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An Exploratory Study of the Relationship Between Community Involvement and LGB Identity

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Introduction

Overview of LGB Identity Models

Much research has been done to understand the identity development of lesbians and gay men, and more recently bisexuals (Rosario, Hunger, Maguen, Gwadz, and Smith, 2001). There have been many models of LGB identity development created in the decades since the first model developed by Vivienne Cass in 1979 (Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014). Nearly all of these models include four basic steps: realization of thoughts indicative of same sex attraction, internal struggle with the possibility of having same sex attraction, acceptance of same sex attraction, and eventually disclosure of that attraction (Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014). These steps act as a simplistic guide to understanding the coming out process for many individuals who are LGB. Of particular interest in this study is the emphasis by many models on the importance of contact with other LGB identified individuals in affirming and normalizing an LGB identity (Rosario et. al., 2001).

Bisexuality and Identity Development

There has been disagreement by scholars as to whether bisexual individual's identity development can be explained by the same models as gay and lesbian individuals (Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014; Rosario et. al., 2001; Brown, 2002). There have been multiple models of identity development specific to bisexual identity development proposed in response to this question (Brown, 2002). Most of these models differ from models of gay and lesbian identity development in that it is assumed that bisexual individuals will develop a heterosexual identity first before forming a bisexual one (Brown, 2002). Most of these models also dedicate multiple developmental steps to bisexual individuals working through confusion around their identity that is specific to bisexuality. Brown (2002) stressed that across models there is a consistent trend of

bisexual individuals often lacking terminology or role models to help them understand their bisexuality.

The particular scale used to measure LGB identity in the current study was chosen specifically because it was re-oriented to gauge bisexual identity as well as lesbian and gay identities. The Lesbian Gay Bisexual Identity Survey (LGBIS) was created from a scale originally known as the LGIS, which was revised to make it more targeted toward general experiences of individual conceptions of their identity in relation to same-sex attraction (Mohr & Kendra, 2012). However, the Cass model is still the basis from which all other LGB models were developed

Application of the Cass Model of LGB Identity Development

While there has been some criticism of the applicability of Cass's identity development model in contemporary society, this is the model that was used most prominently in the conception of the current study (Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014). The criticism of Cass's model usually comes from the fact that the original model was developed based on her experience with white middle to upper class gay men in the 1970s. However, recent research has suggested that Cass's model is still applicable to many LGB individuals who are coming out today, since these individuals still live in a heterosexist society where they are taught that there is a stigma attached to same sex attraction during most of their developmental years (Hillier & Harrison, 2007; Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014). This is a central tenet of Cass's model, as the first three of the six stages are dedicated to overcoming internalized heterosexism or homophobia and being able to admit an LGB identity to oneself (Cass, 1979).

Cass's model gives an in-depth explanation of each stage of identity development, but the stages can be summarized briefly. The first of the six is identity confusion; this stage is

characterized by anxiety and other negative feelings stemming from questions about sexual identity (Cass, 1979). The second stage is identity comparison. This stage involves feelings of alienation as one addresses possible same sex attraction. It is important to note that one does not accept this attraction to be indicative of a non-straight identity and the feelings in this stage are often rationalized as temporary. Stage three is identity tolerance; in this stage feelings of same sex attraction are accepted as permanent and one begins to internally identify with the gay or lesbian community. Stage four is identity acceptance. In this stage one accepts a gay or lesbian identity and has increased affiliation with the gay community, as well as beginning to come out to some people. Stage five and six are often combined in more recent literature. These stages are identity pride and synthesis respectively. Stage five is characterized by an us versus them attitude toward straight individuals, while stage six is characterized by recognition of allies, and a more complex view of individuals sexual identity in relation to other personal characteristics.

The stage in Cass's model that is most important in the current study is Stage 4: Identity Acceptance. In this stage Cass states that individuals will begin to reach out to others with a gay identity (1979). The model states that through these connections the individual will begin to feel the impact of the realize that there is a gay subculture full of other individuals who experience same sex attraction. This contact will validate and normalize a gay identity and give them an understanding of the possibilities for a future that includes same sex relationships and integration into gay culture (Cass, 1979). The model also states that contact with other gay individuals will answer questions like "Who am I?" and "Where do I belong?" It is these claims that the current research investigated.

Social Support and Coming Out

There is abundant research supporting the claim that social support is integral to combating the psychological distress involved in the coming out process (Shilo, Antebi, and Mor, 2015). Many different studies have explored the different forms that this social support can take. Most have identified that there are two sources of support that are most integral to combating psychological distress in the coming out process for LGB persons: supportive family and connections with other LGB individuals (Shilo, Antebi, and Mor, 2015; Johns, Pingel, Youatt, Solder, McClelland, and Bauermeister, 2013; LeBeau & Jellison, 2009).

Shilo and colleagues (2015) found that the importance of these two factors differs depending on the age of the individual. Support from the family was found to be more important to adolescents in the study. While, connections with other LGB individuals was more important for adults. The researchers explained this difference as most likely due to the fact that those under 18 are usually dependent on their parents. This would mean that not having supportive parents would result in a hostile home environment that would be difficult to overcome with any amount of support or connections with other LGB identified individuals.

