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Exploring the Needs of LGBT Youth in Peel: Emerging Themes and Implications

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The Region of Peel

- Consists of 3 municipalities: Brampton, Caledon and Mississauga
- One of the fastest rates of population growth in Canada
- One of the most multicultural communities in Canada, with 93 ethnic groups and 60 languages spoken



Gaps/Barriers in Peel Region

- Mental Health Support and Services
- Services for LGBT youth
- Proximity to Toronto
- Invisible population

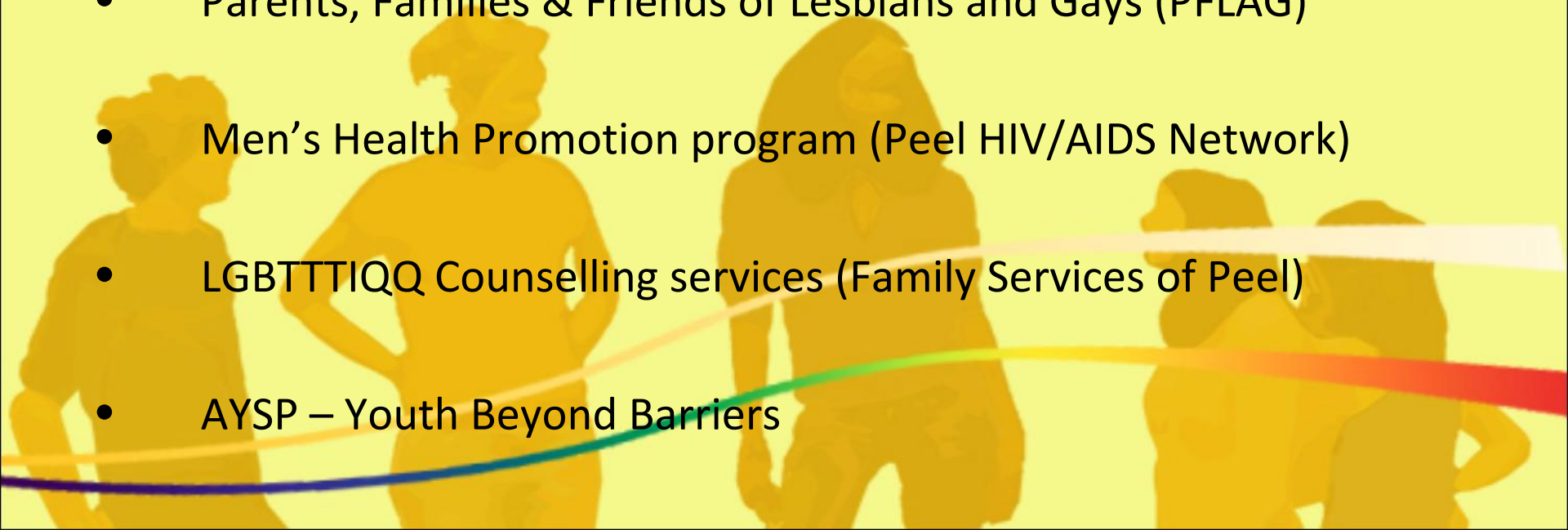


- “It is amazing how like Brampton and Mississauga all, kind of, Peel is different from Toronto. Feels like a completely different country. You are okay to be gay over there, but back here...”



Response to Gaps/Barriers

- Positive Space Coalition of Peel
- Gay-Straight Alliances
- Queer Xposure
- Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)
- Men's Health Promotion program (Peel HIV/AIDS Network)
- LGBTTTTIQQ Counselling services (Family Services of Peel)
- AYSP – Youth Beyond Barriers



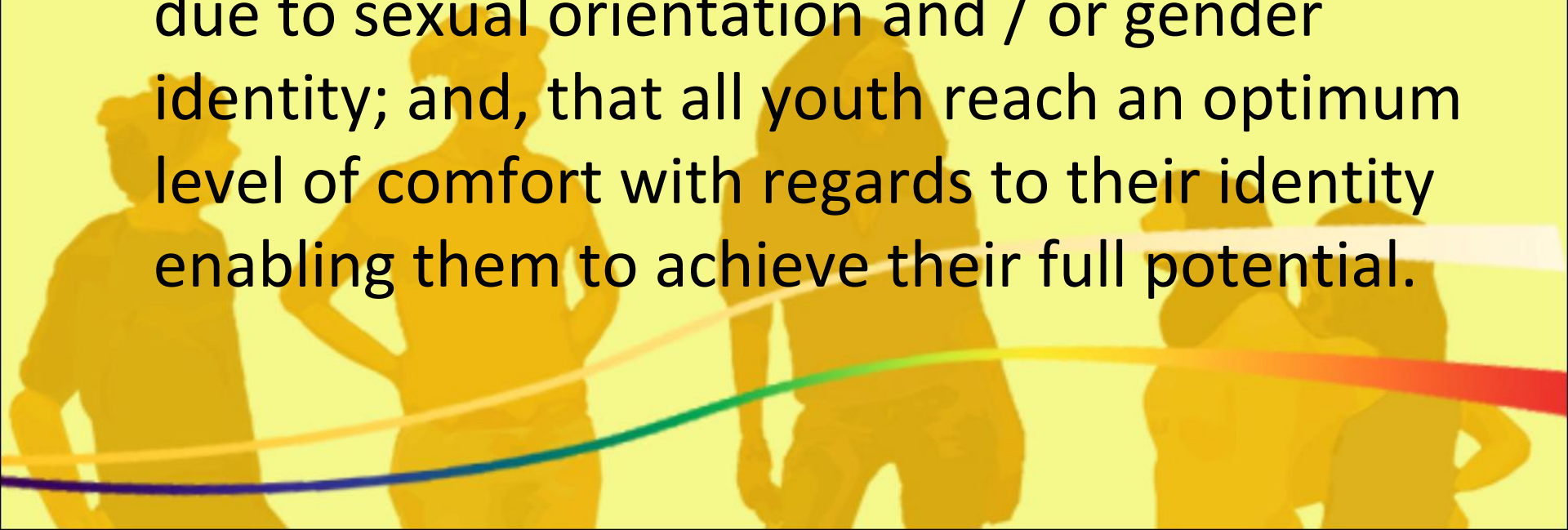
Associated Youth Services of Peel

- History
- Mission Statement
- Programs



Youth Beyond Barriers Mission Statement

- That all youth, regardless of sexual orientation and / or gender identity be afforded equal access to service provision, including the freedom from harassment and discrimination due to sexual orientation and / or gender identity; and, that all youth reach an optimum level of comfort with regards to their identity enabling them to achieve their full potential.



