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THE ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT OF LESBIAN, GAY, AND BISEXUAL PEOPLE:
CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

A Thesis Presented

by

CYNTHIA L. BATTLE

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

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Department of Psychology

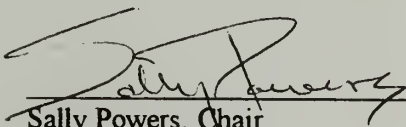
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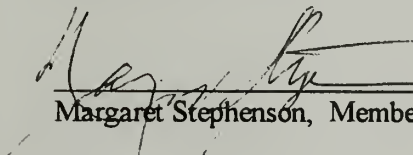
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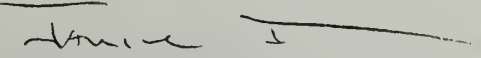
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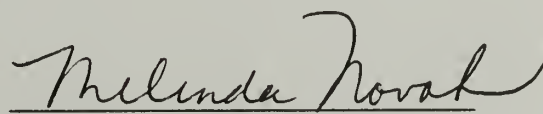
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Finally, this study would not have been possible without the participation of the twenty-two young people who volunteered to be interviewed. For some participants, involvement in this study was a not an insignificant task, and indeed marked the first time they publicly disclosed their sexual identity. I was deeply touched by the honesty, courage, and resilience of these young people, and hope that the power of their personal stories and opinions was not lost in translation.

ABSTRACT

THE ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT OF LESBIAN, GAY AND BISEXUAL PEOPLE: CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

MAY 1997

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The adolescent experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual people warrant the attention of psychological investigators, but serious methodological roadblocks, coupled with a history of heterosexist bias, have kept the amount of published research on this topic small until recently. This 2-part project explored the conceptual and methodological issues central to this growing body of research, as well as effective techniques for future investigations. Part I: An evaluative review of 31 empirical studies published between 1987-1997 revealed that research on "gay youth" has identified many of the pressing issues and needs of this population, but has also been limited by lack of prospective, longitudinal study designs, and adequately representative samples. The experiences of youth who are female, bisexual, questioning their sexual identity, living in rural areas, and/or those who have not sought support services are particularly underrepresented. The emerging body of data is often not adequately linked to existing theories of normative adolescent development. Relatively few of the existing studies have been disseminated within 'mainstream' APA psychology journals, and findings have largely been neglected by standard psychology textbooks on adolescence. Part II: To gain the perspective of LGB community members regarding research priorities and effective methodologies, six semi-structured focus groups were conducted,

comprised of 12 women and 10 men with minority sexual identities. Qualitative analysis of focus group discussions revealed participants' perspectives on (a) the adolescent issues deemed most salient for sexual minority youth, (b) concerns regarding research participation during adolescence or about their adolescence, and (c) suggestions for future research regarding the adolescent experiences of LGB persons. Findings of focus group discussions were incorporated with the review of recent literature to provide recommendations for future study of LGB individuals during the period of adolescence, with implications of developmentally-informed research on sexual minorities across the lifespan. Researchers are urged to use more inclusive and representative sampling strategies, utilize longitudinal, prospective designs, clarify assumptions about the nature of sexual identity, and treat participant confidentiality as paramount.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON LESBIAN, GAY, AND BISEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

Within the psychological literature, information regarding the life course development of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals is seriously lacking.¹ Most of the classic works on human development (such as Erikson, 1963) are based solely on heterosexual populations. Much of the reason for this gap in the literature is that, until the 1970's, theoretical and empirical efforts related to homosexuality were typically pathology-oriented, often focusing on methods to change, explain, or "correct" one's sexual orientation (Gonsiorek, 1991). For instance, psychoanalytic writer Salzman (1974) explains the nature and origin of homosexuality in his overview of adolescent sexual problems:

"Homosexuality is a manifestation of some failure in personality development in which an individual compulsively prefers and becomes exclusively involved in sexual relations with the same sex. [A homosexual] individual grows up with a loathing, disgust, or horror towards his genital apparatus...[and later] fears, loathes or avoids the genitals of the opposite sex. ...The problem is more extensive and complicated than a mere sexual aberration. It is a total personality problem that has *as one of its symptoms* the interest in the person and sexual apparatus of a person of the same sex. ...The treatment of homosexuality is enormously difficult, but there is reason to believe that if efforts are made during adolescence, before patterns are fixed and rewards are too great, some change is possible." (1974, p.204-205, italics in the original)

¹ This thesis specifically addresses developmental issues relevant to lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons. For simplicity, I have often used the abbreviation "LGB," or, alternatively, the terms "minority sexual identity" or "non-heterosexual" to describe the same group. Regarding which sexual identity groups are "included" in this thesis: (1) In this thesis, bisexuality is included as a distinct sexual identity, since many individuals define their identity as such; (2) Some non-heterosexual individuals do not use the terms "lesbian" "gay" or "bisexual"- preferring other terms such as "queer" or "dyke," or rejecting the notion of sexual identity labelling altogether. It is not my intention to exclude these individuals; "LGB" is used for purposes of semantic simplicity only. (3) Many people consider themselves to be transgendered and/or transsexual. This study was not initially designed to investigate developmental issues of transgendered individuals, however, one study participant identified himself as "transgendered;" and some of the issues addressed in this thesis may also be relevant to this population. To my knowledge there is currently no research specifically on the adolescent experiences of transgendered individuals.

It was not until 1973 that homosexuality was removed from the list of psychiatric disorders as catalogued by the American Psychiatric Association's widely-referenced Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (1994). This, and other socio-political changes borne out of the Stonewall era gay liberation movement of the 1970's, have led traditional academic and clinical disciplines such as psychology and psychiatry, to re-examine the topic of sexual identity from less biased, heterosexist vantage point. Even so, as Patterson (1995) remarked in a recent review of psychological research on sexual orientation and human development, it is "astonishing" how little is known about the lives of LGB people, given the large percentage of the population comprised of non-heterosexual individuals. Although demographic estimates regarding the size of this population are still widely debated (from Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin's 1948 estimate of 10% - to Fay, Turner, Klassen, & Gagnon's 1989 estimate of 3-6%), even conservative estimates would indicate that somewhere between 7 and 15 million Americans are gay, lesbian or bisexual. Yet a normative understanding of LGB development is only now being pieced together.

A. Using a Developmental Perspective

The development of lesbian, gay and bisexual persons has been examined by studying various points in the life span, from childhood (Green, 1987; Bell, et.al., 1981) to adolescence (Savin-Williams, 1990; Rotheram-Borus, 1991), to adulthood, including such topics as forming intimate relationships (Peplau, 1993), career issues (Morgan & Brown, 1993) families & parenting (Falk, 1993; Bozett, 1993), and aging (Kimmel, 1993). The retrospective methodology used in many of these investigations has been cited as problematic due to the chance of memory distortion in recalling past events (Anderson, 1994; Bell, 1975; Ross, 1980; Boxer and Cohler, 1989), as have the typically small, non-representative samples (Zera, 1992). The value of longitudinal, prospective methodologies has been advocated by several

researchers in the field (Bell, 1975; Boxer & Cohler, 1989; Patterson, 1995); in their “immodest proposal for the study of lives,” Boxer and Cohler voice their regret regarding the examination of mere “slices of experience in one point in time, rather than focus on an individual’s development across time.”

Theory. In considering the experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual persons from a developmental perspective, Patterson (1995) articulated a number of critical questions which remain unanswered, including: (a) How relevant are classic models and theories of human development in understanding the lives of lesbian, gay and bisexual people? If they are not generalizable to this population, how might existing models/theories be revised? and (b) Are new theoretical models needed to encompass phenomenon of special importance to non-heterosexual populations? If so, what might they be?

In order to address these questions, a better understanding is needed regarding how an individual’s current stage of development affects his or her experience of sexual identity, and, in turn, how a person’s sexual identity may influence developmental processes at different points in the life span. For example, how might the process of sexual identity formation, commonly depicted by linear stage models (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1979), vary when occurring at different points in the life course (i.e. “coming out” as an adolescent vs. “coming out” later in adulthood). Or, how might normal developmental processes, such as the adolescent process of individuation, be the same or different for sexual minority individuals? Patterson (1995) also asks: how are all of these processes shaped by the cultural and historical context in which a person lives?

The past fifteen years has seen an impressive surge of publications regarding the lives of sexual minority individuals, bolstering the amount of descriptive data regarding the experiences, challenges, and needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Still, this growing

body of research almost seems to stand alone, unconnected to psychological investigations of human development - - psychological theories and investigations of normative development ✓
too often ignoring issues of diversity in sexual identity, and research on non-heterosexual populations too often failing to use a developmental lens.

Methodology. The lack of developmentally-based theory on the lives of LGB persons is likely to be due in part to the methodological roadblocks inherent in this field of study. Numerous problems have stood in the way of obtaining adequately large and representative samples. For example, the researchers' task of recruiting gay, lesbian or bisexual research participants, who are often reluctant to disclose their stigmatized sexual identity, can be very difficult. Due to this problem of identifying and recruiting participants, many researchers have obtained convenience samples from similar sources (such as urban and university LGB support groups); the predominance of study samples from these settings is likely to skew our understanding of LGB development.

As with other empirical work, the research methods used in this area of study are inextricably linked to the investigators' underlying conceptualizations and theoretical perspectives. In this case, investigators may have (stated or unstated) assumptions regarding the nature of sexual identity and/or what is normative for a particular developmental process; these assumptions may play a critical role in how a study sample is obtained and how information is obtained from participants. For example, consider how sexual identity is assessed: if an investigator considers sexual identity to be dichotomous in nature (homosexual vs. heterosexual), rather than on a continuum (including bisexuality), the questions asked of participants would reflect that assumption. Therefore, even when research is descriptive in nature, and not directly linked to theory, investigators' assumptions and biases still impact the

methods - and therefore the findings - of the research. When these assumptions are not made explicit, the result may be error or confusion in interpreting the findings.

B. Focusing on Adolescence

With these issues in mind, the focus of this investigation is on research regarding one particular stage of life in the lives of sexual minority individuals - the adolescent years.

Developmental issues with respect to adolescence. Adolescence has been conceptualized as an especially important time for individuals who ultimately identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual, in that: (a) for many, the conscious process of sexual identity formation ("coming out" to self and others) begins during this time, (b) this is a time when significant biological, cognitive, emotional and social changes occur for all youth. These multiple changes are likely to have a significant impact upon the process of sexual identity formation. Some of the most important developmental tasks of adolescence may be uniquely challenging (and, in perhaps in some cases, made easier) for young people coping with awareness of culturally stigmatized sexual identity.

For instance, some of the processes impacted by awareness of minority sexual identity may include: (a) adolescent psychosocial changes, such as developing greater intimacy with peers and autonomy from parents; (b) sexual development, including the navigation of new romantic and sexual relationships; and (c) development of a general sense of one's identity, including a positive self-concept and sense of direction.

When a young person becomes aware of same-sex attraction simultaneously with other important developmental tasks of adolescence, the result could potentially be a time of great personal growth - or a time of significant challenges, particularly in a current cultural climate of intolerance for non-heterosexual identities (Falco, 1991; Savin-Williams, 1990). Hetrick and Martin (1987) have stated, bleakly, "the primary developmental task for the

homosexually-oriented adolescent is adjustment to a socially stigmatized role.” An alarming report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Gibson, 1989) reported that the suicide risk for LGB youth is 2-3 times higher than heterosexual youth, news which further highlighted the need to address the needs of these young people. As Boxer and Cohler (1989) argue, “conspicuously missing [from research on human development] is a developmental understanding of what is ‘normative’ and expectable for gay and lesbian youth growing up in our society today.” ✓

Methodological issues with respect to adolescence. While the study of LGB adolescence (or “gay youth”) has been increasingly viewed as an important topic to investigate, it has also presented investigators with a uniquely difficult set of methodological difficulties.

Perhaps primary among these difficulties is the identification and recruitment of young study participants, as well as the accurate assessment of the sexual identity of those who do participate. Just as it has been noted that LGB people are a “hidden population” due to the lack of a definitive means of external identification and the societal pressure to not reveal one’s non-heterosexual identity (Savin-Williams, 1990), sexual minority individuals during their adolescent years may be regarded as “doubly hidden.”

These youth are much less likely to openly identify themselves for a variety of reasons. Perhaps one of the most obvious is because they are not yet sure *themselves* of who they are or how to describe their sexual identity. Some adolescents may experience a general “moratorium” in achieving their identity status (Marcia, 1966), and this time of crisis and exploration could delay the labeling of one’s sexual identity. A young adolescent’s cognitive constraints could further limit the degree to which he or she is able to make sense of feelings and behaviors that either appear contradictory, or that fall in a “gray area,” not distinctly homosexual or heterosexual.

For those who *are* consciously aware of their feelings of same-sex attraction, and who have already self-identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual, a multitude of concerns may still prohibit the disclosure of this identity in a research setting. Confidentiality is a principle concern for self-identified LGB youth, who might fear rejection from peers and/or family members if “discovered” (O’Coner, 1994). Because most adolescents in our society rely on their parents financially throughout adolescence, the threat of loss of economic security and shelter compounds with the fear of emotional rejection (Schneider, 1989). Gaining parental consent for studies regarding sexuality can be another significant challenge to researchers (O’Conor, 1994).

Even when participants are self-identified LGB youth who feel comfortable openly disclosing their sexual orientation, there can be problems stemming from the format and terminology used in the assessment of sexual identity. The changing and controversial nature of identity labels should be considered when designing survey questions, for example some youth may have negative connotations associated with the word “homosexual” and may hold positive connotations for the formerly-pejorative terms “dyke” and “queer.” Some participants may oppose a forced-choice or dichotomous answer format when reporting sexual identity; others may reject the notion of labeling sexual identity altogether. All of these issues regarding terms and labeling pose challenges for investigators striving to identify (and yet not offend) sexual minority study participants.

In light of the issues articulated above, this thesis (1) evaluates the ways in which the adolescent experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual people have been conceptualized and studied in recent, empirically-based literature, (2) explores the sources of, and possible solutions to, the persistent methodological difficulties which have plagued this area of study, (3) promotes a contextually-based, developmental framework in approaching the adolescence

of LGB individuals and (4) solicits and analyzes the input of LGB community members regarding these issues.

This project involved two study phases. PART I: First, an evaluative review of recent literature was conducted to examine the trends and relevant issues and methods in studying the adolescent experiences of LGB people and the extent to which this literature utilizes developmental theory. PART II: In the second phase, members of the LGB community were recruited to participate in focus groups as "expert informants," as a means of augmenting our understanding of important developmental themes to address and the most useful ways to approach future investigations.

CHAPTER II

PART I: REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL LITERATURE ON LGB ADOLESCENCE

How have the adolescent experiences and development of LGB people been approached, studied, and understood thus far in the empirical psychological literature? The first phase of this project involved an evaluative review of 31 recent empirical studies relevant to the adolescent experiences of sexual minority individuals. Selected studies were (a) empirically-based, (b) published between 1987-1997 and (c) referenced in PsycInfo database using the search words: *lesbian/s, gay/s, bisexual/s, homosexual/ity, youth, adolescent/ce, teen/agers*. Table 1 provides an overview of the 31 studies selected for review

In reviewing the sample of studies obtained, four general areas were considered:

(1) Content: What types of research questions have been asked? To what extent are these studies designed to build new, or test existing, theoretical models of development? To what extent have investigators used a developmental framework in pursuing information about the experiences of LGB people? (2) Methodology: What types of research designs have been utilized? - qualitative vs. quantitative, prospective vs. retrospective, longitudinal vs. cross-sectional? How have samples been selected, and to what extent do they represent the LGB population at large? What are some of the inherent problems that a researcher may encounter when studying this population? In what ways, if any, have these methodological roadblocks been addressed? (3) Assumptions: How has the nature of sexual identity been conceptualized - as dichotomous ("heterosexual" vs. "homosexual") or as a more continuous shading of identities? Is it clear how has the source of one's sexual orientation been conceptualized by the investigators (essentialists vs. social constructionists perspective)? What seems to be the

relationship between these underlying assumptions/conceptualizations and the methodologies employed? (4) Distribution: Who is doing this research, in terms of gender and academic discipline of investigators? Where are research findings being reported?

A. Content: A review of the topics studied

The intent of this section is not to review the specific findings of each of the 31 studies, but rather, to examine trends in the body of literature as a whole. The content area(s) of each individual study were tallied based on the most central issue (or issues) examined. Please refer to Table 2 for the frequency of each of the general topic areas covered. Note that a few studies covered more than one content area.

An examination of the topics listed in Table 2 reveals that one notable trend is focusing on the problems and stressors faced by LGB adolescents - - in particular, suicidal behavior and the adverse conditions which may lead to it. This trend is understandable in light of the 1989 Department of Health and Human Services report on youth suicide (Gibson, 1989) mentioned earlier. Some of the studies reviewed attempted to investigate the stressors and risk factors contributing to the increased rate of suicidality (such as Hershberger & D'Augelli 1995; Hunter, 1990; Proctor and Groze, 1994; Remafedi, Farrow & Deisher, 1991); one report, a "psychological autopsy" of 120 suicides, questioned whether the LGB suicide rate is truly higher than that of heterosexual youth (Shaffer et. al., 1995); and others have supported the notion of increased suicide risk, and have reported high rates of past suicide attempts and suicidal ideation in a sample of gay youth (Schneider, Farberow, and Kruks, 1989).

While the emphasis on problems, stressors and mental health challenges faced by LGB youth is both important and understandable in light of the need to develop appropriate support services for these young people, it is also equally important to attend to both the positive, resilient qualities of LGB youth (such as Savin-Williams' 1995 study of gay male youth's self

esteem) as well as the more subtle developmental processes that may typify the experiences of these youth, experiences less extreme than suicidality and victimization. While many authors of the above articles carefully point out that LGB people as a group are no less well-adjusted than their heterosexual counterparts, the persistent focus on problems such as suicidality - within a context of few studies examining normative development - may obscure this. Our portrait of the normative experience of LGB youth, as drawn by this sample of recent studies, may therefore be skewed by the emphasis on problems and negative experiences, which only represent one facet of the sexual minority experience. As Savin-Williams (1990) argues:

“Social scientists, including gay and lesbian researchers, have focused almost exclusively on the ‘problems’ at the expense of the ‘promises’ of gay and lesbian youth. ...This ‘clinicalization’ of adolescence is not unique to the gay and lesbian youth population... The negative problem-centered approach to gay and lesbian youth, however, distorts our view and is, I believe, an inaccurate portrait.” (1990, p.)

Another trend in this body of literature appears to be an emphasis on documenting the experiences, problems and needs of these youth in a descriptive way rather than testing or generating theories regarding underlying developmental processes. The group of studies reviewed documented prevalence of chemical dependency, homelessness, suicidality, victimization, sexual behavior, HIV/AIDS knowledge, among other things; also well-articulated by these studies were descriptions of the social service, educational, and mental health needs of these youth. This body of research has provided a critical contribution in the development of new intervention and prevention programs in schools, mental health centers, residential treatment facilities, and free-standing LGB support centers. This focus on descriptive data-gathering is understandable that in this relatively early phase of investigations into adolescent experiences of LGB youth; however, a valuable contribution of future investigations will be to further investigate the appropriateness of existing theories of

adolescent development in understanding the lives of LGB youth, and the refinement of new theories which apply specifically to the lives of these young people.

