

Current Research on Heterosexual-Identified Men Who Have Sex With Men

Dr. Andrew D. Eaton, Dr. Travis Sheadler, Dr. Lauren B. McInroy, and Dr. Paul Shuper





Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada

This is funded by a SSHRC Insight Grant which aims to support the long-term conduct of investigator initiated social science and humanities research.

We have been conducting a multi-phase project of H-MSM consisting of scoping reviews, a qualitative interview phase, and a mixed methods survey.



Overview

An estimated **0.5-3.5%** of heterosexual men have engaged in some form of sexual activity with another man at some point in their life.

(Scheidler et al., 2024)

Heterosexual-identified men who have sex with men (H-MSM) are a unique population that experience a lack of concordance between their sexual identity, attractions, and behaviors. Importantly, many H-MSM experience various mental, sexual, and social health problems; yet H-MSM remain underrepresented in research and practice.



camh



This symposium will include three empirical presentations:

- (a) a scoping review on the identity development, attractions, and behaviors of H-MSM;
- (b) a qualitative investigation into the sexual communication patterns of H-MSM; and
- (c) a quantitative analysis comparing H-MSM with gay, bisexual, and queer men and with concordant heterosexual men.

All primary research presented has received institutional ethics approval.



camh

Learning Objectives:

Upon completion, the learner will be able to...

- 1 Identify common characteristics and experiences of heterosexual-identified men who have sex with men (H-MSM).
- 2 Highlight how H-MSM communicate about sex with people of various genders.
- 3 Articulate how H-MSM differ from both gay, bisexual, and queer men and from concordant heterosexual men.



camh

1

A Scoping Review of the Identity Development, Attractions, and Behaviors of H-MSM

Presented by Dr. Lauren B. McInroy



camh

Background

- Some research has found that H-MSM have elevated levels of depressive symptoms compared to concordant heterosexual men. (Mendelsohn et al., 2022)
- Identity-behaviour discordance also has been associated with suicidal ideation. (Annor et al., 2018)
- Some research has begun to explore the experiences of H-MSM (Reback & Larkins, 2010; Silva, 2019; Silva & Whaley, 2017), though this population remains poorly understood.
- Thus, the purpose of this study was to synthesize the literature on the identity development, attractions, and behaviours of H-MSM in order to develop a stronger understanding of this population.



The identity of H-MSM is often misunderstood, with many believing they are closeted gay, bisexual, or queer (GBQ+) men (Carrillo & Hoffman, 2018; Reynolds, 2015; Robinson & Vidal-Ortiz, 2013).

However, there's a distinction between *situational outness* and *sustained discordance*.

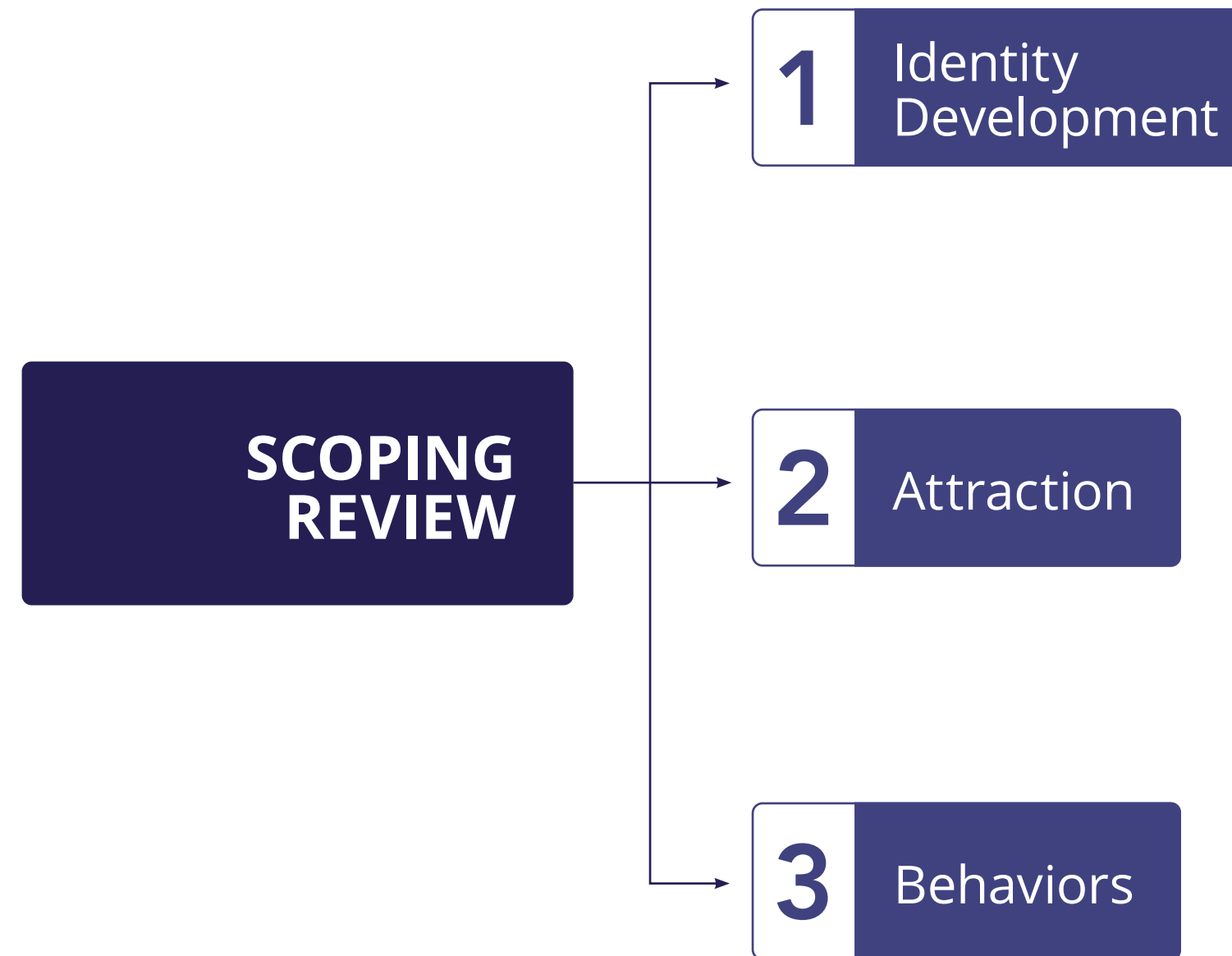
- **Situational outness** involves selectively disclosing one's sexual identity or behavior based on perceived safety and/or perceived benefit (Sabat et al., 2014).
- **Sustained discordance** means consistently identifying as heterosexual across all contexts, despite same-sex behavior. H-MSM often justify this by framing their encounters with men as rare, accidental, recreational, or financially motivated (Reback & Larkins, 2010).

Methods

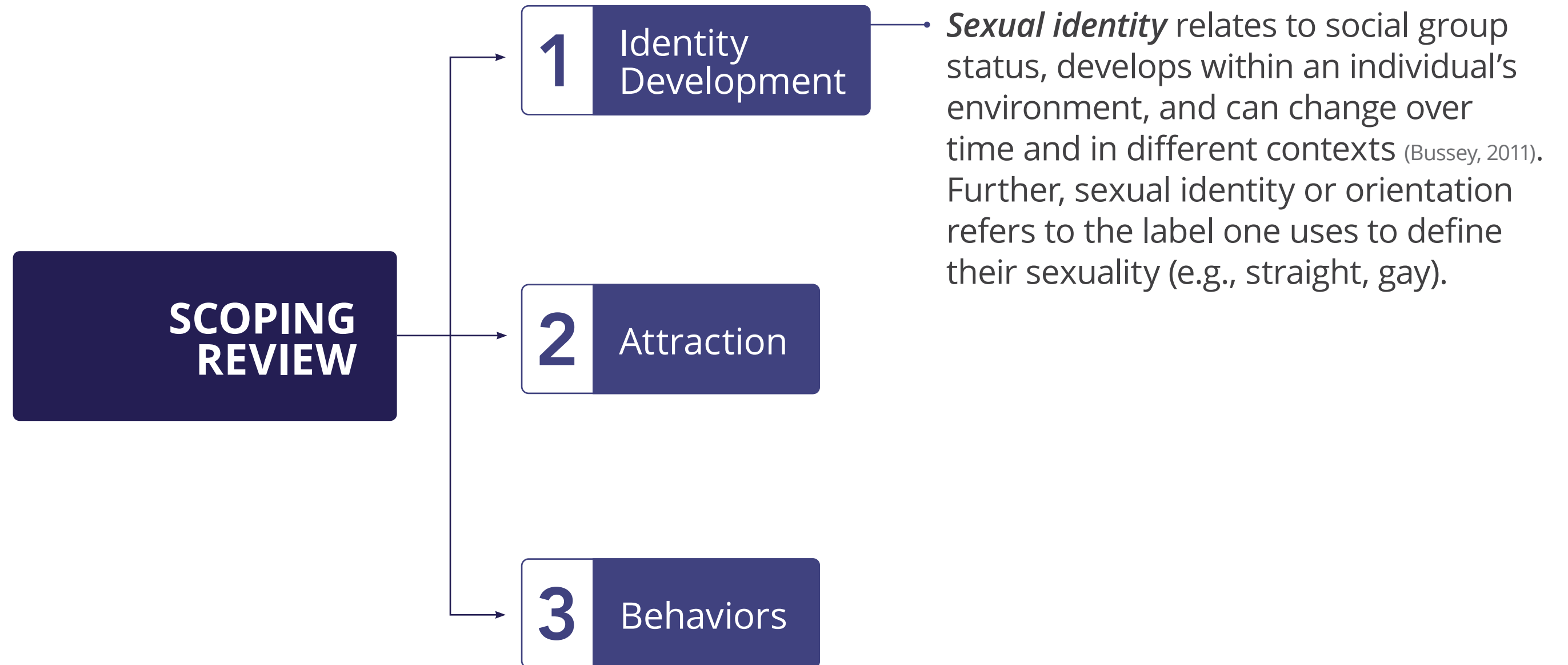
- A scoping review was conducted to collate the extant literature related to the *identity development, attractions, and behaviors of H-MSM*.
- *Thirteen databases* (e.g., APA PsychInfo) were used to retrieve peer-reviewed journal articles published on or after January 1, 2000. Key search terms and phrases included but were not limited to **“straight men who have sex with men”** and **“sexual identity-behavior discordance”**.
- All records were imported into **Covidence**.
- After removing duplicates, *two reviewers independently screened the titles and abstracts of the remaining records (n = 3,617), resulting in the removal of 3,348 records.*

- The two reviewers then independently screened the full-texts of the remaining records (**n = 269**), *resulting in **124 records being retained for inclusion in the present study.***
- Ten reviewers then independently extracted the data from the records. Thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Thomas & Harden, 2008) was used with the extracted data to determine themes and subthemes related to identity development, attractions, and behaviors of H-MSM.