The YBB Program

- Development and Funding
- Direct services for queer and trans identifying youth, aged 12-18, in the Region of Peel
- Referrals
- Inclusionary Criteria
- Community Capacity Building



LGBTTTIQQ Needs Assessment for Peel Region

- YBB: Community based & youth engagement model
- Key issues: service needs and gaps faced by LGBTTTIQQ youth
- Previous to this research



Design and Methods

- Mixed Methodology
- Terms and Definitions
- Instrument Development



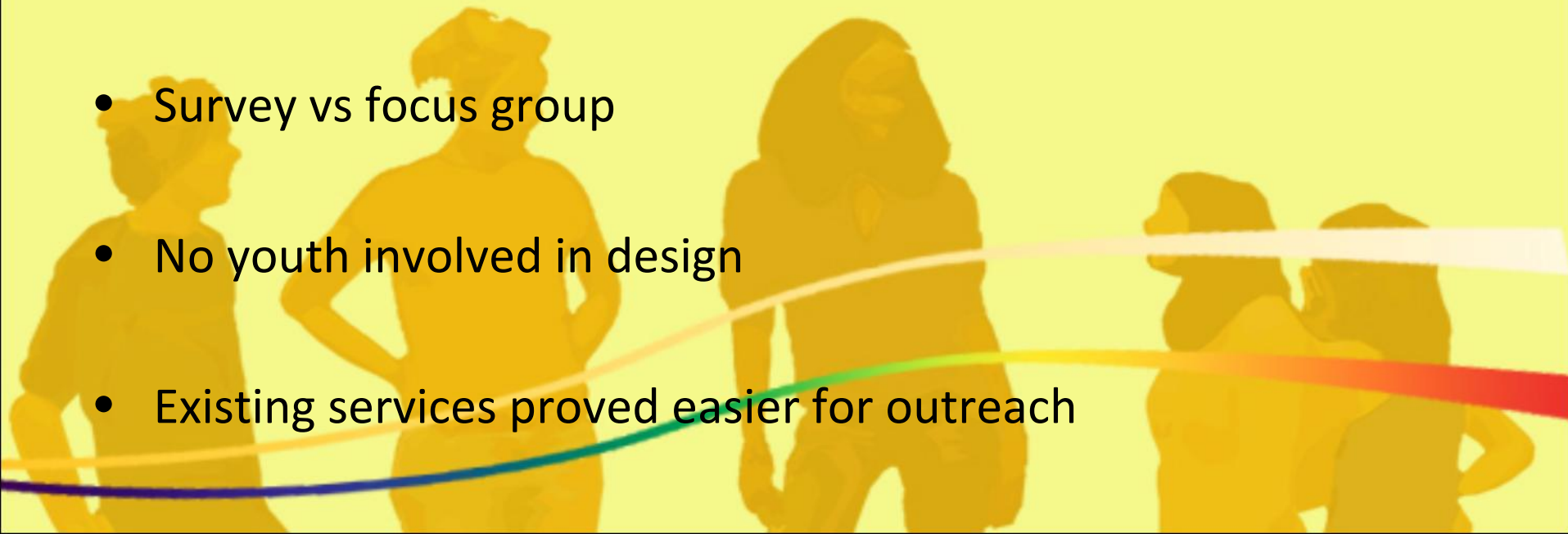
Recruitment and Data Collection

- **Survey**
- **Focus Group and Interviews**



Limitations of Research Methods

- 'Convenience sampling'
- Challenges of reaching diverse youth
- Few generalizations
- Survey vs focus group
- No youth involved in design
- Existing services proved easier for outreach



Respondent Demographics

- Majority of respondents live in Mississauga
- Most have lived in Peel region for 10 years or more
- The average age was 16
- 69% of survey participants identified as female
- 31% as male.
- 4 respondents selected multiple gender identities
- The majority of respondents identified themselves as bisexual and lesbian, with the remainder as gay. 30% chose to select multiple responses
- Most respondents were attending high school or college/university. Only 2 were not in school

Survey “Out” Results

- 86% reported that they are ‘out’ about their sexual orientation to somebody

Of those that are out:

- 97% are out to friends
- 58% are out to a brother or sister
- 53% are out to “other youth at school”
- 47% are out to their parents
- 47% are out “online” (e.g., on Facebook)
- 45% are out to a teacher
- 21% are out to people at work
- 16% are out to their doctor
- 13% are out to their extended family

