

# Acceptance Matters but That's Not All: Managing Suicide Risk in Sexual and Gender Minority Youth

Raymond P. Tucker

Mira Krishnan



# Who We Are

## Ray

- Suicidologist and clinical psychologist
  - Not an expert in gender or sexuality studies/health disparities/healthcare policy
- Ally with little lived experience
  - Cisgender man, straight, White, and able bodied
- Concerned academician living in the deep south

## Mira

- Neuropsychologist and former director over residential services
  - LGBTQIA+ professional education for the past ~6 years
- Lived experience (came out as an adult)
- Focused on spurring national best practices based on youth experience and scientific literature

# Language

- **Sexual and gender minority**
  - **Inclusive term to encapsulate**
    - **Lesbian, gay, bisexual (LGB) sexual orientation**
    - **Questioning/unsure sexual orientation**
    - **Intersex sex assigned at birth**
    - **Transgender or gender diverse gender identity**
    - **Non-binary gender identity**

# Scope of Suicide in LGBT Youth

- We really do not know...
- Sexual orientation and gender minority status are not reported as part of death records



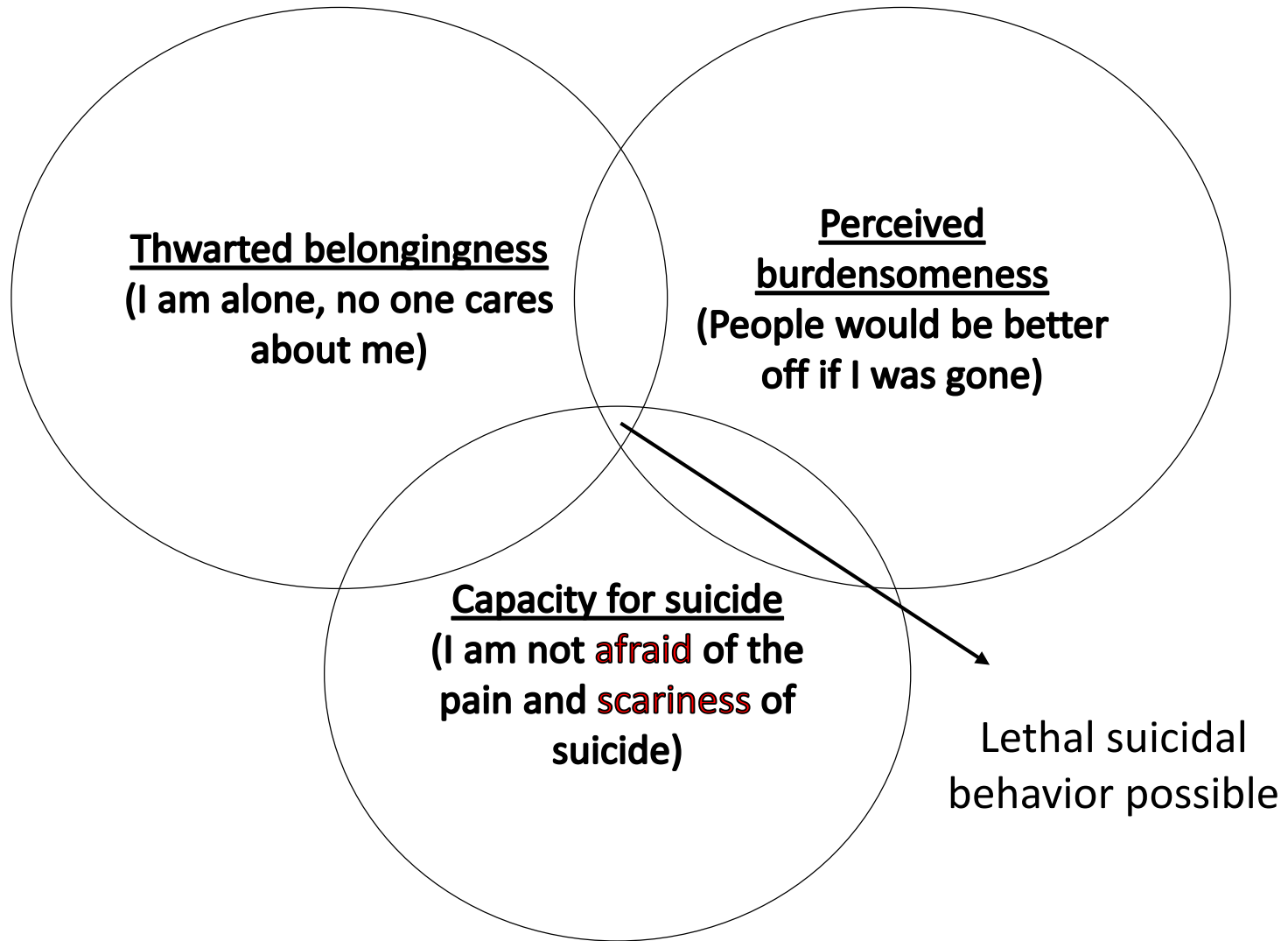
# Compared to sexual majority youth

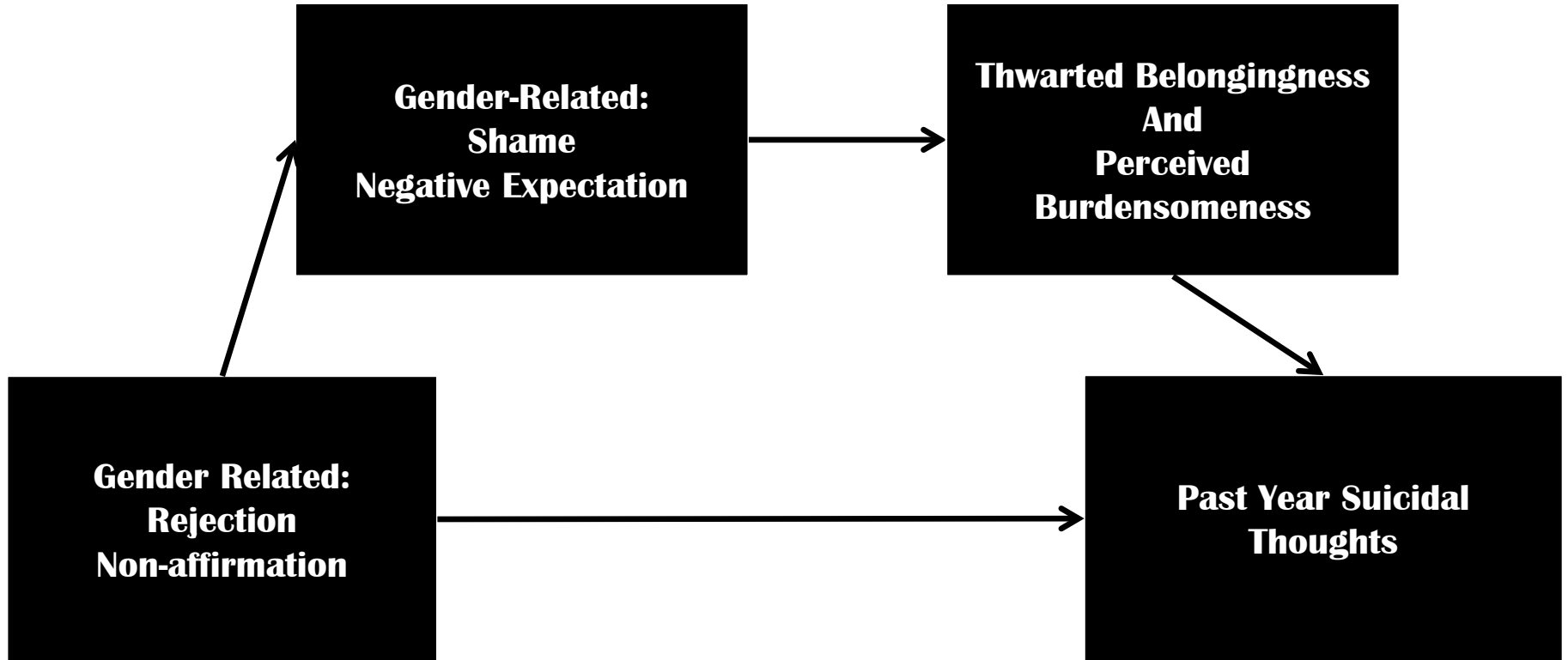
- 3x more likely to have suicidal thoughts at any given time
- 5x more likely to have attempted suicide
  - Also 4-6x more likely for suicide attempts to need medical care
- Family affirmation is important
  - LGB youth who rate their family as affirming their sexual orientation were over 8x less likely to report attempting suicide.
- But not the only factor
  - family support only brings suicide attempt rate in LGB youth to be roughly equal with sexual majority youth.

# Compared to gender majority youth

- Male gender expression = 6x more likely to have attempted suicide (over 50%)
- Female gender expression = 3.75x more likely to have attempted suicide
- Non-binary expression = 5.25x more likely to have attempted suicide
- Rates of suicidal thinking are as high as 60-70% in gender minority 18-24 year olds