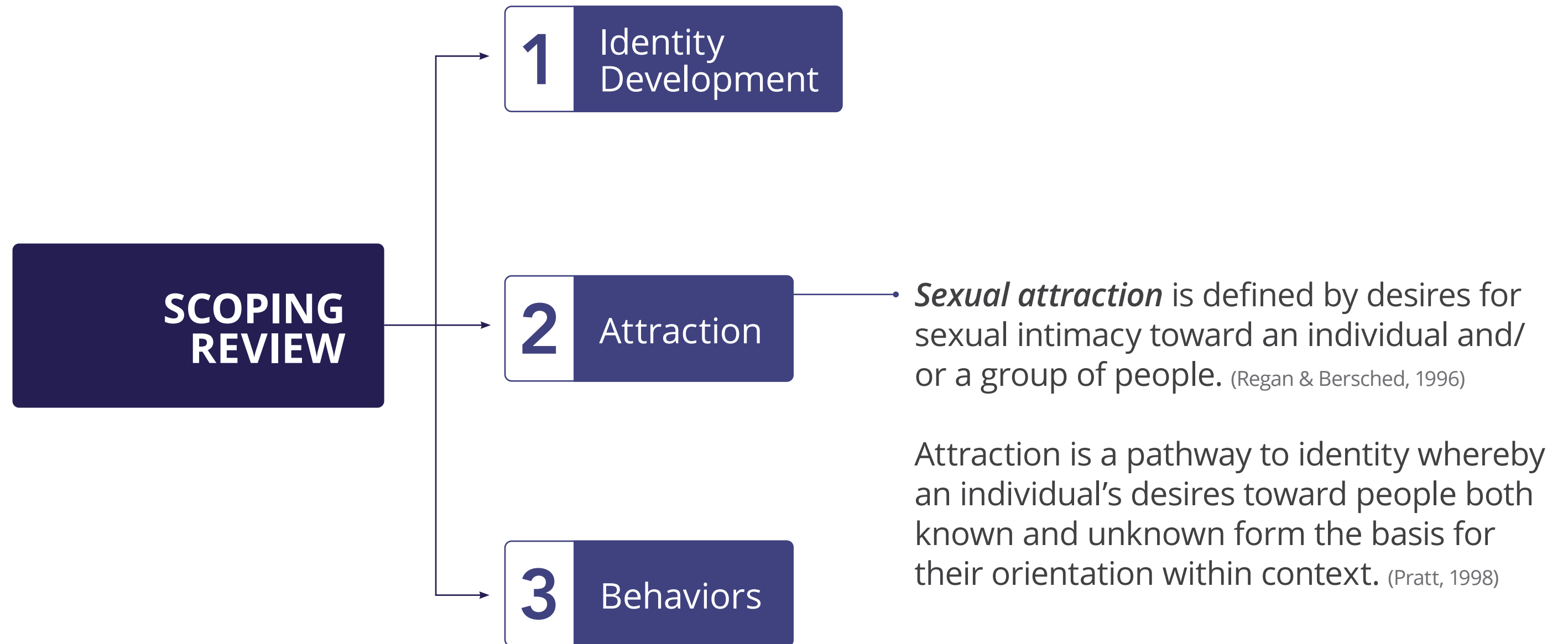
Results



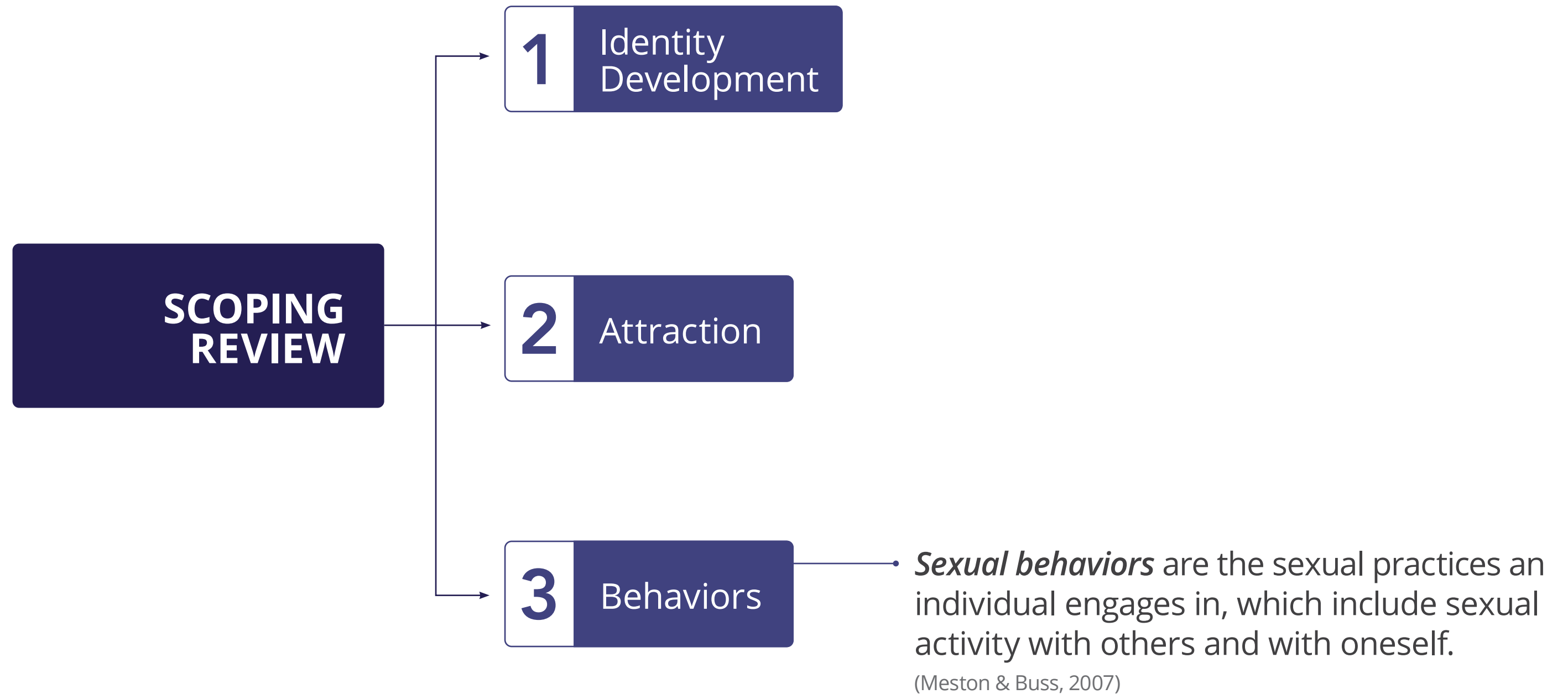
Results



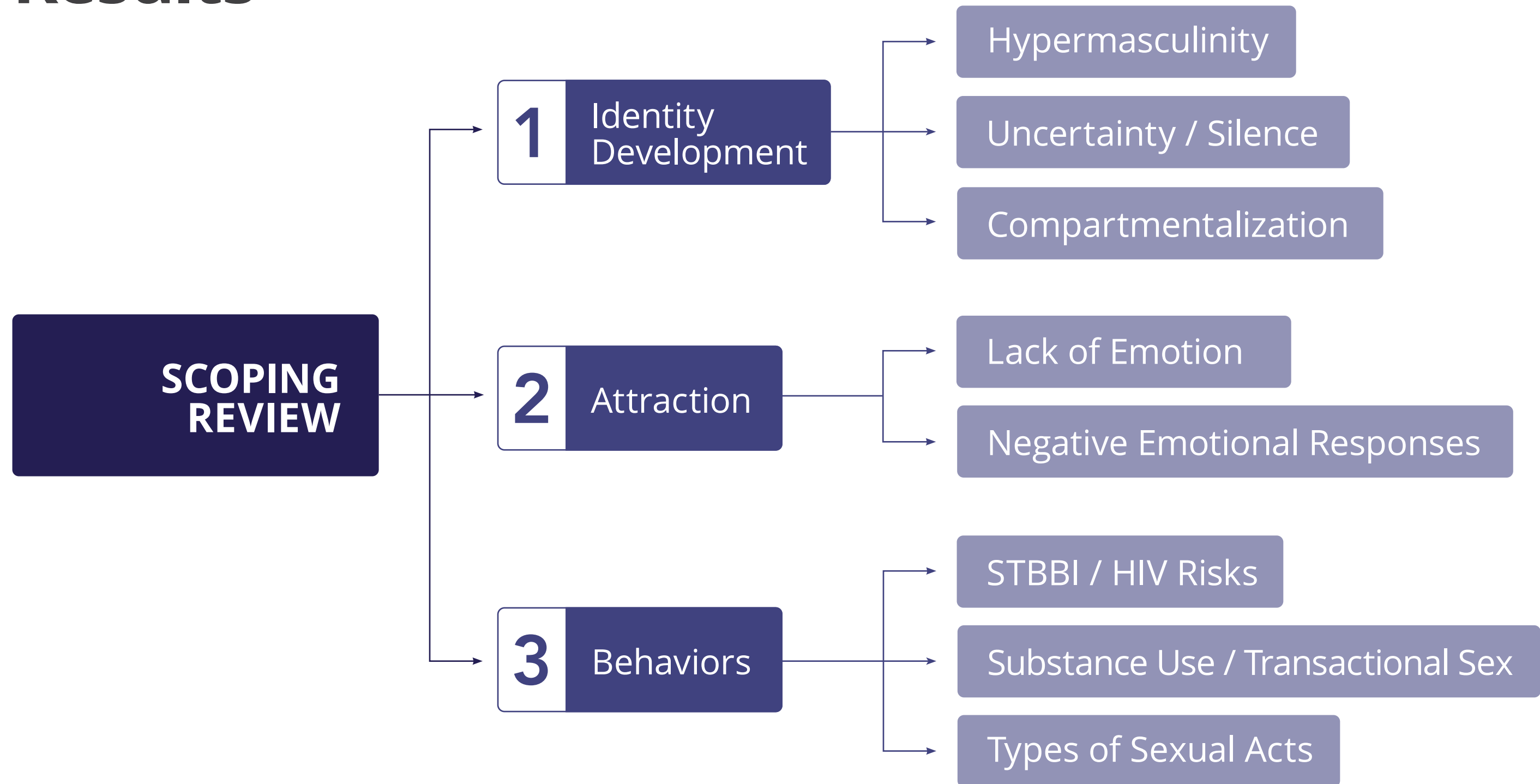
Results



Results



Results



Theme 1: *Identity Development*

Sub-Theme 1.1:

Hypermasculinity

- Hypermasculinity and internalized homophobia are highly prevalent among heterosexually-identified men who have sex with men (H-MSM), largely due to societal and cultural norms that stigmatize non-heterosexual identities.
- Stigma, fear of reputational harm, and traditional family expectations contribute to their identity-behavior discordance.

Sub-Theme 1.2:

Uncertainty / Silence

- Many H-MSM experience uncertainty about their sexual identity due to fear of discrimination, stigma, and a lack of social support.
- Concealment of same-sex behavior is common, especially among those who are politically conservative, married, less educated, or live with female partners. This concealment is linked to poorer mental health, including higher levels of depression and anxiety.

Sub-Theme 1.3:

Compartmentalization

- Some H-MSM compartmentalize their same-sex behaviors as unrelated to their heterosexual identity, often viewing them as infrequent, accidental, or driven by recreational or economic motives.
- Substance use is commonly involved, leading many to see these behaviors as uncharacteristic of their sober selves.
- Others frame same-sex encounters as casual “sport” or engage in transactional sex, allowing them to maintain a heterosexual identity without emotional or identity-based implications.

Theme 2: *Attraction*

Sub-Theme 2.1:

Lack of Emotion:

- H-MSM often experience primarily sexual, rather than romantic or emotional, attraction to men, reserving emotional connections for women and sometimes using sex with men as a form of stress relief.
- While some deny any attraction to men or emphasize a stronger attraction to women to maintain a heterosexual identity, a few do report romantic involvement with gay men or transgender women.

Sub-Theme 2.2:

Negative Emotional Responses

- Many H-MSM often experience negative emotions such as shame, guilt, disgust, and feeling unclean after same-sex encounters.
- These emotions are linked to increased anxiety, depression, substance use, and engagement in transactional sex.
- While most responses are negative, one study found that some H-MSM also report positive feelings like happiness alongside negative emotions in relation to their same-sex attractions and relationships.

Theme 3: *Behaviors*

Sub-Theme 3.1:

STBBI / HIV Risks

- Included records showed that H-MSM are at elevated risk for HIV and other STBBIs, often engaging in risky sexual behaviors but having lower testing rates and less access to or use of preventive tools.
- Barriers to testing include fear of stigma, being outed, lack of knowledge, and limited access to trusted healthcare services.

Sub-Theme 3.2:

Substance Use and Transactional Sex

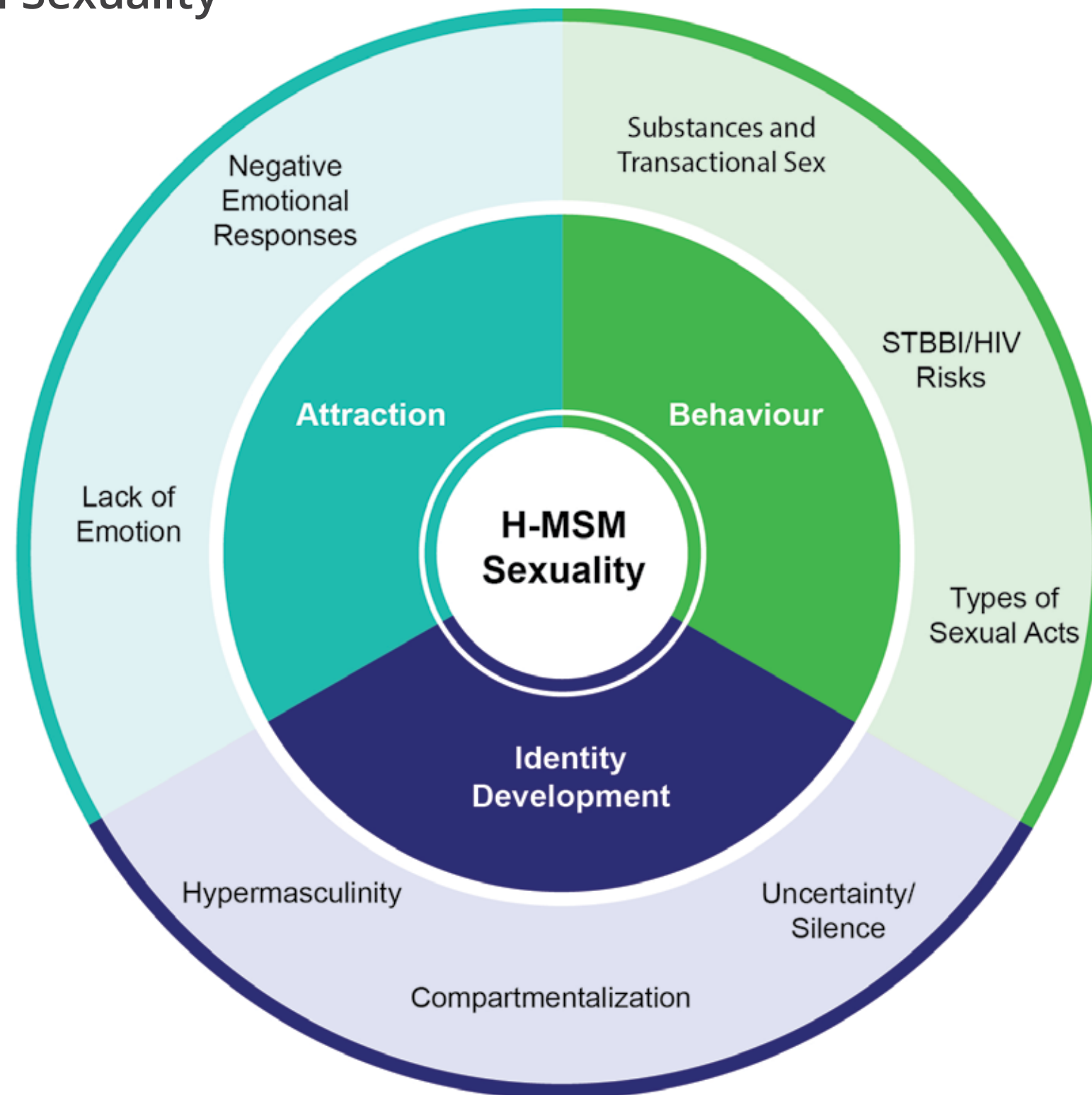
- Substance use among H-MSM is often linked to lowering inhibitions, coping with same-sex behaviors, or maintaining a heterosexual identity.
- Transactional sex, including survival sex for basic needs, is a common HIV risk behavior among H-MSM and is often connected to drug use, secrecy, and higher vulnerability to STBBIs.

Sub-Theme 3.3:

Types of Sexual Acts

- Discretion is highly valued, with H-MSM favoring private, anonymous encounters to protect their identity and finding secrecy both arousing and necessary for avoiding social stigma.
- Compared to sex with women, sex with men is often described as more adventurous, physically satisfying, and emotionally liberating, with some H-MSM engaging in same-sex encounters due to situational factors like incarceration, opportunity, or female partner encouragement.

Model of H-MSM Sexuality



Conclusion

Findings highlight unique features of H-MSM that distinguish them from concordant heterosexual men and sexual minority-identified men. This population is complex and worthy of further investigation to ensure services are inclusive of various combinations of identities, attractions, and behaviors.