Several notable exceptions exist to the primarily-descriptive nature of these studies. Rotheram-Borus's (1995) prospective examination of problem behaviors (sexual activity, conduct problems, substance use, etc.) in LGB youth, questioned the applicability of standard theories of adolescent multiple problem behavior (Jessor & Jessor, 1977; Jessor, 1992) in understanding such behaviors among LGB youth. Savin-Williams (1995) examined whether hypothesized differences existed between heterosexual and non-heterosexual males in terms of timing of pubertal maturation and self-esteem. Other authors (Blanchard, 1995; McConaghy et. al., 1994) tested hypotheses regarding the nature of homosexual identity and romantic attraction.

B. Methods: A review of methodologies employed

Researchers interested in the experiences of sexual minority individuals are faced with a wide array of methodological challenges, particularly with regard to sampling. Authors of the aforementioned studies often acknowledged these difficulties when presenting their work, and warned of potential limitations in interpreting the study findings. To achieve an overall picture of these how this body of research has been conducted, and who has typically been included in study samples, this review evaluates trends in study design, data collection methods and sampling strategy, with particular emphasis on evaluating the representativeness of the samples studied.

Study design and methods of data-collection & analysis. Table 3 provides an overview of the study designs, methods of data collection, and analysis utilized by this group of empirical studies.

Research on LGB development is often criticized as based on primarily cross-sectional and retrospective research with non-representative samples. (Boxer & Cohler, 1987; Croteau, 1996) Based upon 31 studies of LGB adolescence reviewed here, this criticism appears to be legitimate; study samples were not necessarily small, but representativeness of study samples seems to be of particular concern, and will be addressed in detail in the next section.

Given that an investigation's research design and data-collection methodology generally follow the type of question being asked, perhaps the most critical question for researchers is not only *how* the research is conducted, but also: *what questions are being asked?* - *and, how does this relate to the methodology used?* This body of research is designed to be primarily descriptive in nature, with only a small number of studies specifically designed to test existing theories of adolescent development on this population, or to develop new theories. At this juncture, the most powerful role of future research will be to place greater emphasis on theory development, to develop a clearer picture of how the processes of adolescent development are impacted by minority sexual identity status, and how adolescent developmental processes in turn influence a young person's sexual identity development. Thus far, information regarding the interaction of life stage/identity status remain speculative.

In future investigations based on theory-oriented questions, there is a place for both qualitative and quantitative techniques, as well as retrospective and prospective relational designs. In spite of being more costly and involved, prospective, longitudinal designs have an important advantage in that they safeguard against retrospective distortion of past events. Of the 31 studies reviewed, only three used a prospective, longitudinal format. Eight years ago, Boxer & Cohler (1987) argued that the emerging body of theory of LGB development is "largely a developmental psychology of the remembered past" and advocated for a "re-mapping of gay and lesbian life span trajectories...through longitudinal, prospective research

rather than inference.” Still, it appears that retrospective and cross-sectional study designs continue to predominate research in this field.

Longitudinal designs may require a level of participant commitment to the research project, and a need for ongoing contact with researchers, that may be unduly threatening to young LGB people, given the typically-heightened concerns regarding confidentiality. The problem of participant attrition, frequently a concern in longitudinal research) is therefore particularly heightened in this population. Some investigators have, however, experienced success in tracking high-risk, LGB adolescents for longitudinal research, and suggest methods for limiting sample attrition (Gwadz & Rotheram-Borus, 1992).

In light of the fact that longitudinal designs are more costly and time consuming, it is possible that another reason for lack of such formats relates to inadequate funding sources for research on sexual minority issues. In order to follow a sample of sexual minority individuals from “pre-coming out,” through questioning, to the time of a more solidified identity, one would need a very large, perhaps multi-site sample, since it is likely that as few as 5-10% of those in the initial sample would ultimately identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. This type of large-scale, longitudinal study would be extremely costly, and (some predict), is simply not feasible. However, the importance of using prospective methods cannot be understated if an accurate portrait of LGB development over the life course is to be obtained.

Characteristics of study samples. Table 4 summarizes sample characteristics of the literature reviewed,² including sample size, and breakdowns of participant gender, ethnic, and sexual identity.

² One study (Shaffer, et. al., 1995) was not included in these calculations of sampling characteristics and sampling strategy, because the study sample was not comprised of living participants, but was instead a “psychological autopsy” of reported cases of suicide in a geographic region.

Sample size. Samples of the studies reviewed ranged in size from 10-500 participants. As would be expected, the studies with smaller samples were typically qualitative investigations, which require many fewer participants than in-depth quantitative (descriptive or relational) designs. While it is certainly the case that analyses in some studies would have been bolstered by a larger sample - - what seems to be most of concern in this body of research is generally not the quantity of participants, but their representativeness.

Gender. One of most striking characteristics of these studies is the under-representation of women in study samples. Of the 30 studies reviewed, 15 included all-male samples, often without clearly indicating in the title or abstract that women were not included in the sample (which may implicitly suggest to readers that the findings are representative of *all* sexual minority youth, not just males). In some cases, such as Schneider, et. al. 1989, the authors did clearly state that the study included only males; however, no explanation was given as to why the topic under investigation (in this case, suicidality) was of importance only to males. In comparison to the fifteen all-male samples, only one of the studies reviewed (Schneider, 1989) had an all-female sample; in this case the investigator chose to study the experience of young lesbians precisely because "in the study of homosexuality...the male experience is frequently taken as the norm."

Of studies with a mixed male/female sample, just one had an equal number of males and females; the rest had substantially more men, with an average male:female ratio 3:1. When considering all 30 studies (those with a mixed male-female sample or single-sex sample) the male:female ratio climbs to 6:1.

The source of the gender bias is not entirely clear, but often investigators have justified the disproportionate number of men by stating that the gender breakdown is reflective of the organizations which provided their research participants (for example, a sample's 2:1 ratio

accurately reflecting the 2:1 ratio of clientele at the urban LGB youth center). It is not clear whether (a) men are aware of their sexual orientation earlier, as hypothesized by Troiden, 1988 and others, or (b) gay male youth do not outnumber lesbian or bisexual female youth, they simply have higher rates of utilization of support services/social organization - - or some other explanation, such as the possibility (c) that women are more reluctant to self-identify as gay, or (d) less willing to volunteer for research participation in general.

Regardless, it remains the case that most of the research on LGB youth is being done with predominantly or exclusively-male samples, and this must be taken into account when any generalizations are made from existing empirical studies. Future research should attempt to correct this bias by including more young women participants, and being clear when an all-male sample is used.

Geographic region & SES. Also of note is the fact that most investigators (about 80%) obtained their samples from urban and university locations. While many of the participants may be originally from smaller towns or rural areas, this demographic information is often not reported, and the experiences of youth who never go to college or live in urban areas appears to be grossly underrepresented. It may be very difficult to access these youth, since there are often no LGB youth centers in rural and small town areas, and because the often conservative political culture of these areas are not conducive for LGB youth to be openly self-identified, much less volunteer for a research project. In spite of these difficulties, our understanding of LGB development will remain skewed as long as samples continue to be drawn from primarily urban and university settings.

In addition to urban, and college-bound youth being over-represented, it is interesting to note that many research participants were recruited from one particular metropolitan area: New York City. Nine of the 30 studies obtained their samples solely from *one* LGB youth

agency in New York City, the Hetrick Martin Institute for the Protection of Lesbian and Gay Youth (HMI). Additionally, other investigations probably may have included youth from HMI or other New York City agencies in their sampling of “large metropolitan areas.” Many of the participants recruited from HMI were probably in multiple studies, and are therefore “duplicates” in this calculation. Still, it is notable that the nine samples from HMI comprise a total of 1814 youth participants, 40% of the entire number of participants across studies (i.e. forty percent of participants across thirty studies came from a single agency in New York City).

Ethnic Identity of Participants. There was a great deal of variation in how participant ethnicity was reported. Four studies did not include information regarding ethnic identity of participants at all; another categorized participants only as “Caucasian vs. minority.” The remainder of the studies reported the ethnic/racial identity of participants in at least some detail. However, it is important to note that each investigator used his/her own definition of the “Other” category. While most investigators tended to report ethnicity using the following type of breakdown: “Caucasian/White, African American/Black, Latino/Hispanic, Asian, Native American, *other*,” a smaller number of investigators did not include a separate category for Asians, Latinos, or Native Americans - therefore, these individuals were reported in the “other” category in some instances.

Considering the 23 studies that did report the ethnic identity of participants in at least some detail, a meta-breakdown indicated that, across studies, participants were 45% Caucasian/White, 24% African American/Black, 23% Latino/Hispanic, 0.6% Asian, 1.0% Native American, and 3.2% “other.” Even considering that some of the individuals listed as “other” are probably Asian, it remains striking how small the proportion of Asian respondents is in this group of studies. The experiences of Caucasian, African American, and Latino

individuals (especially males) appears to be the most strongly represented by this group of studies. The relatively high percentage of African American and Latino males, in particular, is a reflection of the frequent use of HMI as a recruitment site.

Sexual identity. With regard to the sexual identity of research participants (participant's identification as lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, etc.), the authors of these investigations were often unclear about exactly who they were studying, how they assessed sexual identity of participants, and to whom they believed their findings would generalize. Particularly ambiguous was information about the inclusion or exclusion of bisexual youth. For example, some articles (e.g. Edwards, 1996; Hunter, 1990; Kruks, 1991) would include only terms "gay and lesbian" in the title and abstract, but later state that their investigation included "gay, lesbian and bisexual youth." Another study did the opposite: Hershberger and D'Augelli (1995) entitled their study "The Impact of Victimization on the Mental Health and Suicidality of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youths," however, in the text, they most typically used the terms "lesbian and gay youth" without explaining the absence of bisexual youth. In Kruks' 1991 study entitled "Gay and Lesbian Homeless/Street Youth: Special Issues and Concerns," all of the tables in the article referred to youths of both genders as "gay and bisexual," (no mention of "bisexual" in the title, no mention of "lesbian" in the tables).

Some other authors did not address the notion of bisexuality at all. For example, Hetrick & Martin (1987) and Schneider (1991) used the terms "homosexual" or "gay and lesbian" throughout the entire text of the article, not explaining whether bisexual youth were included, excluded, or lumped together under the "gay," "lesbian," and "homosexual" headings because bisexuality was not recognized as a distinct identity. In Savin-Williams' 1989 investigation, it was reported that, using the Kinsey scale (Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948) over 23% of the study sample indicated "heterosexual interest" along with homosexual

feelings, yet all participants in the study were ultimately categorized as “gay” or “lesbian.” In this case, it is not clear whether the identity labels of “gay” and “lesbian” were the ones preferred by the youth themselves, or whether they classified that way due to the investigator’s assumptions about the nature of sexual identity. Savin-Williams’ more recent (1995) study of pubertal maturation and self-esteem in males again used the Kinsey scale to assess sexual feelings; however, in this study the terms “gay” and “bisexual” to describe participants. This shift in terminology over a relatively short time span could indicate that some researchers are slowly beginning to recognize bisexuality as a distinct identity.

There is also a lack of clarity in reporting how (or whether) sexual identity of participants is assessed. Newman & Muzzonigro (1993) for example, clearly indicated which group they were intending to study (in this case, “gay males”), but did not describe how participants’ sexual identity was assessed, or if it was assessed at all. In this study, participants were recruited from “two lesbian and gay college organizations, one lesbian and gay youth dance, one lesbian and gay youth group, and a gay nightclub which had an under-21 night once a week.” Was the sexual identity of study participants merely assumed to be “gay” by virtue of their gender, and their willingness to be in a study on “gay” youth? If so, this may be problematic given that many youth who visit the places which are commonly used as recruitment sites for research participants (e.g. college LGB organizations and social clubs) do not necessarily identify as “gay.” Improvements for future research include more explicitly stating which groups are being studied, how identity of participants was assessed, and any assumptions that the investigator may have regarding the nature of sexual identity (such as whether the investigator recognizes bisexuality as a distinct identity).

Based upon the identity terms used in the title and abstracts of the 31 selected studies, it appears that bisexual youth, and youth who are still questioning their sexual identity are

seriously underrepresented - - or, as suggested above, that the presence of these youth is obscured by use of "gay" and "lesbian" as catch-all terms for all sexual minority youth. Just over half of the 31 studies reviewed (55%) clearly indicated in title or abstract that bisexual youth were included. Only one of the 31 studies indicated clearly that questioning/unsure youth were included. It is not clear if the invisibility of these youth is primarily a matter of semantics (i.e. bisexual and questioning youth are participating in research, yet in the absence of more fitting identity descriptors, these youth must classify themselves as "gay" or "lesbian") - or whether this potentially large segment of the non-heterosexual population has been excluded from much LGB adolescence research.

It is possible that youth who are currently questioning their identity status may be those most vulnerable to under-representation in research on the adolescence of sexual minority individuals. This is of concern, given that "questioning" youth may in fact comprise the largest segment of adolescents who ultimately identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. For example, in Rust's 1993 study of 406 adult lesbian and bisexual women, the average age of "first homosexual attraction" for lesbian women was 15.4 years, the average age of "first questioning of heterosexual identity" was 17.0 years, but the average age of "first identification as bisexual or lesbian" was not until 20.9 years. For bisexual women, the average ages were about three years older at 18.1, 20.0 and 23.4, respectively. Many other studies similarly report that, for both women and men who ultimately identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual, the adolescent years are often spent questioning and exploring one's sexual identity. When faced with a dichotomous categorical question regarding sexual identity (e.g. "do you identify as heterosexual or homosexual"), it is likely that these still-questioning youths will choose to identify as "heterosexual." Consider Coles & Stokes 1985 study of adolescent sexuality, in which only 1 out of 1,067 youths identified themselves as "homosexual" - about

one tenth of one percent - but 5% reported having had a history of at least one same-sex relationship.

Assuming that it is true that a large number of people who ultimately identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual are not firmly identified as such during their adolescent years, but are, developmentally, at some stage of “questioning” their heterosexual identity, it is odd that most research on LGB adolescence does not seem to adequately consider this methodologically. The inclusion of questioning youth is particularly important in developmental research because these youth are in the midst of a developmental process of identity formation that is a crucial area to study. However, rather than tailoring methodology to youth who are not only firmly self identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual - most of these studies seems to seek out those youth who are not only “self-identified,” but who are also “out” enough regarding their identity to be attending LGB resource centers, support groups, social clubs, bars, etc.

It almost certain that conclusions are being drawn about the adolescence of LGB individuals based only on a small subset of the population. Our understanding of sexual minority youth must include the experiences of bisexual, transgendered, and questioning/unsure adolescents, as well as those youth self-identified as “lesbian” and “gay.” Until then, our portrait will remain skewed.

Sampling strategies. Table 5 summarizes the sampling strategies used in the 30 studies reviewed. Please note that many studies used a combination of recruitment techniques.

Each of these studies all utilized non-random, purposive or convenience samples to obtain research participants; many investigators point to the overwhelming challenge of obtaining an adequately large probability sample, and describe their often creative, elaborate methods they used to recruit participants. Still, it is important to consider the ramifications of this lack of random sampling in this body of literature.

It appears that some routine patterns of recruitment have developed by researchers trying to access these youth, such as the common technique of recruiting participants at metropolitan LGB youth groups. Who might this recruitment source be leaving out? Most likely, non-self-identified, questioning, and not-yet-out youth would not be attending these centers. Also left out would be rural and suburban youth who do not have transportation or access to these urban centers, and youth from rural low-SES families. Youth who are not English-speaking seem to be frequently excluded (with the exception of those from centers such as the Hetrick Martin Institute, which serves a large Latino clientele). These sampling strategies also select against sexual minority youth who do not necessarily identify with the LGB community, choosing to socialize or seek support services at organizations without a special LGB focus. Random sampling from the population at large would more accurately capture the range and diversity of the sexual minority experience, rather than current sampling strategies which tend to access small enclaves of LGB youth at specialized centers.

C. Assumptions: Researchers' conceptualizations of sexual identity

What assumptions about the nature of sexual identity guide this body of research, in terms of how sexual identity is conceptualized, the developmental nature of sexual identity formation, and the timing of this process? Given the current lack of consensus on these issues, it is especially important for researchers and theoreticians to clarify their stance. Whether explicit or not, these assumptions affect what types of research questions an investigator asks, the methods used, and the interpretation of results.

In short, in nearly all of these studies, investigators do not clarify the assumptions guiding their research. As mentioned in the section on methodology, many do not state their conceptualization of sexual identity, or give definitions of the sexual identity terms they use,

nor clearly indicate whether certain groups (such as bisexual and questioning youth) are included, excluded, or lumped in with other groups.

There are several possible reasons for investigators' lack of clarity regarding sexual identity. Probably the most obvious source of confusion is the lack of a clear consensus regarding the nature of sexual identity - how to conceptualize, define, and assess it. For example, some researchers may not include bisexual youth because they simply do not consider bisexuality to exist as a distinct construct. Some may view sexual identity as a "categorical" type of variable, with clear distinctions between each identity, others may view sexual identity as more of a continuous shading of identities, from "exclusively homosexual" to "exclusively heterosexual" (Kinsey et.al., 1948). Some tend to view sexual identity as an "essential" perhaps biologically determined characteristic, whereas others consider it to be a continually-revised product of social construction. Some may define sexual identity by feelings of attraction, others define it by behavior, and still others by the individual's own sense of self or identity.

Writers on this subject have attempted to delineate distinctions and designate clear definitions of different identities, but it does not appear that researchers universally adhere to any one common understanding. Without clarity on these matters, it is difficult for readers to know how to interpret the findings, and to whom they generalize. In the practical world of conducting research, how can an investigator best conceptualize research questions and carry out a research project on sexual minority individuals given the lack of consensus on these issues?

One issue of particular salience is how a researcher defines participants as being a member of the target group for study. Is it more valid for an investigator define to the sexual identity of the study participants using a standard, "operational" definition based on the

participants' feelings/behavior - or should participants' identity be defined solely by the participant, without regard for a standard "operational" behavior-based definition? Can an outsider's conceptualization of another person's identity ever be considered more valid than that individual's own conceptualization? Consider Hershberger and D'Augelli's 1995 study of the impact of victimization on the mental health of youth who were recruited from "gay and lesbian community centers" across the country; after collecting data from a large number of participants, the investigators chose to eliminate data from all youth who identified as "bisexual but predominantly heterosexual," because the authors speculated that these youth would not have experienced as much stress and victimization as other youth. But can it truly be known what differences exist in the experiences of youth who define themselves as "bisexual but predominantly heterosexual" versus those who define themselves as "bisexual but predominantly homosexual"? Using Hershberger and D'Augelli's study as an example, could it be the case that those youth who have experienced a particularly hostile and stressful homophobic environment were the ones less eager to define themselves as "predominantly homosexual," regardless of their true feelings? Where should the line be drawn in determining which participants are bisexual "enough" (or, gay or lesbian "enough") to be in a study on LGB issues - and who should be the one to draw it? Where this line will surely have an effect on our understanding of LGB development.

This question also brings to the fore the issue of whether sexual identity is construed as an essential, stable feature of one's identity vs. a socially constructed product of a person's interaction within a cultural and historical context. On the whole, these authors do not explicitly state their leanings on this issue (though biases can often be detected, based upon the very type of research questions asked). In light of the ongoing discourse on 'essentialist-constructionist' issues in other academic disciplines, it is unusual that those researchers

conducting research on LGB development rarely explicitly link their findings to either perspective. This may perhaps be due to the inherent, assumed focus on the individual within the field of psychology; culture, and other contextual variables are increasingly acknowledged in clinical and developmental psychology, but the field's emphasis on core, intrapsychic processes remains paramount. Thus, the essentialist perspective could be considered the "default" or assumed perspective of traditional academic psychology.