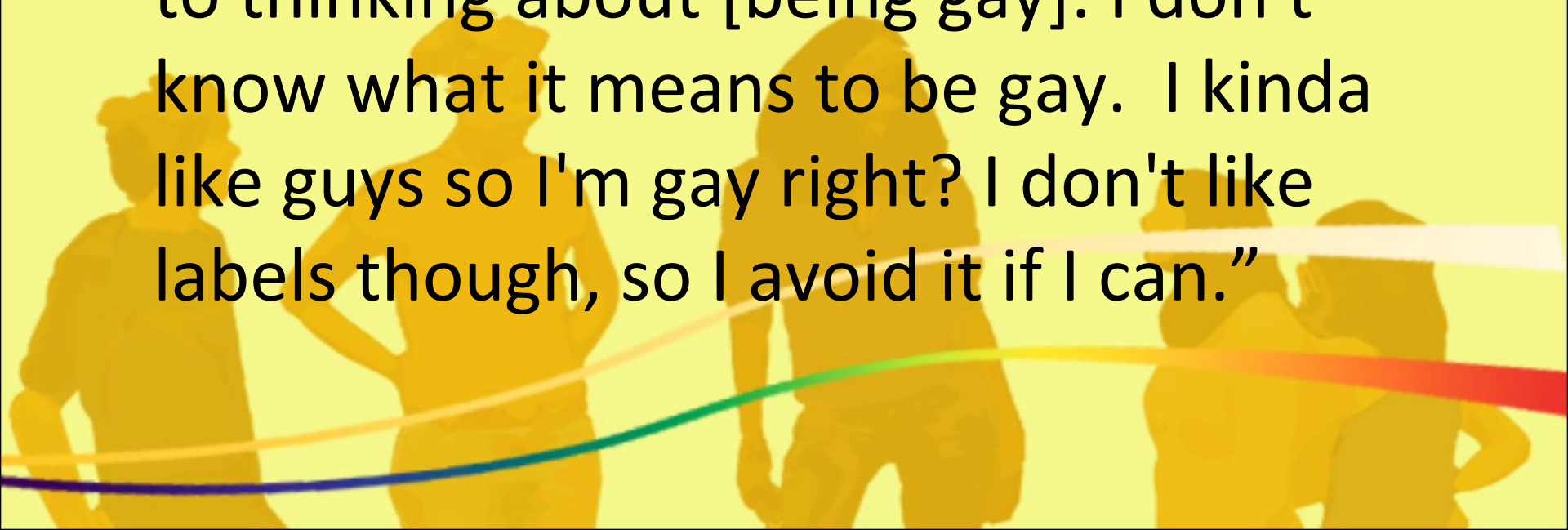
Health

- Physical Health
- Body Image
- Mental Health
- Sexual Health



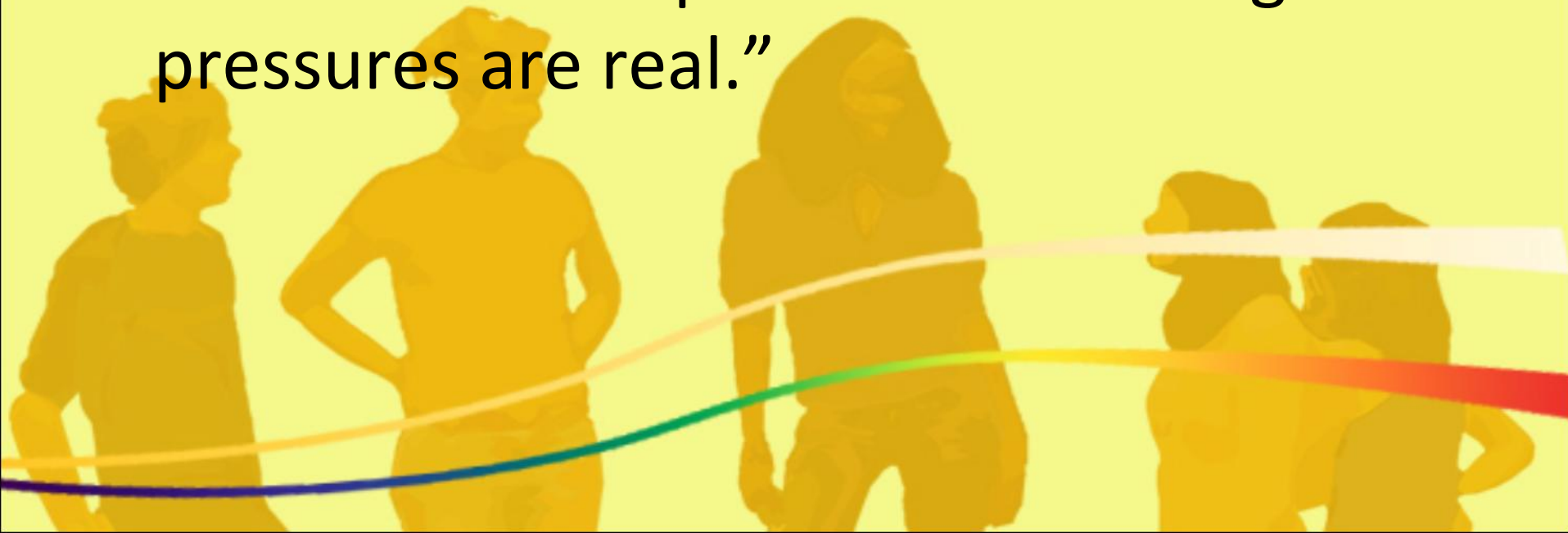
Mental Health

“I worry especially about whether I am mentally sound. I worry about what I am going to do in life. I worry about if I'm actually gay. I don't give too much time to thinking about [being gay]. I don't know what it means to be gay. I kinda like guys so I'm gay right? I don't like labels though, so I avoid it if I can.”

The background of the slide features silhouettes of several people in various poses, rendered in a golden-yellow color. A multi-colored arc, resembling a rainbow, curves across the bottom of the image.

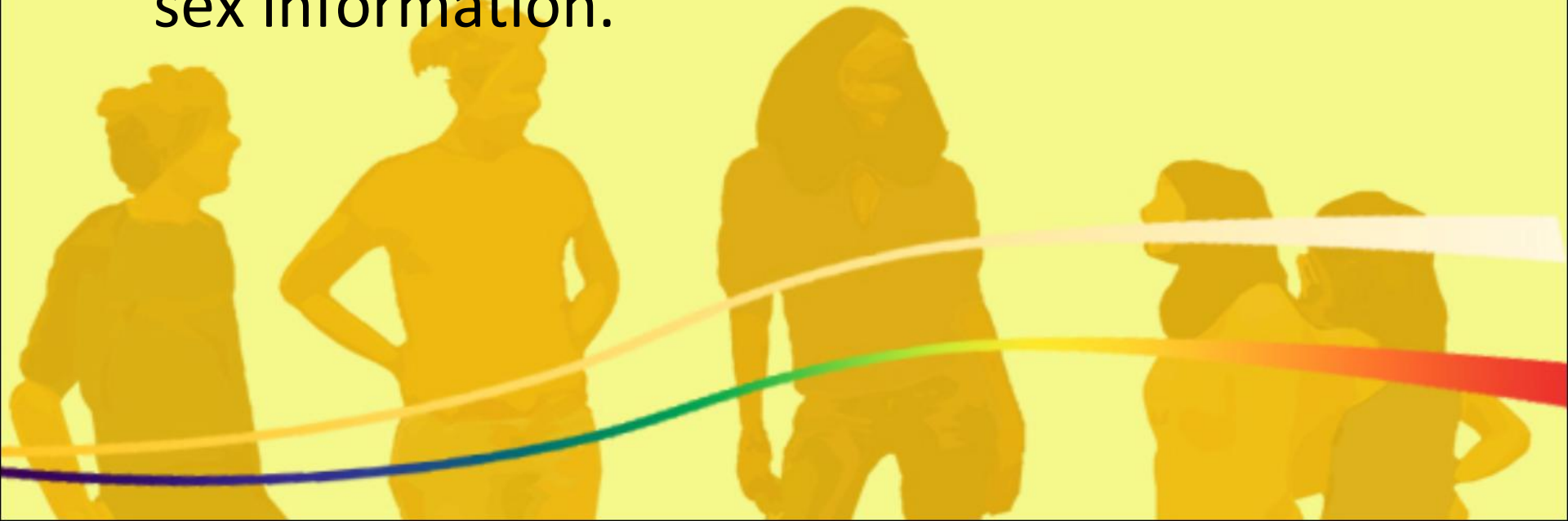
Body Image

“There is 'gay' pressure to be a certain way. Body image etc. I don't feel that way. I am comfortable with who I am. I don't feel those pressures. Although the pressures are real.”



