

**QUESTIONING AND SEXUAL MINORITY
ADOLESCENTS: HIGH SCHOOL
EXPERIENCES OF BULLYING, SEXUAL
HARASSMENT AND PHYSICAL ABUSE**

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ABSTRACT

Using a subset of youth from a sample of 3,636 Canadian adolescents, the present study examined sexual orientation and victimization experiences in high school. A total of 130 adolescents indicated they were gay, lesbian, bisexual, or questioning their sexual orientation. Significantly more adolescents identified as bisexual ($N = 50$) or questioning ($N = 68$) than as gay or lesbian ($N = 12$). Sexual-minority and questioning youth were more likely than heterosexual youth to be victims of bullying, peer sexual harassment, and peer or dating-partner physical abuse. Implications of victimization on questioning and sexual-minority adolescents' mental health are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Issues around sexual orientation commonly arise during adolescence. It is estimated that as many as 10% of youth experience uncertainty about their sexual orientation and approximately 2% identify as a sexual minority (i.e., youths who identify as or believe themselves to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual) (Sturdevant & Remafedi, 1992). In addition to dealing with emerging sexuality issues during adolescence, past studies also confirm that sexual-minority youth are more likely than heterosexual youths to experience physical and verbal harassment (Garofalo, Wolf, Kessel, Palfrey, & Durant, 1998; Savin-Williams, 1994, 2001). These negative experiences for sexual-minority youth have been associated with numerous mental health difficulties (Safren & Heimberg, 1999). The prevention of such difficulties in sexual-minority adolescents, therefore, requires an understanding of the contextual risk factors these youth face in their high school contexts. One challenge to this research is to appreciate the emerging quality of sexual orientation in adolescence. Most research focuses on a pre-defined sexual-minority status, yet many adolescents are simply questioning their sexual orientation. Youth questioning their sexual orientation may be as vulnerable as sexual-minority youth to victimization by peers. It is therefore important to understand the developmental course of youths who question their sexual orientation, or who are adopting a non-heterosexual identity. The current study examines how adolescents describe their sexual orientation, and whether non-heterosexual adolescents—either questioning or sexual-minority adolescents—are at risk for bullying, physical attacks, and sexual harassment in their high school environments.

Large-scale studies indicate that between 1% and 3% of adolescents self-identify as gay male, lesbian, or bisexual (Garofalo et al., 1998; Remafedi, Resnick, Blum, & Harris, 1992). These studies typically have not included the option of describing one's sexuality as unsure or questioning. Yet adolescence is a developmental period in which questioning one's place along the sexuality spectrum typically occurs. As the sexual aspect of the "self" emerges and becomes increasingly more central to identity, questions of non-heterosexuality may surface and become a predominant focus of adolescents who question their own sexuality (Patterson, 1995). When asked whether they have questions about their sexual orientation, as many as 10% of adolescents have reported being unsure (Garofalo et al., 1998). Consistent with this tendency, retrospective accounts of "out" (i.e., openly self-identified gay male, lesbian, or bisexual) adults suggest that uncertainty about sexual orientation and same-gender attraction in adolescence gradually gives way to heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual identification with the passage of time and increased sexual experience (Remafedi et al., 1992).

In accordance with identity theory, adolescents are proposed to fall into one of four identity statuses: identity diffused, foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achieved (Erikson, 1950; Marcia, 1966). These statuses are a function of exploration and commitment, with the absence of crisis and commitment to an identity reflecting identity diffusion or confusion, and resolved crisis and commitment reflecting identity achievement. Moratorium status involves a struggle with identity for adolescents who have not yet made an identity commitment. This period of development may be reflected in the confusion or questioning that a sizeable minority of adolescents report regarding their sexual orientation. In the current social and political milieu, as an adolescent approaches adulthood, he or she may feel compelled to choose a single identity in order to find a community in which he or she can find a sense of belonging.