Given the current lack of consensus regarding how to define and conceptualize sexual identities, it seems prudent for researchers to at least overtly acknowledge their own underlying assumptions on this topic, state precisely how sexual identity is assessed, clearly indicate what the selection criteria were for a participant to be included in the study, and discuss how the assumptions inherent in the study may influence the findings. Without such clarification, it will be impossible to know to whom the research findings are meant to generalize.

D. Distribution: An overview of how this literature has been disseminated

Table 6 provides information regarding the investigators who have conducted this research, and where it has been published.

It is interesting that, just as a gender bias exists in the samples of study participants, a similar bias also exists among authors of this research. Forty-five percent of the 31 studies reviewed were authored by one or more men, whereas 29% of the studies were authored by one or more women; the remainder were authored by a mixed team of men and women. It is not clear what the source of this gender imbalance is; it may reflect the disproportionate number of men in academic jobs, or a disproportionate number of men who apply for or who receive funding for empirical research. It could also simply be the result of differing research interests.

It is notable that this body of literature - which is certainly relevant to the fields of clinical and developmental psychology - is largely being published in interdisciplinary journals rather than in mainstream psychology journals. The reasons for this are not entirely clear. However, this is one indication that researchers, clinicians, and students in the field of psychology may not have adequate exposure to findings regarding LGB development. If this is the case, it is particularly of concern because psychologists are the social scientists often in the role of documenting, defining, revising our understanding of "normative human development." Given that many currently-practicing psychologists were trained in an era in which homosexuality was classified as an "official" mental disorder, the need for up-to-date, less biased information in the mainstream literature of the discipline seems to be crucial.

In addition to academic psychologists and applied psychologists, students in psychology and human development may also not be adequately exposed to information regarding normative LGB development and experiences. Most textbook authors (for example, Adams, Gullotta, & Markstrom-Adams, 1994; Cobb, 1992; Santrock, 1993; Steinberg, 1993) give extremely scant coverage to issues relevant to LGB youth and sexual identity development. Most allot only a few paragraphs to the adolescent experiences of sexual minority individuals, often with a focus on "what causes homosexuality?" The dearth of normative data on non-heterosexual youth in these texts perpetuates the notion of homosexuality and bisexuality as deviant, and does little to alter psychology's heterosexist bias.

E. Conclusions from Part I

A review of recent psychological literature on the adolescence of LGB persons highlights the interconnectedness between investigators' theoretical assumptions about sexual identity, the research methods employed (especially sampling technique and terminology), what

types of research questions are posed, and ultimately, the empirical outcomes of the investigations.

This review reveals a primarily descriptive body of research, focusing on the problems and stresses of self-identified, out youth. While the studies reviewed provided compelling information regarding the experiences, stresses and needs of these youth, many investigations are not adequately linked to theory, and most utilized study samples that probably do not represent the broader population of adolescents who ultimately identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Specifically, most samples were comprised of males who have sought services at an urban LGB youth support center, or university LGB organizations. Less represented are the experiences of youth who are either female, bisexual or questioning, of ethnic minority status (especially Asian), living in rural/small town areas, or non-college bound. Few studies have utilized a prospective, longitudinal format, and none have benefited from random sampling.

In most of these studies, there was considerable lack of clarity regarding how investigators conceptualized sexual identity (specifically whether bisexuality was recognized as a distinct identity group), how sexual identity was assessed, and to whom the findings of the study were meant to generalize. Disagreement regarding the nature of sexual identity, and how sexual identity should be assessed, seems to reflect the general lack of consensus among theorists, activists and members of the LGB community on these questions. In spite of these continued controversies, future investigations can be made stronger by explicitly stating assumptions about the nature of sexual identity which guide the research, and how the methodology is linked to these conceptualizations.

Authors of these studies were more often men than women. Most were published in interdisciplinary journals, and a much smaller number in psychology/mental health journals. As a result, research and applied psychologists have only limited access to findings from these

studies, as only two studies appeared in a “mainstream” APA peer-reviewed psychology journal, and authors of standard textbooks on adolescence have typically not incorporated these findings into their texts. As such, this body of research appears to remain somewhat ghettoized, not reaching the “masses” within the field of psychology.

CHAPTER III

PART II: INPUT FROM LGB COMMUNITY MEMBERS

In the second phase of this project, a series of six qualitative focus group interviews was conducted to provide information about issues considered most salient to LGB adolescence, and suggestions for improving future investigations. Each interview involved a small group of “expert informants” from the lesbian, gay and bisexual community. It was hoped that this type of collaborative approach, receiving input directly from members of the ‘target population’ in question, would lend valuable and necessary insights in how to address the limitations in current research, as well as in determining recommendations for future research.

A. Method

Participants & Recruitment. Twenty-two individuals (12 women and 10 men) with minority sexual identities participated in this phase of the study. Most were enrolled in undergraduate psychology courses at the a large northeastern university, and were recruited via a psychology department-wide “prescreening” questionnaire. The prescreening instrument contained several questions which pertained to sexual identity, feelings of attraction, and sexual behavior, as well as a question asking specifically whether the respondent would like to be contacted for the study (see Appendix A). Only those prescreening respondents who indicated that their identity or behavior was not exclusively heterosexual, *and* who indicated an interest in this particular research project were telephoned and invited to participate in the study. Those who indicated that they were not interested in research participation were not contacted.

Given the methodological nature of this project, it is interesting to note some of the statistics from the recruitment phase of this project. Of the 2,279 students who took the prescreening questionnaire, 201 (approximately 9%) indicated either (1) a history of sexual

behavior that was not exclusively heterosexual and/or (2) use of a sexual identity label of “gay,” “lesbian,” “bisexual” or “questioning.” Of these 201 individuals qualified to participate in this study, 140 of them (70%) also indicated interest in being involved in the study. These 140 respondents were considered “qualified” and “interested.” Contact was attempted with 95 of these individuals via phone, and 76 of attempted contacts resulted in either phone messages or conversations which conveyed the basic nature of the study. As a result of these 76 messages/conversations, 42 people were scheduled for interviews, and ultimately, 20 of them participated. Those who were contacted but opted to not participate were typically unavailable on the night of the group session, scheduled to attend a group but then did not show up, or were simply no longer interested. Ultimately, 26.3% (20 individuals) of the 76 “qualified” and “interested” individuals who were contacted participated in one of the focus groups. Two additional participants, who were both students at other local colleges, were recruited via an announcement at a local LGBT³ resource center.

No monetary compensation was awarded to participants; however, those who were interested could receive “experimental credits” toward their psychology coursework. All except two participants opted for this credit.

Demographic characteristics - age, sex, gender, ethnicity. Table 7 contains demographic characteristics of age, sex, ethnicity, and sexual identity of the 22 participants. All participants were undergraduate college students, ranging from 18 to 23 years old, with an average age of 19.7 years. Just over half of the participants were women (55%); however, the gender breakdown was evenly split between males and females, as there was one transgendered participant who described his sex as “female” and gender as “male.”

³ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered

Participants were asked to define their ethnic identity in their own terms. Sixteen individuals (72.7%) described themselves as either *White, Caucasian, Anglo-Saxon* or *European American*; 2 participants (9.2%) identified themselves as *African American* or *Black*; 2 as *Hispanic* (9.2%) and one as *Jewish-White*. One participant did not respond to the ethnic identity question.

Sexual identity characteristics: sexual identity, outness, first awareness. When asked in an open-ended format what term or terms best described their sexual identity, 6 participants identified themselves as *gay*, 4 as *lesbian*, 4 as *bisexual*, 3 as *questioning* or *unsure*, and one participant (each) identified as: *homosexual, predominantly gay, queer, lesbian-dyke*, and *straight-transgendered*. All participants reported being either “out” (45%) or “partially out” (55%) to others regarding their current sexual identity.

Participants were asked to indicate during which age bracket they became aware of their current sexual identity. Four participants reported being aware of their sexual identity prior to age 11 (18.1%); 9 reported awareness between ages 11 and 14 (40%), 7 between ages 15 and 18 (31.8%), and 1 between ages 19 and 22; one participant reported being not yet aware of her identity.⁴ Most (68.2%) reported first “coming out” to others by age 18; however, 18.1% came out between ages 19 to 22, one between ages 23 and 26, and one person reported being not yet out.

Data collection materials and procedures. Interviews were conducted, and written questionnaires were administered, in an interactive, focus group format. The data which were collected included: (1) transcripts of the group interviews (2) written responses to the Participant Questionnaire and (3) written responses to, and ratings of, eight types of sexual identity questionnaires. Six 2-hour focus groups took place, each comprised of between two and six

⁴ The participants who were questioning their sexual identity status may have each interpreted this question differently - some reporting the age when they became aware of their ‘questioning’ status, and others indicating being ‘not yet aware.’

participants. Groups convened in a neutral meeting space on the University of Massachusetts campus, and were facilitated by the primary investigator. Each group followed a standard, semi-structured format (see Focus Group Interview Protocol, Appendix B): after an explanation of the study and completion of consent forms (Appendix C), participants filled out the Participant Questionnaire (Appendix D), participated in an interactive group discussion, and responded to several sets of rating forms which pertained to different methods of assessing sexual identity (Appendix E). Twenty participants were interviewed in this fashion. Two individuals who were unable to attend one of the groups were interviewed on an individual basis. Procedures for these interviews were identical to those described above, except for the one-on-one rather than interactive nature of the interviews.⁵

Greater homogeneity among focus group participants has been recognized as useful in facilitating a more open and comfortable dialogue (Morgan, 1988). While homogeneity was not used as a factor in recruitment of participants, it was a factor in scheduling participants into specific groups. Initially, age of first awareness of minority sexual identity, as reported on the prescreening questionnaire, was used as an organizing factor. Individuals who reported having an earlier awareness (i.e. aware of non-heterosexual identity prior to age 18) were scheduled together, and those who became aware more recently (either after age 18, or still questioning) were scheduled together. It was hoped that through this type of grouping, participants may find some commonalties in their adolescent experiences - and therefore differences between those in each age of awareness group may be better identified.

While 'age of awareness' was initially used as organizing factor, an interesting pattern developed in the scheduling of the first three groups: all participants in the 'earlier-awareness' group were men, all those in the 'later-awareness/still questioning' group were women. As

⁵ When discussing analyses, these two individual interviews are included in discussions of focus group findings.

mentioned earlier, it has been hypothesized that gay and bisexual men have an earlier awareness of their sexual identity than lesbians or bisexual women (Troiden, 1988); however, it is unclear if the pattern which emerged in these focus groups truly indicates a relationship between one's sex and age of awareness, or if it was merely a coincidence. To maintain a pattern consistent with the first three groups, the remaining three groups were scheduled, intentionally, to use participant's sex as the organizing homogeneous factor. Ultimately, there were two all-male groups (groups #2 and 6) and four all-female groups (groups #1, 3, 4, and 5).

Interviews focused on three general topic areas: (1) important issues and experiences of adolescents who ultimately identify as non-heterosexual; (2) concerns which these young people may have about participating in a research project; (3) suggestions for researchers regarding how to make participation in a research project a more safe, comfortable and rewarding experience for young people who are not heterosexual or who are questioning their sexuality. In most groups, the discussion of "suggestions for researchers" included feedback on the eight types of sexual identity questions. The Participant Questionnaire, administered just prior to the discussion, included several open-ended questions on these topics as well. The questionnaire was intended to stimulate participants to identify their ideas and opinions *before* the interactive discussion, as well as to provide a more comfortable format to convey material which may be difficult to share in a group setting.

In determining the point at which a sufficient number interviews were conducted, I followed what is recognized to be a 'rule of thumb' in focus group research: enough data has been collected when themes are recurring steadily from one group discussion to the next, to the extent that group responses to each question become almost predictable (Morgan, 1988). To reach this point of predictably-recurring themes, six groups were conducted.

Data Analysis. While transcripts from the qualitative group interviews comprised the majority of data collected, it is important to note that both 'individual' and 'group' data, as well as both qualitative and quantitative data were collected as a part of this project. The 'individual' data included each participants' responses to the Participant Questionnaire and to the eight rating forms (some responses on each being numeric ratings, others narrative responses to open-ended questions); 'group' data included transcripts of interactive, qualitative group discussions. Data analysis techniques were chosen accordingly, and will be described below.

The nature of focus group data. Compared with data gathered in an individual fashion, comments made within the context of focus group discussion are the product of a dynamic group interaction, and are perhaps different from how a participants might respond when interviewed individually (Aubel, 1994; Morgan, 1988). For example some participants may feel shy, less able to express themselves in a group context; however, it is likely that volunteers for this study - which was clearly billed as involving an interactive group discussion - were generally among those more comfortable with group interaction. Still, some participants may feel reluctant to express an opinion which diverges with the predominant view, or which is otherwise perceived to be unpopular. In light of this potential problem, efforts were made by the group facilitator to encourage alternative perspectives and validate differing points of view when expressed. Additionally, participants were given an opportunity to write down their individual opinions on the three main questions being investigated (on the Participant Questionnaire) prior to the group discussion on the same topics.

In spite of the potential limitations with focus group data, some of the unique aspects of group interviewing are: the ability to hear explanations and interpretations of a given phenomenon from different points of view, the opportunity for individuals to reflect on others'

statements and opinions (noting differences as well as areas of consensus), and the ability to gain a broader range of input than one might be able to during an equivalent number of individual interviews.

Analysis of narrative focus group data. In preparation for analysis of the focus group discussions (and the two individual interviews), complete transcripts were generated. The primary processes of analysis included an ethnographic, inductive, exploration of themes which emerged from the group discussion, followed by a quantitative content analysis of the frequency of each theme. This type of content/thematic approach to narrative data analysis is described by Morgan (1988), Aubel (1994), and Anastas & MacDonald (1994), and has been used in qualitative investigations on related topics (e.g. Bradford, 1997).

Thematic categories were identified, coded, and tallied by the primary investigator of this project. To promote trustworthiness of thematic codes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), two other readers (an undergraduate research assistant familiar with LGB issues, and the chair of this thesis committee) both evaluated, and helped to revise, the list of themes initially generated. This involved a three-step process. First, the primary investigator and the undergraduate research assistant each independently analyzed the transcribed interviews of focus group discussions to identify emergent themes. Next, the resultant lists of thematic categories were compared and discussed by the two independent raters. As a result of this process, a few weak themes were eliminated, and a few prominent themes were divided into sub-categories. Ultimately, a final list of agreed-upon themes was generated; nearly all of the thematic categories were basically in agreement, so only minor revisions needed to be made at this step. Finally, a third reader (the thesis chair), and read through the theme list, and all six focus group transcripts to assess the "fit" of themes identified by the first two readers. This final reader felt that the thematic categories designated by the first two readers were fitting, able to sufficiently capture the diversity of themes

that arose out of the discussions. After this process, the primary investigator carefully re-read each transcript, and used a “scissor-and-sort” procedure (Morgan, 1988), to classify the transcribed comments of participants into one of the identified categories.

The format for presentation of these data is both narrative (text, with quotes representing the most prominent themes) and graphic (tables and figures depicting the emergent themes, with the relative frequency of each).

Participant ratings of eight sexual identity assessment methods. Participants evaluated eight different methods commonly used to assess sexual identity. Specifically, each method’s strengths and weaknesses were assessed: how well does this question allow you to convey your identity? is it clear? confusing?, etc. Appendix E contains the rating forms which participants used to evaluate the eight methods (Category Type A, Category Type B, Category Type C, Kinsey, Modified Kinsey, Klein, Coleman, and Write-in Response). These eight types were intended to represent some common ways sexual identity has been assessed, including categorical methods (“check-a-box” type methods); continuum-based methods (such as Kinsey, et. al. 1948) and intricate, multifaceted methods (such as Coleman, 1987 and Klein, et. al. 1985).

These data were not analyzed for this thesis, with the exception of one item particularly relevant to research with adolescents. Participants were asked to rate how suitable each method would be for use with young people who may not be sure about their sexual identity. To determine which assessment method is predicted to be most useful for this population, the mean “suitability” rating of each method was calculated.

B. Results

Analyses of the data (focus group transcripts and participant rating forms) yielded the following results:

1. Participant ratings of sexual identity assessment methods

To help determine which methods of sexual identity assessment may be most appropriate for use with adolescents, participants rated eight methods according to how suitable they would be for a person who is unclear about his/her sexual identity. Participants rated the methods (Appendix E) on a Likert-type scale from 0, "not at all suitable," to 6, "very suitable." Mean suitability rating for each method were calculated, and may be found on Table 8.

The method with the highest mean suitability rating is 'Category C,' the category-type method which affords respondents the largest number of options in defining their sexual identity (lesbian, bisexual, gay, etc.) as well as the option of writing in a different term, or indicating uncertainty. The method with the second highest suitability rating is the 'Write-in Response' method, which also provides a great amount of freedom in identifying oneself, and the option to indicate that sexual identity is still uncertain. The method with, by far, the lowest suitability rating was the dichotomous 'Category Type A,' which asks respondents identify themselves as either "homosexual" or "heterosexual."

2. Focus group interviews

The three general topics of discussion included: *(A) important issues and experiences of adolescents who ultimately do not identify as heterosexual; (B) concerns which these young persons may have about participating in a research project; (C) suggestions for researchers re: how to make participation in a research project a more safe, comfortable and rewarding experience for LGB or 'questioning' young people.* The majority of time in discussion was spent on the first topic (identifying important experiences).

a. Question A: What issues are most salient for adolescents who ultimately identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual?

Most participants appeared to be genuinely eager to share about their adolescent experiences, some noting that they were so deprived of support and validation in the past, that the focus group experience was a positive one for them. Group discussions (especially those with five or more participants) often became lively and interactive, especially when this first general question was discussed. After transcription and coding, twenty-eight distinct themes were identified in response to this question, and then grouped according to four general headings: intrapersonal issues - personal development, mental health, feelings about self; interpersonal issues - family, peer and romantic relationships; school/academic issues - academic and school-related experiences; and cultural/societal issues - experience of larger cultural environment. Table 9 defines each of the 28 themes which emerged in the discussion of Question A, indicating how often this theme was mentioned across all six groups; Figure 1 depicts the 10 most commonly mentioned themes. Themes from each of these four headings will be discussed in the following sections, with narrative examples of the most prominent themes provided.

