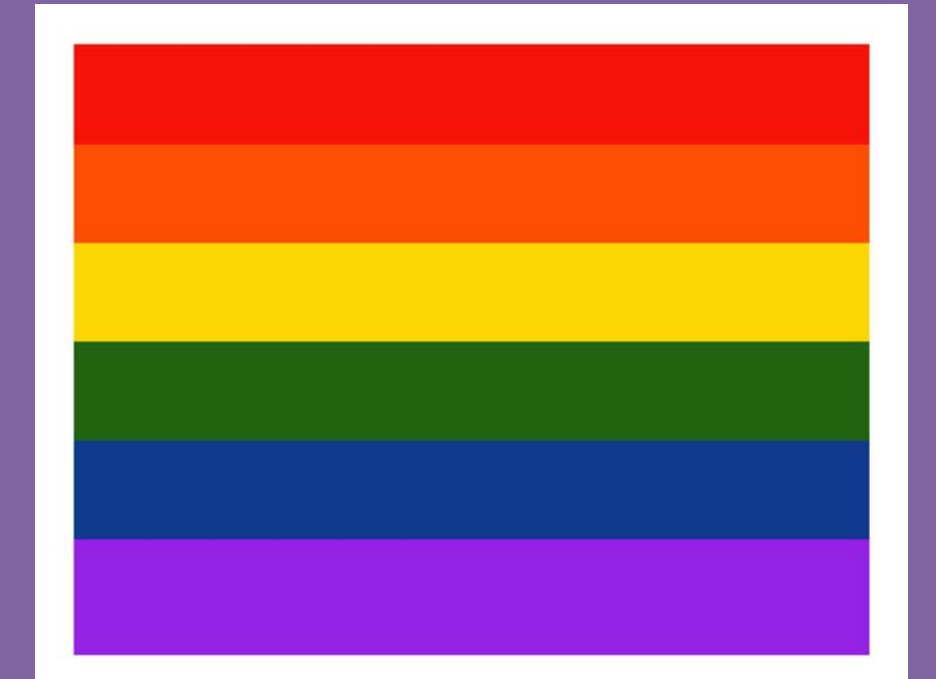


Risk and Resilience in LGBTQ Youth: A Critical Review of the Suicide and Self-Injury Literature

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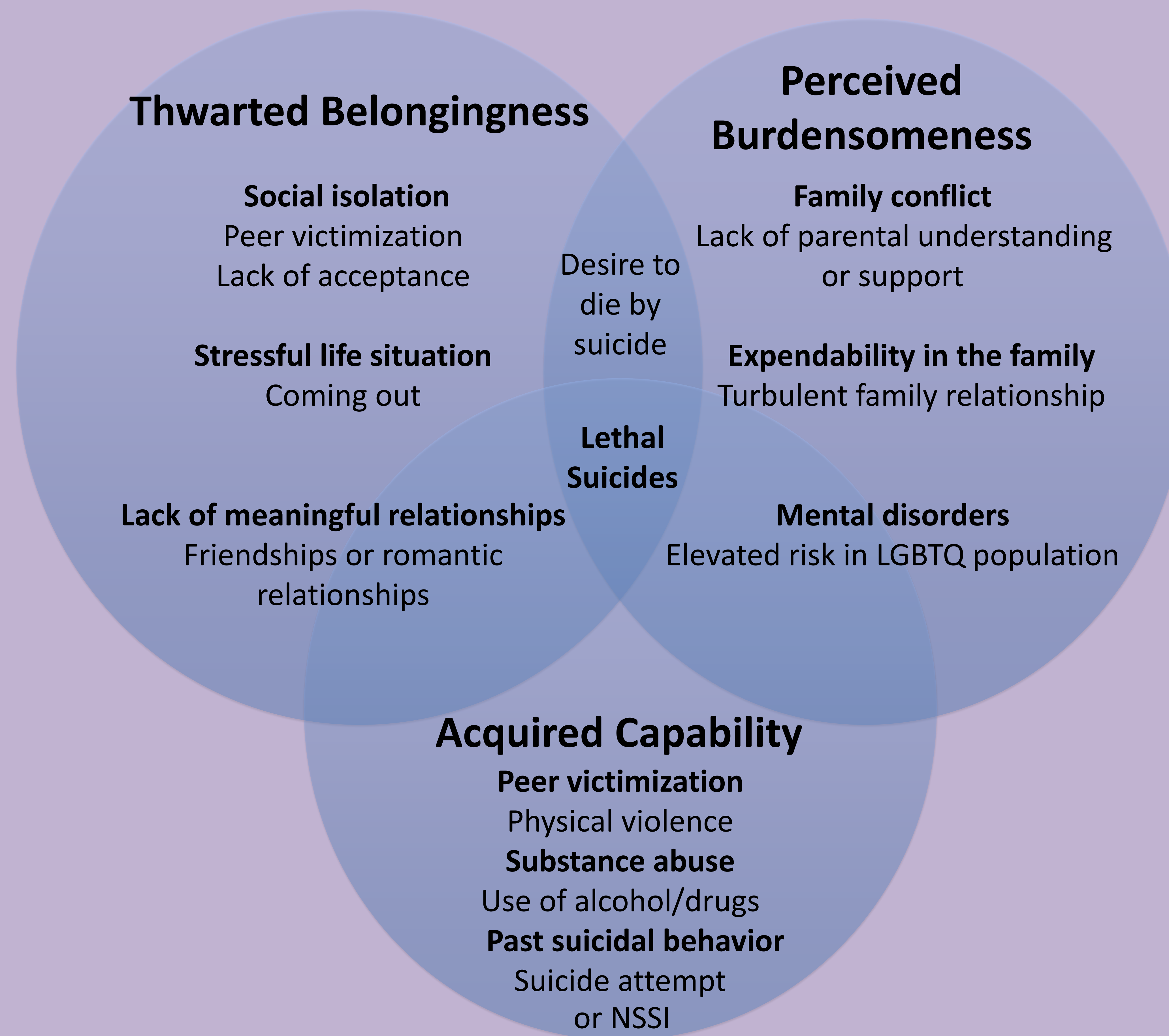
Background