2

Sexual Communication Patterns Among H-MSM

Presented by Dr. Andrew D. Eaton

Background

- Sexual communication is important for sexual satisfaction, well-being, and consent.
(MacNeil & Byers, 2005, 2009; Mark & Jozkowski, 2013)
- Heterosexual concordant men typically adhere to social norms that give men sexual agency over women (Benoit & Ronis, 2022) and rely heavily on subtle, nonverbal sexual communication strategies (Waling, 2024; Willis et al., 2019).
- This type of sexual communication can be problematic as implicit strategies can increase risks for nonconsensual sexual interactions. (Jozkowski et al., 2018)
- Sexual minority men rely less on norms related to who gets to have sexual agency but still mostly use subtle, nonverbal sexual communications strategies. (Webber et al., 2024)
- However, no research has examined the sexual communication patterns of H-MSM. Therefore, the present study, guided by sexual script theory (Simon & Gagnon, 1984), explored the sexual communication strategies of H-MSM.

Methods

This study was guided by interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith et al., 2009) *and sexual script theory* (Simon & Gagnon, 1984).

1. Participants were recruited via paid social media ads, posts to online forums and flyers at local HIV clinics.
2. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with **11 H-MSM**. Questions and probes specifically asked about sexual communication (e.g., **“How do you communicate about sex and sexuality in your relationships?”** and **“How do your sexual encounters with women differ from your sexual encounters with men?”**).
3. Data were analyzed in accordance with guidelines for IPA studies. (Smith et al., 2009) Multiple coders independently coded the transcripts from each interview.
4. The coders then met to discuss commonalities between the codes and to identify themes.
5. Then, data were revisited to ensure the themes accurately depicted the data. The trustworthiness of the study was strengthened via the inclusion of H-MSM, multiple coders, peer supervision, and memo writing.

Results

Three Core Themes

1

Meeting Sex Partners

2

Clear Communication with Men

3

Poor Communication with Women

Results

Three Core Themes

1

Meeting Sex Partners

2

Clear Communication with Men

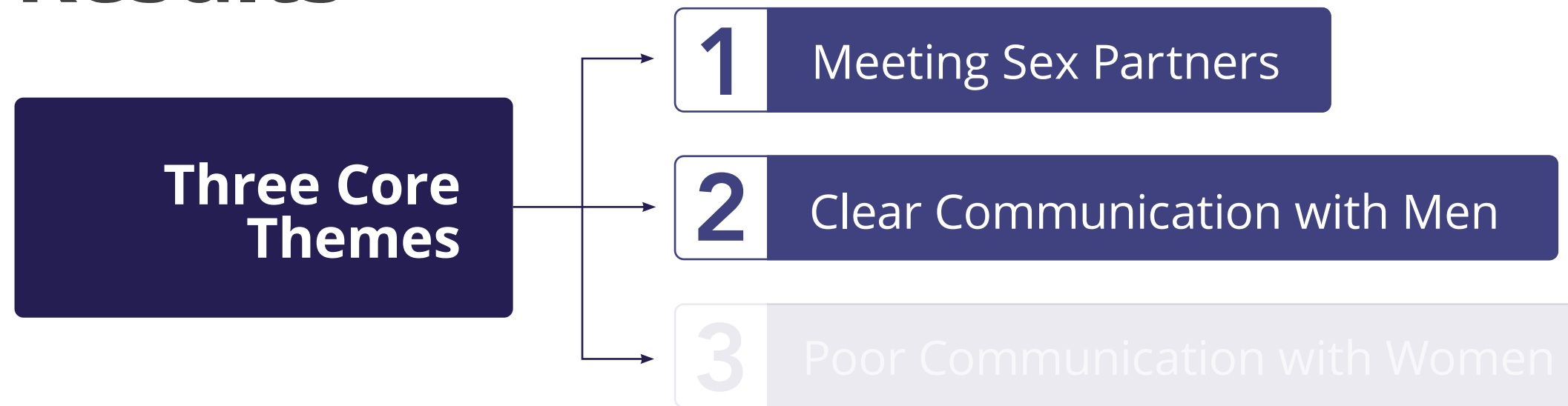
3

Poor Communication with Women

Participants shared that they often communicated with and met potential male sex partners at cruising parks, bathhouses, saunas, hotels, housing rentals, school, work, in cars, and on the internet.

“In my situation, I mean, I was online quite a bit, and I had recently ended a relationship in the early start of COVID. So that really influenced my sex patterns because I could find that sex would be a lot more, like, easier available online and especially like with men.”

Results



Participants usually shared little about themselves on their online profiles. Nevertheless, sexual communication with other men was often explicit and direct. In fact, participants valued succinctly and directly communicating with male sex partners about their sexual interests. Participants also explicitly gained consent from their male sexual partners but often failed to obtain ongoing consent.

“I’ll even ask, ‘what would you like to do? Do you like to tell me what you like, or would you like me to experiment?’ And in a lot of cases—most cases—they’ll tell me [what they like], but there’s been the odd time that they’d say, “well, you know, go ahead and experiment and I’ll tell you if I like it or not.”

Results

Three Core Themes

1

Meeting Sex Partners

2

Clear Communication with Men

3

Poor Communication with Women

Meanwhile, H-MSM reported less explicit and more implicit communication styles with women. They said the fact that relationships with men focused on casual sex made them feel more comfortable with having explicit verbal and written sexual communication with men.

“Men are more—and I’m sure it’s not accurate now that I’m saying it out loud—but men are more looking for sex, so I’m more upfront. This is my line: ‘What are you looking for?’ Whereas when women are talking to guys—and, again, now that I say this out loud, this doesn’t sound right—but when women are talking to guys, they’re looking more for the relationship.”



Conclusion

Findings revealed stark differences in gender-based sexual communication strategies among H-MSM. These findings also have important implications for sexual health and consent.

3

Descriptive Findings from an International, Multilingual, Online, Comparative Sexuality Study Amongst Heterosexual-identified Men Who Have Sex with Men of Diverse Sexual Identities

Presented by Dr. Paul Shuper



camh

Background

- *Sexuality is multidimensional and complex*
 - Identity development
 - Attraction
 - Behavior



Background

- *Sexuality is multidimensional and complex*
 - Identity development
 - Attraction
 - Behavior
- *Heterosexual-identified men who have sex with men (H-MSM)*
 - Sexual identity and behavior discordance



Background

- *Sexuality is multidimensional and complex*
 - Identity development
 - Attraction
 - Behavior
- *Heterosexual-identified men who have sex with men (H-MSM)*
 - Sexual identity and behavior discordance
- *Unknown how H-MSM compare to:*
 - Concordant heterosexual men
 - Gay/bisexual/queer (GBQ+) men



Objective

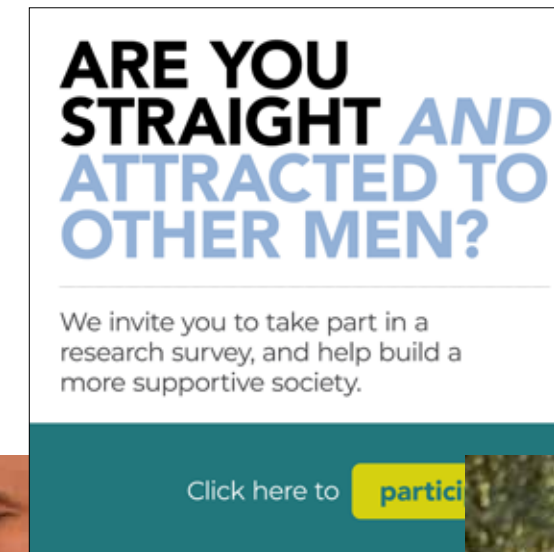
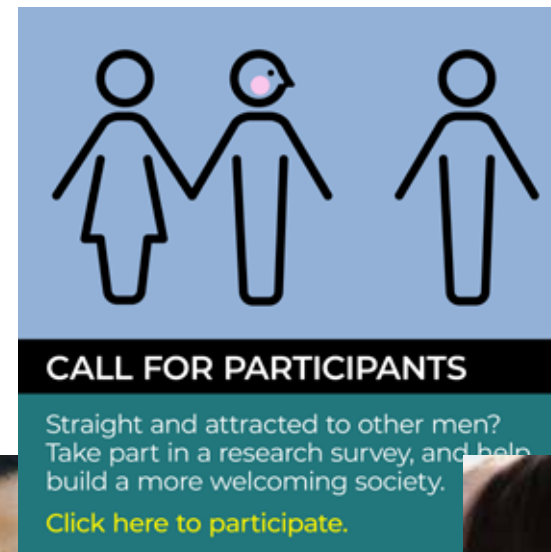
- *Gain insight into potentially unique attributes of H-MSM*
 - Demographics
 - Identity development
 - Attraction
 - Behavior
 - Technology use
 - Personality
 - Relationship negotiation
 - Communication skills
 - PrEP
 - Life satisfaction



camh

Methods

- *Recruitment*
 - Purposive sampling — online and offline venues
 - US, UK, Canada



Methods

- *Online questionnaire for cisgender men aged 18+*
 - English, French, Spanish
 - 12 sections:

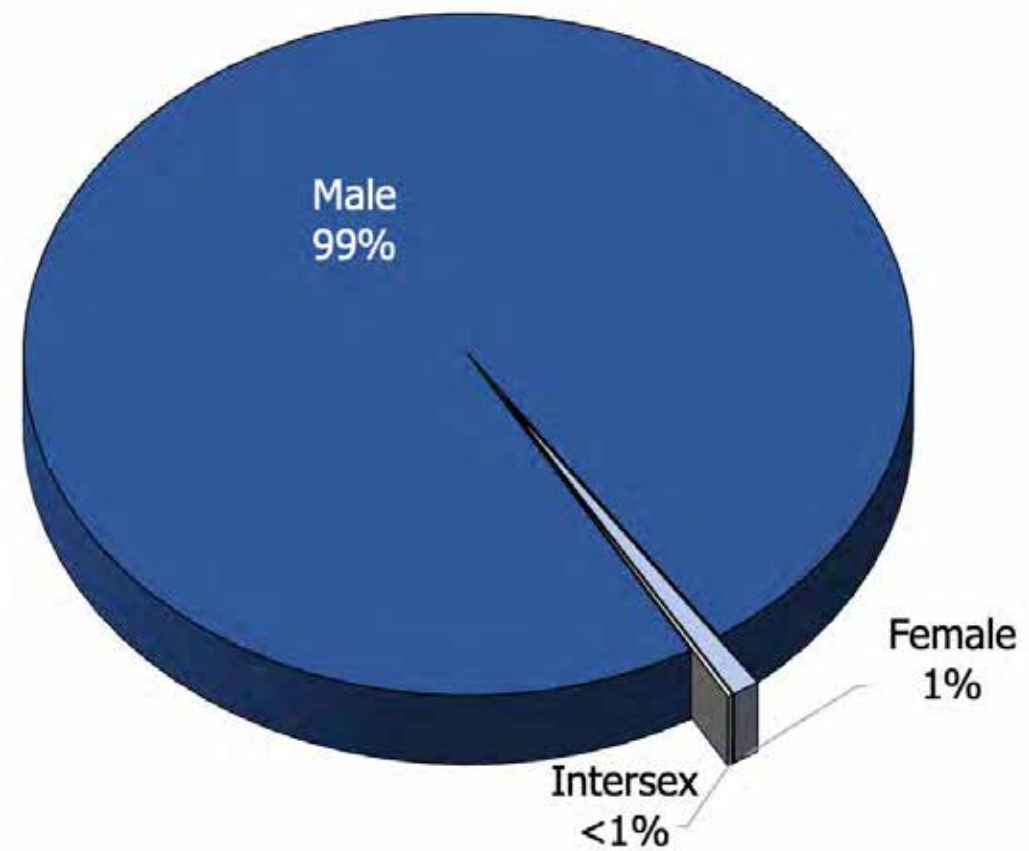
(1) screening	(7) relationship negotiation and communication
(2) demographics	(8) technology usage
(3) identity development	(9) PrEP
(4) attraction	(10) life satisfaction
(5) behavior	(11) additional demographics
(6) coping with same-sex attraction	(12) contact/follow-up information

This paper presents a preliminary descriptive data cut from survey responses collected between January and October 2025.

Results

- *Demographics (N=581)*
 - Age - Mean (SD): 42.6 (15.1)