Shilo (2015) and colleagues also identify connections with LGB individuals as being especially important to combating a specific type of psychological distress called “minority stress.” The researchers identified this as the specific form of psychological distress that comes from being marginalized by the society that one lives in. This type of stress is felt by women, and racial or ethnic minorities, as well as LGB individuals (Shilo et al., 2015).

LGB Identity and Minority Stress

Minority stress was a concept that was also explored in the research by Johns and colleagues (2013) that examined smoking behaviors of young sexual minority women. Their research examined whether connections with other sexual minority women were a protective

factor against smoking. The researchers theorized that higher rates of smoking for sexual minority women was due to the minority stress that they experienced. This research examined how psychological distress experienced by sexual minority women can have effects on physical health. They found that young sexual minority women with more LGB connections reported a lower likelihood to smoke (Johns et. al., 2013). These findings indicate that the positive psychological effects of LGB connections can have positive effects on the physical health of sexual minorities.

In a qualitative survey of UK Lesbian and Gay identified individuals it was found that individuals often stated outright that LGB connections were important to their mental health (Ellis, 2007). The individuals interviewed in this study explained how being around other LGB individuals created an environment where they could “be themselves” in a way that they could not in predominately heterosexual environments. Multiple interviewees in this study explained how being a sexual minority caused them stress when in heterosexual dominated areas, because of the social stigma toward any non-heterosexual behavior. Finding LGB spaces or connections was important to combating seclusion and allowing individuals to be their authentic selves without stress.

Of particular interest in the current study was whether the finding that connections with other LGB individuals were harder to find for individuals who were coming out later in life. The testimonies by the interviewees in the research by Ellis (2007) made it clear that individuals who were realizing or accepting their LGB identity later in life were still in need of LGB connections to work through the stages of their identity development. Therefore, connection in identity development is important regardless of age. The aspect that was most difficult for these individuals was finding ways to connect with LGB individuals that were not designed for young

people. This lack of space for older LGB individuals was the main concern of the study by Ellis (2007). Since it is known that connections with LGB individuals lessen minority stress, provide valuable social support, and are an integral part of identity development, how do LGB individuals make these connections?

A study by LeBeau and Jellison (2009) of gay and bisexual men's views of the gay community asked this same question and formulated a list of the four main ways that gay and bisexual men reported getting involved in the community. These routes in order of most common to least were: friends, the bar scene, formal groups, and the internet. These findings provide a decent framework for the current study to investigate how LGB individuals make contact with others of similar identities. While these findings may be limited by the fact that the research by LeBeau and Jellison (2009) was done exclusively on gay and bisexual men the findings can be theorized to apply to lesbian and bisexual women.

The Internet and LGB Identity Formation

The internet as a platform in which individuals can explore their identity has been of interest to researchers since its rise in popularity. It has been found that the internet is particularly useful to LGB youth who are not out to their families and do not have access to in person LGB community support (Hillier & Harrison, 2007). Research has also shown that LGB youth are about twice as likely to have online exclusive friends when compared to non-LGB youth (Hillier, Mitch & Ybarra, 2012). LGB youth are also more likely to report receiving social support from these online friendships. In most cases these relationships are reportedly with other LGB youth. Thus, the internet acts as a popular space for young people developing their LGB identities.

The internet was found to be a safe space to these youth where they could practice being out and coming out before doing so in offline interaction (Hillier & Harrison, 2007). Many of the individuals in these studies reported that it was easier to face negative reactions to their sexuality in online spaces because they could leave the interaction with no social repercussions and did not risk physical violence. As individuals came out more in real life, they reportedly relied on internet spaces less. In this way it could be theorized that internet safe spaces are used by LGB youth to develop their identities and affirm themselves before facing the reactions others may have offline.

The Current Study

To build on this previous research the current study investigated participants' conceptions of their own LGB identity using the LGBIS scale, as well as their self-reports of when and how they connected with other LGB individuals (Appendix A). Self-reports of how they first connect with other LGB individuals were collected in an attempt to see if the same routes of contact found by LeBeau and Jellison (2009) are present in the current sample. IRB approval for this research is presented in Appendix B. Of particular interest were the presence of any relationships between these variables. Also, of interest were any possible relationship between demographic factors such as age, and responses to the LGBIS scale or the self-reports of when and how connections were made

Methods

Participants

Participants were gathered through a snowball sampling technique. The researcher distributed the digital questionnaire to individuals who were known to identify as LGB via an anonymous link. These individuals responded and then passed the link onto their own

connections within in the LGB community, along with a sample email provided by the researcher explaining the purpose of the survey.

There were 40 total participants. The majority of respondents reported currently living in either an urban (35%) or suburban (37.5%) area. The majority of respondents reported growing up in a suburban area (60%). Of these participants 72.5% reported that they were female, and 25% reported being male, 2.5% responded prefer not to say. Participants ages ranged from 18 to 58, with a mean age of 25.9, and a median age of 21. 27.5% of participants identified themselves as lesbians, 25% of participants identified themselves as gay, 50% of participants identified themselves as bisexual, and 10% of participants identified their sexuality as other. Participants that responded other for their sexuality were able to fill in the term that they used to define their sexuality. Responses to the other option included Queer and Pansexual. Participants were asked their education level ranging from a high school diploma to PhD. 57.5% of participants reported having a high school diploma, 27.5% reported a bachelor's degree, 5% reported a Master's degree, and 10% responded other.