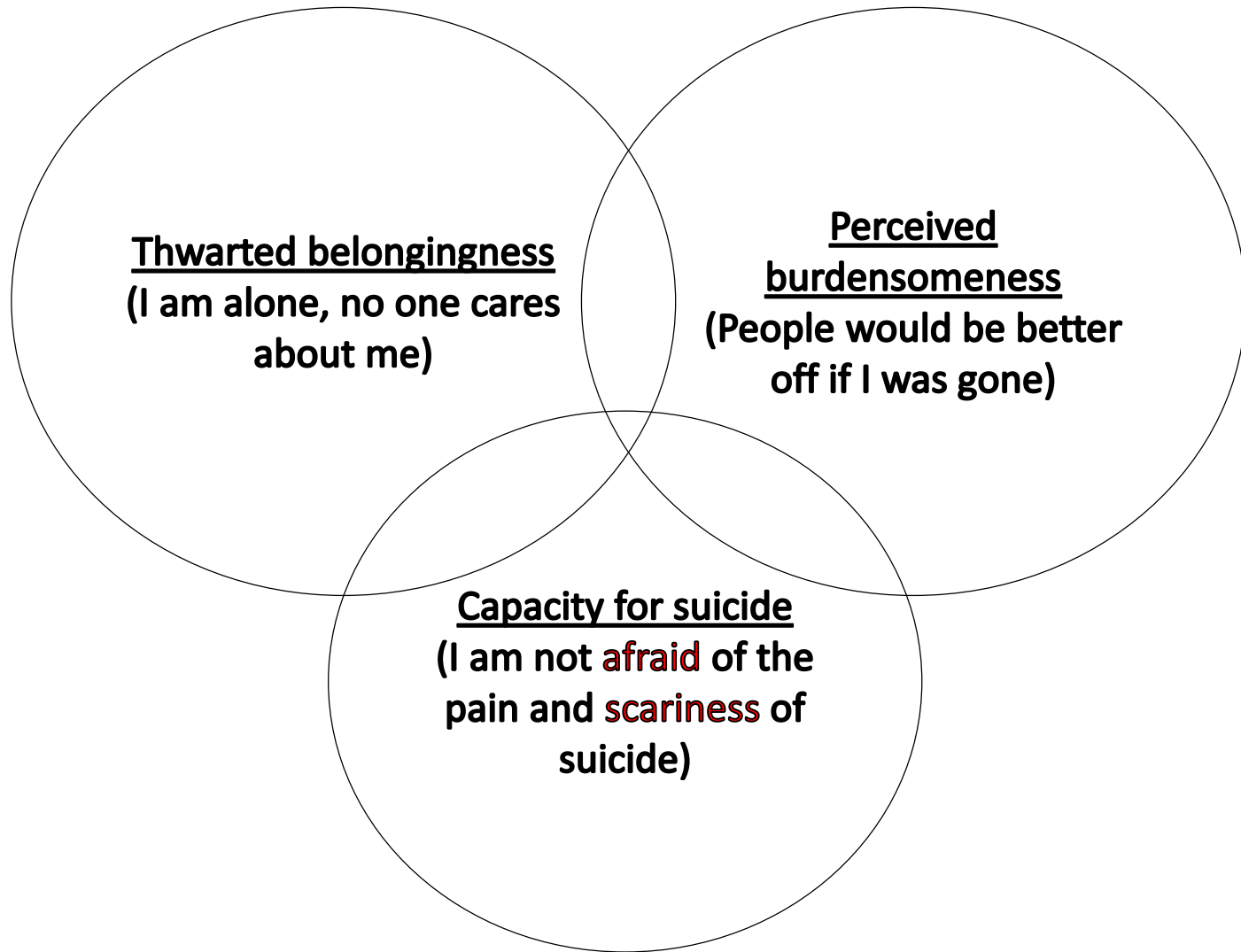
# Interpersonal Theory of Suicide







# Interpersonal Theory of Suicide

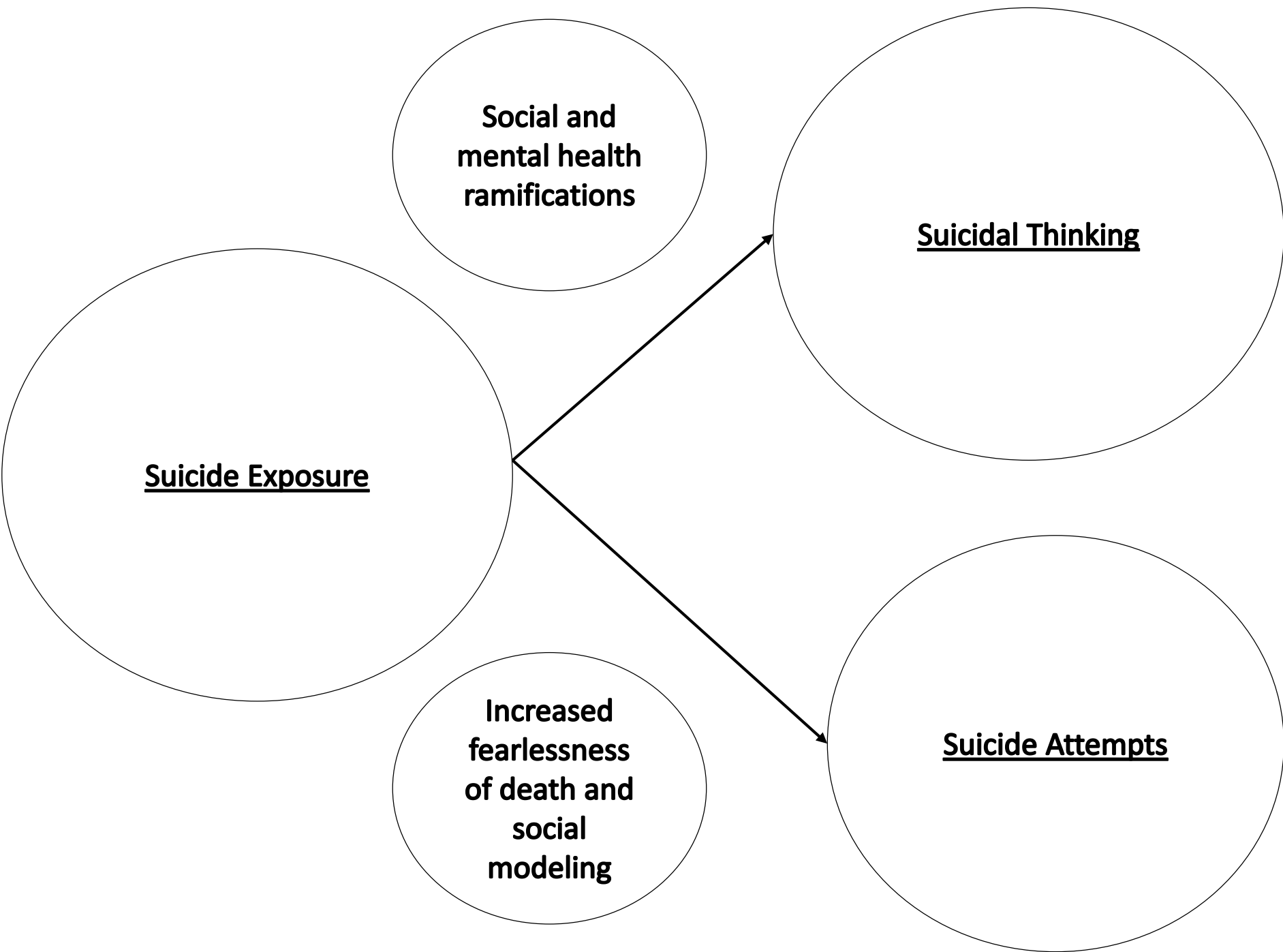


# We know little about

- Rates of firearms in homes of LGBT Youth
- Suicide attempts that lead to death
  - Firearms = 85-95%
  - All other methods = less than 5%
- Key prevention point
  - Stored securely
  - Temporary removal when needed