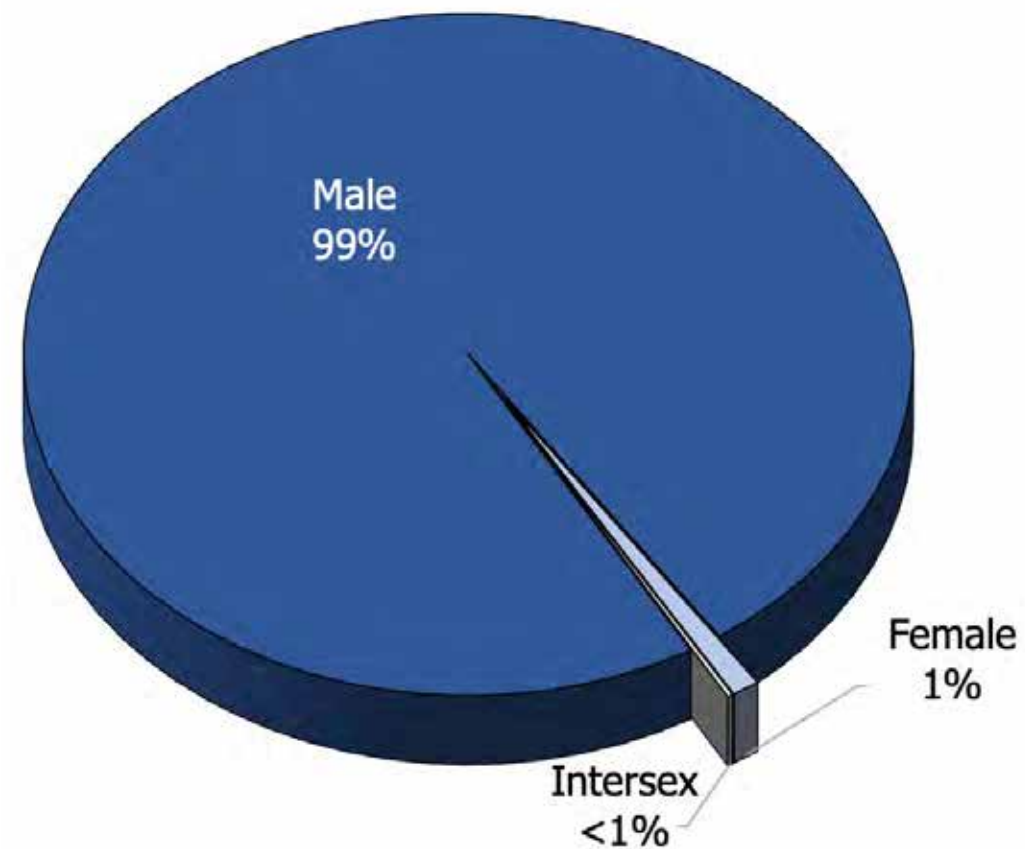
Sex at Birth



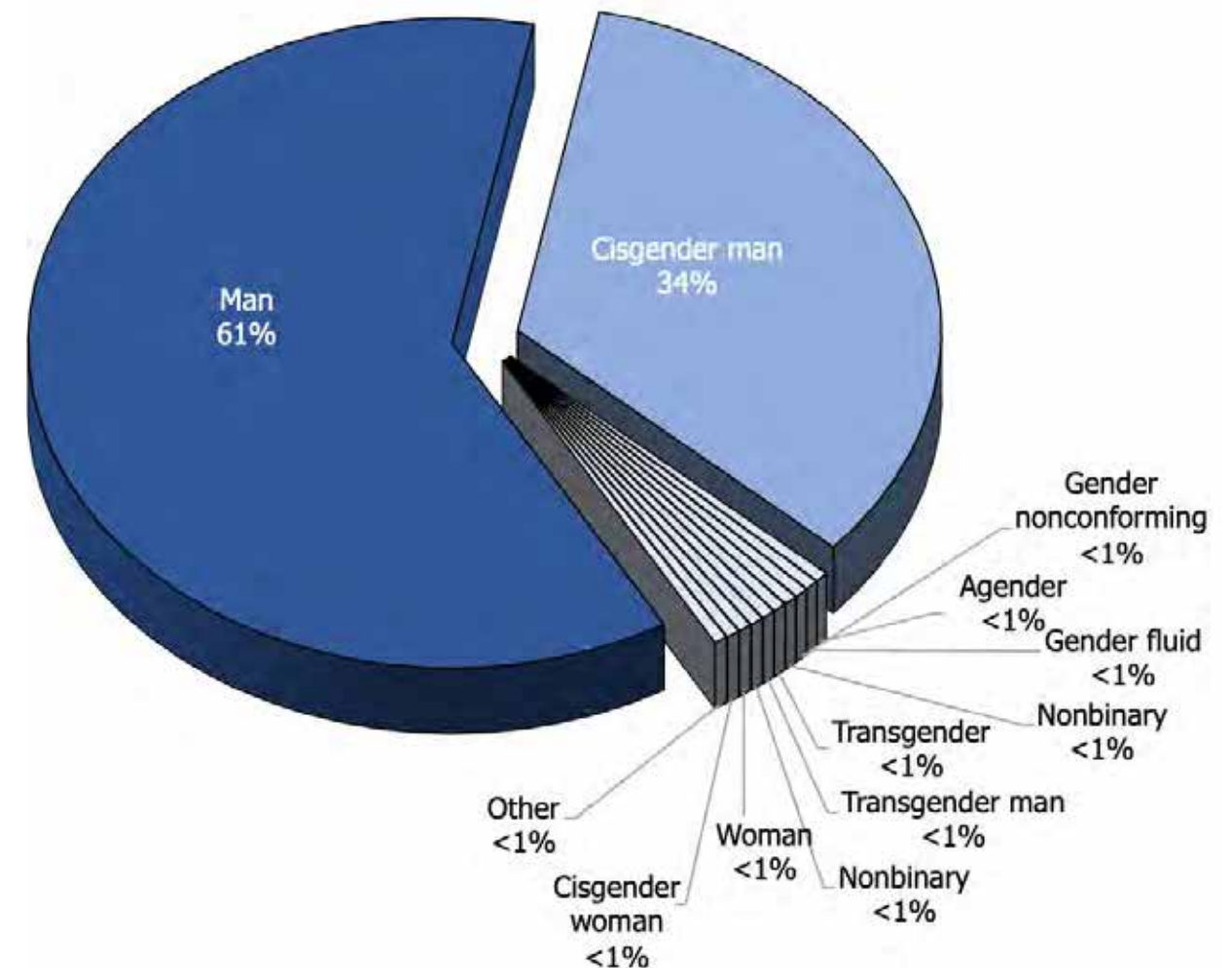
Results

- *Demographics (N=581)*
 - Age - Mean (SD): 42.6 (15.1)

Sex at Birth

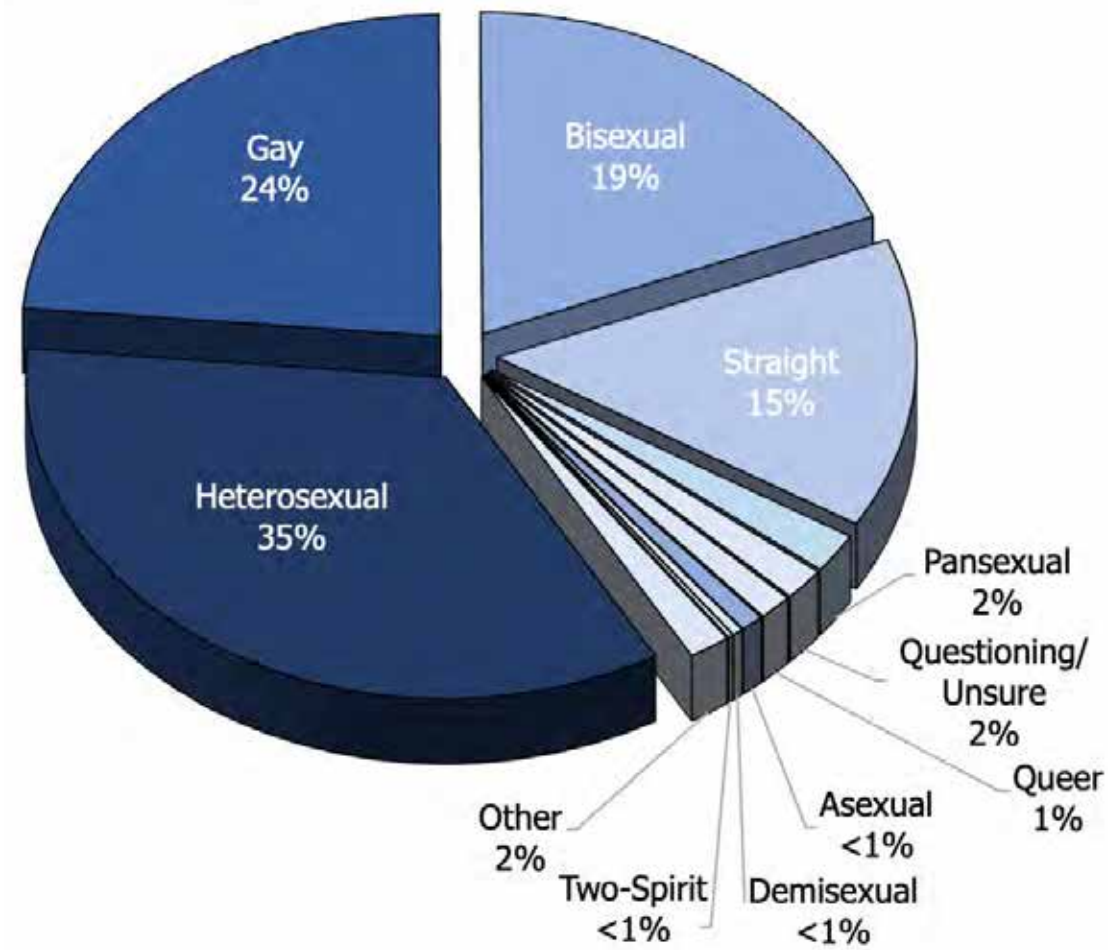


Gender Identity



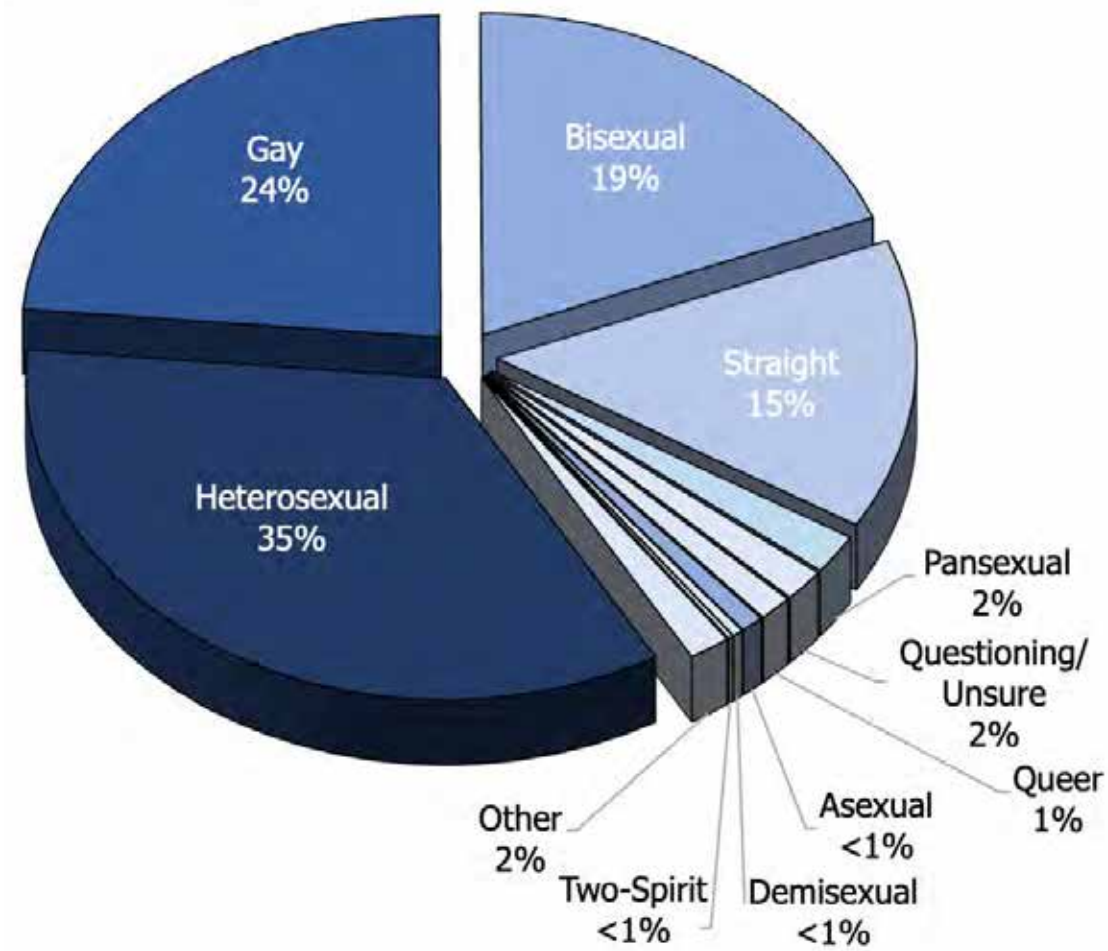
Results

Sexual Orientation/Identity



Results

Sexual Orientation/Identity

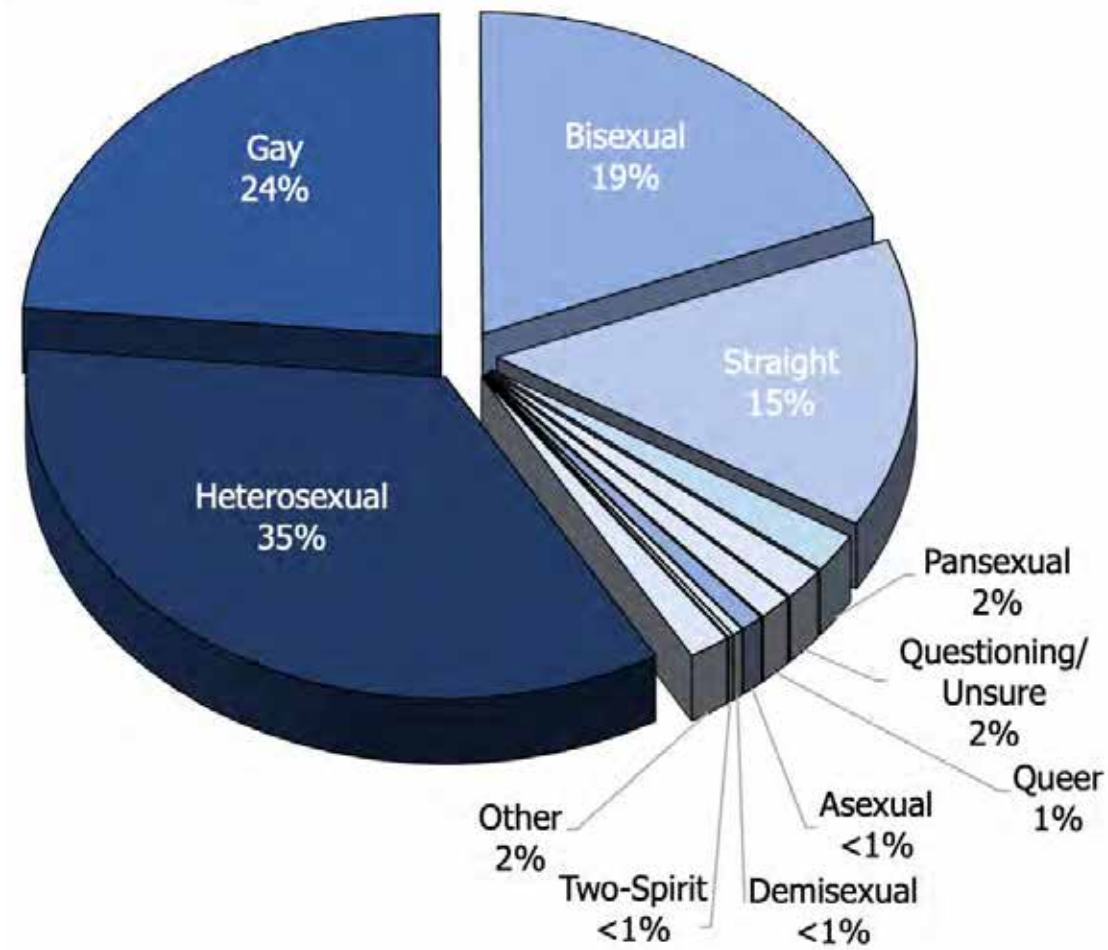


- Ever had sex with a man: 63%



Results

Sexual Orientation/Identity



- Ever had sex with a man: 63%
- Sample (as of Oct 1, 2025):
 - **275** gay/bisexual/queer (GBQ) men
 - **215** concordant heterosexual men
 - **91** H-MSM