Intrapersonal issues. The single most prevalent theme in the focus group discussions pertained to adolescents' *loss of self* (theme A1) - either due to intentionally hiding one's non-heterosexual identity, or becoming disconnected, unintentionally, from a sense of who he/she is. This theme came up in every group, among both men and women, and among participants of diverse sexual identities. Often participants spoke in terms of "playing a role" or "wearing a mask" during adolescence, in order to fit in, or to avoid harassment:

...it was like...creating a whole other person to be. ...after awhile I didn't even *think* about it, it was like I *was* that person. I had to be "Mr. Man" or you know, Mr. Masculine"...And it really, really...*hurts*. I had trouble making friends, you know, because I couldn't be *me*. I had to be this macho guy...play football, drink beer, sit around watch TV with the guys, you know. [Still, today] at one point I'll be 'The Mask Me,' ...and then I'll totally *change*, and I'll be 'The Real Me.' You shift - your speech, your body, your mannerisms they all change.... But,

you know I still carry this mask on me. It holds me back from making a lot of friends, I think. Because...I'm still...coming out...of this thing that I wear. (2)⁶

I wasn't myself - I was leading a heterosexual lifestyle. I was just going with what my *friends* wanted to see, what my *parents* and *family* wanted to see. But I was living *their* life - - instead of living *my* life. (7)

If anyone was anything other than 'Mr. Normal,' you were ridiculed. So, you were forced to go along with that stereotype. You could always focus your mind on being someone you're not. So you don't have to think about who you are, *really*. Because there was always something else, to occupy my mind...so I never had to think about who *I* was. I never had to find out- I never had to think about who I was...deep down. ...my challenge was trying to act like everyone else. You just had to fit in. I thought I had to do that at least. (6)

...So people make different sacrifices in order to not be alone. You just say to yourself: "Hey, maybe this is what I am...but I'm going to keep it to *myself*...in order to be in the group." Because, well, becauseeveryone needs to belong *somewhere*, somehow. And if you don't belong, then you lose a big part of yourself. (1)

For some, there was a fear of what they might find, should the mask be removed:

[I didn't] explore who I was...because I was afraid of what I would discover. I was repressing myself. (6)

So I guess I pretty much ignored it all through high school. ...I'd have those feelings, but I just thought: oh no, *better not go there*. ...at least not until college. (4)

Participants hypothesized what they may be losing or risking by "wearing the mask" - and identified characteristics such as self-respect, dignity, and self-confidence, as well as potential friendships that might have developed, had they been more authentic to their true selves. Many felt that, as a result of hiding one's sexual identity, a person is "incomplete," and loses contact with either all or part of her/his identity, and, perhaps wasting valuable time, not truly living one's life:

[You lose] Your *identity*. I felt like I was silenced in high school, because I couldn't act the way I wanted to act. And you're just losing part of yourself in that. Like he said, you lose part of your dignity, because you're just shutting yourself down. I got really quiet... And I'm kind of coming out of it now. (2)

[you feel] that you're living a life that's not quite true to yourself. .. I think that's really destructive. ...you're shutting something off. In retrospect, you look back and... feel like *all of these years* I've just sort of....*where was I??* (1)

⁶ The number in parentheses following each quote indicates interview number. Interviews 1,3,4,5,7 = females; interviews 2,6,8 = males.

Because, like, when I think about all the time in high school that I felt that I could have, that I, I wasted, because I wasn't true to who I was...inside. No one cared. None of the teachers cared. Just an apathetic attitude towards kids, and their experiences... you know, 'let's shovel these kids off to college.' But they didn't really care. My high school was a big farce, I think. There was just no support. (6)

I think with the mask you lose your ability to be *yourself*. You lose *life*. You lose your friends, the friends that you would have had, social things...you know, nothing's fun. When you can't be yourself, *nothing* is fun. When you are always putting on an act, you can't be yourself and you always have to worry about what people are going to think. So, I think it's so much easier to just be 'out,' and not in the closet. It's just so much easier on yourself to be out. But...the problem is, I don't think that's possible in high school. Not right now at least.(2)

It was like, I was all complete, except for this one part of me. Like, a part of my brain that didn't develop. You know, an emptiness. There's nothing there. But it's a huge part of my life. There's a big part of my life, that I don't know about. And I'm trying to figure out. You're desperately trying to complete the person that you are. I was totally aware that there was something missing. I didn't know what it was. I just needed to open myself up to figure it out. But I didn't do that throughout high school. (6)

The second most common intrapersonal theme was experiencing *periods of anxiety, depression and/or suicidality* related to sexual identity issues (theme A2). For some, there was a general sense of unhappiness, the source of which was not understood, as typified by the recollections of this lesbian woman:

I always knew that I wasn't happy...that I was different. But I just accepted it, because I figured that's the way it's supposed to be. And I never knew why, why I wasn't happy... I think that's a hard thing for a teenager because they *don't* know why - ...so the biggest issue is...not knowing what's wrong with you. (8)

Many participants reported an intense feeling of anxiety upon realizing they were not heterosexual, or just prior to disclosing their identity to someone else for the first time:

I just wanted to comment on the anxiety - for me, it was an obsession. It was the only thing that occupied my mind. It was almost impossible to do my work at school. Because I was just so consumed with that...and that's why it was so intense. Just before I told [my friend], I was like: *this is it*. I thought that if I didn't tell her, or someone, soon that I would do something to myself. Because I felt that desperate. It's so hard to describe...the emptiness that you have...inside. So, I thought to myself: "One of two choices"... [and then I decided] let's go with calling [my friend]. (6)

I was very depressed, *very*... I had lots of anxiety. It all came flooding back a few weeks ago...because that's when my anniversary [of coming out] was. I was almost in tears...just because...my body was reacting to that time of year. ...If we could make the world a more

comfortable place for kids to come out, then... you know, 30% I think it is, of the kids who commit suicide are gay, lesbian, bisexual - maybe that *wouldn't* happen. (6)

And, I had various thoughts that went through my mind...thinking about: *what was the point?* - *why go through all of this?* I spent virtually two months in tears, whenever I was on my own. (6)

Many participants felt that through the experience of having a minority sexual identity, or through the process of coming out itself, they *developed personal strengths and positive personal qualities* (theme A3) such as more openness and sensitivity towards others, greater understanding of self, better school performance, greater sense of acceptance and non-judgment of others, and greater sensitivity for members of other minority groups:

I am more...accepting of other people. Of whatever they are into, whatever they are like, of...whoever they are. Because I want people to accept me for who I am, so ...I'm going to accept people for who they are. And growing up in *my* family, and had [coming out as gay] never happened, I probably wouldn't be like that at all. (Just look at my brothers and my sisters!) That's probably the main thing I've gotten out of all of this. (6)

I think the greatest thing that happened to me was that I became an open person, I became a very...willing to share my feelings with people. I just have, I have a belief that....everyone goes through struggles in their life, and...it doesn't do us any good to ignore the problems in society. We have to talk about the bad things as well as the good things. And in my life, I have just felt like what came out of it is that: if I can talk about [sexual identity issues] with other people, maybe if I can do that for them, then maybe *one person*, or maybe a couple people who are feeling the same way that I did, will recognize themselves... by looking at me. So, I just became a very *open* person...because I want other people...to not go through the pain. It's like...a mission, almost. (6)

Also mentioned was a greater sense of strength, self-confidence, and use of one's voice:

I can speak up for a lot of things I wouldn't speak up for before. I was always confident - but I feel *extra*-confident now. If someone is speaking negative about sexuality issues, now I will speak up - on the spot (7)

It has made me stronger. It has made me a lot stronger in a way, like... "OK, these people are *not* playing around, these people mean business," and some people say they gonna hurt you, and they may hurt you - and so... (the problem) is that a lot of people are just uneducated about the whole issue. So, you take that negative, and you try and turn it into a positive. Teach them the right way. Grant you, they might hate you, they might not hear you, but you have done your job. (7)

I did so much better in school. I felt much more confident in knowing that I had to strive. Like, I consider myself to be very well-spoken now, and I'm loud! [But before] I did *not* speak...to anyone. For a very long time. People asked me something, I used to just say "yes"

or “no.” In my classes, I used to figure: just let the other kids speak. And after questioning myself, I realized that being different meant I had to stand out more, and be more of a unique person. Not only my sexuality, but academically, my interests, everything I did. (3)

Another prominent theme was the experience of “*trying to be straight*” (theme A4) because you were expected to, or because you felt that you had “no choice.”

It was a bad scene all together. I knew *full well* that that I was a lesbian before I ever even tried to date a guy, I just knew. But still, I was *determined* that I was going to [date men] until it worked. Because [being a lesbian] it just *wasn't* an option. I just realized: my life is not going to continue to exist as it is if I go with this [lesbian] part of my personality. So I decided: OK, I won't. I'll just shut it off. (4)

...in high school.... you have to date men...you have to fit into that. (8)

Several participants reported feeling a *pervasive sense of difference* (theme A5), often from an early age (i.e. before having any awareness of their sexual identity).

So, I didn't understand it when they wouldn't let me do the little boy things. I don't know. I mean, I knew I was *different*, but I didn't really - I didn't have a *name for it* until last year. (5)

I didn't have name for it, but I knew something was different about me. I was always looking for someone else who had that sense of difference. I had a sense of something. From when I was really, really little. (4)

Some sensed it as negative, stating they felt “crazy” or “wrong.”

I really felt like something was *wrong*. I thought I was *crazy*. Because people just don't usually think that they are guys in girls bodies. That didn't strike me as something that was normal. And so I just sort of tried to convince myself that I was hallucinating, and there were just hormones going wrong. ... that's basically how I felt, and I think it started around 13. (4)

Other intrapersonal themes which came up included a feeling of *confusion regarding sexual identity* (theme A6), a *feeling that adolescence is delayed* (theme A7), and “overcompensating” as an adolescent - *trying to be perfect, or highly likable* (theme A8) to guard against possible rejection.

I've become the biggest *kiss-up*... I went into every relationship, no matter *who* it was: *teachers, bus drivers, anyone*, with this sense that ‘If they *only knew*, then I have a strike against me.’ I felt like the entire world wouldn't like me, if they knew who I *really* was. And so, before I tell them who I am, I need make really sure that I can solidify that they're going to like me. And so you go into everything you do, trying to please everyone on the face of the earth. So that you have something to fall back on, just in case, they ever find out. And so I always felt like I needed to build up this sense of being like, *the perfect child*. So that it was

like, I'm OK, *DESPITE* that fact that I'm gay. Rather than 'you can like me *because* I'm gay' - - I figured that just wasn't an option. (4)

Interpersonal. In the most general terms, the overriding interpersonal theme was *social isolation* - both in terms of not fitting in, or not being accepted, into existing family and peer groups, and also in terms of experiencing a lack of intimacy in the relationships which do exist.

The single most common interpersonal issue raised was that of *strained or superficial family relationships* due to sexual identity issues (theme A9). Nearly all participants reported at least some tension and/or distance between themselves and their family. Typically, relationships with parents were reported as the most problematic, and siblings were seen as the most understanding.

..and I *did* tell my Mom... And, well, she doesn't agree with it. She feels as though it is an "evil" moving within me. And I'm trying to explain it to her, but she's not getting it. And it makes me feel like, 'Uh, just forget it!' But I'm still trying to get her to understand. (2)

I'm afraid I'm losing ...relationships I had with my cousins, aunts and uncles. It's just very looked down upon, at least from her side [of the family]. I feel like I'll lose some good relationships. There's a cousin of mine who is (gay), and he just got cut off from everybody - his mother, his father, his sisters...just cut off. It's terrible. That's why I'm so afraid of doing it. (2)

It was a *very* tense relationship. ...there was so much of me my parents didn't know in high school, because I had to hide some other things. They couldn't know me as a whole person. And...it was frustrating...and it's *still* frustrating. Because I'm still not open with my parents. ...you just get very good at lying, and weaving tangled webs. (4)

I thought I was going to be kicked out. Which is, I know, a common idea among gay and lesbian, bisexual people - that you'll be shunned away from your family. Of course, that's the worst thing you want, because you want them to be understanding and all that. ...I need my college tuition. I was trying to figure out: if I got kicked out, what was I going to do? Where was I going to stay? But, everything turned out....even though she's still kind of negative, but she says she still loves me, and will have me in the house, and will pay for school. (7)

While most mentions of parents were in the context of strain and misunderstanding regarding sexual identity issues, several participants reported a slow, but growing sense of understanding and acceptance between themselves and their parents.

I just came out to my family last summer. And I was really nervous to do so, because a few years ago it was such a hard process for myself to come to the realization, to accept my own

identity - and to finally come out to friends. I was so nervous about it... And my mother treated it like it was a death in the family. Since then, people are getting a little better with it, even though my Mom still has her issues. (She thought someone *coerced* me, or changed my mind! She really didn't understand. A lot of it was ignorance..) But each time I see them, I see a little bit more acceptance. It's definitely a gradual process. Since that point I don't have this big burden on me any more; I feel really comfortable, and I'm glad I did it. It was the best thing I've ever done. It was actually the most *difficult* thing I've ever done, *and* it's the *best* thing I've ever done. I'm so happy. (2)

The next most common interpersonal theme was experiencing *a lack of intimacy in friendships* (theme A10), often due to hiding the truth about their sexual identity. Participants described a pattern of shutting off friendships...

I seen a lot of people just kind of shut off from anyone who wasn't 'safe' - like, anybody who could possibly figure it out, and... hurt them. She didn't want close friends who could figure it out. She wasn't friends with me for awhile, because she was afraid I would figure it out. (5)

Or avoiding discussing "personal" matters with their friends, especially sexual identity...

I never really brought the personal life into the friendship. (7)

I was never an honest friend. I always feared that there's enough against me already. You *want* coming out to not be a big deal; you want to figure out the right time to do it. But if you do it in the *beginning*, then you've made it a big deal, because it's like "Hi, I'm so-n-so, what's your favorite color, what's your sexual orientation?" You've made it a *defining characteristic*. Whereas the longer you wait, the more chance there is that someone is going to feel betrayed by the fact that you *didn't* tell them. So you are *constantly* searching for that right time for it to become a non-issue. And you usually only see where that right time is, once you've already passed it! Then you get caught up in the 'I really need to do this, but it's going to destroy everything that we've built up.' So you end up with all these really shallow friendships, because you don't ever really want to broach the topic. (4)

Participants also reported feeling as though they could not approach their junior high and high school friends for support or advice regarding romantic relationships:

I was obviously upset about [breaking up with my girlfriend]...but I couldn't tell anybody about it in high school. So, I'd be walking around, my head down, and crying spontaneously in my classes...and...there's nobody to tell. You know, it was...hard. It was not much fun. I had some decent friends from my high school, but they weren't *really* my friends because they didn't know about so much of my life. And that's how I feel about it now. That they were... sort of *superficial* friends. (5)

when your in high school, your sex life is a *major* conversation topic. It just is. So there you are, just avoiding this whole part of your life. Like, 'Sooo...why don't we talk about *MATH!*' (laughter) You just don't end up with as connected of a friendship. (4)

The next most common theme was feeling a *general sense of social isolation*, and “*not fitting in*” to the mainstream social culture of their junior high and high schools (theme A11):

...then I stopped going out [socially], because I didn't feel like I fit in at all. I felt very out of place. (8)

...there just *isn't* a social network [for LGB youth]. (5)

There are no *rules* for people who think they may be homosexual. If you're straight...you get asked out for the prom, and there are all these [social] things. [As a non-heterosexual person] you are denied that. You don't date. It's just different. You're just kind of - *out there*. (4)

It's very *isolated*, but at the same time a *desperately active* existence. Like, you are completely alone in one sense, and yet you are trying harder and harder to find some way to make this life that you've chosen - not *chosen*, but recognized yourself as being a part of - jibe with the rest of society. So you are *constantly* searching, searching,... you're looking for something to identify with. You feel completely isolated. You just want to find some place where you can be accepted, or some place you can accept as part of you. (4)

A number of participants reported a history of having been *teased by peers* for not fitting in (theme A12), often specifically related to non-conformist gender identity or sexual identity:

I *hated* junior high school because - there was always this certain group of kids, they would always tease anybody who was, maybe, feminine or whatever. They would tease you if you didn't do sports. They always teased kids like that. I really hated junior high school. I remember before, being really open (as far as being outgoing and stuff like that) - but because of that I closed up a lot, and I remember going into high school being really shy. I was really, really shy. (2)

I was... the one that everyone made fun of in junior high. They would make fun of me, call me 'faggot,' just as...like, kids do that. You know? and...that bothered me. I kind of brushed it off, when I was in junior high. And...kind of turned it around when I was in high school - as far as, I didn't *internalize* it so much. I just decided that I was going to be so much *better* than they were...and be *nice* to them. And, in a way, like, maybe hopefully reflect it back at them, that they maybe would be *human*, and treat me...like I should be treated. (6)

Participants often noted that the place where they did get adequate social support and a crucial feeling of *acceptance* was from their *friends, family members and girl/boyfriends in the LGB community* (theme A13).

...it was helpful that my girlfriend was going through the same thing...we had each other. (8)

Finally, several female participants mentioned that they had a *history of romantic undercurrents with close female friends*, long before they were aware they were lesbian or bisexual. Some felt they could not make sense of these feelings since homosexuality was such an invisible, taboo topic.

In hindsight, you're like: "Hmm...me and so-and-so in fourth grade!!!... *of course*." But, you know, it was not mentioned, so you had no idea WHAT it was. At the time you just wondered why, when your 'best friend' went away for a month, you just balled your eyes out the whole time. (4)

I had a series of crushes all through high school. I didn't *think* so, I thought they were just friends, but looking back at it - it was definitely something besides that. (4)

School/academic issues. Three themes emerged relevant to a young person's experience of school and academics. First, many participants reported a negative impact by their junior high and/or high school's *heterosexually-biased curriculum*. (theme A15). Participants noted the absence of non-biased information in health/sex-education classes, as well as the lack of any mention of LGB individuals in other courses such as history and literature.

We used to have social and physical education classes, and we would talk about certain things...but *never once* would they mention...homosexuality...or anything that would have to do with that. That would have made it easier for me to cope. At least that would have made me feel slightly more positive about myself. And, not like such an outcast. (6)

In my high school the gay issue was only brought up when the AIDS issue was ever brought up. I think that's the only time it was ever brought up. In health class, it was never brought up-they painted a lopsided picture. (6)

...no one was open about [sexuality]. [As if] it doesn't exist. It was never really discussed (6)

(At) the school that I went to ...DO NOT bring the word [homosexual] up, do not even mention it. Or, only bring it up if you're using it to *insult* someone else. (4)

Secondly, many participants reported a *generally intolerant and homophobic atmosphere* (theme A16) in their junior high and high schools, especially when compared to the more open atmosphere of college.

It's not that I hated academics - I hated the environment I was in. I did perfectly fine in school. In fact I did very well in school...but my concern was getting out of high school...and into college, as fast as I could. (5)

[The atmosphere in high school] was just like, '*You don't exist.*' I was sitting in a senior year psychology class...with a man with a Ph.D. in psychology...who proceeded to tell our class that there were no gay people in our town. But I couldn't do anything, because I wasn't out to anybody. So it was like, 'OK, yeah, right, whatever...' He said there were no gay people in the town, and none in the building - disregarding the gym teacher, who openly had a girlfriend! (5)

Finally, a few participants noted a *negative effect on their school performance* (theme A17) which they believed to be related to either their own internal struggle with sexual identity issues or the negative, unaccepting atmosphere of the school and community.

[Being different] had really bad effects on me. Because it made me resent going to school, even showing up. So that affected me academically. I spent a lot of time...worrying about being attacked. That was on my mind a lot of the time. I got a sense of total hostility coming towards me. So I basically abandoned everyone in high school. I just showed up for class. (2)

Societal/Cultural Issues. Several other themes came up in the focus group discussions, with regard to larger cultural or societal issues. Of these, the most common was noting the prevalence of *stereotypes, misinformation, myths and slurs regarding LGB people* (theme A18). Participants typically reported recognizing these societal messages from an early age, and across many settings.

I constantly heard slurs. I went to a private school, Catholic. Until eighth grade. And it was just like any other [school] - people were called 'fag'...and that was the *lowest of the low*. Like, you were scum. (6)

Things I heard a lot around my home were '*faggot*' '*dyke*' etc. I'm from...rural White America. So, if you're gay, lesbian, Black, Hispanic, anything...but White...and middle class, you're...*fucked*.

Yeah, well, it ['queer'] was always the ultimate term of abuse. People would always use it. If you were doing something stupid, they would say, '*Stop being queer*' or something. (6)

[after Gay Pride Day] they had *anti-gay-pride* stuff chalked *all over the campus*. I was feeling...not too safe.