- Self-injury and suicide have been found to be prevalent in adolescent populations (e.g., Jacobson & Gould, 2007).
- At increased risk within these populations are youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer/questioning, or LGBTQ (e.g., Deliberto & Nock, 2008).
- According to Thomas Joiner's Interpersonal Theory of Suicide (2005), individuals must experience both the desire and the capability to die by suicide for a lethal or near-lethal suicidal act to occur.
- LGBTQ teens are at risk of experiencing feelings of thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness, which contribute to the desire to die by suicide.

Acquired Capability

- Peer Victimization—physical aggression or violence toward LGBTQ teens is estimated at 1.7 times higher than heterosexual peers (Friedman et al., 2011).
- Substance Abuse—LGBTQ youth are more likely than heterosexual peers to use alcohol and drugs (e.g., Poteat et al., 2009).
- Past Suicidal Behavior—history of suicide attempts or non-suicidal self-injury is a known risk factor for suicide (e.g., Nock & Banaji, 2007).
- These risk factors may lead to an increased tolerance for pain, as well as a decreased fear of death, as habituation to dangerous situations occurs (Joiner, 2005).

Interpersonal Theory of Suicide (Joiner, 2005)



Resilience & Suggestions for Prevention

- While LGBTQ youth are at an elevated risk for dangerous behavior, peer victimization, and mental health issues, these experiences are not ubiquitous. Promoting the importance and development of peer relationships and strong family support may decrease the risk of suicidal thoughts or behaviors for LGBTQ teens. Having good parental support and a close social network and serve as a protective buffer to difficulties in school, as well as family conflict (Espelage et al., 2008).
- LGBTQ teens report having longer, more stable relationships than their heterosexual peers (Goldfried & Bell, 2003). Tapping into these and other factors that promote resilience can help LGBTQ teens through this difficult period.
- When Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) is implemented in high schools and middle schools, LGBTQ teens more frequently report feeling part of the school community and feel less discrimination than teens in schools without these types of programs. GSA programs should be more closely studied to determine what it is about these programs that works, and these programs should then be implemented in more schools (Walls et al., 2010).

Thwarted Belongingness

- Social Isolation—LGBTQ teens report higher levels of peer victimization compared to heterosexual teens (e.g., Almeida et al., 2009)
- Stressful Life Situation—Coming out for LGBTQ teens is an important step, but can also cause intense stress and family conflict (LaSala, 2000).
- Lack of Meaningful Relationships—LGBTQ teens may have difficulty finding or expressing romantic relationships, because of marginalized status (Bauermeister et al., 2010).

Perceived Burdensomeness

- Family Conflict—Teens who report having a turbulent relationship with family members regarding their sexual orientation are likely to experience higher levels of conflict (Espelage et al., 2008).
- Mental disorders—LGBTQ teens are at a higher risk for psychological distress and mental disorders, which may contribute to the risk of suicide and self-injury (Mustanski et al., 2010)
- Expendability in the Family—Sabbath (1969) proposed that adolescents may feel that their presence in the family is expendable, and that they won't be missed. LGBTQ teens with history of family conflict and isolation may feel that their presence in the family is expendable.

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