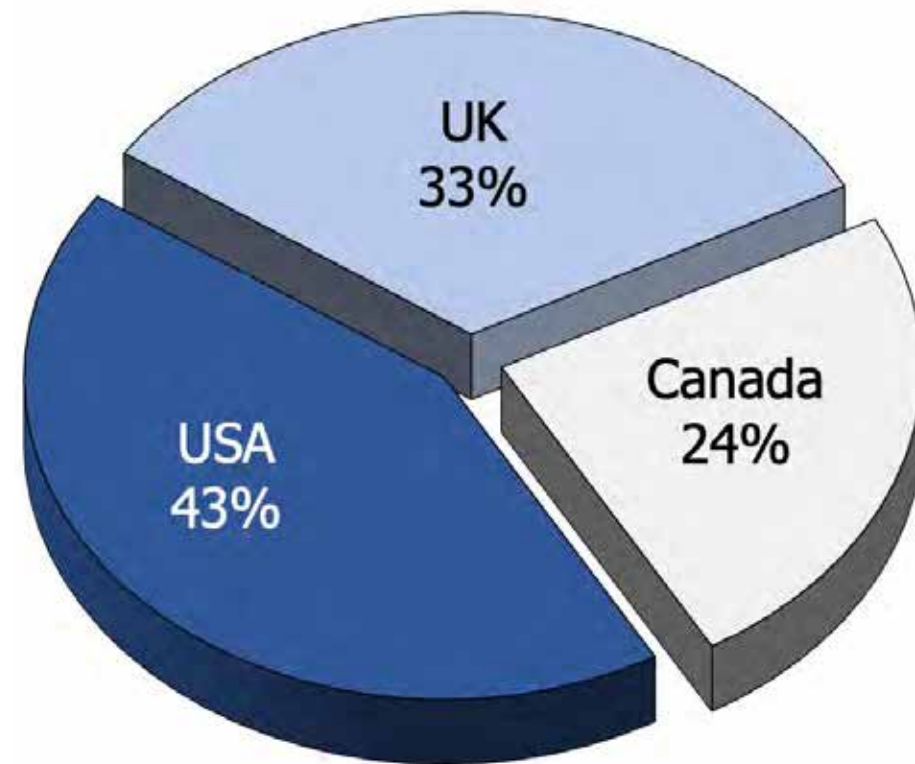


Results

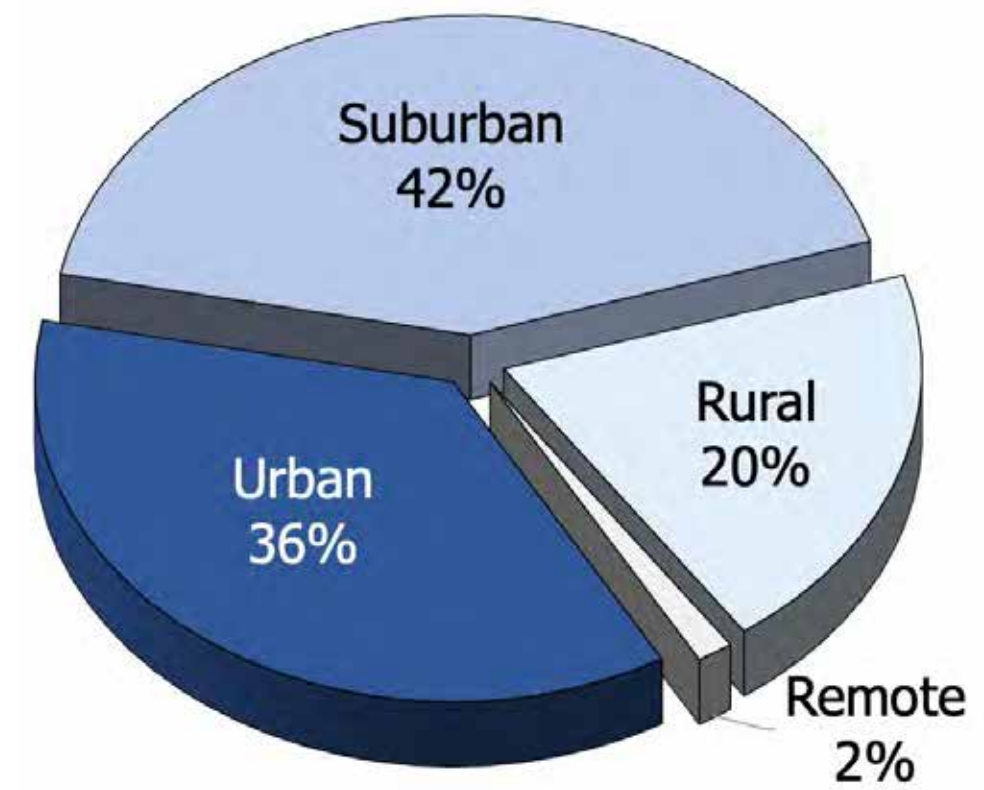
Race	N = 581
White	482 (83%)
Black	51 (9%)
Hispanic	17 (3%)
Latino/Latiné	8 (1%)
Middle Eastern	8 (1%)
Indigenous: First Nations, Inuit, Métis	3 (<1%)
Indigenous: Native American	4 (<1%)
East Asian	8 (1%)
North Asian	1 (<1%)
South Asian	8 (1%)
Southeast Asian	5 (<1%)
Other	9 (2%)

Results

Country



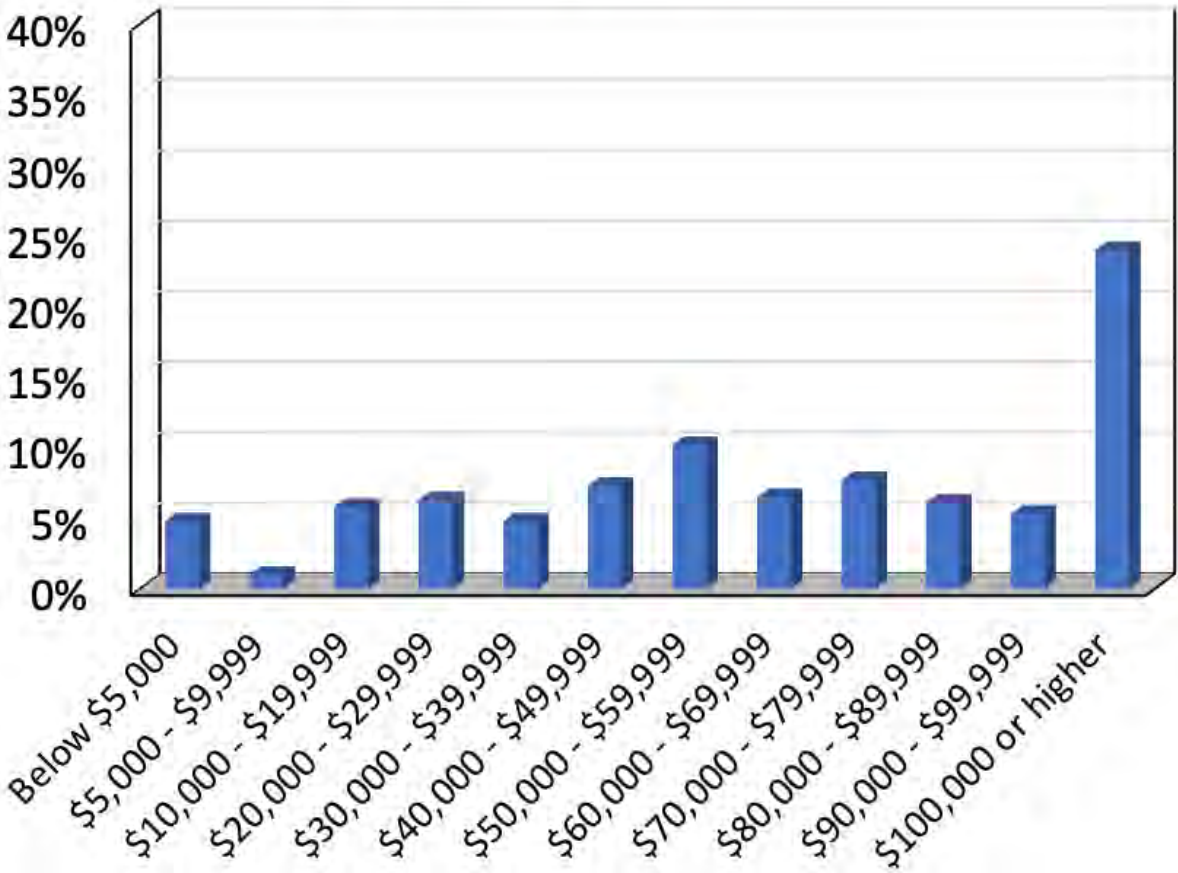
Type of Area



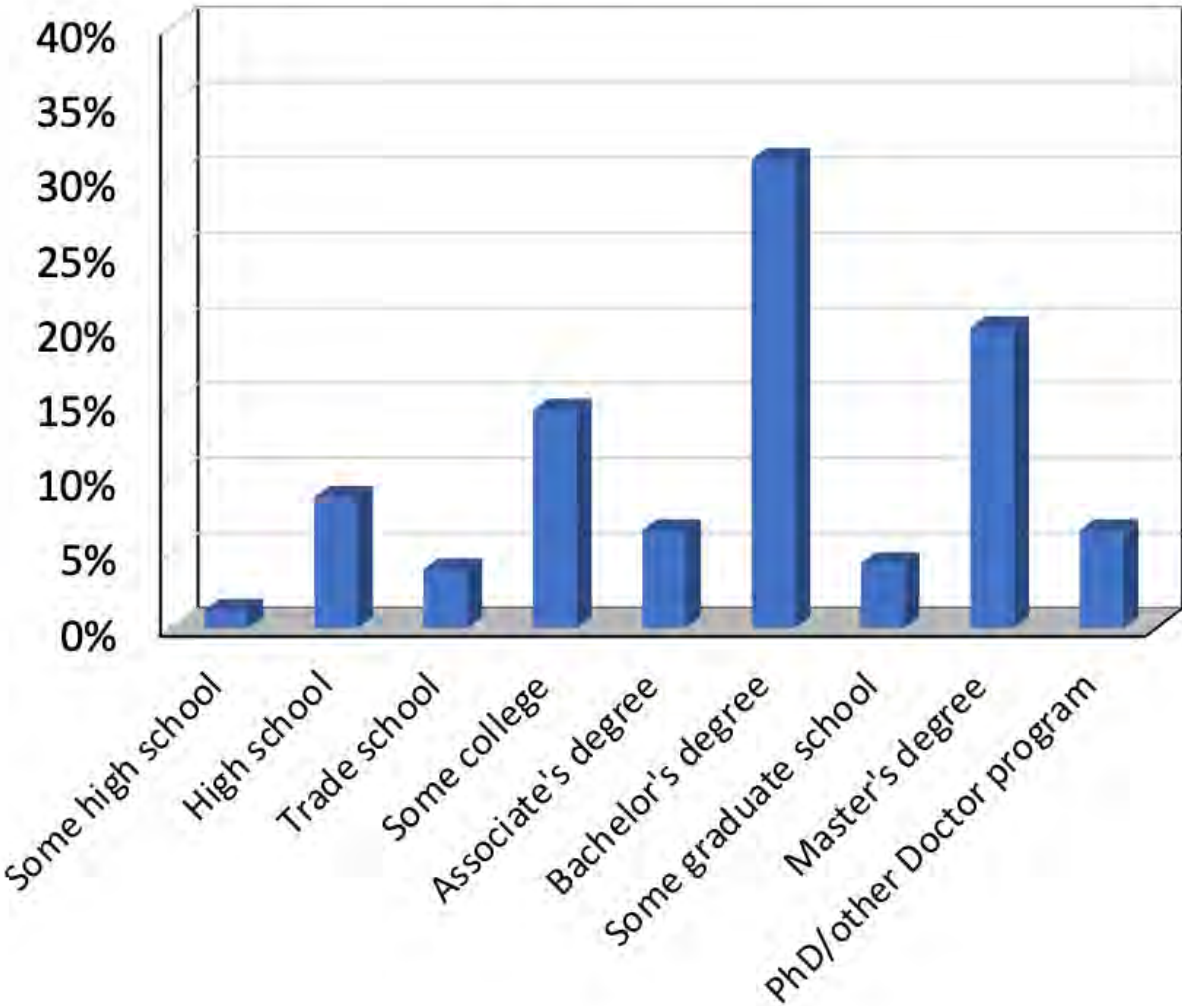
Results

- *Other Demographics*
 - Religion: Christianity = 43%

Annual Income



Education



Results: Comparisons among H-MSM, GBQ MSM, and Concordant Heterosexual Men

- **Demographics**

- **Non-significant:**

- Age
 - Race = White
 - Education = Bachelors Degree+
 - Income = \$100K+
 - Country
 - Type of area