Participants had particularly strong feelings about the inaccurate stereotypes of LGB people, and often reported not fitting the common stereotypes:

I didn't fit the stereotype... I am very feminine, and I dress.... well, it's not the way you *dress* really, it's more the way you *act*. I...don't really even know... All I know is - I don't fit [the stereotype], because...nobody *ever* thinks that I'm a lesbian...EVER... *even after I tell them!* (8)

I got a short hair cut...and everyone [in my school] was like, "*you're a lesbian!*"...that was so obnoxious.

...there are [social] rules saying we can't have children - because they think we are going to try to raise them to be gay, but if you think about it - *we* were raised to be *heterosexual*, so...we can throw that theory right out the window! We just want to love our children. (7)

[The stereotypes of lesbians are] - baggy, overweight, not attractive, and the reason that they are lesbians is because they're not attractive to men... But something that I enjoy very much... is meeting people, and, have them say "Oh, wow, you're really pretty, you must have *a lot* of boyfriends!" [And I say] "No - but I have a *great GIRLfriend!*" And they say "But...you're...*pretty*. You can't be [a lesbian], you look like a *girl*." (3)

The next most common theme in this category was the *experiencing verbal harassment, physical assault, or sensing a threat of physical harm* (theme A19).

Don't go to a frat party. I've heard stories. Also, I have a friend who was jumped in _____ [dorm] That's why I avoid it. He was just walking back [home] ...he said maybe he was just little 'too flamboyant' that day. A couple kids jumped him. People are just assholes down there. (6)

[Every year] these really, really conservative, scary people in really big trucks make a list...of people in my high school who they want to beat up/kill. And then they threaten them. I was scared the first time. But the second time it really didn't bother me...because nothing really happens. Especially the second time when these guys came up to my shoulder and were like 'We're gonna beat you up!' and I'm like, 'Oh yeah, what are ya gonna do to me?!' [I: How is this list publicized?] P3: Oh....somebody finds a list - they put the list in my locker. And I was like "Oh, the 'Beat the Freak Week' list is in my locker." And then, of course, I take it to the principal, and I say 'Look what I have.' And the principal's like 'Uhhh...I think I'll call the police.' And then the police call and inform everyone list 'You're on the Beat the Freak Week List.' The first time it was really scary. But that's because we had no idea what was going to happen. You didn't even have to be *queer* (to get on the list). You just had to be associated. (5)

I grew up near the largest chapter of the KKK in the country. If I had come out in my high school...there wouldn't have been a chance in hell for me to live through that. The first girl I dated in high school...came from a high school near mine, and she came out when she was a junior. - Her sister *outed* her. She didn't *come* out. And she had to leave the school because...when she would go to lunch people would beat her up with lunch trays. So... I tried to stay away from coming out in high school. (5)

I think you'll never know [how much violence there is on this campus]. Schools don't publish these kinds of things. They *do*...but the thing is about the rapes, and hate crimes on campus,

they only publish the ones that are reported to the police. But a lot of people don't report. For fear that their identity will be publicized (6)

There were several comments indicating that the *level of acceptance of LGB sexual identities differs across different ethnic, cultural, regional, and religious groups* (theme A20). It is important to note that making specific cross-cultural comparisons in attitudes towards homosexuality was not the goal of this project, and, indeed, the limited sample size does not allow for accurate between-group comparisons. In light of this, no conclusions/trends about attitudes of different groups may not be drawn from the anecdotal comments of the participants in this study. Still, what *can* be noted is that many participants felt that their cultural/religious/regional heritage strongly impacted their adolescent sexual identity development in some way.

[My mother's] Spanish. And she's deeply religious, Catholic. She's in church every Sunday, every holiday, every Friday - fish, whatever. So, when I first told her, her response was 'You're a *GAY*?!' And I'm like, 'Yeah, I'm "a" gay' [laughs]. But she kind of freaked out in the beginning. She cried, you know (2)

[In the Black community] it's not talked about as much... because we are dealing with a lot of other issues - racism and stuff like that. It's like "*Black people are not gay*" ...that's just the stereotype that the Black community has. And if you *are* gay, it's just *not* talked about. It's very hush-hush. (7)

Well, it depends where you are from. I'm from a [rural] town of 300 people, so I didn't have *any* sort of [LGB] network. I went to a city 2 hours away for my network. (5)

Coming from a West Indian background, it's kind of tough because, um, *everyone* is basically homophobic in the West Indies. There's *nothing* associated with gayness...or anything. It's just like, 'No, that's *wrong*!' (2)

Another theme in this category related to a sense of *invisibility of the LGB community, in particular an absence of role models and mentors* (theme A21):

P3: (It would've helped) to see some kind of role models. Seeing that who you are *isn't* really ...so freakish. I remember thinking, '*I can't be the ONLY one.*'

And instances of *discrimination based on sexual identity* (theme A22):

P1: Heterosexism...it's basically stuff that they have that we don't have...and that we *can't* have...yet. I say "yet" because I know it's going to change. [Heterosexuals] have invisible-like, they can just walk down that street holding hands. Invisible privileges. ...little things that straight people take for granted, that we can't get. Health benefits, marriage. Like, if you

want to spend the rest of your life with one person that you love, you can't get married because there are rules and laws that say we can't get married. (7)

Other less prominent themes included: *perception of less acceptance of LGB men than women* (theme A23); hypothesizing that a new “trendiness” of *identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual* which exists in some, typically urban, areas (theme A24); pressure from all directions to *conform to the heterosexual standard* (theme A25); having one's non-heterosexual identity *dismissed as a fad or a phase* (theme A26); experiencing a *lack of acceptance of bisexuality* from both heterosexual and gay communities (theme A27); and finally, *heterosexist bias in the field of psychology* (theme A28).

b. Question B: What concerns might a young person have about participating in a research project concerning sexual identity?

Table 9 displays fourteen distinct themes identified in response to this question, most of which were grouped under the following three headings: fears regarding loss of confidentiality, concern regarding poor treatment by experimenters, and concern regarding discomfort during research participation. Several other prominent themes are listed under a fourth heading. Figure 2 depicts the six most commonly-mentioned responses to Question B, including both focus group mentions as well as written responses to the Participant Questionnaire.

Fear of loss of confidentiality. *Fear of loss of confidentiality* (theme B1) was the dominant theme in response to this question. Nearly every participant in this study predicted that the loss of privacy would be the chief concern, and that this could potentially stop a young person from becoming involved in a research project concerning sexuality issues, or from truthfully disclosing her/his identity.

...if you are trying not to get outed, and you don't want to talk about sexuality...you won't go within 10 feet of [a sexuality study]! (5)

Usually in high school you're trying to go the opposite, you're trying to *build* the mask. I would go out of my way to avoid something like that.. you're trying to show people that you're *not* gay. (2)

If you are trying not to get outed, you'd probably steer clear of [participation in a research study]. If you were really concerned about it, then anything that said "sexuality" - you'd be like, "whoa!...that's a topic I *don't* want to deal with in high school" (4)

I would never have put my name to something, or given my phone number, for any type of a study. (2)

Many participants hypothesized that they would have *lied regarding their sexual identity if they had been asked during their junior high or high school years* (theme B2), to protect their privacy:

...even taking part in [a research study] would make you stand out. ...at that point, I was lying to everyone on who I was to begin with. I would probably lie on all of the questions. I would just make up a story and hope they believe me. I would have just said 'no' if I was approached. (6)

[I would have responded:] "Heterosexual." It's easy. It's on the safe side.

It was pointed out by several participants *that confidentiality concerns are particularly heightened during adolescence*, as this is a time of greater insecurity and self-consciousness (theme B3):

...an adolescent who is not 'out,' [is] a lot more guarded. More self-conscious. I mean, you're self-conscious *anyway* when you are a teenager... you're paranoid then.(4)

P2: ...you're so hyper-conscious of your sexuality [during adolescence], that you assume everyone else is. Particularly when you are 14-15-16 [years old]. (4)

Some participants articulated what *their specific concerns would be, with regard to lost confidentiality* (theme B4), such as loss of friends, popularity, parental support, success in school, and college opportunities. For example, several participants articulated the fear that, even if a study was described as "confidential," their parents would somehow find out:

I probably would have lied because of this fear that they'd send a copy of it to my parents. (5)

Poor treatment by experimenter due to ignorance, homophobia, or cold personality.

Participants articulated various fears about receiving *poor treatment from the investigator(s)*,

such as *blatantly homophobic attitudes and being judged as "abnormal"* (theme B5). For this reason, several mentioned that their preference would be to know that the *experimenter was gay, lesbian, or bisexual* (theme B6) even though this could potentially further jeopardize one's confidentiality:

...it would make me really uncomfortable if the person doing the study did not identify as queer. As a high school student, being confused about my sexuality or whatever...to participate in a study with someone who was straight - the people who were running it - that would be awkward...very, very awkward. (5)

I think that *definitely* being gay would be helpful. But...if the whole school knows that the person running [the sexuality study] is gay, and you go [to it]... that's just *not* going to happen [if you are in the closet]! (5)

Participants also expressed *concerns about being treated with disrespect, having their feelings of same-sex attraction dismissed as a "phase,"* or not being believed (theme B7).

You can tell by [the wording of] the questions that they obviously either *don't believe* that you are what you are....or that they *don't like* what you are...just by little things that an experimenter does. (5)

This woman commented on how insensitive treatment by an experimenter would influence her responses if participating in a research project:

For example, if someone is really indifferent and cold, then I'd be like 'Aaaaaa...' I'd probably lie *all over the place*. It can even be their *personality*. ...if the experimenter is just naturally stand-off-ish, that's going to affect what you say. It could really heighten someone's anxieties (5)

Discomfort during research participation. Participants predicted that the *inherent discomfort of revealing personal matters to strangers* (theme #B8) could thwart the possibility of someone getting involved.

One thing is the difficulty, the discomfort, of sharing personal information with people who are basically strangers. That's what concerns me...giving a little bit of yourself to strangers. (1)

There were also several comments indicating a fear of *general discomfort, anxiety, or fear in being involved in a research project* (theme B9):

It would be very uncomfortable. (2)

I think I'd feel the urge to do it, but I'd be terrified. (2)

Other prominent themes. It was suggested by several participants that involvement in a research study may be avoided by those who are *not ready to publicly declare their sexual identity* (theme B10) - not because of loss of confidentiality per se, but because a public declaration would necessitate the person to confront her/his own sexual identity. If a person is not ready or able to "come to terms" with her/his sexuality, or is confused about it, then research participation could be difficult, confusing, or emotionally threatening.

I think if you had asked me to do this [in high school], I wouldn't have done it. Like, ugh!, I *can't*! Not that I'm concrete in anything now, but I would have been a lot *less* than I am now. It would have been very hard. (3)

Yeah, does [checking this box] mean I have to be this for the rest of my life?! ...because if you don't know, you can't answer that!

...when people ask you for a definite, definite answer on something that you can't answer that fast. ...you have to really know, otherwise you can't do it. I don't know...it's hard.

[Putting "homosexual" on a form this time was] a big step. ...becoming more public. I look at it now, and it's like no big deal. But back then, even that question was scary for me. Now, I think it's funny - but it was pretty harsh back then, so I would always put 'heterosexual.' (8)

While this is not a "concern" per se, several participants mentioned that participating with peers in a *group format can be a very positive experience for young LGB individuals* (theme B11); some related this to how isolated they felt in their recent adolescent past, dealing with these issues on their own.

I think it feels so good to participate because, because we wanted [connection, validation] so badly when we were back in school. (2)

It's really helpful to talk about this stuff. Sometimes I feel like everyone in my life's just sick of hearing about [my coming out process]. I have a lot of straight friends...they're cool, whatever. But you start getting dirty looks after you keep bringing up a girl you are interested in. They're like, "*Enough!* We're OK with your sexuality, haven't we proven that? Now - can you *stop* talking about it, *please*." (4)

Yeah, it's really helpful to talk in a group. (4)

Finally, other participants brought up *concerns regarding the potential use of deception in research studies* (theme B13), and the *burden of feeling like you are "speaking for" the entire LGB community if you participate* (theme B14).

c. Question C: How could a research project be designed to be safe, respectful, rewarding experience for young people?

Many suggestions for researchers, both general and specific, arose out of the focus group discussions. To a large extent, these suggestions parallel the concerns and fears articulated above, as possible remedies for these problems. Refer to Table 10 which lists the fifteen most prominent themes identified in response to this question; Figure 3 depicts the frequency of the top six themes.

Themes were grouped into four general areas of advice for investigators: Researchers should do everything within their power to maintain participants' confidentiality and anonymity; Researchers should be informed about the nature of sexual identity and the coming out process and translate this into respectful and vocally supportive behavior, rather than indifferent or homophobic behavior; Researchers should strive to make the experience of participation comfortable, enjoyable, and rewarding; suggestions re: specific research modalities (individual interviews, questionnaires, focus groups).

Researchers should do everything within their power to maintain participants' confidentiality and anonymity. The most prevalent suggestion for researchers was to do everything possible to maintain participants' confidentiality. Some emphasized *the importance of confidentiality in general* (theme C2) while others articulated *specific suggestions related to protection of confidentiality* (theme C1). While there was not a clear consensus regarding the best techniques by which researchers may accomplish this, there was clear consensus on the importance of doing anything and everything possible to respect the privacy and confidentiality of participants.

For example, some believed that a questionnaire format would yield more honest responses than an interview because it feels more confidential:

...a questionnaire is more private than sitting down and talking to someone. ...especially if it's confidential, I'd think you'd be able to answer [honestly]. Sitting down and talking to someone about it is much more difficult...if you want to deny it. [If you are not 'out' then] you obviously don't want to do an [interview]. (3)

Others offered ideas regarding how to make a group administration more confidential:

If you have one of those "fill in the bubble" things [as a response sheet], then [the people seated next to you] can't associate which question is which. (2)

...make sure to not have (the questions) all in the same order. ...just like what professors do with exams. You can't cheat off of them, because the questions in a different order. People [sitting next to you] wouldn't be curious if the questions were all in a different order. ...like, 'I don't know what he's answering anyway.' (2)

A few pointed out that it would be more confidential to require the entire class take the same questionnaire rather than singling out LGB people:

...if every student was going to get the same piece of paper, then it wouldn't be a scary thing. It would be refreshing because I'd be like, 'wow, the first gay thing I've ever seen!' -But it would be very intimidating [if it felt like you were singled out] I know I would never have put my name to something, or given them my phone number, for any type of a study. But if someone had said explained the confidentiality behind it, and if I felt it was a safe and comfortable place to go, then I definitely would have [participated]. (2)

...have everybody fill out something, so that way you're not singled out...and you can fill it out honestly. (2)

Some suggested offering a private questionnaire administration instead of a group setting...

I don't know how realistic this is, but I would have them go into a private room, or have dividers up so you couldn't see my paper. Like the ballot box. Because that would definitely affect what I wrote. (2)

Researchers should be informed and respectful about the nature of sexual identity and the coming out process. Participants urged researchers to use techniques which demonstrated an accurate awareness of, and respectful attitude toward, the experience of LGB individuals.

The most common such theme was *avoiding use of identity labels in research* (theme C3) for a variety of reasons: (a) there may be discrepancies between feelings, behavior and identity, so using only identity labels may yield inaccurate information:

...my friend...I told him about myself (being gay) and he said, 'Well, I feel attraction towards guys.' But he considers himself "straight," so.... (2)

I just believe gay is not a term that defines practices, it's a term that defines *culture*. ...if you don't identify with gay culture, you're not going to say you're "gay." You're going to say that you are "attracted to men." (2)

or because (b) identity labels can be threatening or confusing,

Yeah, "gay" can be a really scary word sometimes. (2)

I always have a hard time giving answers to straight forward questions like: 'are you a *this* or a *that*?' Sometimes you really don't know...I mean, *today* I might feel like "this," *tomorrow* I might feel like "that." It's like... P2: Like pinning yourself down into a box... P1: Yeah! (1)

or because (c) identity labels simply are not important:

...you feel like you have to have a *label*....some sort of cubby-hole you fit into. And, if it's not going to be "straight," then it has to be 'OK, I'm a "lesbian."' That was very uncomfortable for me - I didn't feel like I *had* a label. - I think if people were somehow better educated, then they'd see that you don't have to have a label. (you don't have) to be placed in a little cubby-hole, which defines who you are definitively. You can just be yourself and that's the end of it. It took me so long to figure out: who cares if I'm this, that or the other thing. I'm just _____ (her own name) and that's the end of the story. And I really don't *need* to have some sort of badge or label to define me.

To solve this problem, some recommended focusing on feelings and behaviors rather than identity labels:

Or not even defining, or giving them labels, just saying "attraction to other guys" without using the words. Or, 'how often do you have gay feelings?' then they may be like, 'Oh, I'm not gay, so I can't have gay feelings.' Whereas if you said: a percentage of guys feel a certain way towards other guys, then you ask, 'How often does this happen to you?' then they might answer more truthfully. (2)

The second most common theme was urging researchers to *be aware that certain words may be very offensive, have negative connotations, and therefore may influence how a person responds on a questionnaire* (theme C4):

The wording [has] a big part in how people answer questions. For example, I remember seeing questions like, 'How many of your friends are *homosexual*?' Like, very clinical type. The word "**homosexual**" is very scary. That's what the Christian Right will say: "The Homosexuals" and "The Deviants" ...if you used very neutral terms, like "gay" and positive terms [instead], people might be more apt to answer truthfully. (2)

...[my friend] was very offended by [the word] "**other**" in the list of sexual orientations. He just thought it was demeaning for some people to have to put themselves down as "other."
P2: "Other" feels like they are saying "*These* are what we are considering sort-of normal, but you're *not* a person, you're excluded." (5)

Participants also alerted researchers to the fact *that sexual identity is a very complex and sensitive matter* (theme C5), and that it is usually not a clear cut "yes or no" type question; these questions often require a lot of thought and are hard to answer.

...there's a certain boundary that in [asking] "How do you identify yourself?" the person may feel they are being honest, but they don't really know. ...There's a lot of talking through that needs to be done, in order to answer a question like that. It's not just a "yes or no" question. It's something that means a lot, and has a lot more issues connected to it than I think [researchers realize]. It's not like a true or false thing...it's not like an SAT question. Most people are offended by the question, and that may change or taint how they answer. Like, 'Why should it be anybody else's business?' (3)

I don't know where I stand, and when I looked at that [question], I thought, "I don't know" ...I *had* something with a girl for awhile, but it's not there now. So...what am I *now*? You know what I mean? It's very difficult to look at...I don't identify myself as *anything*, really...when you have to answer that, it's difficult.

Other suggestions *included tailoring research methods to those who are not yet out or sure of their identity* (theme C6), because these are the individuals more sensitive to wording of questions and confidentiality issues.

The people who are 'out' enough not to care, it really doesn't matter *how* you present it, because they're *out*. The people you want to catch are the people who are paranoid. The ones who are really not 'out.' You really need to tailor [the research design] to them, because those are the ones who are not going to do it, or they will check the wrong box if the situation isn't right. If people feel really comfortable with themselves, then it will be easier for them. (4)

Participants also stated that the best results would come from situations in which either the researcher was '*out*' as *lesbian, gay or bisexual*, or was at least a *vocal ally to the LGB community, actively showing support to research participants* (theme C7). It was also pointed

out by several participants that the having *a friendly, reassuring personality may facilitate greater honesty in responses* (theme C8). Finally, participants emphasized the importance of *never dismissing a person's sexual identity as "a phase"* (theme C9).