# We do know...

- **LGBT Youth experience increased exposure to painful and provocative events**
  - Physical abuse
  - Sexual abuse
- **Painful and provocative event exposure is at the core of capability for suicide**



**Suicide Exposure**

**Social and  
mental health  
ramifications**

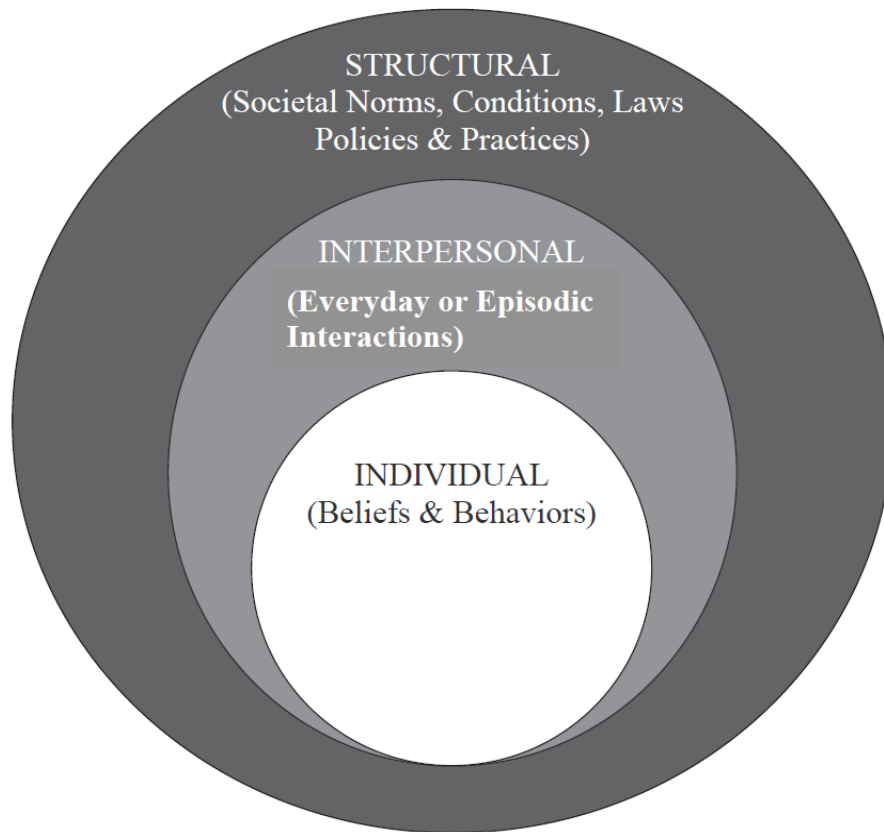
**Suicidal Thinking**

**Increased  
fearlessness  
of death and  
social  
modeling**

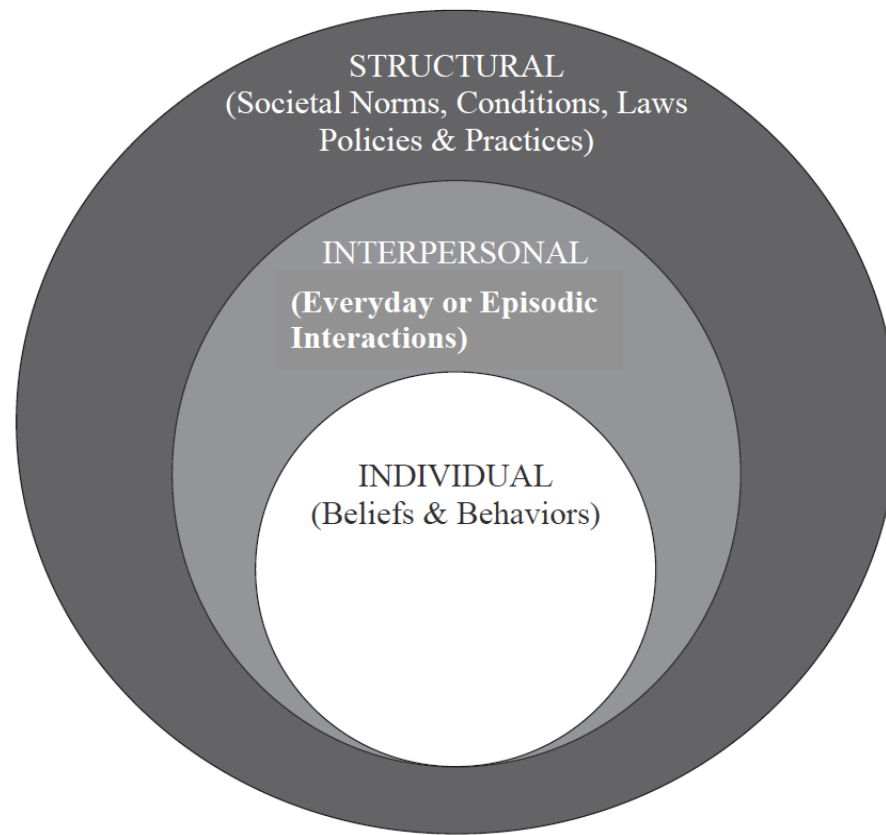
**Suicide Attempts**

# Where all these models and ideas go wrong?

- The sexual and/or minority youth is at the heart of the model



**Fig. 1.** Modified Social-ecological model of transgender stigma & stigma interventions.



### **Structural**

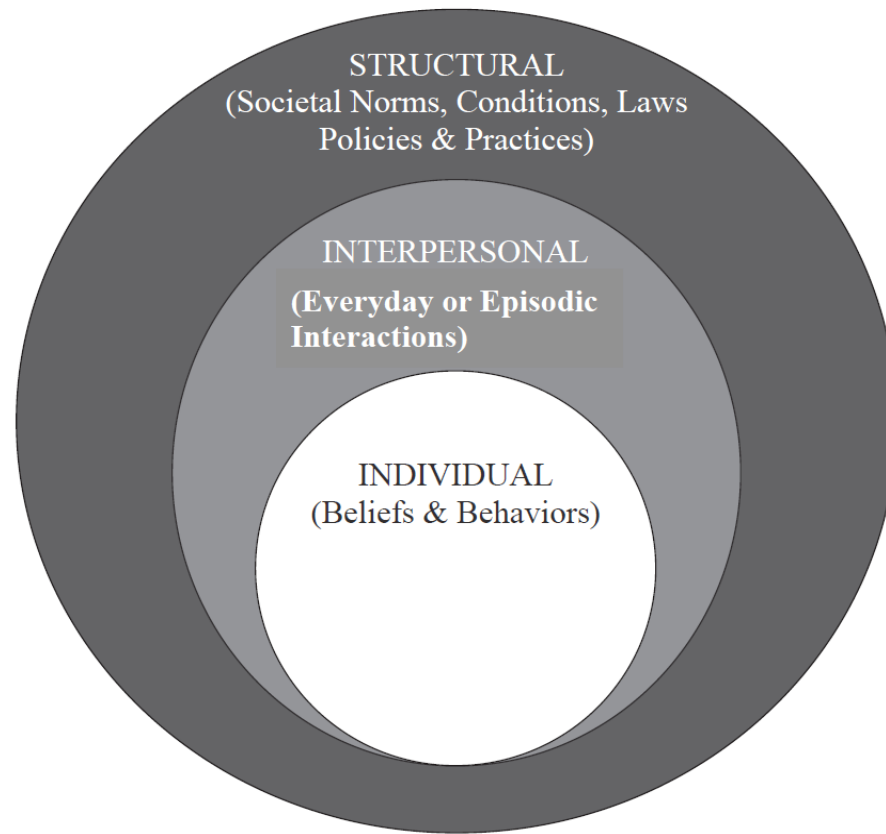