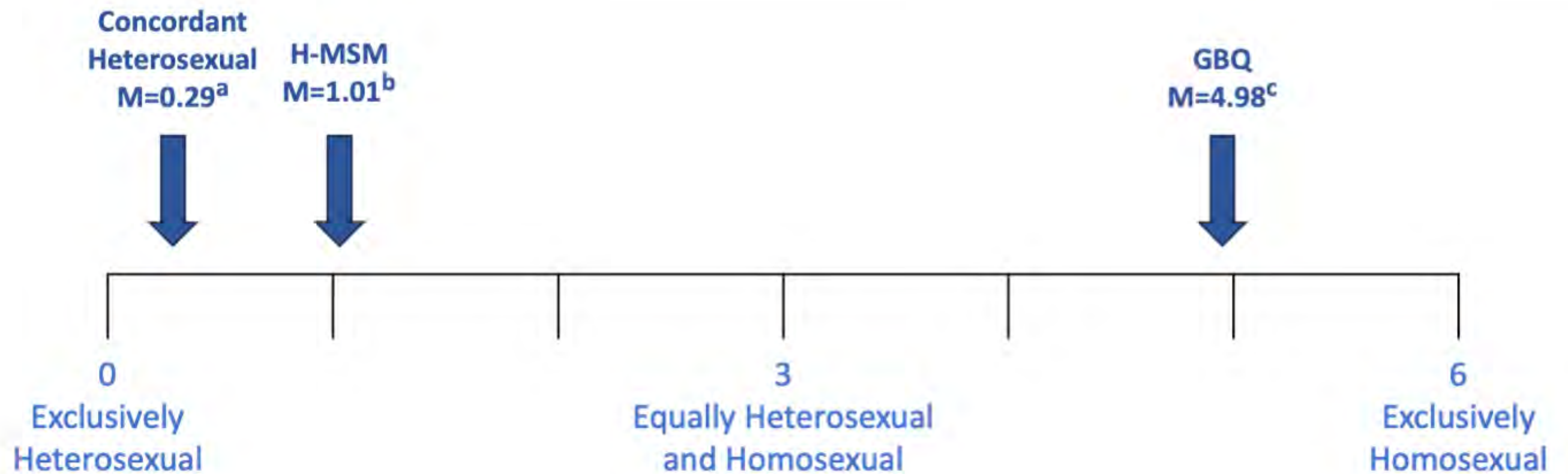
- **Significant:**

- Religion = Christian
 - o Concordant heterosexual (38%) < GBQ MSM (52%)



Results: Comparisons among H-MSM, GBQ MSM, and Concordant Heterosexual Men

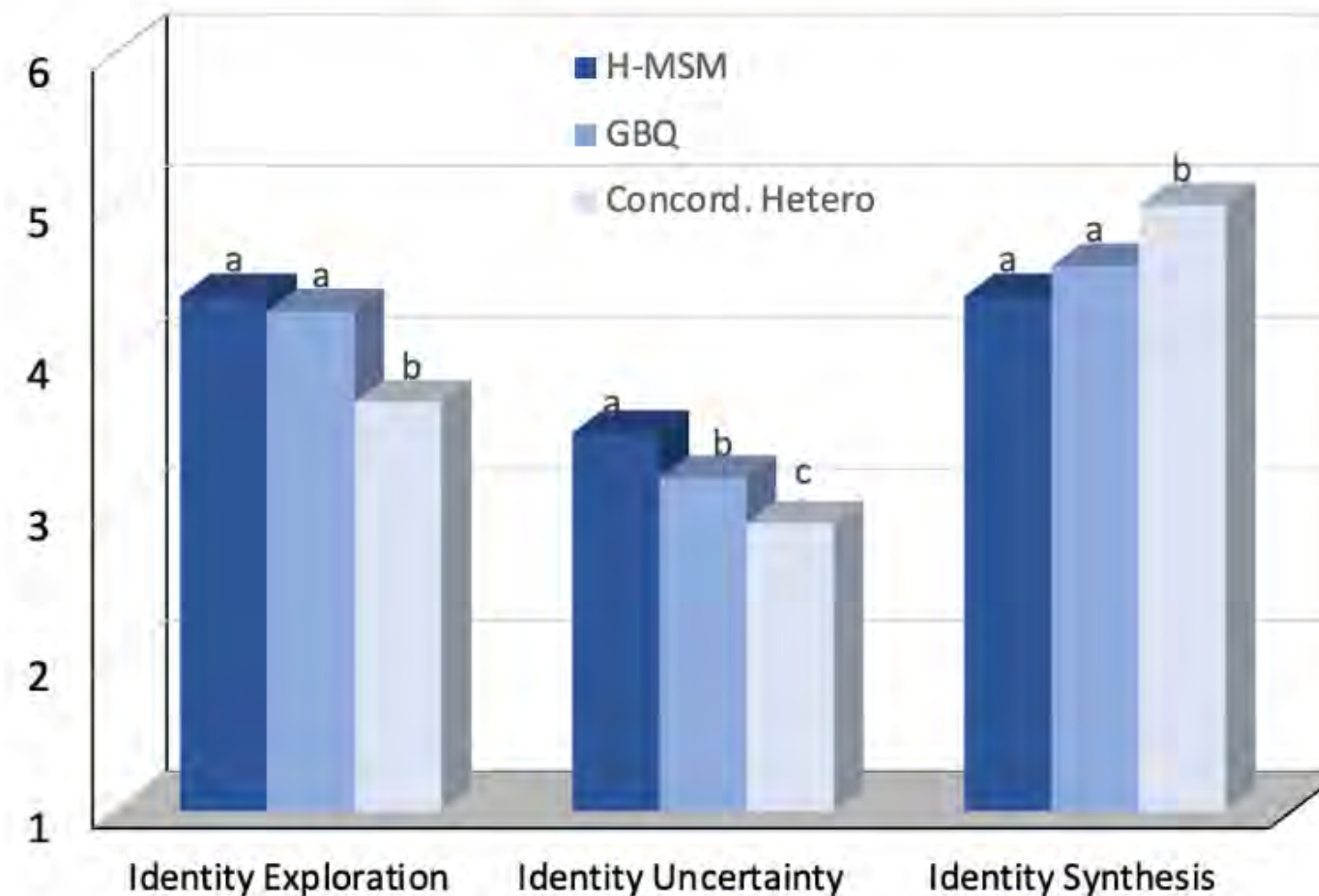
- **Identity:** Kinsey Scale



Results: Comparisons among H-MSM, GBQ MSM, and Concordant Heterosexual Men

- Identity*

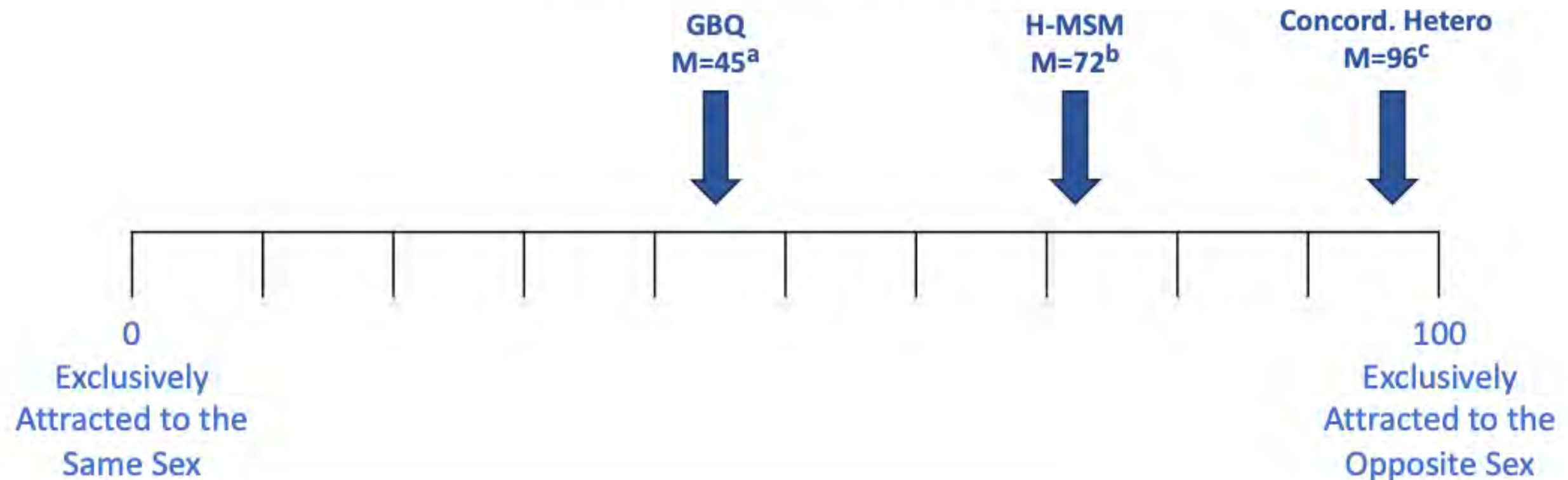
Sexual Identity Exploration and Commitment
(Worthington et al., 2008)



Results: Comparisons among H-MSM, GBQ MSM, and Concordant Heterosexual Men

- *Attraction*

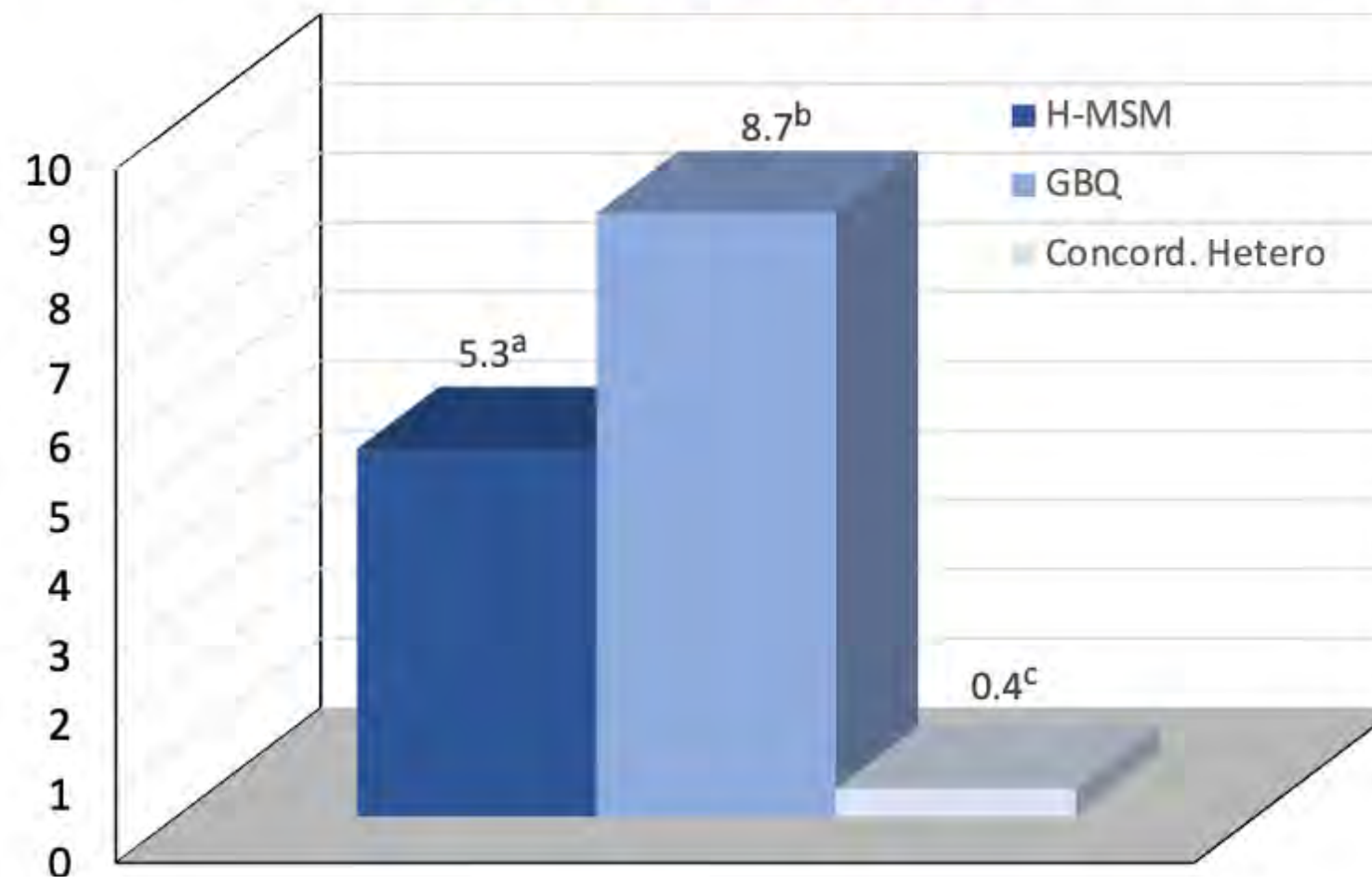
Sexual Preference Scale (McConaghy et al., 1991)



Results: Comparisons among H-MSM, GBQ MSM, and Concordant Heterosexual Men

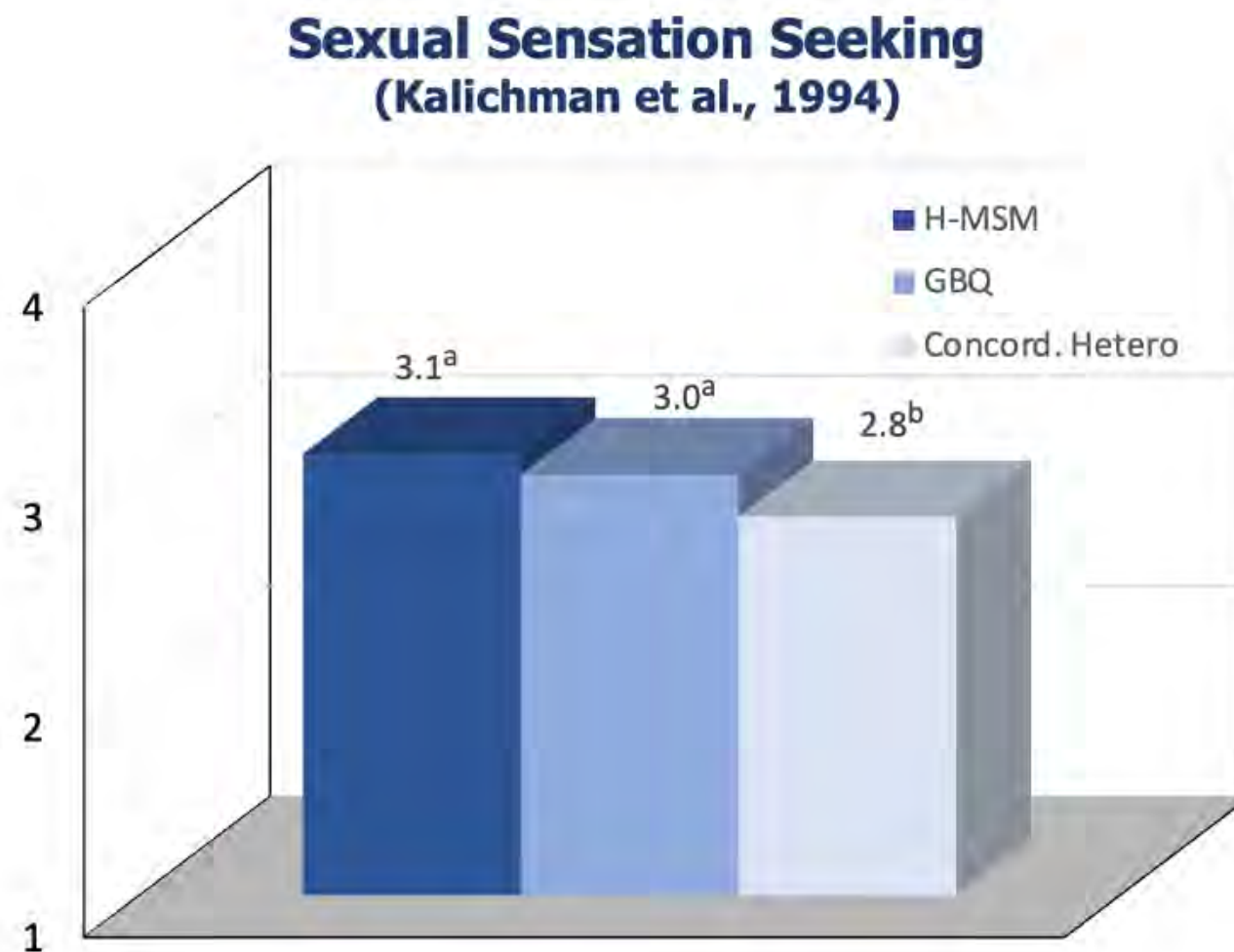
- *Behavior*

In the Last 12 Months, Approximately How Many Men Have You Had Sex With?