Measures

Participants responded to an online questionnaire, created and distributed through Qualtrics. The questionnaire consisted of 35 questions separated into three different categories. The first category was demographic. These included items asking the respondents sexuality, age, sex, level of education and how they would describe the area where they lived as well as the area that they grew up. An identity survey, and open-ended questions about community involvement were also used. See Appendix A for the questionnaire.

LGB Identity Survey.

The LGBIS is composed of 27 questions designed to measure eight dimensions of LGB identity that have been discussed in theoretical and clinical work (Mohr & Kendra, 2012). These dimensions are; Acceptance Concerns, Concealment Motivation, Identity Uncertainty, Internalized Homonegativity, Difficult Process, Identity Superiority, Identity Affirmation, and Identity Centrality. Of particular interest in the current study were the dimensions of Acceptance Concerns, and Identity Affirmation.

Due to a faulty distribution of the questionnaire items were listed with 4 response categories rather than the six categories that the LGBIS is meant to have. As a result of this error data may skew negatively. In an attempt to correct for this error only responses to a subscale that averaged a 3.1 or above were coded as positive, while a 3.0 or below were coded as negative.

Community involvement.

The final questions were open-ended questions about the participant's involvement with other LGB individuals. Open-ended questions were chosen because of the explorative nature of the study. These questions asked when participants made contact with other LGB individuals, and how they did so.

The open-ended questions were coded by the researcher using content analysis. The question of when participants made contact with other LGB individuals was coded into the developmental stage that could be identified in the response. The life stages found in the responses to the question of when was either (1) early adolescence 10-14 years, (2) middle adolescence 15-17 years, (3) late adolescence 18-20 years, (4) young adulthood 21-35 years, or (5) other/cannot be determined.

The second open-ended question, asking how participants became involved with other LGB individuals was coded through content analysis into the categories identified by LeBeau

and Jellison (2009). These categories were (1) friends (2) bar scene (3) formal groups (4) Internet. The additional category of other/cannot be determined was added.

Results

The participants' responses were coded according the previously stated criteria and reviewed. First an analysis of the general descriptive statistics of the responses to the LGBIS and Open-Ended questions about LGB connections was done. Special attention was paid to the question of how participants connected with other LGB individuals to see if the same routes of involvement observed by LeBeau and Jellison were present (2009). Then the data was analyzed to look for any relationships between variables.

LGBIS.

The responses to the eight different subscales of the LGBIS were coded and reviewed the results can be seen in Figure 1 (1= *Disagree Strongly*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Disagree Somewhat*, 4 = *Agree Somewhat*). On average responses to the subscale of Acceptance Concerns were not overwhelming positive or negative ($M=2.75$, $SD = .917$, $Mdn 3.0$). This indicates that most participants had some trouble accepting their LGB identity but there were no extreme acceptance concerns. Responses to the Concealment Motivation subscale were not much more negative than positive ($M = 2.8$, $SD = .969$, $Mdn = 3.0$), which suggests that some participants were invested in hiding their LGB identity from others while some were not. Responses to the Identity Uncertainty subscale were mostly negative ($M = 1.993$, $SD = .885$, $Mdn = 1.875$). These responses suggest that participants were fairly certain in their LGB identities. Participants on average responded negatively to the subscale of Internalized Homonegativity as well ($M = 1.667$, $SD = .851$, $Mdn = 1.333$). Which suggests that respondents on average did not have negative views of their LGB identity. Participants responses to the Difficult Process subscale were not

extremely positive or negative ($M = 2.75$, $SD = .917$, $Mdn = 3.0$). This implies that some participants had difficulty processing their LGB identity while some did not. Responses to the Identity Superiority subscale were on average fairly positive ($M = 3.808$, $SD = .458$, $Mdn = 4.0$). These responses suggest that most participants viewed their LGB identity as something that made them superior to others who were not LGB. Participants also scored positively on average on the subscale of Identity Affirmation ($M = 3.817$, $SD = .459$, $Mdn = 4.0$). These results indicate that respondents on average associate positive experiences and feelings with their LGB identity. Lastly on the subscale of Identity Centrality responses were not much more positive than negative ($M = 3.095$, $SD = .782$, $Mdn = 3.2$). This implies that some participants saw their LGB identity as a central part of their larger identity while some did not.

LGB Connections.

Participants' responses to the first Open-Ended question of when they first connected with other LGB individuals were coded by the researcher along the criteria outlined earlier. For example, if a participant reported, "In middle school some classmates and friends started coming out as LGBT, this was my first contact with the community," that response would be coded as early adolescence because individuals are in middle school during the ages of 10-14. Some participants reported the number of years it had been since they made first contact. In these scenarios the number of years was subtracted from the participants reported age in the demographic questions in order to code the answer. The results of this analysis showed that the majority of participants first made contact with other LGB individuals in either early adolescence (32.5%) or middle adolescence (32.5%). The remaining participants made contact in either late adolescence (20%), young adulthood (12.5%) or did not state a distinguishable life stage in their response (2.5%). These results are illustrated in Figure 2.