Researchers should strive to make the actual experience of participation comfortable, enjoyable, and rewarding. For best results, it was suggested that researchers not only respect confidentiality and be informed/respectful of the LGB experience, but also strive to make the research experience an especially comfortable and rewarding one for participants. This would aid in counterbalancing the heightened anxiety that most young people would have in this situation, and "give something back" to the participants so that the research is reciprocal - rather than simply a "one-way" process.

The most prominent suggestion in this category was *providing research participants with useful information and feedback* (theme C10) - perhaps even utilizing the research project as a means of social justice to counter the wide-spread negative attitudes towards homosexuality:

P2: Something else of importance is the education *after* the questionnaire goes out....they could explain [the results] to the students afterwards and say "X number of people [in this group] felt the same way you did" and this is how the general population feels. Try to tie it into some social justice education type stuff.

Other comments in this section included: *providing food and refreshments* (theme C11); *fully explaining the nature of the research project* and how the information will be used (theme C12); *being aware of the discomfort one experiences in the beginning of a research interview* and not jumping into heavy topics right away (theme C13); *creating an informal, "make yourself at home" type of atmosphere* (theme C14); and *showing gratitude for the time and effort of the research participants* (theme C15) by verbally thanking them, and providing monetary compensation, if possible.

Other suggestions regarding specific research modalities. This category is comprised of suggestions made regarding the "pros and cons" of specific research modalities with young LGB

participants. For example, regarding *questionnaires* (theme C16), remarks were made about both the benefits of this modality (more confidential than interviews) and limitations (topic does not lend itself to straightforward “cut and dry” type survey questions). With regard to *group interviews*, it was suggested to keep groups small, but not too small, the best size *being between 5-8 participants* (theme C17). Other suggested that it would be sensible to *provide different options of how to participate, because different people are comfortable in different types of settings and formats* (theme C18). Finally, it was suggested that if doing interviews, *conduct them in an unstructured fashion* (theme C19), rather than “assaulting the person with questions...let them put it in their own words.”

C. Conclusions from Part II

The twenty-two young people who participated in Part II of this project provided useful, often poignant, insights regarding the experience of confronting sexual identity issues during adolescence. From the analysis of group and individual interviews, the most salient issues for LGB youth include experiencing: a loss of identity; strained family relationships; negative slurs and stereotypes re: LGB people; verbal &/or physical harassment; periods of depression &/or anxiety; lack of intimacy in friendships; social isolation; biased/heterosexist school curriculum; pressure to conform to heterosexual standard; and development of personal strengths from confronting these issues.

Regarding research participation, participants predicted that adolescents’ overriding concern would be fear of loss of confidentiality. Other themes included: general discomfort sharing personal life with strangers, fear that participation would force them to come out, even if not ready yet, general anxiety about participating in any type of research, hypothesizing that lying would take place, since it may feel too risky to be truthful, and fear of being treated poorly by an insensitive or homophobic investigator.

Many suggestions were made regarding how research in this field may be improved. The most common suggestions were for researchers to: avoid use of identity labels; protect confidentiality at all costs; avoid negative such as “homosexual;” address and validate participants’ fears about confidentiality loss; be informed about the complex nature of sexual identity and the coming out process; and, finally: tailor research format to those who are not yet out (as they are probably most sensitive to wording of questions and confidentiality issues).

It should be noted that focus group participants were recruited to provide a small, vocal group of “expert informants” on the topics above, and are not likely to be representative of the LGB population at large. Findings are intended to enhance an in-depth understanding on the certain, selected topics (in this case, suggestions for improved research), but not necessarily represent the full range, nor frequency of the attitudes held by the all non-heterosexual individuals. In light of this, the anecdotal comments (i.e. narrative quotes) included in the results section should not be construed as the representative perspectives.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

When considering the conceptual and methodological issues which have posed difficulties for recent investigations of LGB adolescence (identified in PART I), together with the input from focus group participants (from PART II), some practical implications for future research in this field may be identified. From this synthesis of findings from the evaluative literature review and collaborative input from LGB community members, the following suggestions for investigators have emerged:

A. Implications for the content of research

Many of the issues deemed to be salient for lesbian, gay and bisexual youth have been the subject of at least some recent research, such as harassment, victimization, mental health concerns, heterosexism in the schools, and coming out issues. However, many of these investigations have been descriptive in nature, often not adequately linked to theories of adolescent development. Findings from both Phase 1 and Phase 2 indicate that many other topics relevant to adolescent development exist, but have not been allotted the same degree of coverage in the literature.

With regard to content of investigations, researchers in this field of study are urged (1) to expand the scope of topics studied, not only focusing on documentation of stressors and problems, but also on the strengths and resilience of these youth, and examining less 'extreme' experiences, and (2) to more frequently pose developmentally-minded questions which will help provide a basis for understanding how the processes and "tasks" of adolescent development may be impacted when a young person questions his/her sexual identity.

The nature and diversity in themes from the interviews in Phase 2 underscores the importance of broadening the range of topics studied. For example, the most prominent theme across all interviews was the experience of “sacrificing, hiding or losing” one’s identity or sense of self (theme A1). How might this experience, presumably a common one among LGB youth, impact the developing sense of self? Would other facets of identity (in addition to sexual identity) be shaped by years of “hiding” or “losing” one’s identity? Would a young LGB person be more apt to experience a delay in identity development - - or might this period of acute identity crisis ultimately accelerate identity development in the quest for understanding who one truly is? From existing literature, it is unclear the extent to which this type of experience, potentially a common one among non-heterosexual youth, impacts the normative process of identity formation during the adolescent years.

Other interesting questions for empirical study include: what is the impact of having a stigmatized minority sexual identity on adolescent friendships, romantic/sexual relationships, and a young person’s social development in general?; when there is an increased prevalence of suicidality in LGB youth, to what extent is this the result of challenges to the developmental tasks of adolescence?; how might the strained/superficial relationships between an LGB adolescent and her parents affect her process of individuation and developing autonomy?; how might the experience of coping with a minority sexual identity during adolescence contribute to the development of adaptive skills and positive mental health outcomes?; how does membership in a (societally-oppressed) sexual minority group influence a young person’s moral development?

B. Implications for research methodology

In addition to the pressing need for well-designed, well-funded prospective/longitudinal investigations to address theoretical questions regarding LGB development, another persistent

problem in need of attention is the difficulty of locating and recruiting appropriately representative samples. Most recent published studies utilized samples characterized by an overrepresentation of youth who are 'out,' male, of Caucasian, African-American or Latino heritage, residing in urban or university settings, and who are not bisexual or questioning their sexual identity status. A skewed picture is developing without adequate representation of other groups, perhaps in particular without the large percentage of youth who are still questioning their identity status (i.e. not yet firmly self-identified and 'out' as lesbian, gay or bisexual). Based upon focus group input, it seems as though these youth may (understandably) be more sensitive to many aspects of the research process, especially terminology, identity questions, and confidentiality issues. In the planning of a research project on LGB adolescent experiences, it is important to design methods with these individuals in mind. The following specific recommendations (primarily reiterated themes from focus group discussions) are applicable to all investigations, but have particular salience when trying to recruit youth who are still questioning. Developing research procedures which are highly sensitive to the experience, needs and concerns of the target population being studied will not only allow participants to have a more pleasant, rewarding experience, which is indeed, important in and of itself. It should also increase the number and diversity of individuals who are willing to participate, and promote greater honesty in responses, thereby promoting more accurate and meaningful findings.

Be extremely sensitive to confidentiality issues. Above all, the primary concern with regard to research participation is loss of confidentiality. Investigators should take every precaution to protect participants' privacy - which may entail more careful planning, more involved/costly research procedures, waiver of parental consent requirement, and frequent vocal reassurances to participants. Attending to these confidentiality concerns may facilitate

participation from groups currently under-represented in this body of research, especially still 'questioning,' or not yet "out" youth, and youth from rural, conservative areas.

Be respectful and well-informed regarding LGB issues. Be an "ally" to sexual minority individuals. Another factor which may stop LGB youth from research participation is a concern about disrespectful, homophobic treatment by investigators. Focus group participants predicted best results would occur if the investigator is: (a) well-informed about the issues and terminology relevant to today's LGB youth, (b) vocally supportive of non-heterosexual identities, and (c) warm, friendly, and respectful interpersonally. Some expressed a desire for the investigator to be openly lesbian, gay or bisexual, but most did not express a preference.

Avoid sexual identity labels. Avoid use of sexual identity labels; they can be threatening and confusing, especially to a young person who is still trying to discover who he/she is. Have participants describe their feelings and behaviors instead.

Be careful in choosing terminology. Avoid use of terms with negative connotations, such as (for some) the word "homosexual." Also, be aware that some people have positive associations with formerly-pejorative terms, such as "dyke" and "queer." If identity labels *must* be used, the most sensible solution may be to allow participants to write in their own identity label, rather than having to select a term which may not fit, or which is overtly offensive.

C. Researchers' assumptions regarding sexual identity

Given that there continues to be a lack of consensus on several important issues relevant to sexual identity - for instance, whether bisexuality is recognized as a valid, distinct identity, the meaning of various sexual identity labels - it is vital that investigators clarify their assumptions and perspectives on these matters when it is relevant to the research questions being asked. In

particular, investigators need to be careful in articulating which sexual identity groups are being studied, how sexual identity was assessed, and to whom findings are meant to generalize. Without such clarification, consumers of research are at risk of making incorrect interpretations and generalizations of the data presented.

D. Distribution of future research

Decades of culturally-sanctioned heterosexism have resulted in widespread pathologization of, and discrimination against individuals with minority sexual identities. While this is gradually changing, homophobic bias continues to permeate our society, resulting in legal discrimination, negative stereotypes, and “passive” heterosexism across many fields (i.e. heterosexual assumptions in theories and practices, rendering sexual minority individuals invisible or deviant).

Psychology - with its emphasis on understanding human behavior, defining normative processes and cataloguing pathology - could potentially be an important academic discipline in conducting relevant, unbiased research, generating meaningful theories, and, ultimately, promoting positive social change in this area. However, there continues to be a relative dearth of solid research and theory within the traditional academic discipline of psychology. Considering research on adolescence as an example, it appears that very few empirical studies on LGB issues make their way into mainstream APA journals, and only scant data on these topics is included in standard textbooks on the subject.

Stronger research and theory regarding lesbian, gay and bisexual development is clearly needed to broaden and update our currently-biased understanding of normative human development. However, accomplishing this task will take more than the energy and commitment of individual investigators or research teams - such commitment already exists. For this change to happen, it is equally important to have adequate funds from granting agencies, enthusiastic support

from research institutions, and informed, unbiased editors, reviewers, and publishers of academic journals and textbooks.

Table 1: Thirty-one empirical studies of LGB adolescence, published between 1987-1997.

Author(s)	Year	total N	% females	General topic	Recruitment source or technique	Instrument or measure
Blanchard, et. al.	1995	156	0%	etiology of homosexuality	patients at gender identity clinic	chart review to assess birth order and sibling sex ratio
D'Augelli & Hersberger	1993	194	27%	mental health problems	youth group participants at LGB support centers across the U.S.	questionnaire including sections of Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI) and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (RSE)
Edwards	1996	37	0%	social and psychological functioning	snowball technique	questionnaire
Hammelman	1993	48	42%	factors leading to suicide	participants in LG support group & LG campus organization	questionnaire
Hersberger & D'Augelli	1995	165	25%	impact of victimization on suicidality	youth groups participants at LG community centers across the U.S.	questionnaire, Rosenberg Self Esteem Inventory (RSE), Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI)
Hetrick & Martin	1987	329	28%	developmental issues	clients at Hetrick-Martin Institute in New York City	chart review
Hunter	1990	500	21%	victimization and suicidal behavior	clients at Hetrick-Martin Institute in New York City	chart review
Johnston & Bell	1995	133	0%	theories of romantic attraction	participants in LG church group or LG college organization, friendship network, students in sexuality classes	questionnaire including Kinsey scale
Kruks	1991	68	21%	homelessness and prostitution	clients of an urban youth services agency and other agencies	chart review
McConaghy et.al	1994	411	0%	theories of romantic attraction	twins registered at an Australian twin registry	questionnaire
Newman & Muzzonigro	1993	27	0%	impact of traditional family values and racial identity on coming out process	members of LG college organizations, participants at a LG dance, members of LG youth group, patrons of a LG night club	questionnaire
Pilkerton & D'Augelli	1995	194	27%	victimization	participants at LG community centers across the U.S.	questionnaire
Proctor & Groze	1994	221	28%	suicide risk factors	participants at LGB youth groups across the U.S.	Adolescent Health Questionnaire
Remafedi	1991	137	0%	suicide risk factors	ads, gay bars, participants in support groups, university students, friendship network	questionnaire
Remafedi	1994	139	0%	HIV/AIDS knowledge, beliefs, and behavior	youth referred to program by self, peers, outreach workers	structured interview & questionnaire used for assessment before and after intervention
Rotheram-Borus et.al	1991	59	0%	HIV/AIDS knowledge, beliefs and behavior	clients at Hetrick-Martin Institute in New York City	semi-structured interview (SERBAS-Y), risk index, beliefs about AIDS and AIDS prevention
Rotheram-Borus et.al	1992	119	0%	lifetime sexual behaviors	clients at Hetrick-Martin Institute in New York City, runaway males in residential shelter	semi-structured interview (SERBAS-Y)
Rotheram-Borus et.al	1994	131	0%	lifetime sexual and substance abuse behaviors	clients at Hetrick-Martin Institute in New York City	semi-structured interview (SERBAS-Y), drug and alcohol use survey
Rotheram-Borus et.al	1994	138	0%	suicidal behaviors	clients at Hetrick-Martin Institute in New York City	semi-structured interview re. suicide issues, Adolescent Life Events Scale

(Continued, next page)

(Continuation of Table 1)

Author(s)	Year	total N	% females	Topic	Recruitment source or technique	Instrument or measure
Rotheram-Borus et al.	1994	136	0%	HIV/AIDS risk	clients at Hetrick-Martin Institute in New York City	semi-structured interview at baseline, 3,6,12 months
Rotheram-Borus et al.	1995	136	0%	multiple problem behavior syndrome/externalizing behavior	clients at Hetrick-Martin Institute in New York City	semi-structured interview & questionnaire at baseline, 3,6,12,18, and 24 mo
Savin-Williams	1989	317	33%	role of parents in coming out process	attendees at a picnic sponsored by local gay bar, participants at a LG college organization, members of a LG activist organization, attendees at a workshop, friendship network	Gay and Lesbian Questionnaire (GALQ), Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSE)
Savin Williams	1995	83	0%	pubertal maturation timing and self esteem	respondents to ads in local bars, restaurants, and newspapers; students in university lectures; friends of past participants	sociodemographic and sexual behavior questionnaire, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (RSE), structured qualitative interview.
Schneider, M.	1989	20	100%	lesbian coming out process	friendship networks, word of mouth, members of coming out support group, members of an urban LG youth group	unstructured interviews
Schneider, M.	1991	60	50%	social service needs	friendship networks, word of mouth, members of coming out support group, members of an urban LG youth group, readers of a feminist newsletter	guided interview (grounded theory technique)
Schneider, S. et al.	1989	108	0%	suicide	members of LG college organizations, participants in local LG community center youth group	questionnaire
Shaffer	1995	267	25%	suicide	120 consecutive, documented suicides vs. 147 'controls' from the phone book	diagnostic interview (DISL)
Shufin & Solis	1993	266	28%	chemical dependency	clients at Hetrick-Martin Institute in New York City	counselor ratings of past client charts
Telljohann & Price	1993	120	26%	life experiences of LG youth relevant to high school personnel	participants at centers for lesbian and gay youth across the U.S.	questionnaire with 17 open-ended items
Tremble et al.	1989	10	30%	cultural differences in coming out process	members of urban group for lesbian and gay youth	unstructured interviews
Uribe & Harbeck	1992	50	26%	school-based intervention for LGB youth	youth who participated in school-based LGB advocacy program	interviews

Table 2: Content areas investigated in recent research on LGB adolescence

<i>Topic #</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
1	suicide	8
2	victimization	4
3	coming out process	4
4	psychosocial functioning/developmental issues and concerns	3
5	etiology of homosexual feelings or identity	3
6	identification of social service/school needs	3
7	HIV/AIDS knowledge and/or behavior	3
8	sexual behavior	2
9	chemical dependency/substance abuse	2
10	homelessness/prostitution	1
11	problem behaviors/externalizing	1

Table 3: Study designs and data collection techniques in research on LGB adolescence

<i>Study design/methods of data collection & analysis</i>	<i>frequency</i>
Flexible method research - "qualitative" methods of data collection & analysis, e.g. interviews	(5)
• exploratory, descriptive (describing phenomena, either current or retrospective focus)	4
• explanatory, theory-building research, such as "grounded theory" method (current or retro.)	1
Fixed method - "quantitative" methods of data collection & analysis, e.g. surveys, measures	(25)
• descriptive (describing or reporting prevalence of a phenomenon, often retrospectively)	12
• relational, cross-sectional (examining relationships betw. variables, current or retrospectively)	10
• relational, longitudinal (examining relationships betw. variables across time, prospectively)	3
• experimental (examining variables manipulated by investigator)	0

Table 4: Characteristics of study samples in research on LGB adolescence

<i>Sample characteristics of 30 studies reviewed</i>	
sample size	
• average sample size (N)	150
• range of sample sizes	10-500
gender	
• studies with all-male samples (15 out of 30 studies)	50.0%
• studies with all-female samples (1 out of 30 studies)	3.3%
• studies with mixed (male-female) samples (14 out of 30 studies)	46.7%
• average male:female ratio of participants (of 14 studies with both males & females)	3:1
geographic region	
• % of studies with urban or university sample	80%
ethnicity - meta-breakdown of the 23 studies which reported ethnic group membership:	
• African American/Black	24.1%
• Asian	0.6%
• Caucasian/White	45.4%
• Latino/Hispanic	23.2%
• Native American	1.0%
• Other (note: "other" defined differently by each investigator)	3.6%
sexual identity	
• percentage of studies which included bisexual youth (15 out of 30)	50%

Table 5: Sampling strategies and recruitment techniques used in recent research on LGB adolescence

<i>sampling strategy</i>	<i>frequency</i>
random sampling	0 studies
non-random sampling: purposive or convenience sampling	29 studies
<i>(note that some studies utilized more than one recruitment source)</i>	
• clients attending support centers for LGB youth (usually in urban areas such as HMI in NYC; current cases or chart review)	21
• participants at university-based LGB support centers, clubs, groups	6
• friendship networks or snowball technique	6
• respondents to advertisements in LGB newspapers, newsletters, or other media	3
• youth served by urban social service agencies, not specifically for LGB youth, such as programs for runaways/homeless youth, current cases or chart review	2
• youth attending bars/nightclubs known to have LGB patrons	2
• students in a college sexuality course	2
• students in a HS-based LGB support program	1
• members of LGB activist organizations	1
• male twins registered at a twin registry	1
• child and adolescent patients at a gender identity clinic	1
• members of church-based LGB organization	1
• youth who were identified and referred to study by outreach workers	1

Table 6: Information regarding the authors and publishers of recent research on LGB adolescence

<i>How many studies were...</i>	<i>percentage</i>
authored by one or more men? (14 out of 31)	45%
authored by one or more women? (9 out of 31)	29%
authored by a mixed team of men and women? (8 out of 31)	26%
published in an mainstream, APA, peer-reviewed journal? (4 out of 31)	13%
published in other psychology/mental health journals? (8 out of 31)	26%
published in other, often interdisciplinary journals? (19 out of 31)	61%

Table 7: Demographic characteristics of focus group participants

AGE	range mean age	18 to 23 years 19.68 yrs; sd=1.43
SEX	women (12) men (10)	55% 45%
ETHNICITY	Caucasian/White/Anglo/European-American(16) African American/Black (2) Hispanic (2) Jewish-White (1) did not respond (1)	72.7% 9.2% 9.2% 4.6% 4.6%
SEXUAL IDENTITY	gay (6) lesbian (4) bisexual (4) questioning, unsure of sexual identity (3) lesbian dyke (1) homosexual (1) predominantly gay (1) queer, primarily attracted to men (1) straight, transgendered, sex=F, gender=M (1)	27.3% 18.2% 18.2% 13.6% 4.6% 4.6% 4.6% 4.6% 4.6%
AWARE	not applicable - not yet aware of identity (1) before age 11 (4) between ages 11 and 14 (9) between ages 15 and 18 (7) between ages 19 and 22 (1)	4.6% 18.2% 40.0% 31.8% 4.6%
OUT	'out' (10) partially 'out' (12) not at all 'out' (0)	45% 55% 0%
FIRSTOUT	not applicable - not yet out (1) between ages 11-14 (1) between ages 15-18 (14) between ages 19-22 (4) between ages 23-26 (1)	4.6% 4.6% 63.6% 18.1% 4.6%

⁷ One participant indicated that she was "partially out" on one question, but later reported being "not yet out."