Despite this fluidity of adolescent sexual orientation, there has been little effort to identify questioning adolescents and to describe their high school experiences along with the experiences of those who express a lesbian, gay male, or bisexual orientation. In the present study we ask adolescents to describe their sexual orientation and allow them to express its emerging nature. Among the few studies that include information on sexual identity, youth who self-identify as bisexual, unlabelled, and questioning are more frequent in samples than are gay- or lesbian-identified youth (Garofalo et al., 1998; Remafedi, 1998; Lock & Steiner, 1999). We subsequently hypothesize that many non-heterosexual youth, when given the option, may identify themselves within the more transitional category of questioning, as they may not be ready to identify themselves conclusively as either gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Unfortunately, the developmental experience of emerging sexuality often parallels the contextual risks of physical and verbal harassment for sexual-minority adolescents. For this reason, in this study we examine the victimization associated with adolescent sexual-minority orientation from a developmental-contextual perspective. Developmental contextualism suggests that developmentally salient issues, such as adolescent sexuality, must be viewed within the contexts of societal values and expectations (Lerner & Simi, 2000). During the emergence of sexual orientation self-identification during adolescence, the peer context becomes increasingly central (Brown, 1999). Friends and peer groups play important roles in the lives of adolescents, allowing for adoption of more adult-like roles. Additionally, romantic relationships emerge within these contexts and dating becomes a common social

experience at this time (Connolly, Furman, & Konarski, 2000). We propose that, to understand the health risks of non-heterosexual adolescents, a better awareness of the contextual risks present in these social environments is needed.

Patterson (1995) describes the context in which questioning and sexual-minority youths develop as one of widespread prejudice and discrimination. Adolescents who are questioning their sexual orientation, or who self-identify as gay male, lesbian, or bisexual, in a predominantly heterosexual peer context may be perceived as different—a perception which can provide the basis for harassment and victimization within the peer milieu. Victimization within the peer environment—either bullying, physical abuse, or sexual harassment—is clearly a negative experience and constitutes a risk factor for poor emotional and behavioural adjustment.

American studies of sexual-minority adolescents indicate that they are, indeed, more likely than their heterosexual peers to be victimized and threatened by their peers. In a large, representative high school-based sample of adolescents, sexual-minority youths were more likely than their peers to report being physically threatened, injured with a weapon, and fearful of attending school, and having had property stolen or deliberately damaged by peers (Garofalo et al., 1998). Sexual harassment also has been reported as a significant problem. Among sexual-minority adolescents recruited from centres serving gay and lesbian youth, 70% reported some sort of harassment (Telljohann & Price, 1993). Girls reported being subjected to rude comments, discrimination, profanities written on lockers, and threats from students' parents. Boys reported that they were the recipients of bashing threats and that peers were always putting gays down (Telljohann & Price, 1993). More recently, a survey of 350 sexual-minority youths found over half the adolescents reported verbal abuse in high school because of their sexual orientation, and 11% said they had been physically assaulted (D'Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002). Although victimization experiences have not been studied among sexually questioning adolescents, it is anticipated they may experience similar physical abuse and harassment experiences as do sexual minority youth.

Despite the importance of romantic relationships to adolescents' developing relations with their peers, little research has examined victimization experiences in the dating relationships of questioning and sexual-minority adolescents. There is evidence that violence within same-sex adult relationships does occur (Miller, Bobner, & Zarski, 2000). To date, little research has been done looking at the romantic relationships of sexual minority youth. An adolescent may have experiences with same- and opposite-sex romantic partners. Within the contexts of these relationships, victimization may occur. Clearly, research is needed to address the romantic relationships of sexual minority and questioning youth to better understand developmental antecedents to problems that may occur in later adult relationships.

Recent evidence supports the link between sexual-minority youths' current mental health symptoms, especially traumatic stress reactions, and abusive peer experiences during high school (D'Augelli et al., 2002). School-based homophobia was found to be associated with lower self esteem and increased likelihood of self-destructive behaviours among homosexual adolescents (Uribe & Harbeck, 1991). Safren and Heimberg's (1999) study of sexual minority youth in an after-school program concluded that developmental contextual factors, such as victimization, appear to play a major role in predicting emotional and behavioural problems. Isolation and fear resulting from victimization experiences may lead both to internalizing feelings of loneliness, withdrawal, low self esteem and depression and to externalizing

feelings of anger and outrage (Hammond, 1986). For all adolescents, regardless of sexuality, the emotional impact of victimization (including physical or sexual harassment) can include “feeling self conscious, embarrassed, afraid or scared, confused about who you are, and self doubt” (AAUW, 2001; p. 33). The behavioural impact of victimization can encompass “having trouble sleeping, loss of appetite, cutting school, attention and study difficulties, as well as decreased achievement” (AAUW, 2001; p. 37).