#### Types of Stigma

- Gender conformity to natal sex norms
- Stigmatizing policies and enforcement practices
- Lack of provider training and education
- Healthcare access barriers
- Economic inequality
- Gender inequality

#### Interventions

- Non-discrimination policies
- Access to care policies
- Transgender health content in medical school curricula

**Fig. 1.** Modified Social-ecological model of transgender stigma & stigma interventions.



**Interpersonal**

Types of Stigma

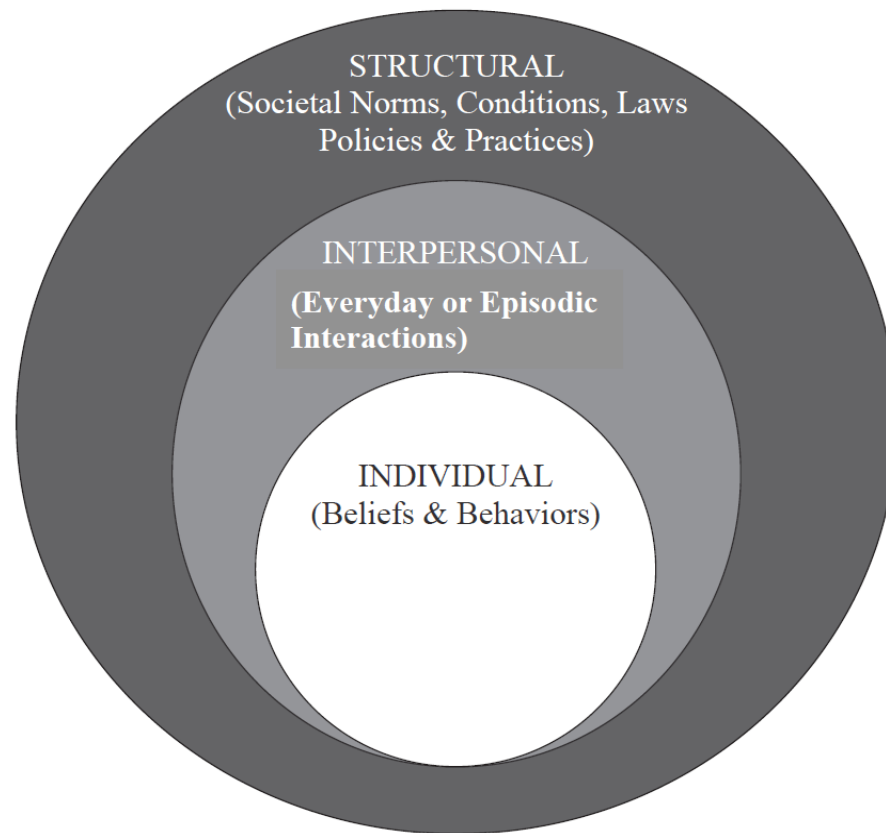
- Healthcare discrimination
- Workplace discrimination
- Family rejection
- Hate crimes
- Sexual assault
- Physical assault