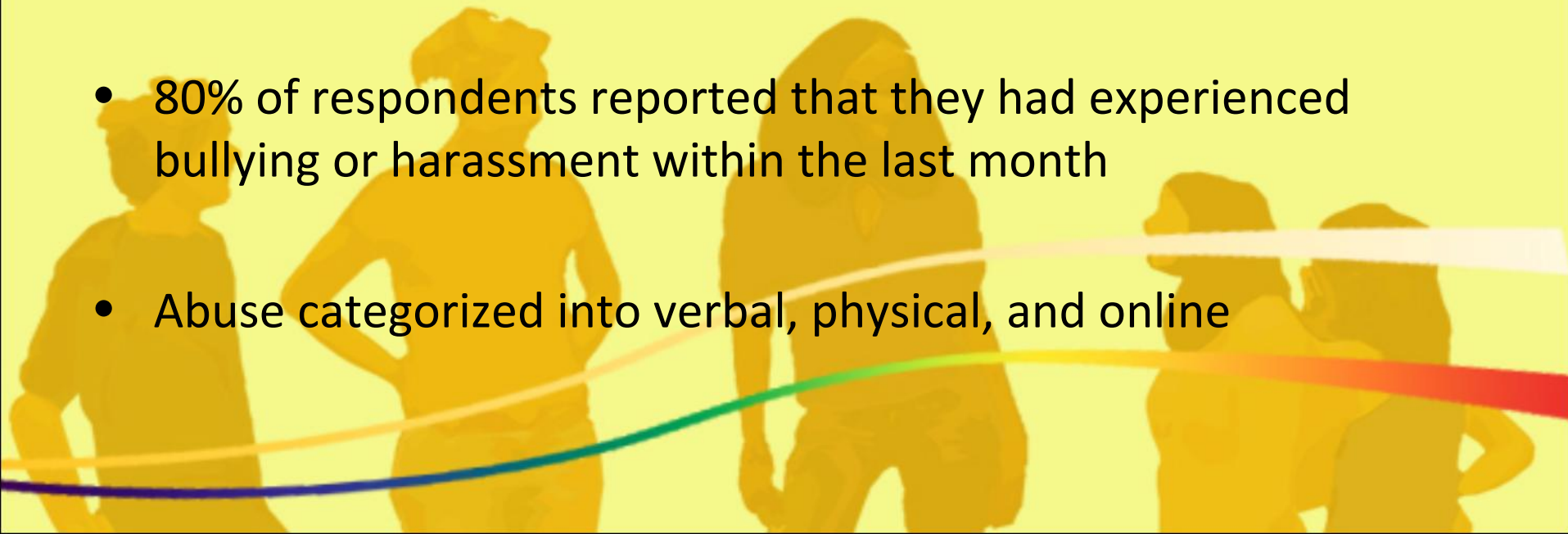
Sexual Health

- “More information on gay sex in sex education class. Normally if it's mentioned people just laugh, it's not taken seriously. I'd like to learn more about sexual health and gay sex information.”



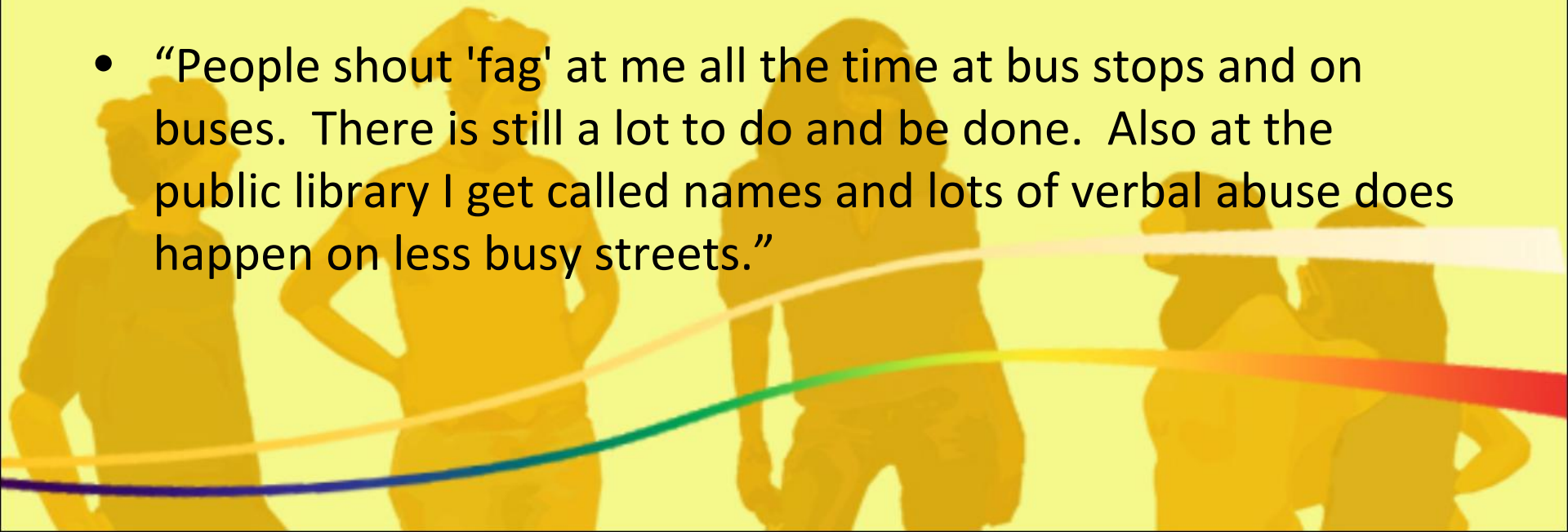
Safety and Abuse

- Respondents reported feeling most safe at home, in stores/malls and at work
- They felt least safe at recreation/fitness centres, on the street or sidewalk and using public transit
- 80% of respondents reported that they had experienced bullying or harassment within the last month
- Abuse categorized into verbal, physical, and online