In the current study, adolescent sexual orientation is explored among a large sample of Canadian youth. To increase the generality of the findings, a sample recruited in high schools was used to explore questioning and sexual-minority orientation rather than the more common clinical or community group samples. Adolescents questioning their sexual orientation, as well as those identified as bisexual, gay, or lesbian, were included in the study so that we could better understand the emerging nature of sexual orientation in adolescence. Bullying, sexual harassment, and physical abuse (by peers and romantic partners) were assessed. The goals of this study were: (a) to achieve a better understanding of how sexual orientation manifests during adolescence, and (b) to consider the links between questioning one’s sexual orientation or identifying as a sexual minority and the negative experiences of victimization by peers and romantic partners. We predicted that a greater number of adolescents would identify their sexual orientation as questioning than as a sexual minority. We also expected that questioning adolescents, as well as sexual-minority adolescents, would have a greater risk than their heterosexual peers of experiencing bullying, sexual harassment, and physical abuse by peers and romantic partners.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

As part of two large-scale multi-site research projects investigating mental health, the participants for this study were drawn from a sample of 3,636 adolescents from 17 high schools in Toronto, Kingston, and Montreal. Before commencement of the project, proposals outlining the study measures received approval from the investigators’ University Human Participant Review Board. The participating school board research committees also reviewed the measures before allowing access to the schools. Information packages were then sent to each participant and their parents outlining the purpose and methodology of our study. Youths were required to have both parental and personal consent forms signed in order to participate in the study. The questionnaire included a box to be checked off by students if they would like to further discuss any of the issues raised in the survey. Feedback presentations were given at each of the involved schools.

As part of this specific research endeavour, all of the adolescents were asked to describe their sexual orientation as either: heterosexual, gay male, lesbian, bisexual, or questioning. A total of 130 (60 male, 70 female) adolescents indicated they were gay, lesbian, bisexual, or questioning their sexual orientation. To create a matched comparison group, the heterosexual participants in the overall project were stratified by gender, age, and school. Then 130 adolescents were randomly selected. To confirm that the 130 sexual-minority or questioning participants did not differ from their comparison heterosexual participants on the matching variables, a MANOVA was conducted. Results indicated that the two groups did not differ by age, gender, or school (Wilks’s $\lambda = .99$, $F(1, 259) = 0.34$; *ns*). Follow-up chi-square analyses in-

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dicated that questioning and sexual-minority participants did not differ from their comparison heterosexual participants on non-matched demographic variables including race, family composition, and extent of parental education.

The 260 adolescents ranged from 14 to 18 years of age, with a mean age of 15.44 years ($SD = 1.04$ years). The majority of the adolescents were from Euro-Canadian backgrounds (74%), with 13 (5%) African Canadian adolescents, 24 (9%) Asian Canadian adolescents, 6 (2%) Latin American Canadians, and 8 (3%) Native Canadians. The remaining 18 (7%) adolescents were from a variety of other ethnic backgrounds. Sixty-five percent of the adolescents came from two-parent households, 18% came from single-parent homes, 8% came from families with one biological and one step parent, 5% lived with both parents in joint custody, and 4% were living in other types of family configurations (e.g., with legal guardians). Almost three quarters of the mothers (70%) and the fathers (73%) had completed some post-secondary education. The 260 adolescents selected in this study did not differ significantly from the whole sample on any of these demographic variables: (family composition ($\chi^2(6, 3630) = 6.95, ns$), mother education ($\chi^2(5, 3631) = 4.15, ns$), father education ($\chi^2(5, 3631) = 1.54, ns$).

Measures

Sexual Orientation. As part of the Dating Questionnaire (Connolly & Konarski, 1994), all of the adolescents were asked to describe their sexual orientation as either: heterosexual, gay male, lesbian, bisexual, or questioning.

Bullying. Following Olweus (1989), participants were asked how often they had been bullied by their peers in the last two months. Bullying was defined as encompassing "when another student or group of students says nasty and mean things to him/her or teases him/her a lot in a mean way. It is also bullying when a student is hit, kicked, threatened, locked inside a room and things like that." This list of issues was provided as one question: "How often have you been bullied by your peers in the last two months?" Responses were rated on a Likert-type scale, ranging from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*several times a week*).