Interventions

- Family/partner support groups
- Healthcare provider trainings
- Intergroup contact

**Fig. 1.** Modified Social-ecological model of transgender stigma & stigma interventions.





### **Individual**

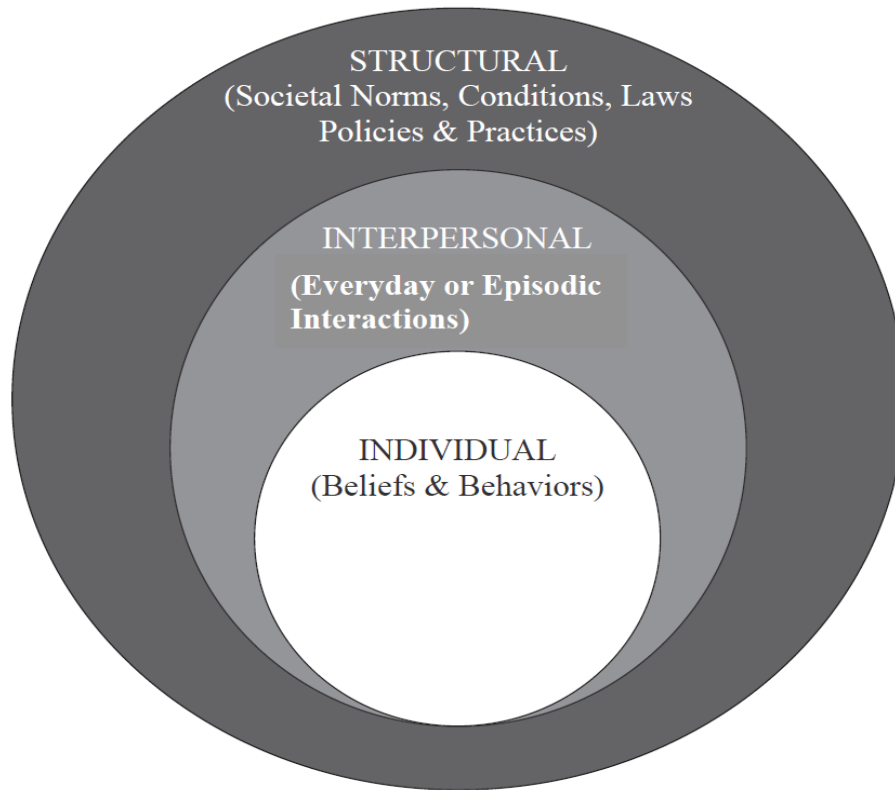
#### Types of Stigma

- Concealment of stigma
- Avoidance of stigma
- Internalization of stigma

#### Interventions

- Counseling/therapy
- Self-affirmation
- Transgender support groups
- Collective activism

**Fig. 1.** Modified Social-ecological model of transgender stigma & stigma interventions.



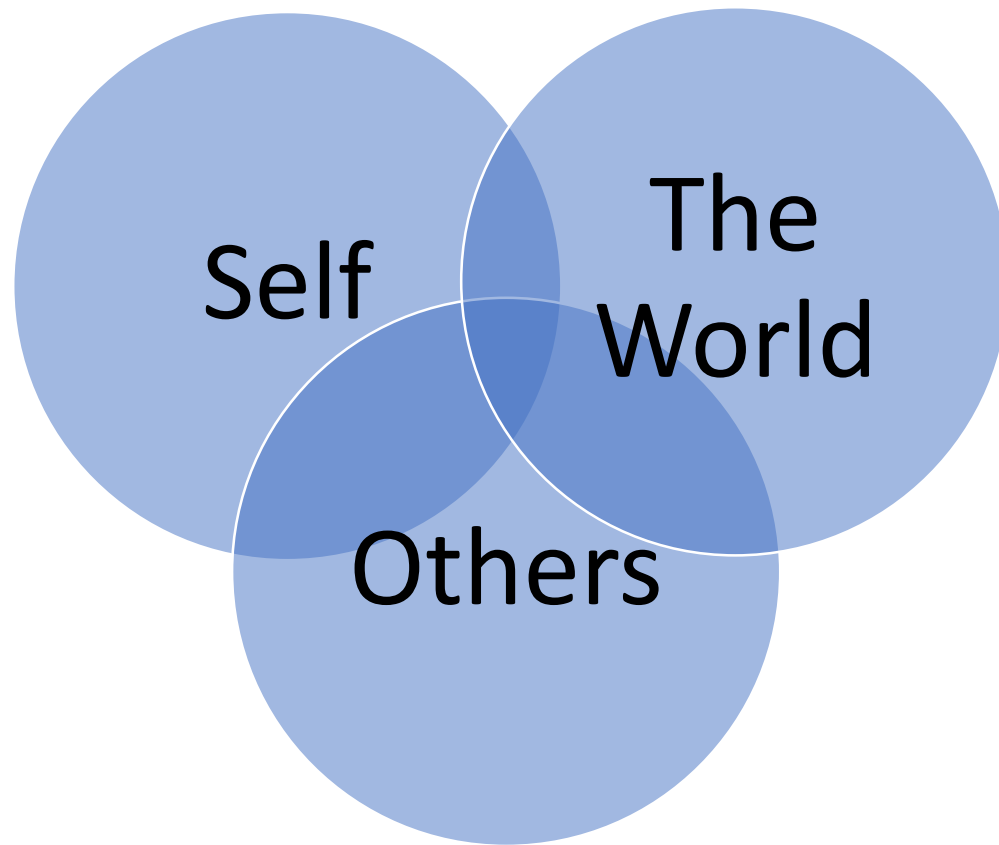
**What can your residential services do at each level to reduce suicide risk?**