Participants' responses to the Open-Ended question of how they first connected with other LGB individuals were also coded along the criteria outlined in the Methods section. Special interest was paid to responses to this question to see if the categories defined by LeBeau and Jellison (2009) were present, which they were. Only one respondent's answer to the question of how connections were made with other LGB individuals could not easily be recognized as one of the categories that LeBeau and Jellison (2009) found in their study of Gay and Bisexual men's involvement with the LGB community. This respondent reported making contact through "Glee and other tv shows." There is a possibility that the respondent made connections with others who watched tv shows with LGB characters and then found out that they were LGB. However, this would be a large assumption to make from the respondent's short answer so it was marked as other.

Of the participants responses the majority (65%) were coded as connecting through Friends. Only one participant reported first connecting through the Bar Scene. Six responses were coded as Formal Groups (15%), such as GSA groups in school or Pride parades. Five responses were coded as making contact through the Internet (12.5%). These results are illustrated in Figure 3.

Discussion

The current study aims to better understand the relationship between LGB individuals' connections with others who share their identity and their own conceptions of their LGB identity. The study also aimed to better understand when and how LGB individuals make these connections.

The findings from the Open-Ended questions of how participants first connected with LGB individuals supports previous research on the routes that individuals take to make contact

with the LGB community (LeBeaus & Jellison, 2009). This previous study was done on a sample of gay and bisexual men. The findings of the current study, which had a majority of female respondents shows that these findings may be applicable to both men and women.

In the current study the majority of participants reported making contact with other LGB individuals through friends. Slightly more of the sample reported their first contact being through friends than was found by LeBeau and Jellison (2009). This may be due to the fact that the sample in the current study was not representative, and much smaller than the previous study on gay and bisexual men. However, it may also be due to changing norms around sexuality. The studies were done 10 years apart. It may be possible that the current atmosphere that is more accepting toward LGB identities may allow individuals to discuss sexuality with friends where in the past doing so may have endangered those friendships.

Also noteworthy among the responses to the question of how connections were made is the relative lack of connections being made through the bar scene. In the current study only one participant reported making contact through the bar scene. While in LeBeau and Jellison's (2009) study 28.6% of their participants reported making first contact through the bar scene. This difference may have come about due to the differing compositions of the samples. The current study had a majority of female respondents (72.5%), while LeBeau and Jellison only studied men. Gay bars have been historically a much larger part of gay male culture, which may be a part of the reason why there were not more reports of this route of contact.

This also may be due to changing norms. The majority of participants in this study reported first making contact with other LGB individuals in early or middle adolescence. At this age it is very unlikely that individuals would be going to gay bars. The next most common route of connection after friends was found to be formal groups (15%). These groups were often listed

as a school Gay Straight Alliance or other LGBT organization in school. At the ages that participants reported first contact these routes would have been much more accessible for them. This is also likely due to the changes in social acceptance of LGB identities. As same-sex attraction becomes more socially accepted these groups become less taboo in schools and individuals who are questioning their sexuality may feel safer to attend them.

The findings from the question of when individuals first made connections with other LGB individuals are reflective of these changes. A trend in the data was noticed during analysis of when participants made first contact with other LGB individuals. There was a tendency for participants who were at the older end of the age range to report making first contact later in life. Participants at the younger end of the age range tended to report making first contact earlier in life. A scatterplot illustrates this trend (Figure 4). This finding may be representative of the changes in social climate over the past few decades. Participants who are at the younger end of the age of range of the participants would have most likely grown up in an environment more accepting of LGB identities than those at the older end of the age range.

The findings from the question of how contact is made might be important to LGB identity, specifically participants' acceptance of an LGB identity. Analysis of the data showed that on average those who made first contact through friends rated negatively on acceptance concerns. There may be any number of reasons for this tendency. It may be that individuals who have the least trouble accepting an LGB identity may be more willing and able to discuss sexuality with those whom they already have connections with. It may also be that those who connect with other LGB individuals through existing connections as a result have less trouble accepting their LGB identity.

There also may be a third variable not measured in the current study which could lead to this tendency: the environment in which participants realized their LGB identity may have been this third variable. For example, if an individual lived in an environment that was not accepting of LGB sexualities they may rate high on acceptance concerns and they may not have connected to LGB individuals through friends because their peers may have also had trouble accepting their identity. So, sexuality was not discussed among friends, or there may not have been many visible LGB individuals to make friendships with.

The possible relationship between Acceptance Concerns and how LGB connections were made found in the current research is a topic which needs further investigation. Future research could investigate individuals' reasons for making connections in the way that they did, as well as what type of environment they were raised in in more depth. The majority of the current sample had a suburban upbringing. While there was no observed trend in the current data related to upbringing, a more diverse sample may reveal different findings than were present in the current study.