Sexual Harassment. Five items were adapted from the American Association of University Women's Sexual Harassment Scale (AAUW, 1993; McMaster, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2002) to form a sexual harassment scale. These questions included: "How often has another kid . . . made sexual comments, jokes, movements, or looks at you? brushed up against you in a sexual way on purpose? spread sexual rumours about you? called you fag, dyke, lezzy, or queer? flashed or mooned you?" Participants were asked to indicate how often each of these experiences had been perpetrated on them by boys and by girls within the last 6 months. These responses were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, 1 (*never*) to 5 (*daily*). Mean scores were created for experiences of sexual harassment by peers. Internal consistency for this score, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was 0.72.

Physical Abuse. Experiences of physical abuse by peers and romantic partners were assessed using the students' responses to five items adapted from the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979). These were: (a) pushed, grabbed, or shoved; (b) slapped or kicked; (c) something thrown, smashed, hit, or kicked at you; (d) hit with something; and (e) choked, punched, or beaten. Participants were asked to indicate how often each of these experiences had been perpetrated on them by peers and by their romantic partner within the last 6 months. Response ratings were adjusted from the original Conflict Tactics Scale to provide general response options, and revised

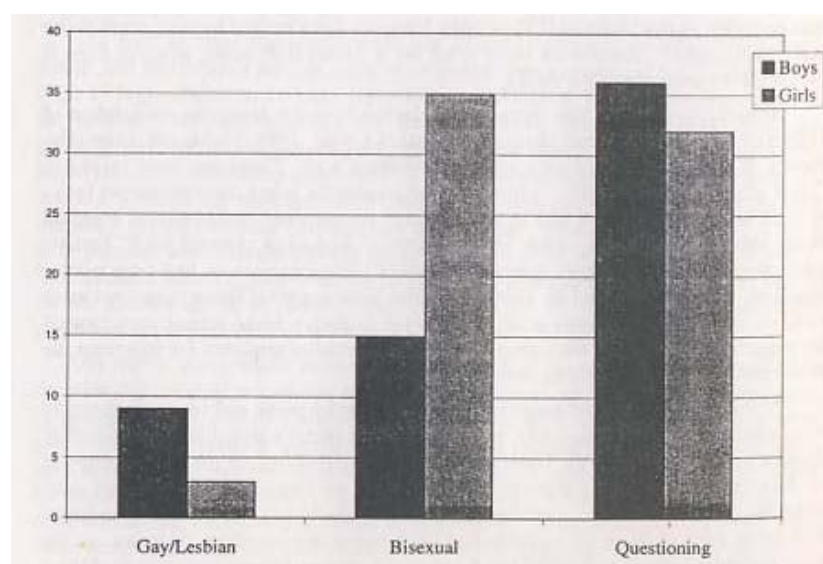
anchors were given to each rating option. These responses were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, 1 (*never*), 2 (*rarely*), 3 (*sometimes*), 4 (*often*), and 5 (*always*). Mean scores were created separately for reports of physical victimization by peers, and by a romantic partner. Internal consistency for these scores, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, were 0.80 for victimization by a peer and 0.84 for victimization by a romantic partner.

RESULTS

Sexual Orientation Identification

A total of 130 (60 male, 70 female) adolescents indicated they were gay, lesbian, bisexual, or questioning their sexual orientation—approximately 3.6% of all adolescents who participated in the overall project. The percentages of adolescents identifying as non-heterosexual did not differ significantly across the 17 schools. As shown in Figure 1, more adolescents identified as bisexual ($N = 50$; 15 boys, 35 girls) or questioning ($N = 68$; 36 boys, 32 girls) than as gay or lesbian ($N = 12$; 9 boys, 3 girls). The gay and lesbian adolescents were similar in age ($M = 15.83$, $SD = 1.20$) to the bisexual ($M = 15.50$; $SD = 1.00$) and questioning ($M = 15.36$; $SD = 1.08$) adolescents ($F(2, 128) = 1.04$, ns). Moreover, the mean age of all sexual-minority and questioning adolescents ($M = 15.46$; $SD = 1.06$) did not differ from the mean age of the entire heterosexual sample ($M = 15.30$; $SD = 0.99$) ($F(1,3635) = 3.29$, ns). The gender distribution among the sexual-minority and questioning adolescents (46%

FIGURE 1
Number of Girls and Boys Reporting Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual,
or Questioning Sexual Orientation



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male; 54% female) also did not differ from the entire heterosexual sample ($N = 3506$; 47% male; 53 % female), ($\chi^2(1, 3635) = 0.82, ns$).