Results: Comparisons among H-MSM, GBQ MSM, and Concordant Heterosexual Men

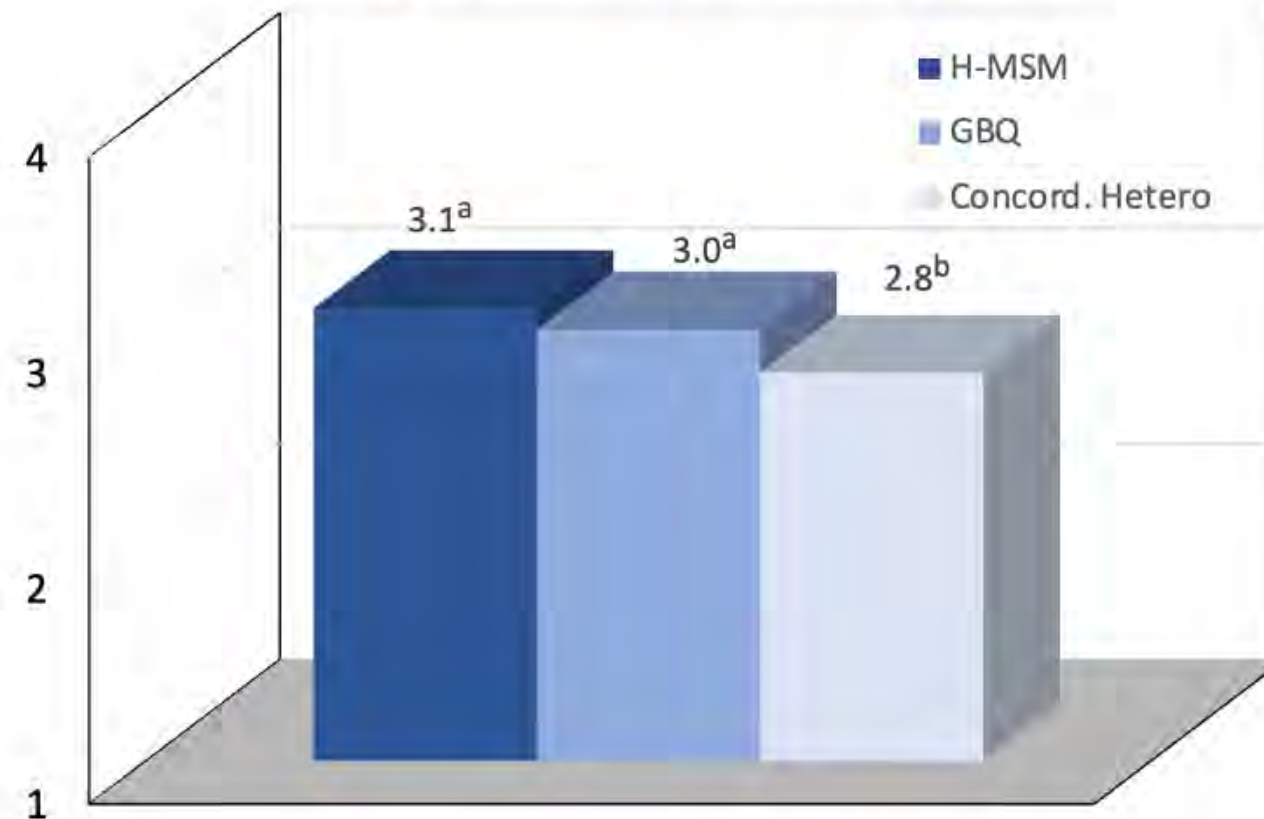
- *Behavior/Personality*



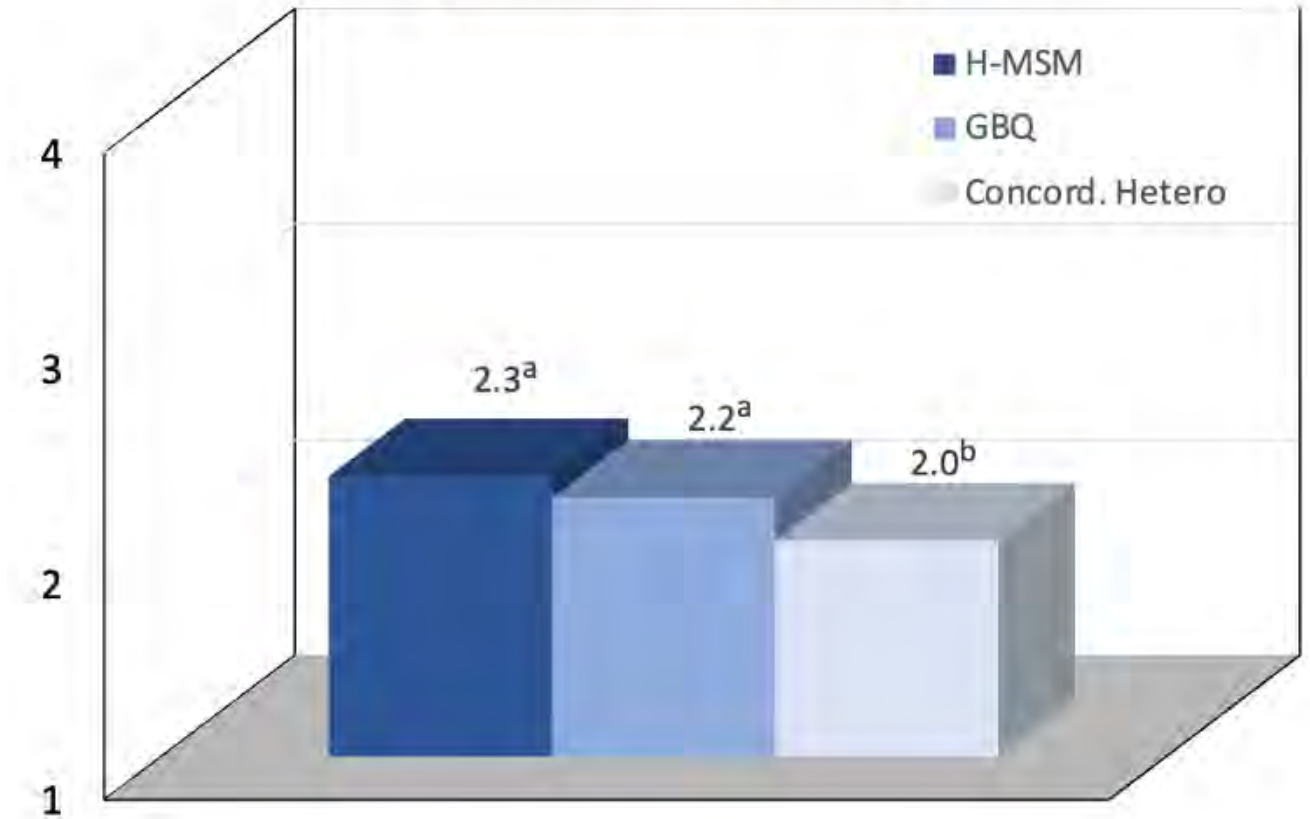
Results: Comparisons among H-MSM, GBQ MSM, and Concordant Heterosexual Men

- Behavior/Personality*

Sexual Sensation Seeking
(Kalichman et al., 1994)

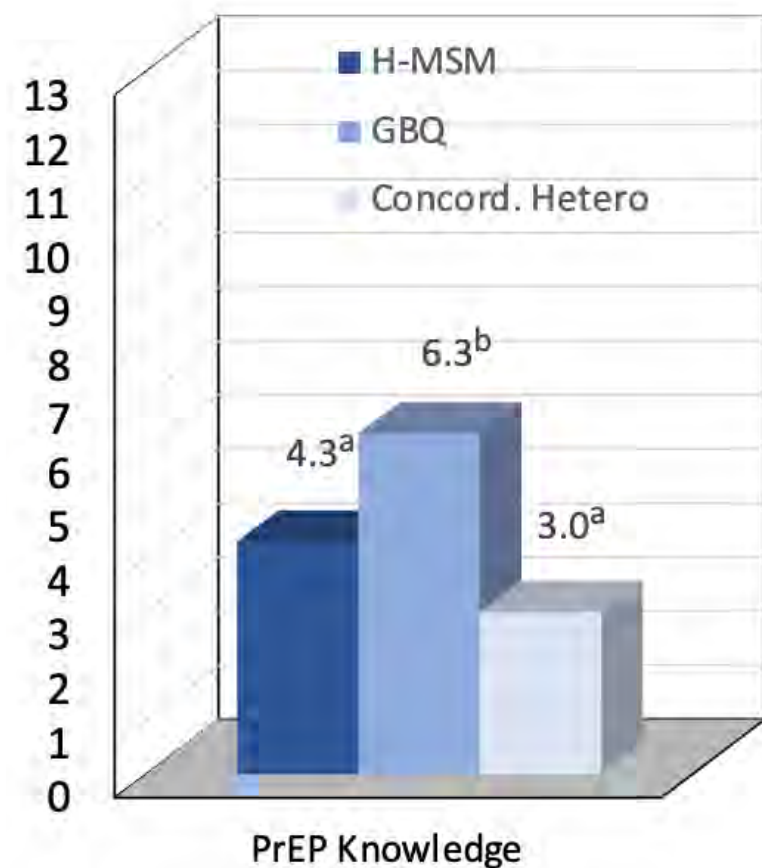


Sexual Compulsivity
(Coleman et al., 2001)



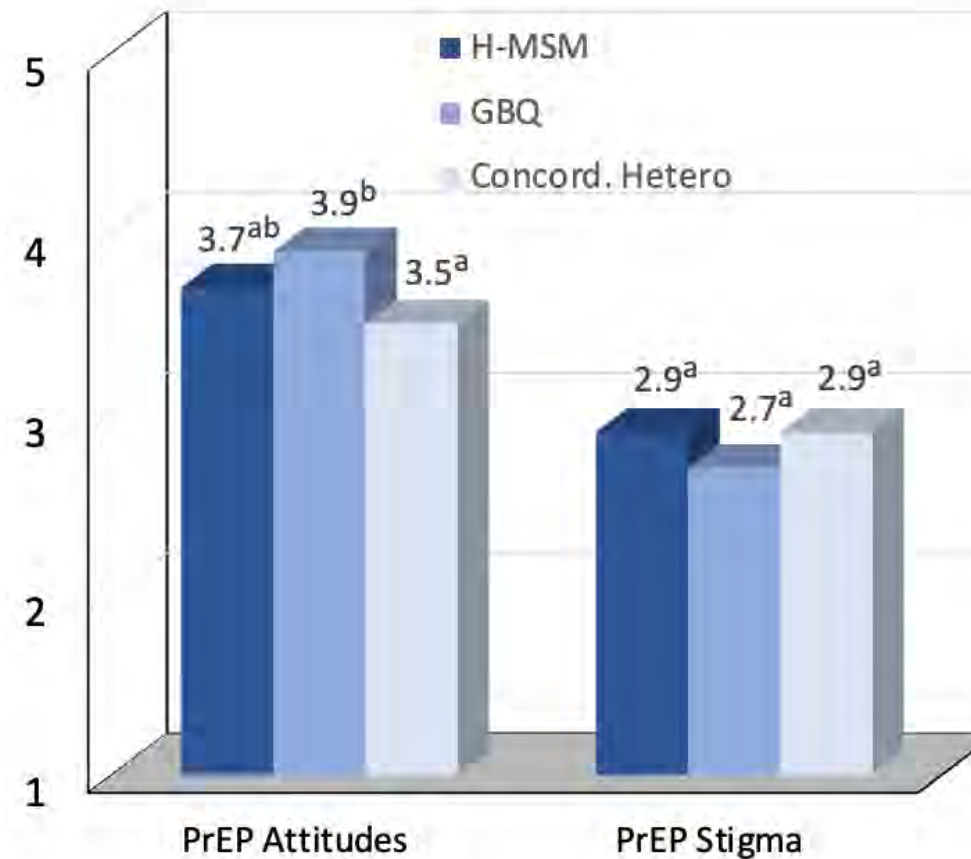
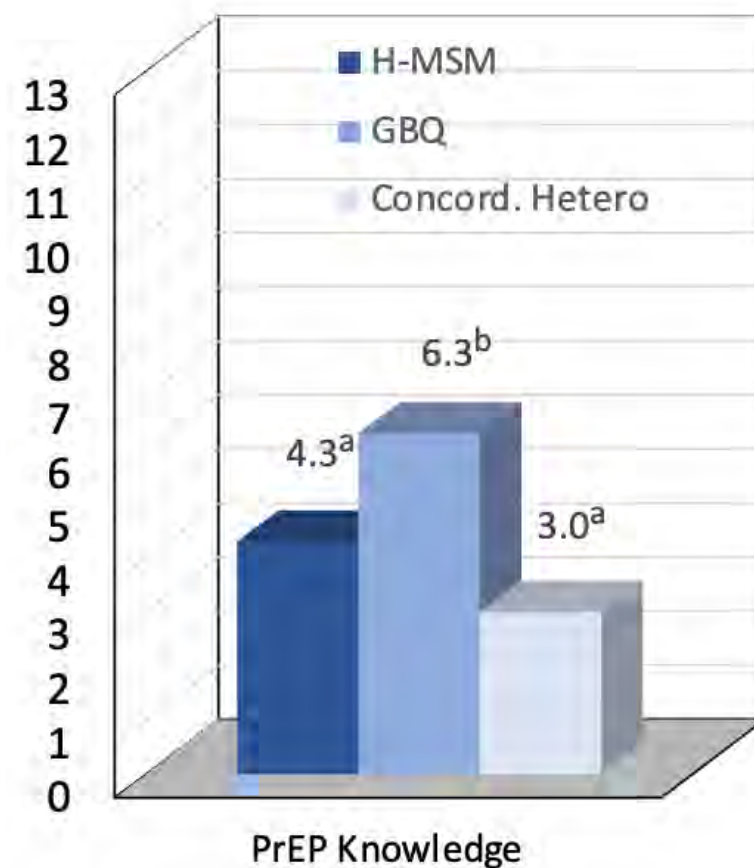
Results: Comparisons among H-MSM, GBQ MSM, and Concordant Heterosexual Men