Limitations

The first and most obvious limitation of the findings of the current research was the incorrect implementation of the LGBIS scale. As was stated in the Methods section all of the data from the LGBIS was collected using only 4 of the 6 response choices included in the original formation of the LGBIS. This was due to a faulty handout of the scale as well as an oversight by the researcher. Due to a limited population to draw participants from and a short timeline for collecting data a corrected version of the questionnaire was not distributed. Instead the data was carefully analyzed to make sure the responses were properly interpreted. Only responses to subscales that had an average of 3.1 or above were counted as positive. Everything

below a 3.1 was recorded as a negative response. This was the best that could be done with the current data, however it must be recognized that the limited positive answer choices may have led participants' data to skew negative simply because of the majority negative response options.

Another noteworthy limitation in the current research was the sampling method.

Snowball sampling is not random and is not representative of the larger LGB population. Due to this sampling method the results of the current study may not be generalizable to the whole LGB population. The sample was also largely female and bisexual, so this may cause responses to not be representative of the LGB population. Snowball sampling was used despite these limitations because of the restricted timeline of the study.

Conclusion

The development of and LGB identity in same sex attracted individuals has been studied by many different individuals, and multiple models have been proposed and tested on the matter. However, there are still many questions to be asked and answered. LGB identity development differs from many other types of identity development, such as race and ethnicity, in that it is not an identity that individuals are socialized into from birth. This aspect makes LGB identity unique from most other types of identity that are studied by social scientists. This exploratory study sought to investigate LGB participants conceptions of their own identity, and how and when they may have connected with others of a shared identity. In doing so more questions have been raised than answered. Future research should further investigate the trends observed in this study to better understand the importance of how and when LGB individuals connect with others of shared identities.

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Figure 1. Bar graph of the mean and median responses to the eight LGBIS subscales.

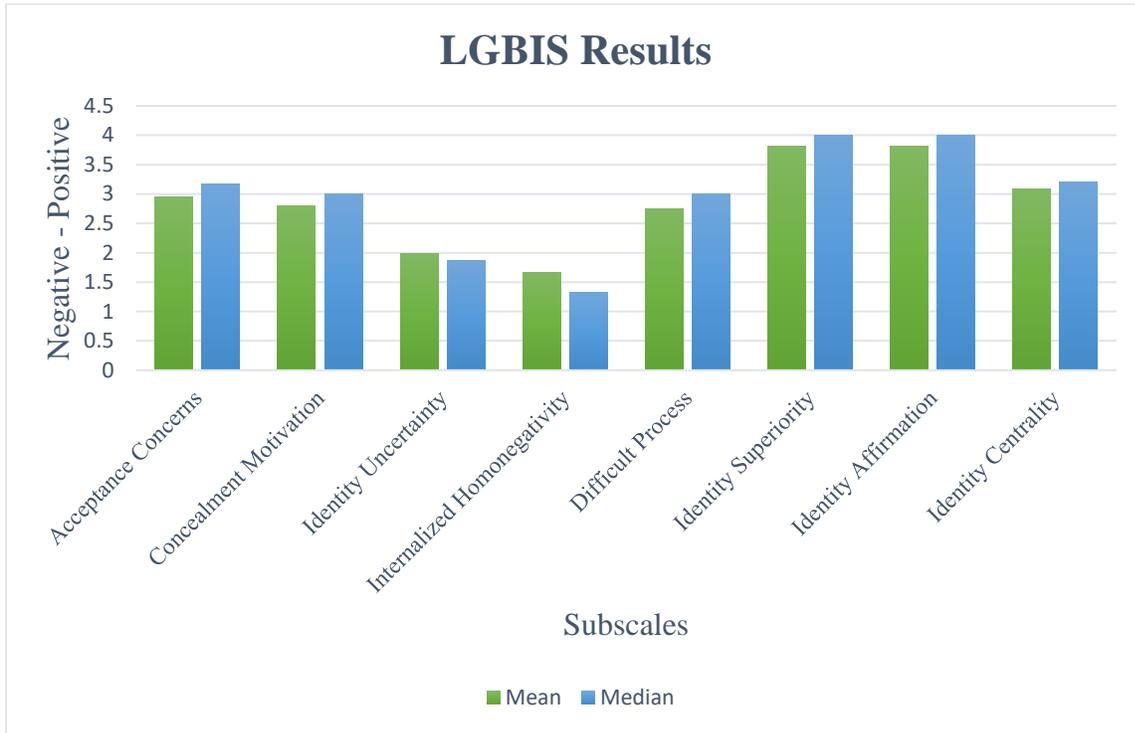


Figure 2. Participants responses to the open-ended question of when first contact was made with other LGB individuals.