# LGBTQIA+ suicidality is an international problem

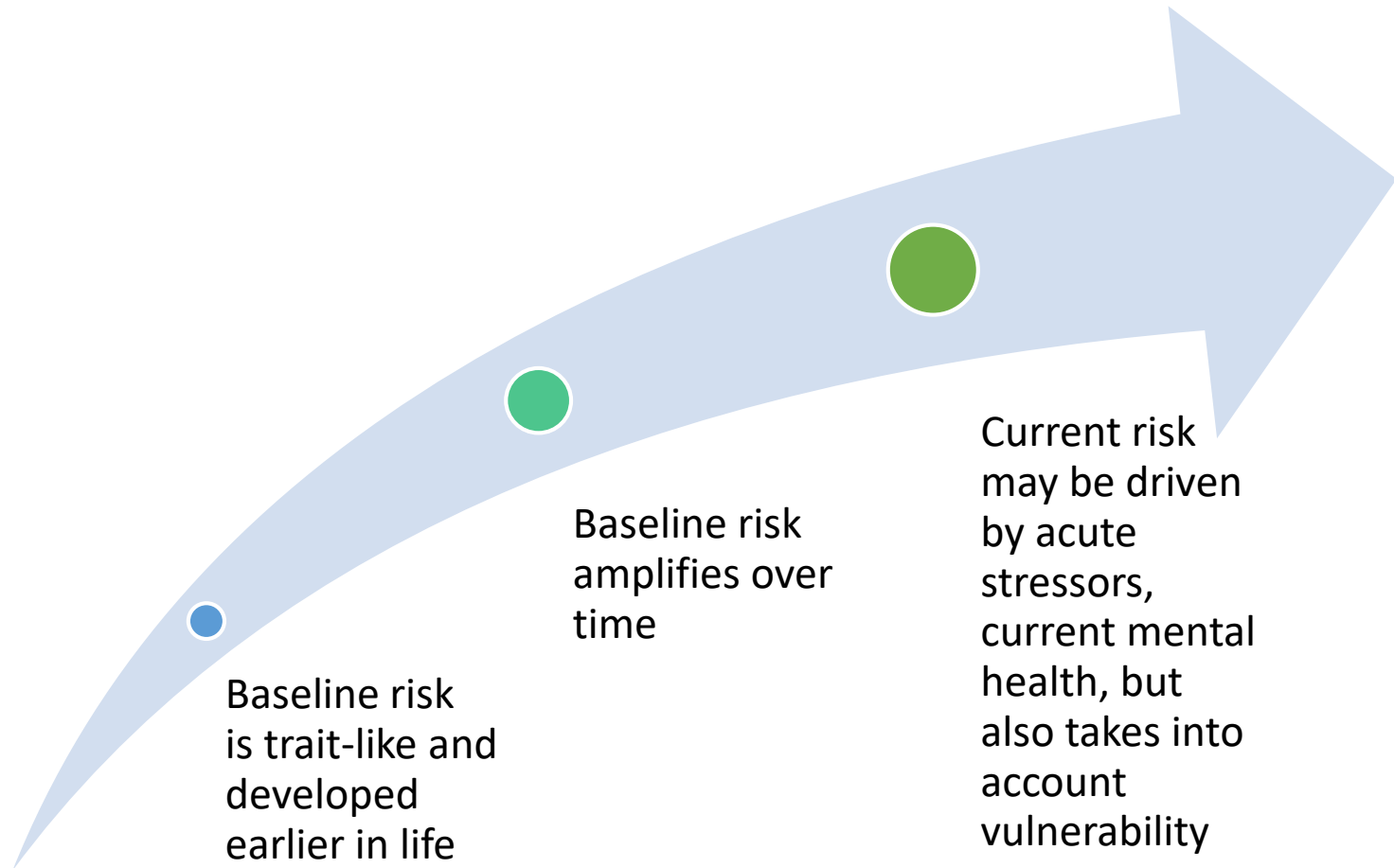
(Virupaksha, 2016 data on trans people)

	Rate of Attempts
United States	41%
India	50% by age 20
San Francisco	32%, 50% of those <25yo
Australia	50%
UK	48% among youth

**The suicide triad builds on work in cognitive therapy – it extends tools you already have**



# Suicidality may build on long-standing vulnerability



# Critical developmental experiences may be crucial

Recent  
discrimination or  
concealment  
pressures

Recent suicidality



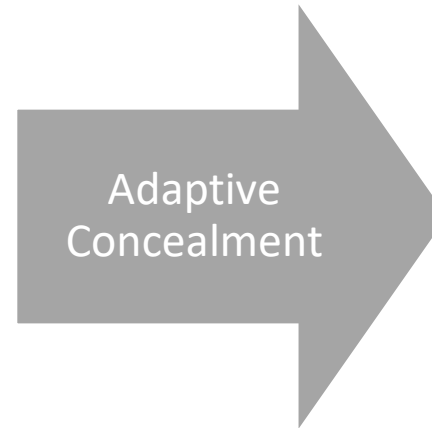
Critical  
developmental  
shame/pressure to  
conceal