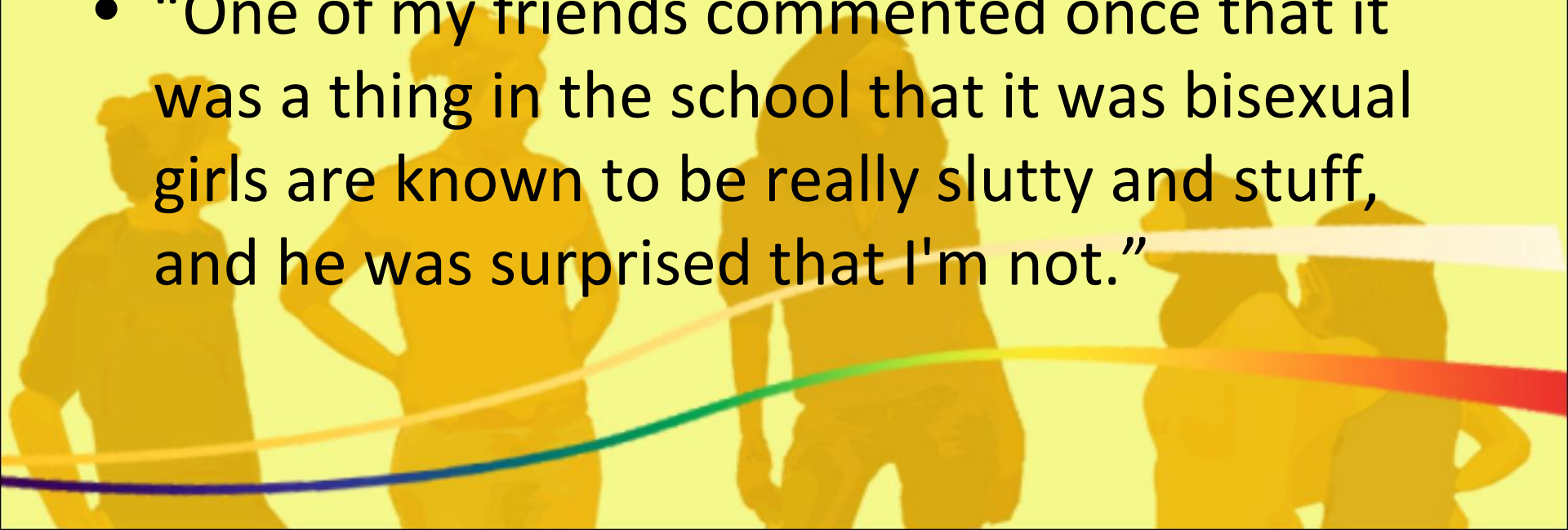


Verbal Abuse

- “My bio-parents always made me feel like shit and told me to go kill myself, especially when they would threaten to kick me out. So I guess you could call that emotional abuse.”
- “the police tell me when I am experiencing homophobia, to get off and ride another bus!! that's so unreasonable”
- “People shout 'fag' at me all the time at bus stops and on buses. There is still a lot to do and be done. Also at the public library I get called names and lots of verbal abuse does happen on less busy streets.”

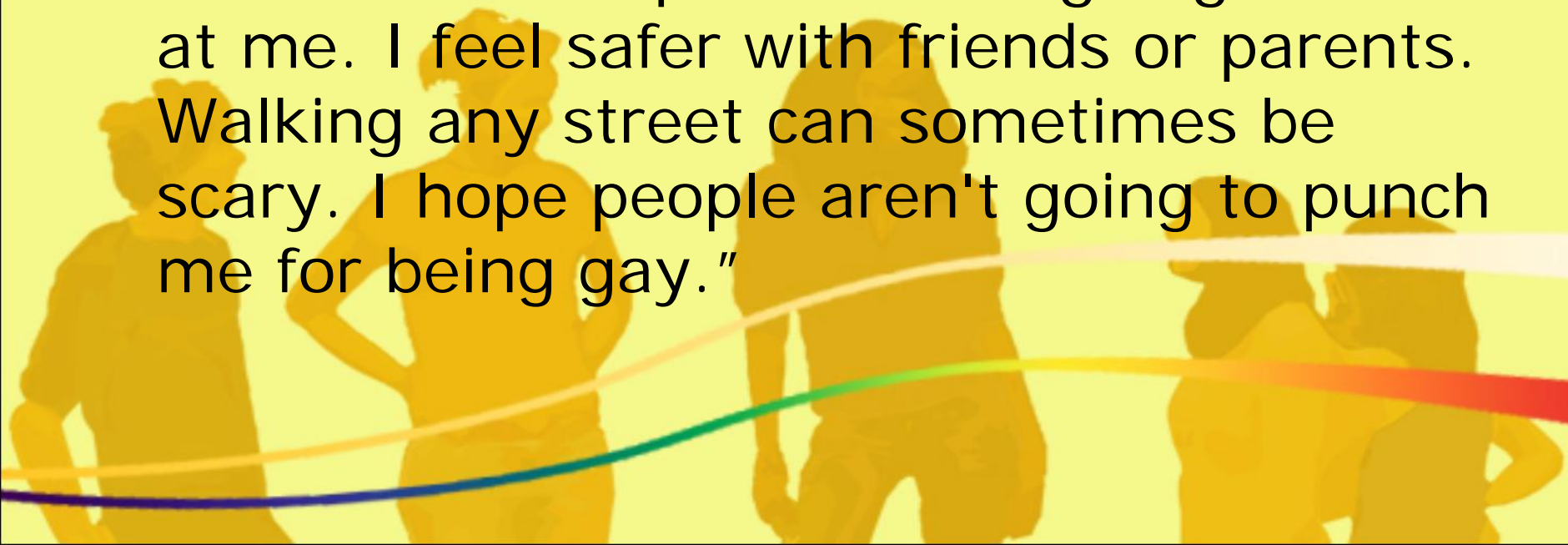


- “But I still hear ‘that’s so gay’ at least a thousand hundred times a day. And also like guys joke around like ‘you’re gay, you’re gay’. It’s like why is that a derogatory term?”
- “One of my friends commented once that it was a thing in the school that it was bisexual girls are known to be really slutty and stuff, and he was surprised that I'm not.”