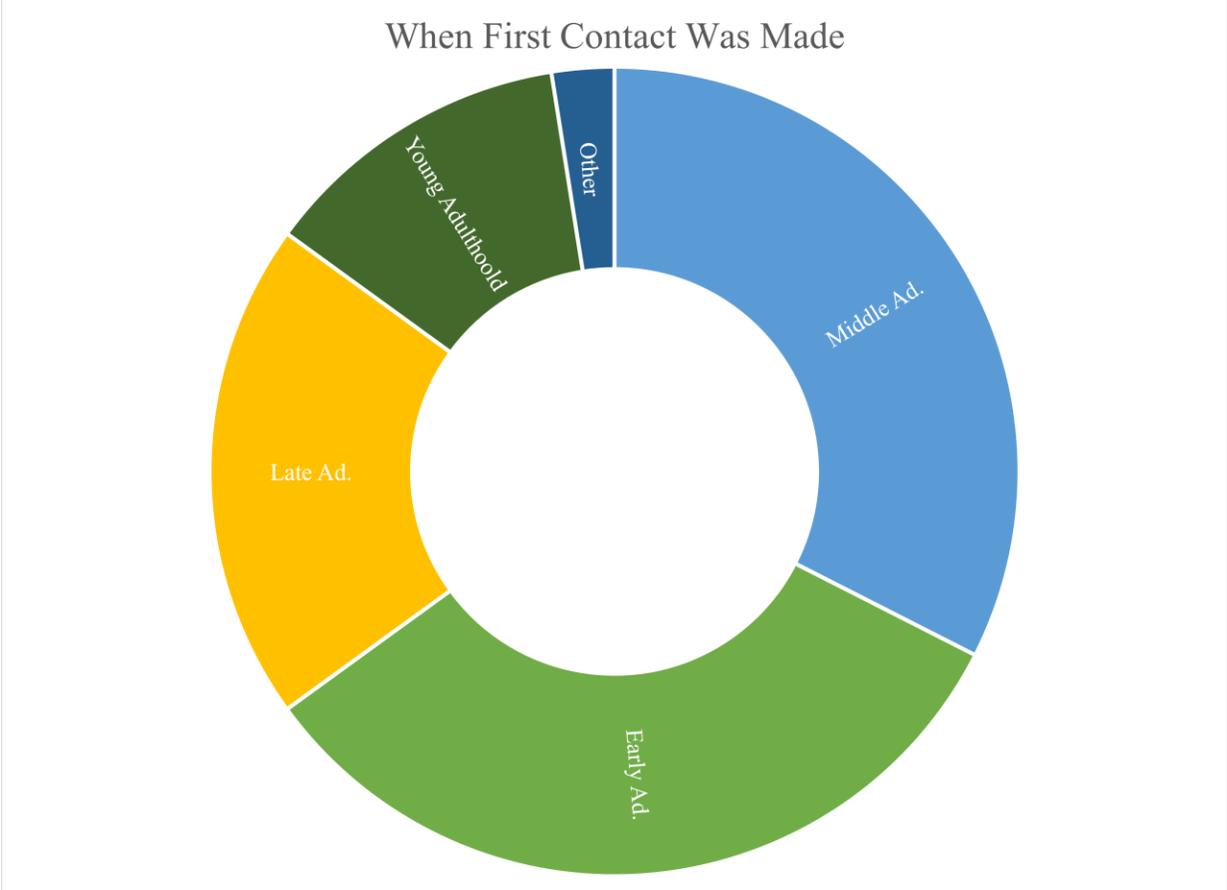


Figure 3. Participants responses to the open-ended question of how first contact was made with other LGB individuals.