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graph TD; A[Recent discrimination or concealment pressures] --> C[Critical developmental shame/pressure to conceal]; B[Recent suicidality] --> C;
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# Youth choices must be contextualized



- Fear of mistreatment or violence
- Shame or self-loathing
- Self-consciousness



- Affirmation of true gender
- Concealment of gender history

Rood, 2017

# Studies on trans young adults

- Seelman (2016) and Rankin (2010) look at a subset sample of ~5000 trans college students
- Negative bathroom experiences
  - Being questioned about using gendered bathrooms
  - Being stared at
  - Being denied access or told to leave
- Those most likely to have these experiences
  - People of color
  - With disabilities
  - Lived in rural areas
  - More commonly perceived as transgender
  - Trans women more than other trans groups



**Table 1.** Sample descriptive statistics ( $N = 2,325$ ).

Characteristic	Descriptive Statistics	Characteristic	Descriptive Statistics
Race/ethnicity		Annual Household Income	
<i>White</i>	73.3%	<\$10K	18.6%
<i>Multiracial/Mixed race</i>	16.4%	\$10K-\$29,999	27.5%
<i>Black/African American</i>	3.7%	\$30K-\$49,999	21.0%
<i>Asian/Pacific Islander</i>	2.6%	\$50K-\$69,999	12.7%
<i>Hispanic/Latino(a)</i>	2.5%	\$70K-\$89,999	8.4%
<i>Other</i>	1.4%	\$90K & above	11.8%
Age		Has a physical disability	
<i>M</i>	31.02		16.3%
<i>(SD)</i>	(10.32)	Has a learning disability	9.2%
<i>Median</i>	27	Has a mental disability (other than gender-related mental health diagnosis)	23.5%
<i>Range</i>	18 - 76	Denied access to bathrooms	
Current gender identity			24.9%
<i>FTM transgender</i>	43.7%	Denied access to gender-appropriate campus housing	20.8%
<i>MTF transgender</i>	30.9%	Interpersonal victimization in college or grad school	
<i>F-to-other/gnc/part-time</i>	16.6%	<i>From students</i>	30.2%
<i>M-to-other/gnc/part-time</i>	2.2%	<i>From teachers/staff</i>	13.8%
<i>F-to-crossdress male</i>	4.7%	Suicide attempt	
<i>M-to-crossdress female</i>	1.9%		46.5%
Educational Attainment			
<i>Some college</i>	35.4%		
<i>Tech school/Assoc. degree</i>	11.7%		
<i>Bachelor's degree</i>	33.7%		
<i>Some grad school or above</i>	19.3%		

Note. Some percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

**Table 2.** Lifetime suicide attempt prevalence by demographic characteristics, access to campus spaces, and interpersonal victimization.

Characteristic	Suicide attempt (n = 1,077), No. (%)	No suicide attempt (n = 1,239), No. (%)
Race/ethnicity		
<i>Person of color</i>	312 (51.1%)	299 (48.9%)
<i>White</i>	748 (44.4%)	935 (55.6%)
Annual Income		
<i>Less than \$30,000</i>	554 (53.1%)	489 (46.9%)
<i>\$30,000 and up</i>	498 (40.7%)	725 (59.3%)
Physical Disability		
<i>Yes</i>	224 (59.1%)	155 (40.9%)
<i>No</i>	853 (44.0%)	1084 (56.0%)
Learning Disability		
<i>Yes</i>	124 (58.2%)	89 (41.8%)
<i>No</i>	953 (45.3%)	1150 (54.7%)
Mental Disability		
<i>Yes</i>	368 (67.5%)	177 (32.5%)
<i>No</i>	709 (40.0%)	1062 (60.0%)
Bathrooms/Facilities <sup>a</sup>		
<i>Denied access</i>	257 (60.5%)	168 (39.5%)
<i>Not denied</i>	553 (43.2%)	728 (56.8%)
Gender-Appropriate Campus Housing <sup>a</sup>		
<i>Denied housing</i>	166 (60.6%)	108 (39.4%)
<i>Not denied</i>	438 (41.8%)	611 (58.2%)
Victimization by college students		
<i>Yes</i>	385 (55.1%)	314 (44.9%)
<i>No</i>	692 (42.8%)	925 (57.2%)
Victimization by college teachers/staff		
<i>Yes</i>	190 (59.0%)	132 (41.0%)
<i>No</i>	887 (44.5%)	1107 (55.5%)

<sup>a</sup>The frequencies for denial of access to bathrooms/facilities and campus housing displayed here do not include those who responded "Not applicable."

# Families matter (NPR & FAP)

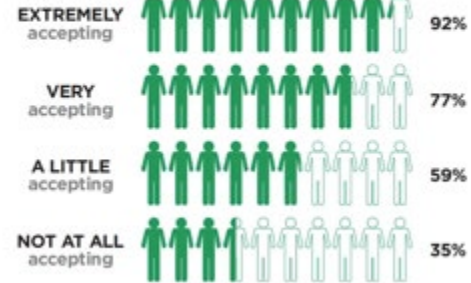
## Lifetime Suicide Attempts for Highly Rejected LGBT Young People

(One or more times)



## Youth Believe They Can Be A Happy LGBT Adult

Level of Family Acceptance



Ryan, Family Acceptance Project, 2009

# Questions?