Table 8: Sexual identity assessment methods, rated by suitability for use with adolescents who may not be certain of sexual identity status

(0=not at all suitable; 6=very suitable)

Type of Assessment Method	Assessment Method	Mean suitability rating (sd)
Category-Type	Category Type A	0.50 (1.34)
	Category Type B	1.73 (1.67)
	Category Type C	4.48 (1.37)
Continuum-Type	Kinsey	2.86 (2.00)
	Modified Kinsey	3.52 (1.80)
Complex, Multifaceted-Type	Coleman	4.00 (2.12)
	Klein	3.50 (1.95)
Self-definition-Type	Write-in Response	4.27 (1.80)

Table 9: Salient issues for adolescents who ultimately identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual

I. INTRAPERSONAL - <i>personal development, mental health, feelings about self</i>		
#	frequency ⁸	theme
A1.	37 (+3)	participant recalls sacrificing, hiding, or losing identity
A2.	18 (+2)	participant recalls periods of depression, anxiety or suicidality related to sexual identity issues
A3.	12	participant recognizes personal strengths developed as a result of coping with sexual identity issues
A4.	13	participant recalls 'trying' to be straight - dating the opposite sex during adolescence because you are expected to
A5.	11 (+2)	participant recalls feeling different, crazy, or wrong
A6.	5	participant recalls periods of confusion re: sexual identity (<i>mainly came up in women's groups</i>)
A7.	5	participant reports the feeling that his/her adolescence was 'delayed'
A8.	2	participant recalls trying to be perfect and/or highly likable to others out of a fear of rejection
II. INTERPERSONAL - <i>family, peer and romantic relationships</i>		
A9.	28 (+9)	participant reports past/present strained or superficial family relationships
A10.	17 (+2)	participant reports a past/present lack of intimacy in friendships
A11.	15 (+6)	participant reports past/present sense of social isolation, not fitting in, not being accepted
A12.	8 (+1)	participant reports past/present ridicule, joking, teasing by peers
A13.	7	participant recalls LGB friends, family, lovers and community as a crucial source of support and validation during adolescence
A14.	5	participant reports a history of romantic undercurrents in past (early adolescent or childhood) same-sex relationships (<i>mainly came up in women's groups</i>)
III. SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT - <i>academic and school-related experiences</i>		
A15.	14 (+4)	participant reports being affected by absence of non-biased high school curriculum
A16.	12 (+5)	participant recalls high school as a generally intolerant environment, esp. compared to college
A17.	6	participant reports sexual identity issues/homophobia had negative affect on academic performance
IV. SOCIETAL/CULTURAL - <i>experience of larger cultural environment</i>		
A18.	24 (+1)	participant recalls pervasive stereotypes, myths, and slurs re: LGB people
A19.	21(+4)	participant recalls threat of, or actual, physical harm, harassment.
A20.	11	participant reports that level of acceptance of minority sexual identities differs across ethnic, religious, racial, and regional groups
A21.	9 (+5)	participant recalls lack of out peers & absence of adequate role models
A22.	8 (+4)	participant recalls instances of discrimination based on sexual identity
A23.	5	participant reports noticing less tolerance for LGB men than LGB women
A24.	4	participant recalls a new 'trendiness' of identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual
A25.	4	participant recalls pervasive messages to conform to the heterosexual standard
A26.	4	participant recalls having their identity dismissed as a fad or a phase
A27.	2	participant recalls a lack of acceptance of bisexuality (from straight or gay community)
A28.	2	participant reports sensing heterosexist bias in field of psychology

⁸ Frequencies were tallied for the number of mentions during focus group discussions, as well as on the Participant Questionnaires (in parentheses).

Table 10: Concerns about participating in a research project concerning sexual identity

I. Loss of Confidentiality - <i>sexual identity will be exposed, privacy lost, negative effects</i>		
#	frequency ⁹	theme
B1.	18(+22)	participant expresses general fear regarding loss of confidentiality
B2.	7	participant hypothesizes that, due to this fear, he/she would have lied about identity on questionnaires during adolescence
B3.	2(+1)	participant states that confidentiality is of heightened importance during adolescence due to general 'insecurity'
B4.	1(+3)	participant articulates fear of a specific losses if 'outed' - popularity, friends, job, good grades, college opportunities
II. Poor treatment by investigator due to ignorance or homophobia - <i>being judged, treated disrespectfully, or not taken seriously</i>		
B5.	3(+3)	participant expresses fear of researcher's homophobia or judgemental attitude
B6.	3	participant states concern that investigator may be heterosexual
B7.	2(+3)	"it's just a phase"- participant states concern that investigator will be patronizing, not take his/her experiences seriously
III. Discomfort during research participation - <i>feeling intimidated, threatened, anxious in discussing personal matters, esp. with strangers</i>		
B8.	6(+6)	participant expresses general discomfort about speaking to strangers openly re: personal matters
B9.	3(+5)	participant expresses general concern about feeling uncomfortable, anxious, or scared during research participation
IV. Other concerns or ideas		
B10.	6(+4)	participant states that some youth may not participate due to not being ready to come out to self; participation would mean "it's official"
B11.	5	participant states that a positive outcome of participation would be the ability to connect with other LGB peers (if done in a group format) thereby receiving support and lessening one's isolation
B12.	2	participant warns that adolescents lie in research studies in general
B13.	1	participant expresses concern re: use of deception
B14.	0(+1)	participant expresses concern re: the burden of having to speak for the entire LGB community

⁹ Frequencies were tallied for the number of mentions during focus group discussions, as well as on the Participant Questionnaires (in parentheses).

Table 11: Suggestions for investigators conducting research on LGB issues

I. Minimize the confidentiality risk - take careful steps to maintain participants' anonymity		
#	frequency ¹⁰	theme
C1.	12(+3)	Participants make specific suggestions regarding ways to minimize confidentiality risk - including: (a) (if survey) a arranging a private administration, not seated next to peers, (b) not recording names, (c) not conducting research in/near the school, (d) do not have school staff recruit or administer research instruments, (e) conduct research over the phone rather than in person, (f) do not single out LGB people - have entire group/class participate.
C2.	5(+8)	Participants express general recommendation to protect participants' confidentiality, and openly address and validate participant fears re: loss of confidentiality
II. Be informed (rather than ignorant or biased) about the nature of sexual identity and the coming out process; be respectful and vocally supportive behavior, rather than insensitive or homophobic		
C3.	15	Avoid using identity labels; focus on feelings and behavior instead, because: (a) there may be discrepancies between feelings, behavior and identity and (b) identity labels can be threatening and may scare people off.
C4.	14	Be aware that certain words have negative connotations, can be very offensive, and may influence how a person responds on a questionnaire.
C5.	10	Be aware that sexual identity is a very complex matter; not a clear-cut black/white type of question.
C6.	8	Be aware that individuals who are not yet out are more apt to be sensitive to how research is conducted, including the wording of questions. Tailor format to these individuals because they may be either (a) confused and/or (b) not truthful, if questions are not worded in a particular way.
C7.	2(+3)	Be non-homophobic and vocally supportive; make is clear that you are an ally to the LGB community.
C8.	1(+4)	Investigators with friendly, reassuring and non-threatening personalities will get best results.
C9.	1(+1)	Never dismiss a person's sexual identity or feelings as "just a phase."
III. Minimize the inherent discomfort during research participation - make the actual experience of participation comfortable, enjoyable, and rewarding		
C10.	5(+1)	Make research participation a truly enriching experience for participants - provide participants with useful information and feedback; utilize research as a means of social justice.
C11.	1(+2)	Provide food and refreshments.
C12.	0(+3)	Fully explain the research project & how data will be used.
C13.	1(+2)	Be aware of participant discomfort in the beginning of a research interview; don't jump into heavy topics.
C14.	2	Create an informal, 'make-yourself-at-home' atmosphere.
C15.	0(+2)	Show gratitude for the time and effort of the research participants; pay them money if possible.

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¹⁰ Frequencies were tallied for the number of mentions during focus group discussions, as well as on the Participant Questionnaires (in parentheses).

(Table 11, continued)

IV. Other suggestions re: specific research modalities		
C16	3(+0)	Recognize the limitations and benefits of questionnaires with this population. Limits=hard to grasp complexity of issues & easier to lie. Benefits=more confidential because not face to face.
C17	0(+4)	If running groups keep them small (between 5-8 participants); otherwise do one-on-one interviews.
C18	1(+1)	Provide options in how one may participate (i.e. interviews vs. questionnaires, etc.) People are comfortable with different formats.
C19	0(+1)	If doing interviews, conduct them in an unstructured fashion.

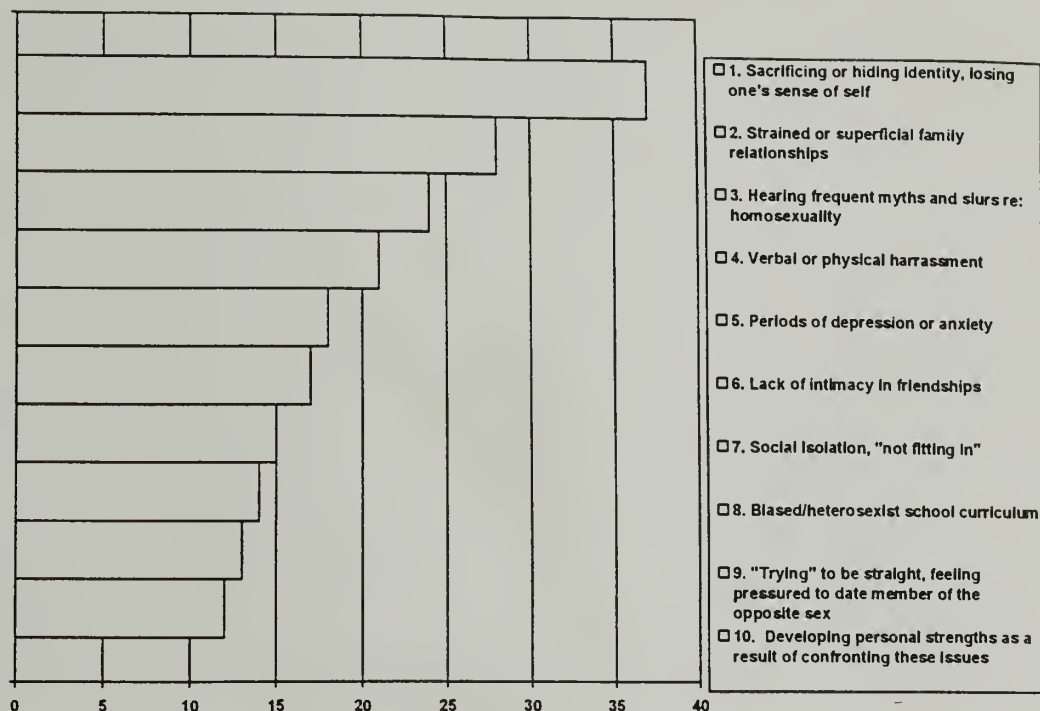


Figure 1: Issues and experiences salient to the lives of LGB adolescents

(Frequency of the 10 most common themes, of the 28 themes listed in Table 9.)

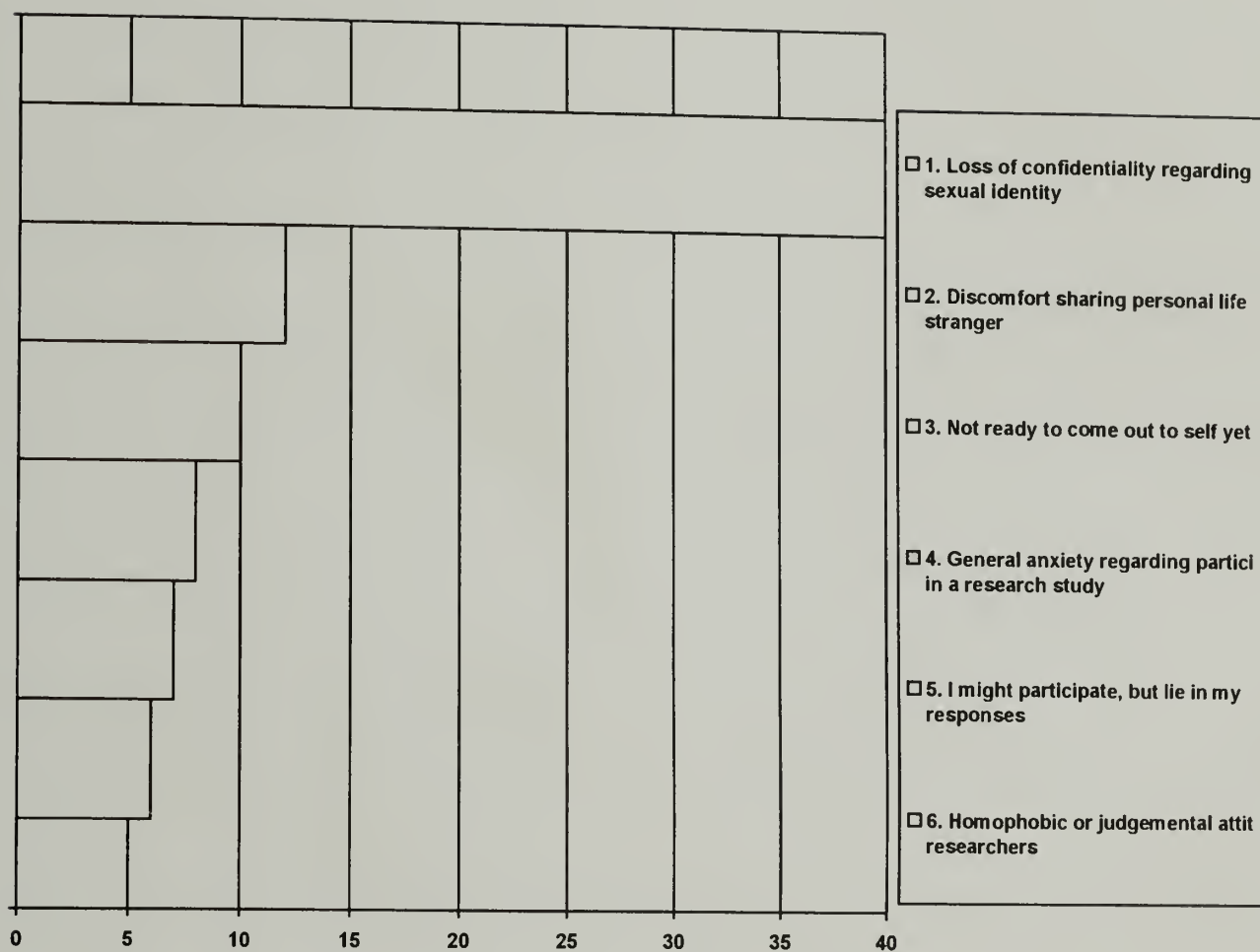


Figure 2: Concerns LGB adolescents may have regarding participation in a research project

(Frequency of the 6 most common themes, of the 14 themes listed in Table 10.)

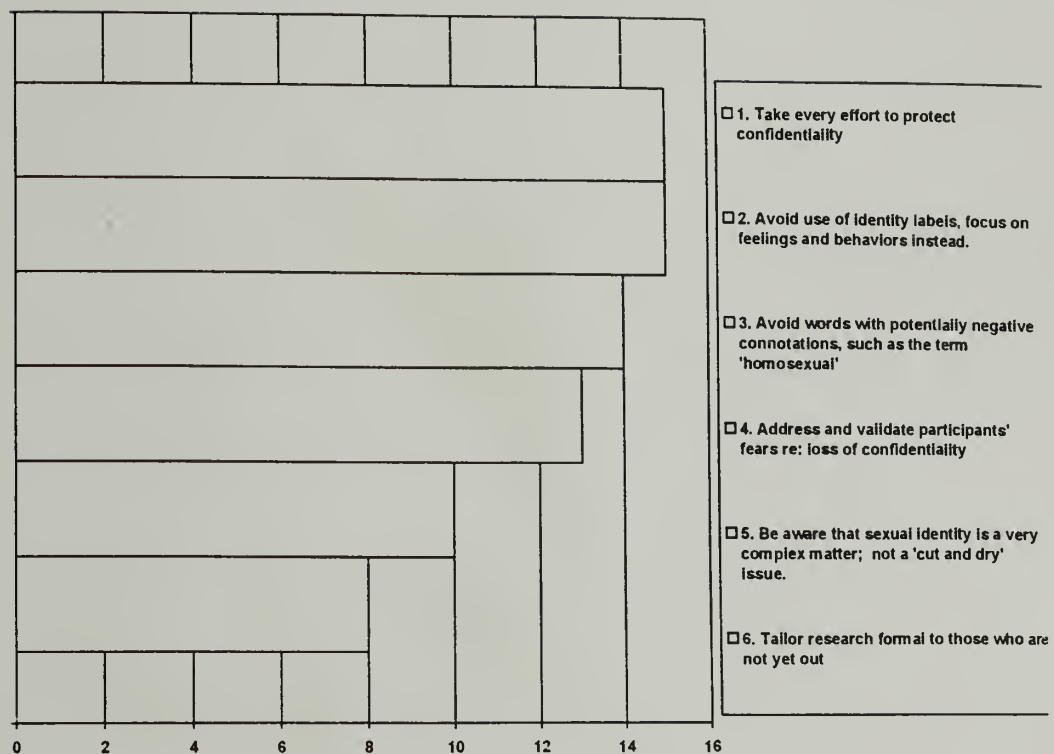


Figure 3: Suggestions for future LGB adolescence researchers

APPENDIX A

PRESCREENING QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever felt, at any point in your life, feelings of romantic or sexual attraction towards someone of your same gender? (*regardless of whether you expressed these feelings to anyone else*)

NO (0) YES (1)

2. If you answered "no," please indicate, using the scale below, how difficult is it to imagine the possibility of feeling this way in the future. [*If you answered "yes" above, just mark "N" on your OPSCAN sheet for this question.*]

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

**I cannot imagine
having these feelings
at any point in my life**

**I can imagine having
these feelings at some
point in my life**

3. Have you ever been romantically and/or sexually involved with someone of your same gender?

NO (0) YES (1)

4. There are many different terms which people use to describe their sexual orientation. Because of the numeric format of this prescreening questionnaire, we are not able to have people write in the terms they feel most comfortable with. Given these limitations, please select the choice below which you feel provides the best description of your current sexual orientation.