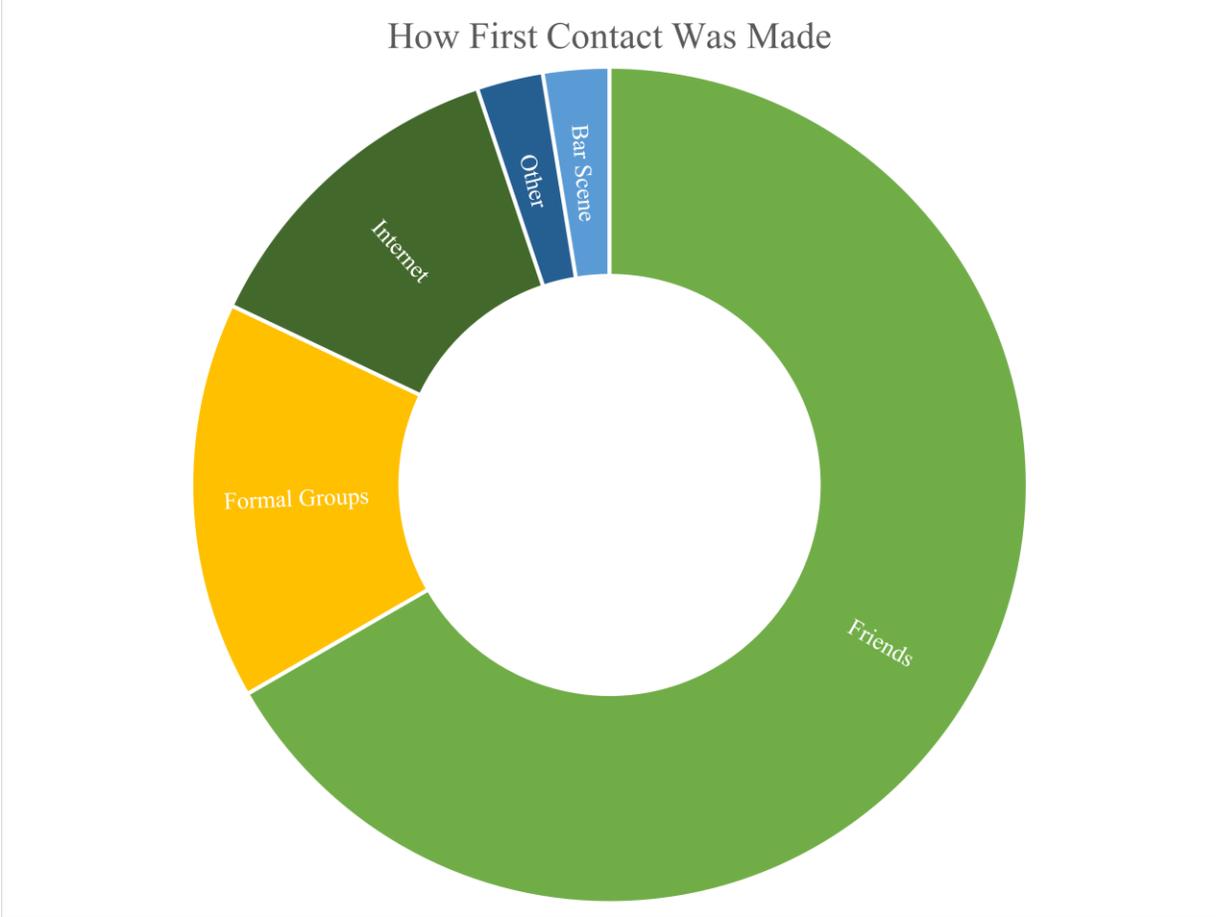
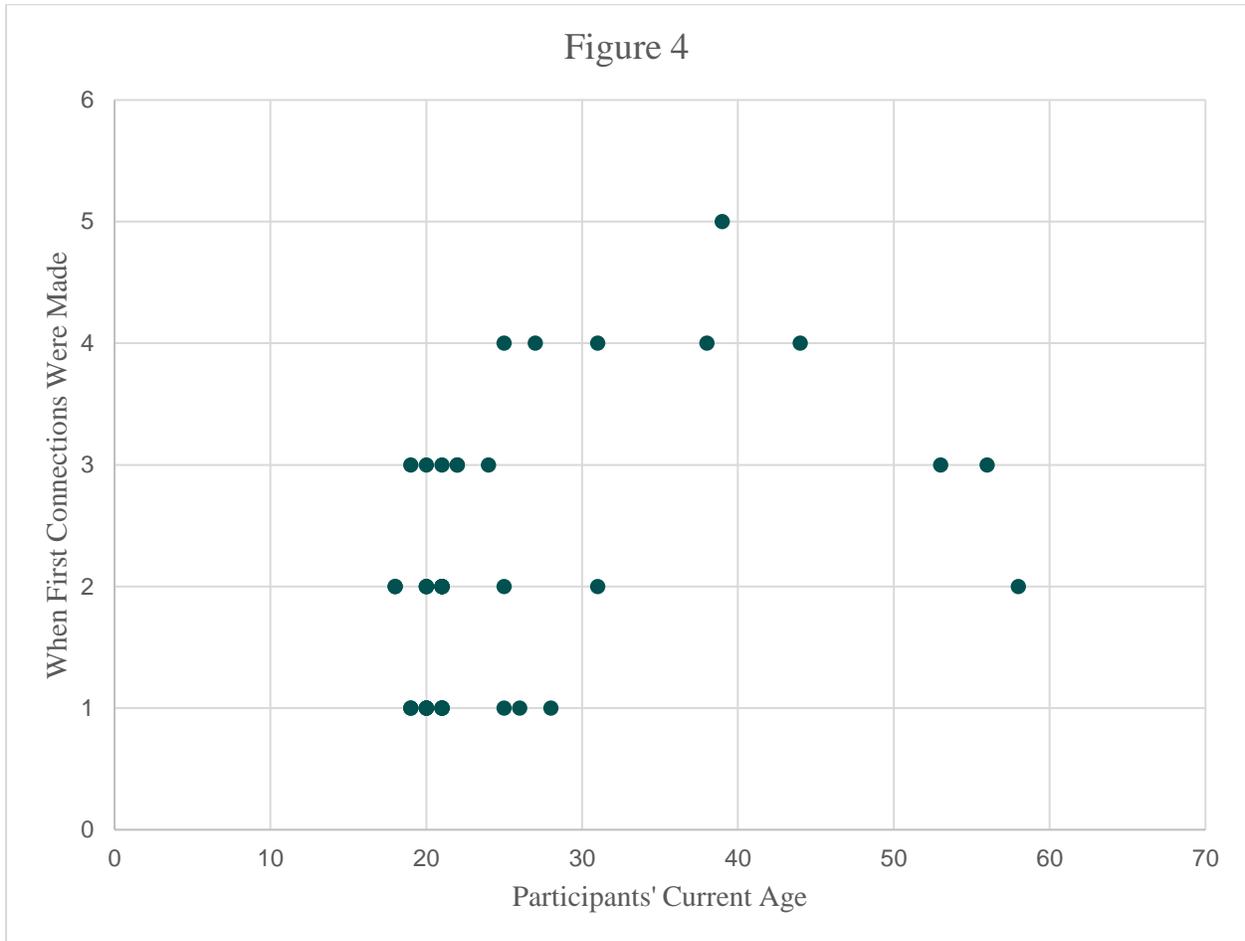


Figure 4. Scatterplot of the relationship between the current age of participants and when connections with other LGB individuals were first made.