- *PrEP*



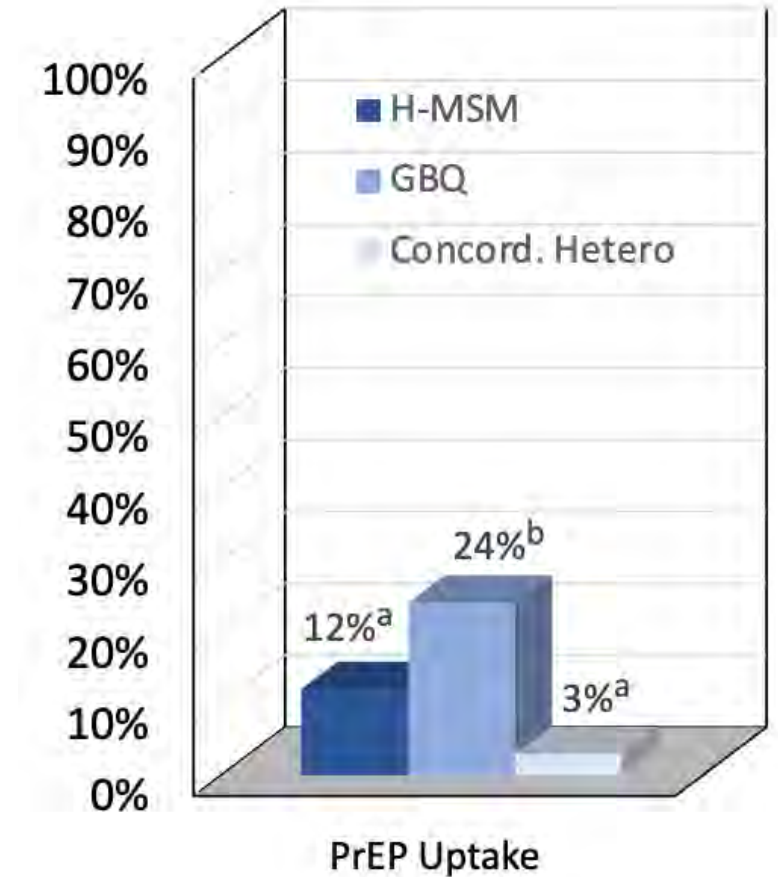
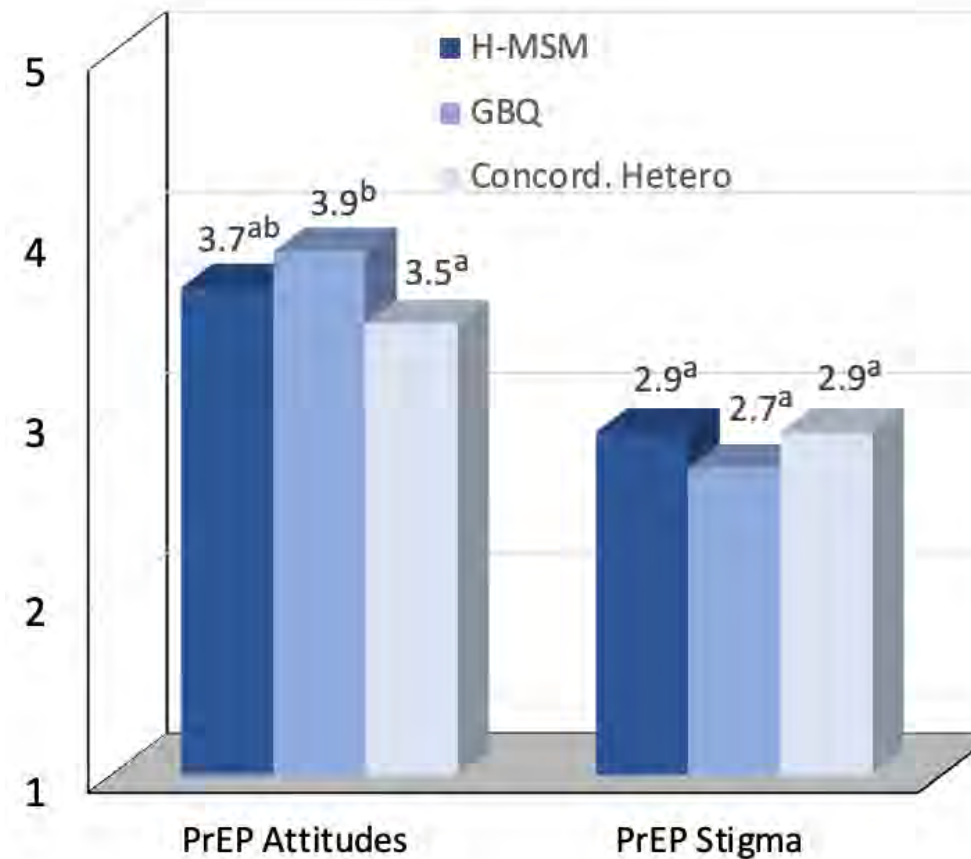
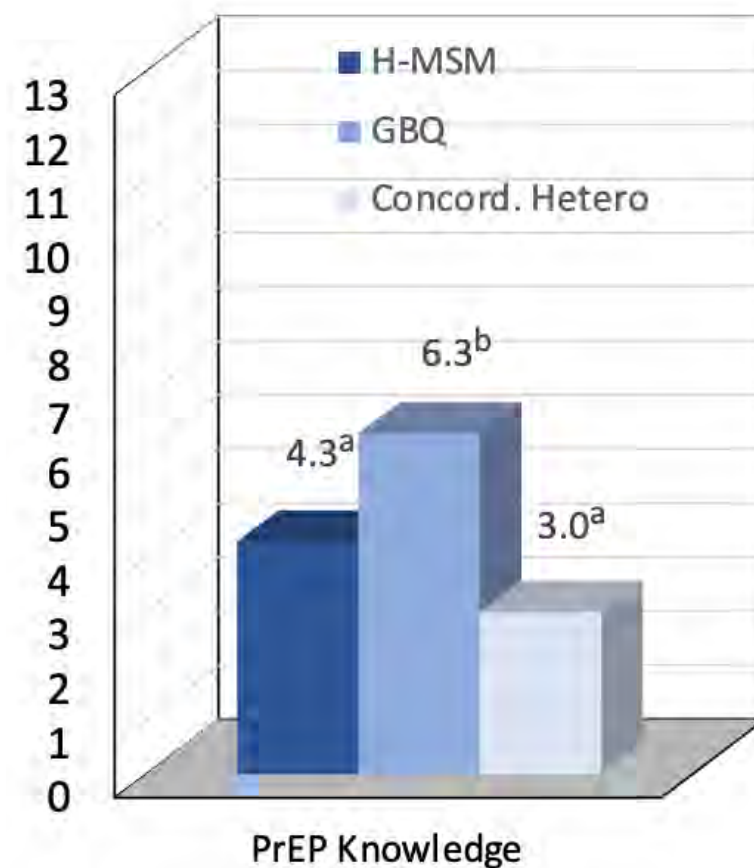
Results: Comparisons among H-MSM, GBQ MSM, and Concordant Heterosexual Men

- *PrEP*



Results: Comparisons among H-MSM, GBQ MSM, and Concordant Heterosexual Men

- *PrEP*





Interim Conclusions

- In our multinational sample of H-MSM, GBQ MSM, and concordant heterosexual men, demographic similarities were the norm
- Although in some cases H-MSM paralleled their GBQ MSM counterparts, key differences were found with respect to identity-, attraction-, and behavior-related indicators
- Differences in PrEP knowledge and uptake were notable, suggesting that tailored prevention initiatives are needed for H-MSM
- Research and public health efforts could be enhanced by recognizing H-MSM as a distinct population and not just as closeted GBQ MSM

References

- Annor, F. B., Clayton, H. B., Gilbert, L. K., Ivey-Stephenson, A. Z., Irving, S. M., David-Ferdon, C., & Kann, L. K. (2018). Sexual orientation discordance and nonfatal suicidal behaviors in U.S. high school students. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 54(4), 530-538. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2018.01.013>
- Benoit, A. A., & Ronis, S. T. (2022). A Qualitative Examination of Withdrawing Sexual Consent, Sexual Compliance, and Young Women’s Role as Sexual Gatekeepers. *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 34(4), 577–592. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2022.2089312>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Bussey, K. (2011). Gender identity development. In S. J. Schwartz, K. Luyckx, & V. L. Vignoles (Eds.), *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research* (pp. 603-628). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-7988-9_25
- Carrillo, H., & Hoffman, A. (2018). ‘Straight with a pinch of bi’: The construction of heterosexuality as an elastic category among adult US men. *Sexualities*, 21(1-2), 90-108. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460716678561>
- Jozkowski, K. N., Manning, J., & Hunt, M. (2018). Sexual consent in and out of the bedroom: Disjunctive views of heterosexual college students. *Women’s Studies in Communication*, 41(2), 117-139. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2018.1470121>
- MacNeil, S., & Byers, E. S. (2005). Dyadic assessment of sexual self-disclosure and sexual satisfaction in heterosexual dating couples. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 22(2), 169–181. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407505050942>
- MacNeil, S., & Byers, E. S. (2009). Role of Sexual Self-Disclosure in the Sexual Satisfaction of Long-Term Heterosexual Couples. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 46(1), 3–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224490802398399>
- Mark, K. P., & Jozkowski, K. N. (2013). The mediating role of sexual and nonsexual communication between relationship and sexual satisfaction in a sample of college-age heterosexual couples. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 39(5), 410-427. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623X.2011.644652>
- Mendelsohn, D. M., Omoto, A. M., Tannenbaum, K., & Lamb, C. S. (2022). When sexual identity and sexual behaviors do not align: The prevalence of discordance and its physical and psychological health correlates. *Stigma and Health*, 7(1), 70–79. <https://doi.org/10.1037/sah0000338>
- Meston, C. M., & Buss, D. M. (2007). Why humans have sex. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 36(4), 477-507. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-007-9175-2>
- Reback, C. J., & Larkins, S. (2010). Maintaining a heterosexual identity: sexual meanings among a sample of heterosexually identified men who have sex with men. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 39(3), 766-773. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-008-9437-7>
- Regan, P.C., & Bersched, E. (1996). Beliefs about the state, goals, and objects of sexual desire. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 22(2), 110-120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00926239608404915>
- Reynolds, C. (2015). “I am super straight and I prefer you be too.”: Constructions of heterosexual masculinity in online personal ads fo “straight” men seeking sex with men. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 39(3), 213-231. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019685991557573>
- Robinson, B. A., & Vidal-Ortiz, S. (2013). Displacing the dominant “down low” discourse: Deviance, same-sex desire, and Craigslist. *org. Deviant Behavior*, 34(3), 224-241. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2012.726174>
- Sabat, I., Trump, R., & King, E. (2014). Individual, interpersonal, and contextual factors relating to disclosure decisions of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 1(4), 431. <https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000061>
- Scheidler, T. R., Rao, S., Shuper, P. A., Beer, O. W. J., Curtis, T., McInroy, L. B., & Eaton, A. D. (2024). Recruiting and engaging heterosexual-identified men who have sex with men: A brief report of considerations for sex researchers. *The Journal of Sex Research*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2024.2380017>
- Simon, W., & Gagnon, J. H. (1984). Sexual scripts. *Society*, 22, 53-60. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02701260>
- Silva, T. J. (2019). Straight identity and same-sex desire: Conservatism, homophobia, and straight culture. *Social Forces*, 97(3), 1067-1094. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soy064>
- Silva, T. J., & Whaley, R. B. (2018). Bud-sex, dude-sex, and heteroflexible men: The relationship between straight identification and social attitudes in a nationally representative sample of men with same-sex attractions or sexual practices. *Sociological Perspectives*, 61(3), 426-443. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0731121417745024>
- Smith J. A., Flowers P., Larkin M. (2009). *Interpretive phenomenological analysis: Theory, method, and research*. Sage.
- Thomas, J., & Harden, A. (2008). Methods for the thematic synthesis of qualitative research in systematic reviews. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 8, 45. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-8-45>
- Waling, A. (2024). “Take it easy, I’ll tell you if there’s something wrong”: Young cisgender heterosexual men and sexual communication during casual sex in Australia. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-024-01013-3>
- Webber, V., McCreedy, S., Yurkovich, C., Dietzel, C., Feicht, B., Joy, P., Holmes, D., & Numer, M. (2024). Are queer men queering consent? A scoping review of sexual consent literature among gay, bisexual, trans, and queer men. *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 36(3), 359-383. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2024.2360727>
- Willis, M., Hunt, M., Wodika, A., Rhodes, D. L., Goodman, J., & Jozkowski, K. N. (2019). Explicit verbal sexual consent communication: Effects of gender, relationship status, and type of sexual behavior. *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 31(1), 60-70. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2019.1565793>

THANK YOU!
Questions?