Peer Victimization Experiences

Preliminary One-Way ANOVA analyses revealed no significant differences between gay, lesbian, bisexual, and questioning adolescents on the dependent variables of bullying ($F(2, 112) = 0.25, ns$), sexual harassment ($F(2, 126) = 0.35, ns$), peer physical abuse ($F(2, 126) = .07, ns$), or physical abuse by a romantic partner ($F(2, 94) = .21, ns$). For this reason and to maximize sample size, sexual-minority and questioning adolescents were grouped together to form a non-heterosexual sample.

Differences in bullying, sexual harassment, and peer physical abuse between non-heterosexual adolescents (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and questioning) and heterosexual adolescents were examined using a 2 (Gender) x 2 (Sexual Orientation) MANOVA. Even though we did not generate specific hypotheses regarding gender and sexual orientation, we chose to include gender to provide some exploratory analysis of its possible moderating effect.

Comparing the sexual-minority and questioning adolescents to the heterosexual adolescents, using the reports of bullying, sexual harassment, and physical peer victimization as dependent variables, the analysis yielded a significant multivariate effect for sexual orientation (Wilks's $\lambda = .92, F(1, 209) = 5.90, p < .001$) and gender (Wilks's $\lambda = .93, F(1, 209) = 5.16; p < .01$) but no significant effect for the interaction between gender and sexual orientation. As shown in Table 1, sexual-minority and questioning adolescents reported more experiences of bullying, sexual harassment, and physical abuse than heterosexual adolescents.

TABLE 1
Means and Standard Deviations of Bullying, Sexual Harassment and Peer
and Romantic Partner Physical Abuse for Sexual Orientation Groups

	Non-Heterosexual Adolescents (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, & Questioning) <i>M(SD)</i>	Heterosexual Adolescents <i>M(SD)</i>
Bullying in last 2 months*	0.63 (1.00) ^a	0.31 (0.64) ^b
Peer sexual harassment*	1.79 (0.76) ^a	1.47 (0.54) ^b
Peer physical abuse*	1.42 (0.67) ^a	1.21 (0.41) ^b
Romantic partner physical abuse**	1.30 (0.71) ^a	1.09 (0.34) ^b

^{a b} represent means across rows that are significantly different

* $N = 260$; ** $N = 195$

Physical Abuse by a Romantic Partner

Not all adolescents reported romantic involvement, and so experiences of physical abuse by a romantic partner were analyzed on the subset of adolescents with a romantic partner. Of the 260 participants, 195 (100 heterosexual; 95 non-heterosexual) adolescents responded to questions regarding physical abuse by a romantic

partner. Respondents to these questions did not vary significantly by sexuality ($\chi^2(1,259) = 0.52; ns$).

Differences between the heterosexual and non-heterosexual adolescents were examined using a 2 (Gender) x 2 (Sexual Orientation) Univariate ANOVA. Comparing the non-heterosexual and heterosexual adolescents on reports of physical victimization by a romantic partner as the dependent variable, the analysis yielded a significant univariate effect for sexual orientation ($F(1, 194) = 7.90, p < .01$) and gender ($F(1, 194) = 5.31, p < .01$). There was no significant effect for the interaction between gender and sexual orientation. As shown in Table 1, sexual-minority and questioning adolescents reported significantly more experiences of physical victimization by a romantic partner than did heterosexual youths.

DISCUSSION

This study examined sexual-orientation identification in a large high school sample of Canadian adolescents. Victimization in the peer context, including romantic partner experiences, was also examined to better understand the issues that sexual-minority and questioning adolescents face during this time of development. The results indicate that, given the opportunity, many more adolescents identify as questioning or bisexual than as gay or lesbian. Consistent with previous studies, our results also reveal that both sexual-minority and questioning adolescents are at a higher risk of peer and romantic-partner victimization in the high school context than are their heterosexual peers.