UNDECIDED	GAY	BISEXUAL	STRAIGHT	LESBIAN
(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)

5. At what age did you first become aware of the sexual orientation indicated above?

- (0) NOT APPLICABLE - my sexual orientation is not yet decided
- (1) BEFORE AGE 11
- (2) BETWEEN AGES 11 AND 14
- (3) BETWEEN AGES 15 AND 18
- (4) BETWEEN AGES 19 AND 22
- (5) BETWEEN AGES 23 AND 26
- (6) BETWEEN AGES 27 AND 30
- (7) BETWEEN AGES 31 AND 40
- (8) BETWEEN AGES 41 AND 50
- (9) AFTER AGE 50

6. Relatively little is known about the adolescent experiences of gay, lesbian and bisexual people. During the coming semester, interested individuals will be invited to participate in a brief (one and a 1/2 to 2 hours) discussion group regarding this topic. Group discussion will focus on the following questions: (1) *What are the most important issues facing gay, lesbian and bisexual youth today?* (2) *How should researchers attempt to study these issues?* (3) *What concerns might people have about participating in psychological research?* Four experimental credits may be earned for participating with this project. Please indicate below how you feel about participating in one of our discussion groups (note - your response below will not commit you to being involved) -

- (0) UNDECIDED - maybe I would participate; I'm not sure at this point
- (1) NOT INTERESTED in participating
- (2) INTERESTED - I would probably like to participate (if I have time, etc.)
- (3) VERY INTERESTED - please make sure to try and reach me when you are arranging the discussion groups

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Prior to Group

- Calls will be made to scheduled participants the day before the group to confirm the group's time, date, and location.
- Focus groups will meet in the group therapy rooms of the University of Massachusetts Psychological Services Center.
- Physical set-up will be completed 20 minutes prior to the group's start time and will entail:
 1. Positioning audio tape recorder, testing and cueing tapes.
 2. Getting written materials in order, i.e. consent forms and one binder for each participant, which contains: questionnaires, participant rating forms, research subject forms. Have extra pens & pencils on hand.
 3. Arranging physical space properly, including appropriate number of chairs, lighting, etc.
 4. Setting out water pitcher, tea, and light refreshments.

As Group Participants Arrive

- As they arrive, participants will be welcomed, given a name tag to fill out, and a copy of the consent form to read over.

Format of Focus Group Session

- Group proceedings will begin when the last participant arrives, or 10 minutes past the scheduled starting time (whichever is first).
- The facilitator will introduce herself and the study, roughly following the script below:

"Let me start by introducing myself and telling you a bit about what we'll be doing tonight during the hour and a half that we'll be together. I believe I have already talked to all of you on the phone - my name is Cynthia Battle & I am a doctoral student in the clinical psychology program here at Umass. My research area is gay, lesbian, and bisexual adolescent development.

Tonight's group is a part of a study which focuses on what kind of research has been done on the adolescent experiences of LGB people. So far, most of the work that I've done to find answers to these questions has been through reading research literature to evaluate what type of studies have been published - not only in regard to the topics that were chosen for study, but also examining the assumptions and theoretical perspectives that the researchers have held in approaching this area of study, what types of methods were used to collect data, where research subjects were recruited, etc. There are a lot of challenges that researchers face in studying the lives of gay teens (e.g. confidentiality issues), so one of the other things I have been focusing upon is how these special challenges have limited existing research.

Later on I will be telling you more about what I've found so far. In fact, one of the primary reasons I asked you all to participate tonight is because I need help in making sense of what I've found. I am hoping you'll be able to give me some feedback about the tentative conclusions that I have made so far (i.e. whether they seem to make sense to you or not) and I'd also like for us all to put our heads together to identify the most useful directions for future research. (e.g. What are the most important issues facing gay adolescents? How are the adolescent experiences of gay people the same/different from heterosexual people? What methods are best suited to answer the most important research questions? What are some concerns that may potentially hold someone back from being involved in a research study?)

Before we go ahead and address these questions, we have some of paperwork to - and I also want to go around the room so everyone can introduce themselves. Why don't we do that now - just say your first name, your class year (if you're a student) and how you ended up hearing about tonight's group.

[group introductions] I want to thank you all for taking time out of your schedule to come here tonight. Your input is truly appreciated.

- The facilitator will then make sure all participants have a copy of the consent forms, pass out binders, explain consent & confidentiality, and proceed to the questionnaire.

"The next thing we should do is spend a few minutes going over the consent form and filling out a short questionnaire. If you have any questions as we go along tonight - if anything is unclear or confusing - I hope you'll let me know. It will be the most helpful for me if you can be very open about what makes sense to you and what does not [pass out binders to each participant. review consent form aloud, especially the clause regarding confidentiality of group discussion & purpose of audiotaping, answer questions, ask them to sign consent, turn on tape recorder] Now you can go ahead and fill out the brief questionnaire, which is the next page in your binder."

- After all participants have completed the initial questionnaire, a more interactive group discussion will begin. The specific issues to be addressed within the group will be determined during the first phase of the project (evaluative literature review); the exact questions & format will be written up prior to the group session, and will be followed in a semi-structured fashion.
- In addition to this discussion, participants were asked to rate the usefulness, face validity, and clarity of some questions found (during Phase I) to be commonly used by researchers in assessing a subject's sexual identity.

Closing of Group

- After the discussion has ended & rating forms have been completed, participants will be asked to fill out research subject OPSCAN forms to verify participation.
- A sign-up sheet will be available for those participants interested in receiving a write-up of the study's results.

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

You are about to participate in a project concerning how researchers study the adolescent experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Due to past bias in the field of psychology and other academic disciplines, relatively little has been documented about the experiences and development of gay people across the life span. The goal of this study is to aid researchers who would now like to focus on these issues. Specifically, your input will help identify what issues are the most central in the lives of gay adolescents, and how it might be best to investigate these topics. Ultimately, a normative understanding of gay development will assist those in many professional fields - including psychology, social work, medicine, education, & others - to provide better, more comprehensive and sensitive services to people of diverse sexual identities.

You have been invited to participate in this study because you either identified yourself as currently lesbian, gay, or bisexual, or because you have experienced at least some degree of questioning of your sexual identity. Because you know what this experience is like, we particularly value your input as "experts" on this subject matter.

Your participation during the next 2 hours will involve: completion of a brief questionnaire, participation in a group discussion, and completion of several brief rating forms. We do not expect that these activities will cause discomfort, but it is important to know that your participation is entirely voluntary. Should you choose not to continue at any time, you may do so; refusal to participate will involve no penalty. It is possible that you may find the group discussion to be an interesting experience, and enjoy the exchange the ideas in the group. Four extra course credits will be granted to those participants who are currently taking undergraduate psychology course(s) here at UMass.

Your responses on the written questionnaire and rating forms will be kept entirely confidential. Additionally, when writing up the results of this study, the comments made during the group discussion will not be identified by who the speaker was. Tonight's group discussion will be audiotaped to assist in capturing all of your comments and suggestions, however the tape will be destroyed once a written transcription of the discussion is generated. All responses will be kept anonymous and written materials will be stored in a locked data archive. Group participants will be reminded of the importance of respecting each others' privacy, not disclosing other participants' personal stories outside of this group setting. It should be recognized, however there is the potential for some loss of confidentiality, just as there is anytime one openly shares ideas and opinions in a group setting.

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact Cynthia Battle at the University of Massachusetts, (413) 545-4381.

Thank you for your participation.

I have read the above statement regarding the nature and purpose of this research project and agree to participate.

Signed: _____

Print name: _____

Address: _____

Phone #: _____

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

Date of birth: ___/___/___

Age: _____

Gender: _____

1. What term do you usually use to describe your sexual identity (such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, etc.)?

2. At what age did you first become aware of your sexual identity as indicated above? (please circle the number of the appropriate response)

- (0) NOT APPLICABLE - my sexual identity is not yet clear
- (1) BEFORE AGE 11
- (2) BETWEEN AGES 11 AND 14
- (3) BETWEEN AGES 15 AND 18
- (4) BETWEEN AGES 19 AND 22
- (5) BETWEEN AGES 23 AND 26
- (6) BETWEEN AGES 27 AND 30
- (7) BETWEEN AGES 31 AND 40
- (8) BETWEEN AGES 41 AND 50
- (9) AFTER AGE 50

3. Are you currently "out" to most people in your life regarding your sexual identity?
(circle the appropriate answer)

YES NO PARTIALLY

4. If so, at what age did you first come out to others?

- (0) NOT APPLICABLE - not yet "out"
- (1) BEFORE AGE 11
- (2) BETWEEN AGES 11 AND 14
- (3) BETWEEN AGES 15 AND 18
- (4) BETWEEN AGES 19 AND 22
- (5) BETWEEN AGES 23 AND 26
- (6) BETWEEN AGES 27 AND 30
- (7) BETWEEN AGES 31 AND 40
- (8) BETWEEN AGES 41 AND 50
- (9) AFTER AGE 50

5. Based on either your own experience or the experience of others, what do you see as the most important issues facing lesbian, gay and bisexual youth today?

6. What concerns might a young person have about participating in a research project regarding sexual identity issues?

7. What are some ways that investigators might be able to make participation in research a safe, comfortable, and rewarding experience for young people?

APPENDIX E

RATING FORMS

PW _____

Evaluation of Common Sexual Identity Questions

On the following pages you will find several questions commonly used as methods to determine a person's sexual identity. Please respond to each question (or group of questions) on the top of each page, and then afterwards rate that particular method's usefulness, clarity, etc.

After everyone is finished, we will discuss all eight methods as a group, to see what people liked and didn't like.

Category Type A

Please indicate how you would describe yourself:

— heterosexual
— homosexual

(1) In your opinion, please rate how well the question allowed you to convey your sexual identity:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

does not describe my sexual identity at all

describes my sexual identity very accurately

(2) As a means of understanding a person's sexual identity, how could the above question be improved? (what do you not like about it, and why?)

(3) As a means of understanding a person's sexual identity, what do you like about the above question?

(4) Was there anything confusing about the question you just answered? If so, what?

(5) Please rate the suitability of this method for use with people who are currently unsure of their sexual identity (i.e. how easily &/or accurately could someone convey an "undecided" sexual identity status?)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6
not at all suitable very suitable

Category Type B

Please indicate how you would describe yourself:

— heterosexual
— homosexual
— bisexual

(1) In your opinion, please rate how well the question allowed you to convey your sexual identity:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

does not describe my sexual identity at all

describes my sexual identity very accurately

(2) As a means of understanding a person's sexual identity, how could the above question be improved? (what do you not like about it, and why?)

(3) As a means of understanding a person's sexual identity, what do you like about the above question?

(4) Was there anything confusing about the question you just answered? If so, what?

(5) Please rate the suitability of this method for use with people who are currently unsure of their sexual identity (i.e. how easily &/or accurately could someone convey an "undecided" sexual identity status?)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6
not at all suitable very suitable

Category Type C

Please indicate how you would describe yourself.

—	straight
—	bisexual
—	gay
—	lesbian
—	other: _____
—	undecided

(1) In your opinion, please rate how well the question allowed you to convey your sexual identity:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
			describes my sexual very accurately			

(2) As a means of understanding a person's sexual identity, how could the above question be improved? (what do you not like about it, and why?)

(3) As a means of understanding a person's sexual identity, what do you like about the above question?

(4) Was there anything confusing about the question you just answered? If so, what?

(5) Please rate the suitability of this method for use with people who are currently unsure of their sexual identity (i.e. how easily &/or accurately could someone convey an "undecided" sexual identity status?)

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
			very suitable			

Kinsey (1948)

On the scale below, please circle the number which best reflects *both* your feelings of sexual attraction and your experience:

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
<i>exclusively heterosexual</i>								<i>exclusively homosexual</i>

(1) In your opinion, please rate how well the above question allowed you to convey your sexual identity:

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
does <u>not</u> describe my sexual identity at all							describes my sexual identity very accurately

(2) As a means of understanding a person's sexual identity, how could the above question be improved? (what do you not like about it, and why?)

(3) As a means of understanding a person's sexual identity, what do you like about the above question?

(4) Was there anything confusing about the question you just answered? If so, what?

(5) Please rate the suitability of this method for use with people who are currently unsure of their sexual identity (i.e. how easily &/or accurately could someone convey an "undecided" sexual identity status?)

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>not at all</u> suitable							<u>very</u> suitable

- (0) Exclusively heterosexual
- (1) Predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally homosexual.
- (2) Predominantly heterosexual, but more than incidentally homosexual.
- (3) Equally heterosexual and homosexual.
- (4) Predominantly homosexual, but more than incidentally heterosexual.
- (5) Predominantly homosexual, but incidentally heterosexual.
- (6) Exclusively homosexual.

Modified Kinsey

(a) On the scale below, please circle the number which best reflects your feelings of sexual attraction:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

exclusively heterosexual *exclusively homosexual*

(b) Now, please circle the number which best reflects your actual sexual experiences:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

exclusively heterosexual *exclusively homosexual*

(1) In your opinion, please rate how well the above set of questions allowed you to convey your sexual identity:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

does not describe my sexual identity at all describes my sexual identity very accurately

(2) As a means of understanding a person's sexual identity, how could the above questions be improved? (what do you not like about them, and why?)

(3) As a means of understanding a person's sexual identity, what do you like about the above questions?

(4) Was there anything confusing about the above set of questions? If so, what?

(5) Please rate the suitability of this method for use with people who are currently unsure of their sexual identity (i.e. how easily & accurately would they be able to convey their undecided sexual identity status)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

not at all suitable very suitable

PM _____

Coleman (1986) (ATTACHED)

(1) In your opinion, please rate how well the above set of questions allowed you to convey your sexual identity:

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
does <u>not</u> describe my sexual identity at all							describes my sexual identity <u>very</u> accurately

(2) As a means of understanding a person's sexual identity, how could the above questions be improved? (what do you not like about them, and why?)

(3) As a means of understanding a person's sexual identity, what do you like about the above questions?

(4) Was there anything confusing about the above set of questions? If so, what?

(5) Please rate the suitability of this method for use with people who are currently unsure of their sexual identity (i.e. how easily &/or accurately could someone convey an "undecided" sexual identity status?)

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>not at all</u> suitable							<u>very</u> suitable

INSTRUCTIONS:

Fill in the following circles by drawing lines to indicate which portion describes male or female elements. Indicate which portion of the circle is male by indicating (M) or female by indicating (F).

Example:



If the entire circle is male or female, simply indicate the appropriate symbol in the circle (M or F).

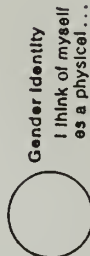
Fill out the circles indicating how it has been up to the present time as well as how you would like to see yourself in the future (ideal).

UP TO PRESENT TIME



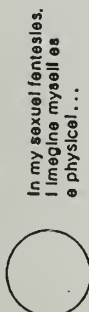
Physical Identity

I was born as a biological...



Gender Identity

I think of myself as a physical...



In my sexual fantasies, I imagine myself as a physical...

FUTURE (IDEAL)



Physical Identity

Ideally, I wish I had been born as a biological...



Gender Identity

Ideally, I would like to think of myself as a physical...



In my sexual fantasies, I wish I could imagine myself as a physical...

Sex-Role Identity

My interests, attitudes, appearance and behaviors would be considered to be female or male (as traditionally defined)...



Sex-Role Identity

I wish my interests, attitudes, appearance, and behaviors would be considered to be female or male (as traditionally defined)...



Sexual Orientation Identity

My sexual behavior has been with...



Sexual Orientation Identity

I wish my sexual behavior would be with...



My sexual fantasies have been with...



I wish my sexual fantasies would be with...



My emotional attachments (not necessarily sexual) have been with...



I wish my emotional attachments (not necessarily sexual) would be with...



What is your current relationship status:

- ☐ Single, no sexual partners
- ☐ Single, one committed partner Duration _____
- ☐ Single, multiple partners
- ☐ Coupled, living together (Committed to an exclusive sexual relationship)
- ☐ Coupled, living together (Relationship permits other partners under certain circumstances)
- ☐ Coupled, living apart (Committed to an exclusive sexual relationship)
- ☐ Coupled, living apart, (Relationship permits other sexual partners under certain circumstances)
- ☐ Other _____

**In terms of my sexual orientation,
I identify myself as . . .**

- ☐ Exclusively homosexual
- ☐ Predominantly homosexual
- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Predominantly heterosexual
- ☐ Exclusively heterosexual
- ☐ Unsure

**In the future, I would like to
identify myself as . . .**

- ☐ Exclusively homosexual
- ☐ Predominantly homosexual
- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Predominantly heterosexual
- ☐ Exclusively heterosexual
- ☐ Unsure

In terms of comfort with my current sexual orientation, I would say that I am . . .

- ☐ Very comfortable
- ☐ Mostly comfortable
- ☐ Comfortable
- ☐ Not very comfortable
- ☐ Very uncomfortable

Klein (1985) (ATTACHED)

(1) In your opinion, please rate how well the above set of questions allowed you to convey your sexual identity:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6
 does not describe my sexual identity at all describes my sexual identity very accurately

(2) As a means of understanding a person's sexual identity, how could the above questions be improved? (what do you not like about them, and why?)

(3) As a means of understanding a person's sexual identity, what do you like about the above questions?

(4) Was there anything confusing about the above set of questions? If so, what?

(5) Please rate the suitability of this method for use with people who are currently unsure of their sexual identity (i.e. how easily &/or accurately could someone convey an "undecided" sexual identity status?)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6
 not at all suitable very suitable

Klein Sexual Orientation Grid

Variable	Past	Present	Ideal
A. Sexual Attraction			
B. Sexual Behavior			
C. Sexual Fantasies			
D. Emotional Preference			
E. Social Preference			
F. Self-Identification			
G. Hetero/Gay Lifestyle			

Refer to Figure 2.

Refer to Figure 3.

Figure 2

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Other	Other	Both	Both	Same	Same	Same
mostly	mostly	equally	equally	somewhat	somewhat	mostly
more	more	more	more	more	more	more

Figure 3

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Hetero	Hetero	Hetero	Hetero	Gay	Gay	Gay
mostly	mostly	equally	equally	somewhat	somewhat	mostly
more	more	more	more	more	more	more

Write-in response

What term (or terms) do you think best describe your current sexual identity? (If your sexual identity is not clear at this point, just write in "undecided.")

(1) In your opinion, please rate how well the question allowed you to convey your sexual identity:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

does not describe my sexual identity at all

describes my sexual identity very accurately

(2) As a means of understanding a person's sexual identity, how could the above question be improved? (what do you not like about it, and why?)

(3) As a means of understanding a person's sexual identity, what do you like about the above question?

(4) Was there anything confusing about the question you just answered? If so, what?

(5) Please rate the suitability of this method for use with people who are currently unsure of their sexual identity (i.e. how easily &/or accurately could someone convey an "undecided" sexual identity status?)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

not at all suitable very suitable

Please rank order the eight types of sexual identity questions that you just responded to (1 being the best, 8 the worst). The criteria to use is: the degree to which the question (or set of questions) allows a person to accurately describe her/his sexual identity.

- ___ Category Type A (yellow)
- ___ Category Type B (green)
- ___ Category Type C (light pink)
- ___ Coleman (bright pink)
- ___ Kinsey (orange)
- ___ Klein (blue)
- ___ Modified Kinsey (grey)
- ___ Write-in response (purple)

Comments?

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