violence: Takeaways

- Sexual and gender minority individuals may be more likely to report sexual violence because of
 - Sexualisation of certain sexual minority groups (i.e., bisexual women) and the desexualisation of other groups (i.e., lesbian women)
 - Overlap between transphobia and homophobia and certain types of sexual violence
 - Overlap of dating violence and sexual violence

Barriers for help-seeking

Barriers for help seeking

- Sexual and gender minority young adults face significant barriers to help seeking (Scheer, Martin-Storey & Baams, 2020)
 - Barriers to informal help seeking
 - Barriers to formal help seeking

Barriers to help seeking

- What kinds of support do sexual and gender minority people want to address intimate partner violence? (Scheer & Baams, 2019)
 - Less than half of sexual and gender minority youth and young adults who experienced dating violence sought services
 - Of those who did
 - 2% sought housing support
 - 18% sought advocacy
 - 22% sought medical care
 - 38% sought mental health support
 - Youth and young adults were more comfortable seeking informal support compared to formal support

Barriers to help seeking: Takeaways

- Beyond the barriers to help seeking experienced by youth in general, sexual and gender minority youth experience additional barriers to help seeking
- A minority of sexual and gender minority youth seek support as a result of sexual violence experiences

Recommendations for Educators

Recommendations for educators: Things to know

1. Recognize vulnerability for dating and sexual violence among sexual and gender minority adolescents (i.e., avoid gender-based stereotypes around dating violence victimization and perpetration)
2. Identify the ecological factors that make sexual and gender minority adolescents more vulnerable to dating violence
3. Understand that romantic relationships may be an important context for support for sexual and gender minority youth
4. Contextualize the risk for dating violence among sexual and gender minority youth within their broader ecological framework

Recommendations for educators: Things to Know

5. Dating and sexual violence can be both similar and different for sexual and gender minority youth compared to their heterosexual peers

Love is respect: resources for sexual and gender minority youth

- Healthy relationships for sexual and gender minority youth
 - Respects your chosen gender pronouns or name.
 - Respects your boundaries.
 - Gives you space to hang out with friends and family without thinking you're cheating.
 - Doesn't take your money or tell you what to buy.
 - Never threatens to out you to people.
 - Never tells you you're not a real lesbian, gay man, trans person or whatever you identify as because you don't have sex the way they want you to.
- <https://www.loveisrespect.org/healthy-relationships/healthy-lgbtq-relationships/>

Recommendations for educators: Things to communicate

1. Be open about your level of expertise around sexual and gender minority issues
2. Let adolescents clarify how they define their sexual or gender identities
3. Avoid gendered language when discussing dating or sexual violence
4. When working with gender or sexual minority young adolescents, try to avoid assumptions about what kinds of relationships they have based on the labels they use

Recommendations for educators: Things to do

1. Be mindful of sexual and gender minority youths' experiences
 1. Avoid dated stereotypes around gender and gender roles
2. Choose materials and programming addressing sexual and dating violence that include gender and sexual minority youth, or modify programming to be inclusive of different genders and sexual identities (i.e., Safe Dates program)
3. Use visible symbols (i.e., pride flags) to indicate to youth that this is a space that is inclusive for sexual and gender minority students
4. Include examples of sexual and gender minority youth when discussing issues such as consent and dating violence as part of the school curriculum

Conclusions

- Romantic relationships are an important developmental milestone during adolescence
- These relationships are contexts of risk and resilience for sexual and gender minority youth
- Sexual and gender minority individuals experience specific barriers to service usage for sexual and dating violence
- Supportive relationships with adults in the school environment are extremely important for sexual and gender minority youth

Additional resources: Dating violence

- Love is respect
 - Provides information and support about dating and sexual violence among sexual and gender minority individuals
 - <https://www.loveisrespect.org/healthy-relationships/healthy-lgbtq-relationships/>
- VAWnet
 - Provides information and support about dating and sexual violence among sexual and dating violence for sexual and gender minority individuals
 - Provides resources for service providers addressing dating violence among sexual and gender minority populations
 - <https://vawnet.org/sc/improving-services-lgbtq-individuals>

Additional resources: Sexual and gender minority youth

- GLSEN: Educator resources for sexual and gender minority youth
 - <https://www.glsen.org/resources/educator-resources>
- GSAnetwork: A website for developing a GSA at your school
 - <https://gsanetwork.org/>
- Youth line: A place where LGBT youth can call for support
 - <https://www.youthline.ca/>