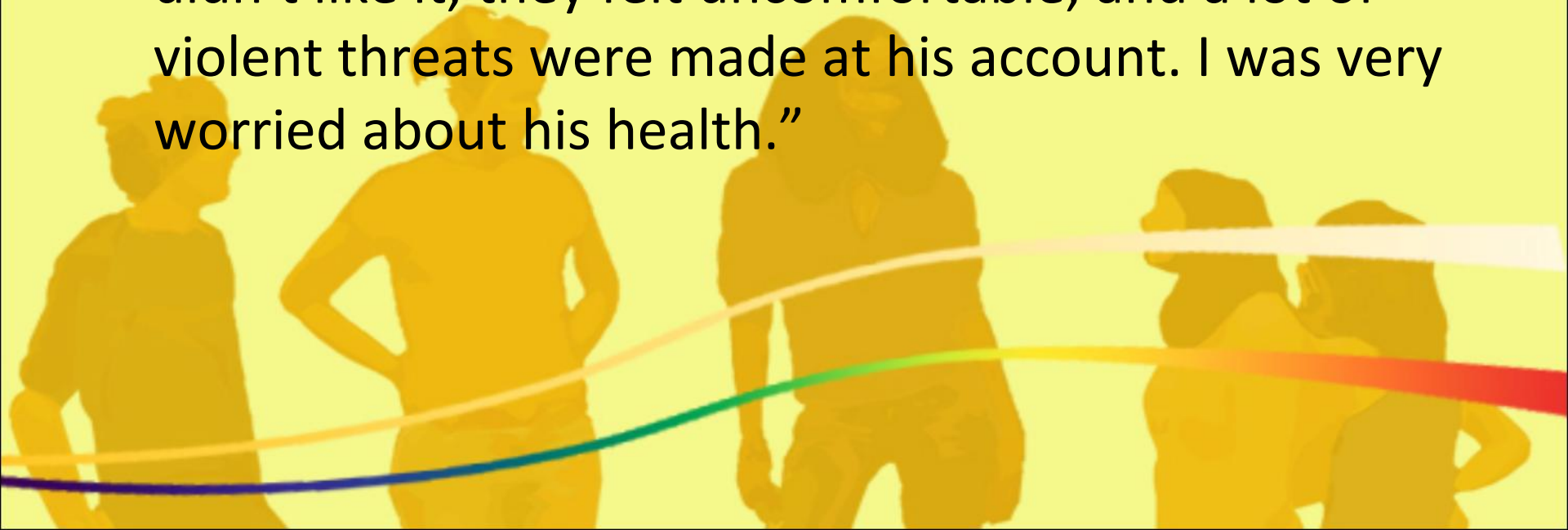


Physical Abuse

- “I don't feel safe when I walk home from school sometimes. Other kids looking at me. Looking up and down at me. I wonder whether they know I am gay or not. Sometimes I hope no one is going to look at me. I feel safer with friends or parents. Walking any street can sometimes be scary. I hope people aren't going to punch me for being gay.”

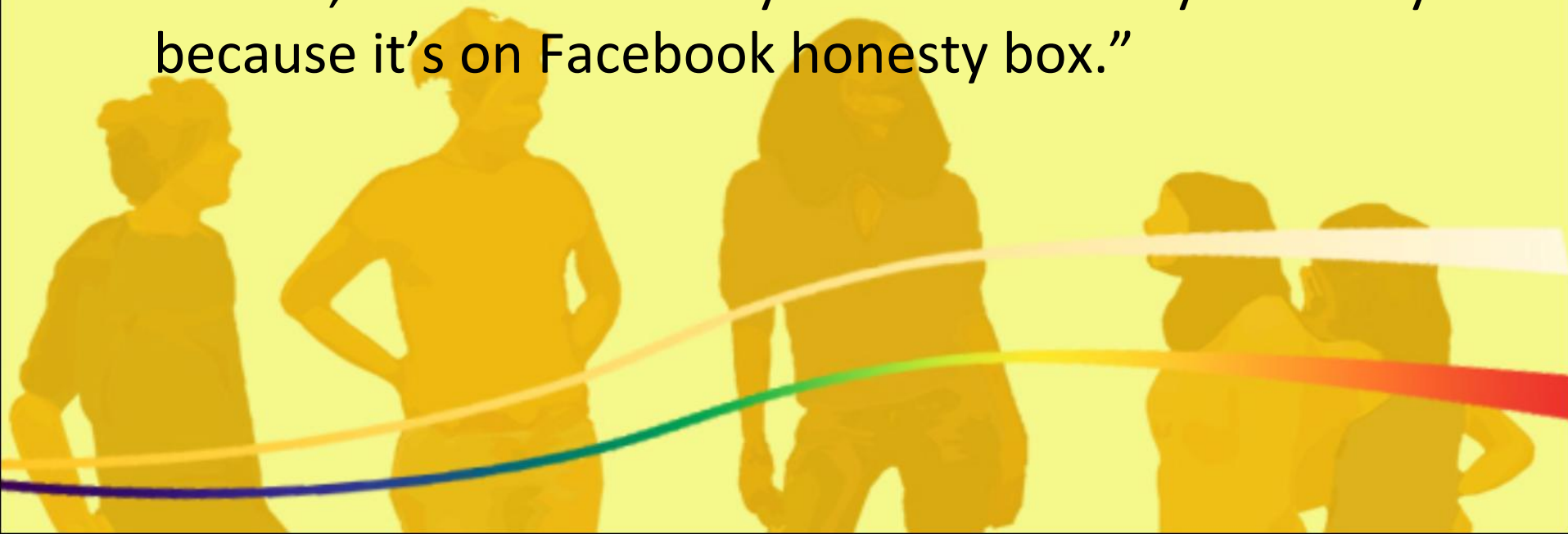


- “Ya, just recently my friend, he’s very openly gay, he dresses very feminine, wears make-up, he went to M-- but he moved to H--. But in the first week I was hearing stories about people wanting to beat him up because they thought he was transsexual. They didn’t like it, they felt uncomfortable, and a lot of violent threats were made at his account. I was very worried about his health.”



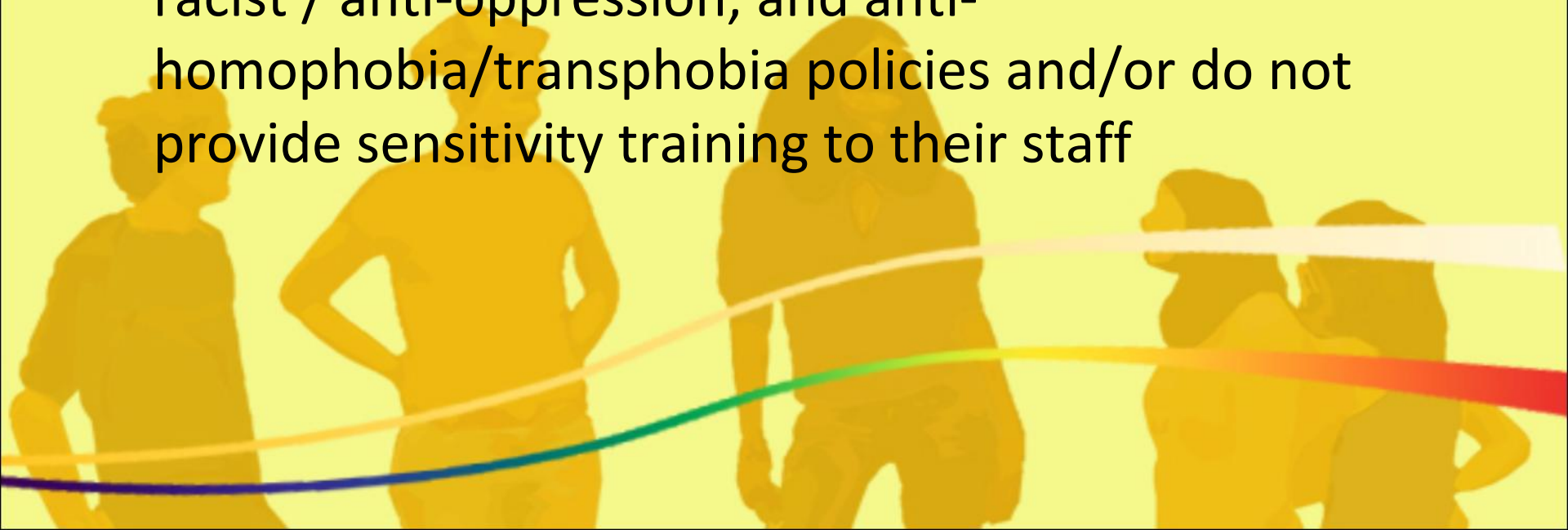
Online Abuse

“There’s like an honesty box on Facebook that I got a lot of crude comments on, from both males and females, mostly females, saying things like ‘you’re a dirty lesbian’ and I’ve gotten death threats on there too. So, but I didn’t really take them really seriously because it’s on Facebook honesty box.”