Appendix A

Demographic Questions

1. What is your sexual orientation?

- Gay

- Lesbian

- Bisexual

- Other:

2. How old are you?

-

3. Are you...

- Male

- Female

- Prefer not to respond

4. What is your highest level of education

- High school diploma

- Bachelor's Degree

- Master's Degree

- Doctorate

- Technical School Certification

- Other

5. How would you describe the area that you grew up in?

- Rural

- Urban

- Suburban

- Other

6. How would you describe the area that you live in now?

- Rural

- Urban

- Suburban

- Other

LGBIS

1. I prefer to keep my same-sex romantic relationships rather private.
2. If it were possible, I would choose to be straight.
3. I'm not totally sure what my sexual orientation is.
4. I keep careful control over who knows about my same-sex romantic relationships.
5. I often wonder whether others judge me for my sexual orientation.
6. I am glad to be an LGB person.
7. I look down on heterosexuals.
8. I keep changing my mind about my sexual orientation.
9. I can't feel comfortable knowing that others judge me negatively for my sexual orientation.
10. I feel that LGB people are superior to heterosexuals.
11. My sexual orientation is an insignificant part of who I am.
12. Admitting to myself that I'm an LGB person has been a very painful process.
13. I'm proud to be part of the LGB community.
14. I can't decide whether I am bisexual or homosexual.
15. My sexual orientation is a central part of my identity.

16. I think a lot about how my sexual orientation affects the way people see me.
17. Admitting to myself that I'm an LGB person has been a very slow process.
18. Straight people have boring lives compared with LGB people.
19. My sexual orientation is a very personal and private matter.
20. I wish I were heterosexual.
21. To understand who I am as a person, you have to know that I'm LGB.
22. I get very confused when I try to figure out my sexual orientation.
23. I have felt comfortable with my sexual identity just about from the start.
24. Being an LGB person is a very important aspect of my life.
25. I believe being LGB is an important part of me.
26. I am proud to be LGB.
27. I believe it is unfair that I am attracted to people of the same sex.

Open Ended Questions

1. When did you first connect with other LGB individuals?
2. How did you first connect with other LGB individuals?

Appendix B



Office of Research Administration
Akron, OH 44325-2102

NOTICE OF APPROVAL

Date: 2/26/19
To: Jenna Collins
Department of Psychology
From: Katie Watkins Assistant VP of ORA and IRB Administrator
IRB Number: 20190202
Title: Community Involvement in LGB Identity Development

Approval Date: 2/22/19

Thank you for submitting your Request for Exemption to the IRB for review. Your protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and qualifies for exemption from the federal regulations under the category below:

- Exemption 1** – Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices.
- Exemption 2** – Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior.
- Exemption 3** - Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior not exempt under category 2, but subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office.
- Exemption 4** – Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens.
- Exemption 5** – Research and demonstration projects conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine public programs or benefits.
- Exemption 6** – Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies.

Annual continuation applications are not required for exempt projects. If you make changes to the study's design or procedures that increase the risk to subjects or include activities that do not fall within the approved exemption category, please contact the IRB to discuss whether or not a new application must be submitted. Any such changes or modifications must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

Please retain this letter for your files. This office will hold your exemption application for a period of three years from the approval date. If you wish to continue this protocol beyond this period, you will need to submit another Exemption Request. If the research is being conducted for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, the student must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

Approved consent form/s enclosed

Informed Consent

Title of Study: Community Involvement in LGB Identity Development

Introduction: You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by J. Collins, a student in the Department of Psychology at The University of Akron.

Purpose: This is an explorative study of the connection between community involvement in LGB identity development. The study will include about 25 individuals who experience same-sex attraction.

Procedures: The study will involve a series of questionnaires that should take you between 10 and 20 minutes to answer. These include 6 demographic questions, 28 questions about your LGB identity, and 4 open ended questions about your community involvement.

Exclusion: In order to participate in this study, you must be 18 or older, and experience same-sex attraction. If you do not fit these two criteria you are ineligible to participate in this study.

Risks and Discomforts: The questionnaire about LGB identity development may involve some self-reflection that can lead to questions about your sexuality or some slight discomfort. If this happens to you GLBT hotline provides support nationally and can be reached through their website gibthotline.org

Benefits: You will receive no direct benefit from your participation in this study, but your participation may help us better understand if community involvement is related to LGB identity development.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw: Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice.

Anonymous and Confidential Data Collection: The data collected here will be anonymous. No identifying information will be collected, and your anonymity is further protected by not asking you to sign and return the informed consent form.

Who to Contact with Questions: If you have any questions about this study, you may call J. Collins at (330)696-1930, or email at jc192@zips.uakron.edu or Dr. John Queener at (330)972-7280. This project has been reviewed and approved by The University of Akron Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the IRB at (330) 972-7666.

I have read the information provided and all of my questions have been answered. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. My completion of this survey will serve as my consent. I may print a copy of this consent statement for future reference.

APPROVED
IRB 2/22/19
Date _____
The University of Akron