In this high school sample of adolescents, bisexuality and questioning one's sexuality were more commonly endorsed self-definitions of sexual orientation than were gay male or lesbian. The large representation of questioning adolescents in our survey suggests that issues surrounding sexual orientation are indeed arising and that adolescents may be more willing to acknowledge them than they had been in the past. Such questioning may be reflective of Marcia's (1966) moratorium identity status. It also may be similar to the initial stage of Troiden's (1989) developmental approach to sexual orientation, in which a sensitization occurs with first awareness of same-gender attraction. This stage also involves an initiation of a process of identity exploration and/or identity confusion, which is followed by identity assumption, where an adolescent assumes a self-definition of gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

The substantial number of bisexual adolescents in the survey is also interesting and may be a consequence of the recent visibility of bisexuals and greater availability of information about sexual orientation. Alternatively, it may be a choice not to define one's self as gay, lesbian, or heterosexual, which are perhaps viewed by adolescents as more rigid and less fluid categories. Our findings suggest an increasing prevalence of adolescents identifying as bisexual—and yet bisexuality has rarely been the focus in adolescent empirical research. These results are consistent with the recent Add Health study, conducted in the United States, which found a greater percentage of adolescents reporting attraction to both sexes than adolescents reporting exclusive attraction to the same sex (Russell, Sief, & Truong, 2001). The Add Health authors discuss being "surprised at the degree to which youth reporting bisexual attractions stand out in our results" (Russell et al., 2001, p. 120). Future research with larger sample sizes would allow for a more comprehensive examination of these adolescents' developmental experiences. This may challenge the presumption of single-sex sexual orientation, particularly in adolescence. Although gender differences were not found in the present study, larger samples also will allow

for a thorough examination of possible gender variations among sexual-minority adolescents. Gilligan's (1982) challenges to Erikson's (1950) work on identity may be particularly relevant to the examination of sexual identity formation among adolescent females. Overall, the recent visibility of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals within Western culture may promote different trajectories for sexual orientation identity emergence and greater comfort with exploration or questioning one's orientation among youths (Herdt & Boxer, 1993).

Alongside their willingness to explore sexual orientation, the questioning and sexual-minority youth of this sample also reported more hostile peer contexts than did their heterosexual peers. Questioning and sexual-minority youth reported higher rates of bullying, sexual harassment, and physical abuse from their peers than did heterosexual adolescents. This victimization by peers may be multi-faceted. Victimization may occur as result of homophobic attitudes, prejudice, and discrimination. It may be that peers feel psychologically threatened by a classmate who is gay, bisexual, or questioning his or her sexuality and these feelings, in turn, evoke harassing and victimizing behaviours. At the same time, an adolescent who is targeted with sexual harassment and peer victimization may begin to question his or her sexuality. Finally, we cannot rule out the possibility that sexual-minority adolescents or youth in a period of questioning their sexuality may be particularly sensitive to victimization of this nature and, in turn, may be more willing to report these experiences.

Clearly, peer group integration for sexual-minority and questioning adolescents seems particularly problematic, and is an important context to be examined when considering prevention and intervention efforts. Because the developmental task of negotiating a non-heterosexual orientation occurs simultaneously with hostility in the peer environment, it suggests that the mental health difficulties of these youth may not stem directly from sexual minority status, but more likely from the hostile environments that they encounter. Empirical results support the strong association between experiences of victimization and psychological and physical well-being among sexual minority youth (Safren & Heimberg, 1999).

Given the increased risk of victimization these youth face day-to-day in their high school environments, it is recommended that schools review the effectiveness of their non-discrimination policies and practices. The promotion of increased protection for students against all forms of harassment and discrimination, including sexual identity, is essential. We, however, also recognize that victimization may be hidden—that is, it may occur outside school boundaries, in more private settings. This possibility is particularly relevant to physical abuse that occurs in romantic relationships.