Social Inclusion

- Many LGBT youth feel socially excluded from mainstream services and systems
- Mainstream institutions often do not have clear anti-racist / anti-oppression, and anti-homophobia/transphobia policies and/or do not provide sensitivity training to their staff

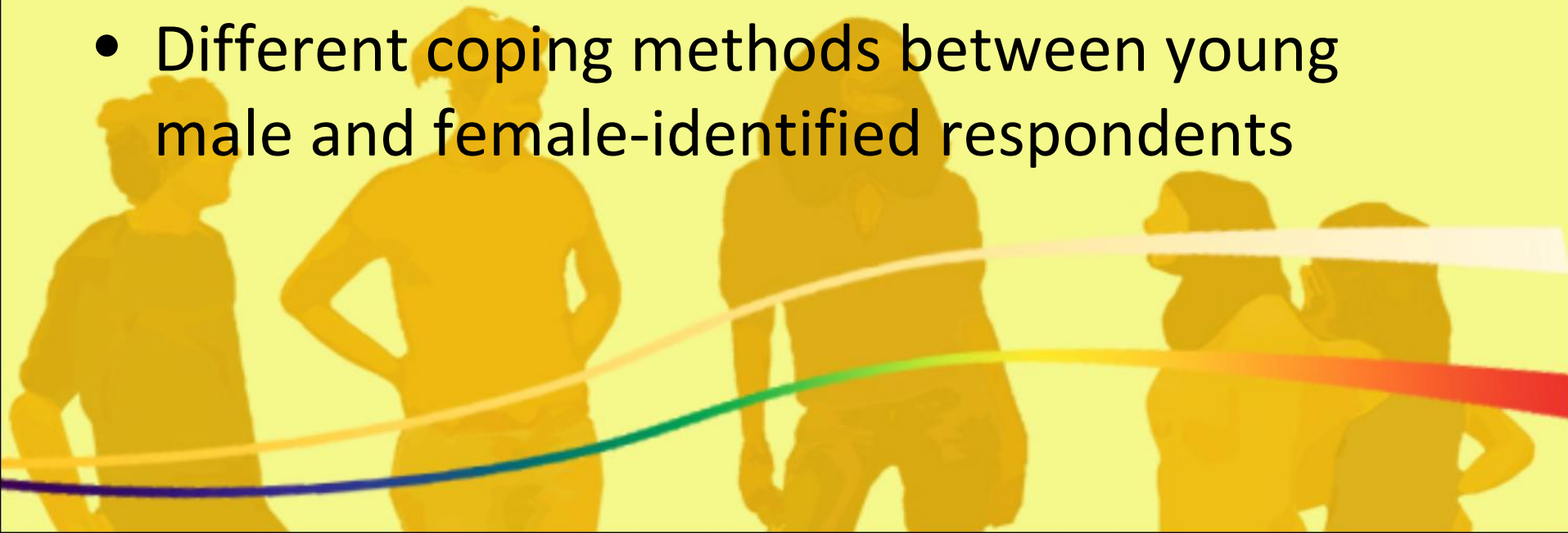


- “I'm not aware of any support/help for LBGTQ in the community if anyone faces discrimination.”



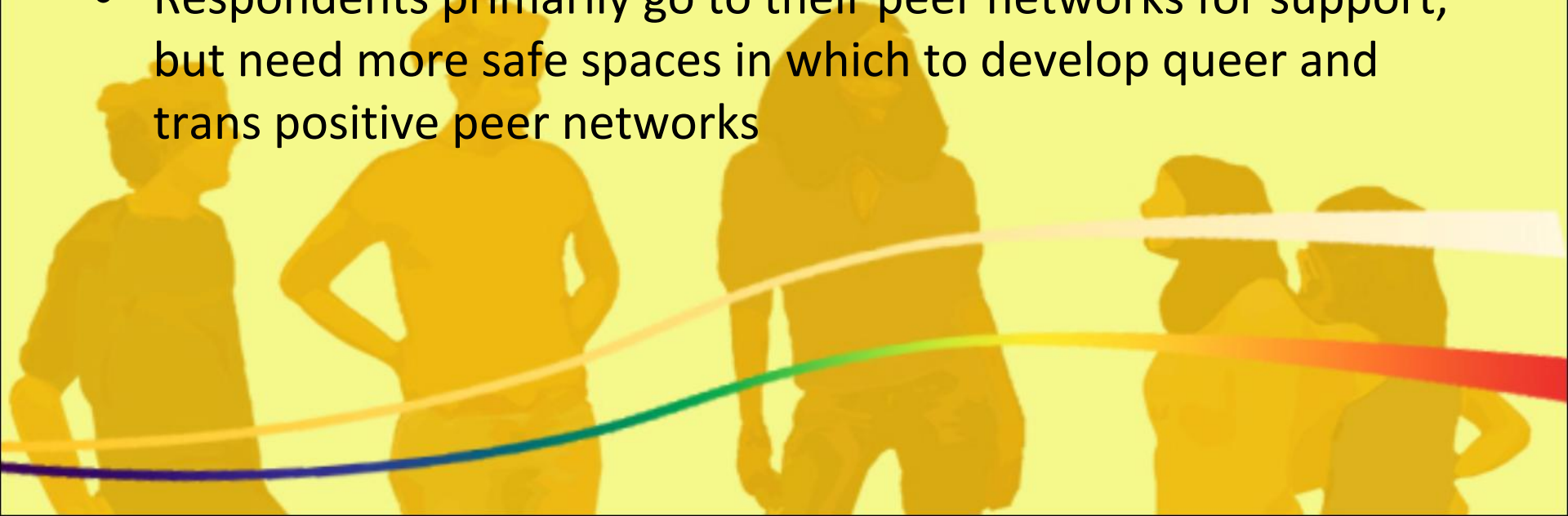
Coping Strategies

- Respondents frequently look to friends or partners to help them cope with their problems
- Different coping methods between young male and female-identified respondents



Identity and Sense of Community

- Most participants felt some sense of community (e.g., at school) although opinions were mixed in terms of whether they identified with a larger LGBTTTTIQQ community in Peel
- Respondents primarily go to their peer networks for support, but need more safe spaces in which to develop queer and trans positive peer networks



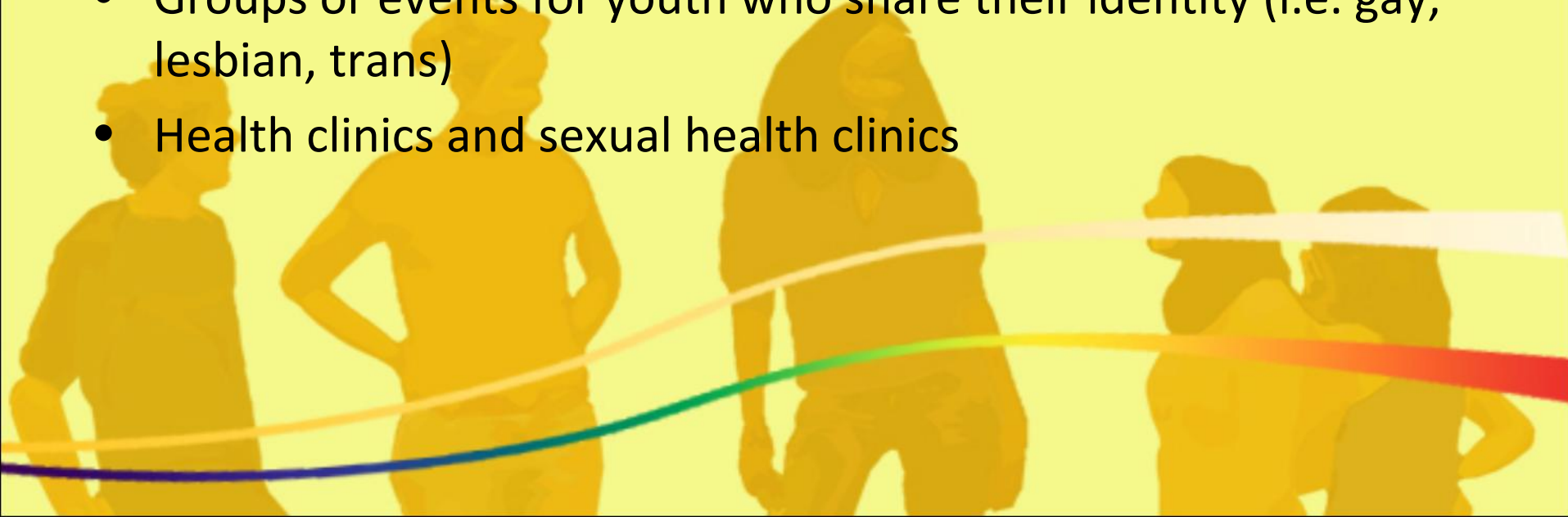
“Positive places include: home, school, where I have friends who know me, so that I can be myself; sometimes the mall is a safe space if I'm with friends. It feels safe being with people who know me and therefore who know I'm not being obnoxious but just me.”



Community Programs and Services

Programs/services rated most important by participants are:

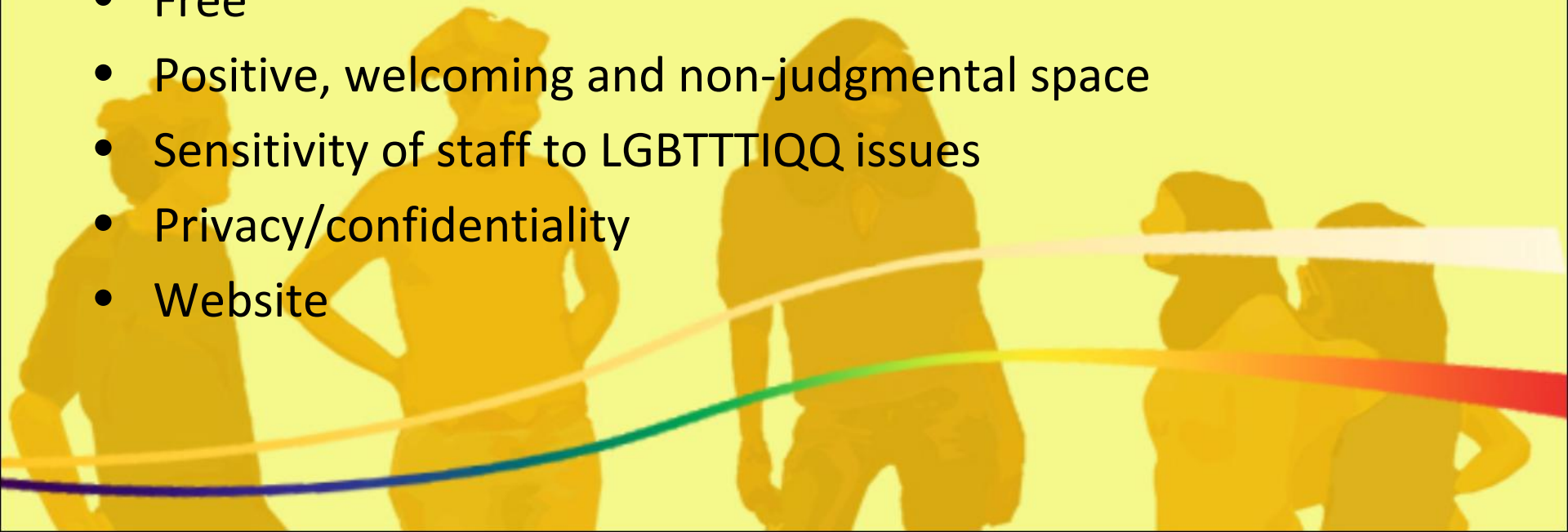
- Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA's)/other clubs at school
- Youth drop-ins/support groups
- Queer positive employment services
- Groups or events for youth who share their identity (i.e. gay, lesbian, trans)
- Health clinics and sexual health clinics



Desired Characteristics of Community Programs/Services

The most important program/service characteristics identified are:

- Convenient location and time
- Free
- Positive, welcoming and non-judgmental space
- Sensitivity of staff to LGBTTTTIQQ issues
- Privacy/confidentiality
- Website



Recommendations for AYSP & Peel Region

- Mental health awareness and research
 - Availability of YBB program materials
 - Anti-discrimination policies
 - YBB program expansion
 - Strategies to engage racialized and marginalized LGBT youth
 - LGBT youth website
 - Training and education
 - Develop brochures
 - Youth advisory committee
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- The background of the slide features silhouettes of several young people of diverse ethnicities and genders. At the bottom, there is a horizontal rainbow arc with colors transitioning from blue on the left to red on the right.

Relevance to Ontario

- “EGALE survey” 2007
- “Safe schools action team” 2008
- “The experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered students of color in our Nation’s schools”



Contact Information

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