This study is unique in its focus on romantic experiences of sexual-minority adolescents. Non-heterosexual adolescents reported higher rates of physical abuse from a romantic partner than heterosexual adolescents. In our data set, the gender of the romantic partner is not specified. Hence it is possible that these adolescents may be reporting on romantic experiences with both same-sex and opposite-sex partners. Dating violence typically has been investigated among heterosexual adolescents and young adults. Empirical evidence suggests that girls and boys are equally likely to report perpetrating physical violence against their romantic partners (Capaldi & Crosby, 1997). Violence in the romantic relationships of sexual-minority youth, however, is in early stages of empirical consideration. To date, research suggests that some sexual minority men and women have experienced physical violence from their past and current romantic partners (Burke & Follingstad, 1999; Lie, Schilit, Bush,

Montagne, & Reyes, 1991). Again, we do not know the sex of the romantic partners our participants are reporting. Gender in romantic aggression may be a critical variable in the violence itself. This important distinction, and the determination of prevalence of same-sex violence, offers a crucial area for future research. Nevertheless, our findings draw attention to the importance of recognizing that victimization by a romantic partner, and its subsequent threats to emotional well-being, are not exclusive to heterosexual couples and must be considered an additional risk factor for these youth.

Our findings provide an important confirmation and extension of previous findings by empirically focusing on the experiences of adolescents from a representative high school sample who are questioning their sexual orientation. A limitation of the present study is the relatively small sample of non-heterosexual youths, especially gay and lesbian adolescents. The small number limited our ability to provide any meaningful discussion of their specific peer environments. It does, however, reflect, to a rather large extent, the low prevalence of adolescents identifying as a sexual minority in a community school sample. Our sexual-minority sample was drawn from over 3,000 adolescents in 17 high schools across two provinces; the 3.5% of that sample who self-identified as non-heterosexual is reasonably consistent with previous research in community settings (e.g. Garofolo et al., 1998; Remafedi et al, 1992), and we therefore feel confident that our sample is representative. Yet, the question of how best to study the development of these youths remains unclear. Recruitment in clinical settings may more easily generate larger samples, yet their representativeness of the population of non-heterosexual youths is open to question—which is especially important when examining issues (such as victimization) which may be related to mental health. On balance, we believe it is important to study sexual minority youths in the community as well as in clinical settings. Following these adolescents longitudinally may be a useful strategy to compensate for the smaller samples and provide great insights into their developmental experiences. In particular, looking at adolescents who question their sexual orientation longitudinally may aid us in further understanding how their developmental trajectories may be similar to or different from those of sexual-minority or heterosexual adolescents.

A consideration of this study's findings highlights the need to target intervention and prevention services to appropriately address the powerful impact of victimization within peer contexts, and to expand these services to encompass school, family, and community contexts. Teachers and school counsellors may wish to monitor more closely for bullying, sexual harassment, and peer victimization. Clinicians can serve both as resources of information and as confidantes for the peer stresses that may confront sexual-minority and questioning adolescents. Additionally, clinicians working with sexual-minority and questioning youth also should be sensitive in examining experiences of victimization by both peers and romantic partners. In considering such experiences of abuse, clinicians should be aware of how heterosexism and homophobia may complicate both the abuse and the victim's efforts to obtain help (Chesley, MacAulay, & Ristock, 1998). Schools and communities should work towards promoting intolerance for any forms of discrimination, bullying, physical victimization, and sexual harassment. Overall, continuing study of the contextual experiences of questioning and sexual-minority adolescents beyond the peer context will improve our ability to provide appropriate and very necessary support for these youth.

RÉSUMÉ

La présente étude porte sur les liens entre l'orientation sexuelle et la victimisation à l'école secondaire. La population sous étude est constituée d'un sous-groupe tiré d'un échantillon de 3 636 jeunes Canadiens et Canadiennes. Cent trente adolescents et adolescentes ont affirmé être gai, lesbienne, bisexuel(le) ou en questionnement par rapport à leur sexualité. Le nombre de sujets qui s'identifient comme bisexuels ($N = 50$) ou en questionnement ($N = 68$) est significativement plus élevé que ceux qui s'identifient comme gai ou lesbienne ($N = 12$). Les jeunes qui appartiennent à une minorité sexuelle ou qui sont en questionnement sont plus susceptibles que les jeunes hétérosexuel(le)s d'être victimes d'intimidation, de harcèlement sexuel par leurs pairs et d'abus physique par leurs pairs ou leurs partenaires. L'étude analyse les conséquences de la victimisation sur la santé mentale des adolescentes et adolescents en questionnement ou de minorité sexuelle.

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