PERCEIVED PARENTAL RELATIONSHIPS FOLLOWING DISCLOSURE OF
SEXUAL ORIENTATION BY LESBIAN, GAY, AND BISEXUAL OFFSPRING

by

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ABSTRACT

In a society that appears to be growing more accepting of lesbian and gay people, where prominent individuals can speak more openly about their sexual orientations without fear, there appears to be a growing societal acceptance of non-heterosexual people. Can this growing tolerance be applied to parental relationships with their own lesbian and gay children as well, and does this acceptance of gay and lesbian culture apply when it hits closer to home?

This thesis attempted to research perceived parental relationships following the disclosure of sexual orientation by lesbian, gay, bisexual female, and bisexual male offspring. The first hypothesis was that parental relationships with their lesbian, gay, and bisexual offspring will be perceived by offspring as more negative following disclosure of sexual orientation than before disclosure. The second hypothesis was that parental relationships with lesbian and bisexual offspring following disclosure of sexual orientation will be perceived by offspring as more positive in comparison to relationships with gay male offspring following disclosure. Furthermore, the third hypothesis was that parental relationships with lesbian, gay, and bisexual offspring will be perceived by offspring as more positive as the length of time since disclosure increases.

The Parental Attachment Questionnaire (PAQ), designed by Maureen Kenny, assessed perceptions of current relationships with parents. Two questions assessed perceptions of relationship with parents before and immediately following disclosure of
sexual orientation in comparison to the present time. A paired-samples $t$ test comparing the mean scores before disclosure and immediately after disclosure revealed that there was a significant difference between scores before and scores immediately following disclosure, indicating that participants in this study perceived their relationships with their parents as significantly worse immediately following disclosure than before disclosure.

There were no significant differences between the four groups on scores on the Parental Attachment Questionnaire. Although research suggests that the “coming out” experiences of lesbians, gay males, and bisexuals may differ, support for this hypothesis was not found in this study.

A small but significant positive Pearson correlation was found between length of time since disclosure and Composite, Subscale 1 Affective Quality of Relationships, and Subscale 2 Parents as Facilitators of Independence, scores on the PAQ. A small but significant positive Pearson correlation was also found between age and Composite, Subscale 1, and Subscale 2 scores on the PAQ. A significant Pearson correlation was found between age and length of time since disclosure. No significant correlations were found between age at time of disclosure and composite or subscale scores on the PAQ. An examination of partial correlations statistically controlling for age as a covariate revealed that time since disclosure was no longer correlated with composite scores on the PAQ, or any of the subscales. The results found when controlling for age as a covariate indicate that perceptions of a better may be a result of other age-related factors rather
than the time since initial disclosure. This study did not find support for the hypothesis that relationships will improve as the length of time since disclosure increases, however, the findings here indicate that perceived relationships do improve, though identifiable reasons for which were not found here.
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INTRODUCTION

Despite the long and arduous struggle for acceptance of people of non-heterosexual orientation, it seems there may yet be hope for equality among individuals of differing sexual orientations. In a society growing seemingly more accepting of people identifying as gay and lesbian, where prominent individuals can speak more openly about their sexual orientations than at any other time in recent history, there appears to be a growing awareness and tolerance of non-heterosexual people and the issues within their community. Recent headlines mark the movement for equal rights for all persons, with attention given to the desire for equal rights for gay and lesbian families to legally wed, adopt, and experience job security within the workplace and acceptance within the larger cultural community. There is a growing audience for television, movies, and periodicals focusing on and featuring LGB people and issues. Ever-growing organizations like PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbian and Gays) and Gay-Straight Alliances in High Schools and colleges across the country create strong support and union between heterosexual and gay, lesbian, and bisexual people as well as give hope for an end to the negative treatment and defamation of people of differing sexual orientations.

While it may appear that acceptance of LGB populations may be emergent within the social context, there is evidence to suggest that the struggle for equality is far from over. In the 2004 Presidential election, the majority of voters in all 13 US states
proposing a ban on same-sex marriage voted in support of the ban (Lewis, 2005). As of this writing, only one state in the Union, Massachusetts, legally recognizes same-sex marriage. In February of 2004, President George W. Bush called for an amending of the United States Constitution to make marriage legally defined as only between one man and one woman, which would effectively ban gay and lesbian couples from legally marrying (The White House, 2004). Gay and lesbian couples continue to be met with discrimination when purchasing homes, finding employment and insurance benefits, when attempting to adopt, and when gay and lesbian wills are contested (Beeler & Di Prova, 1999).

Harassment of gay, lesbian, and bisexual adolescents in schools is often ignored by authorities and perpetuated by both peers and authorities alike (Beeler & Di Prova, 1999; Savin-Williams, 1994). In a 1995 study, researchers found that 80% of gay, lesbian, and bisexual adolescents and young adults age 15 to 21 reported having experienced verbal insults (Hershberger & D’Augelli, 1995). In addition, 44% received threats, 23% had property damaged, 33% had objects thrown at them, 30% were chased or followed, 13% spat on, 17% experienced direct physical attack, and 10% had been assaulted with a weapon (Hershberger & D’Augelli, 1995). Further bias-related violence is estimated to affect more than half of lesbian or gay adults in their lifetimes through either verbal or physical assaults, or both (Comstock as cited in Hershberger & D’Augelli, 1995).
Although there appears to be promising advancements toward acceptance and equal treatment of people of non-heterosexual orientations, they occur within the context of a larger society that continues to adhere to heterosexist attitudes, laws, and values. The family is seen as a microcosm of the views, values, and beliefs held by society as a whole. Culture within the family and the relationships between the members are greatly influenced by the larger social framework, just as the larger culture is influenced by the family (Mash & Wolfe, 2005). Many heterosexist attitudes extend into the conceptualization of family and family values, and in turn relate to the relationships between parents and their gay, lesbian, and bisexual children. This thesis will look at the perceived relationships between gay, lesbian, and bisexual adults and their parents following the disclosure of their non-heterosexual orientation.

For the purpose of clarification, the use of the term “parent” will include both biological parent(s) and any primary caregiver(s) other than biological parent(s). Also, the terms disclosure, “coming out,” or “out” is used in reference to persons identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual making clear to his or her parent(s) the nature of his or her sexual orientation. The abbreviations LGB and GLB will also be used interchangeably in reference to the lesbian, gay, and bisexual population.
The disclosure of one’s same-sex sexual orientation, “coming out,” is held to be one of the most significant events in the establishment of one’s non-heterosexual identity (Beeler & Di Prova, 1999; Holtzen, Kenny, & Mahalik, 1995). While crucial to identity formation, the actual coming out event can incite feelings of great anxiety as one considers both the potential risks and benefits of their disclosure (Ben-Ari, 1995; Beeler & Di Prova, 1999). Disclosure of non-heterosexual orientation has been said to dramatically and profoundly affect family members and frequently causes a crisis within the family (Beeler & Di Prova, 1999; D’Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998; Robinson, Walters, & Skeen, 1989). In fact, the initial disclosure of one’s gay, lesbian, or bisexual orientation has been likened to a traumatic experience for many parents (Floyd et al., 1999). Researchers who have described the initial parental response to their child’s disclosure as traumatic assert that this is possibly due to the many changing emotions and challenges parents may experience as they adapt to the child’s sexual orientation (Floyd et al., 1999). Disclosure prompts a difficult process of adaptation during which parents ascribe negative stereotypes to their child and may even experience feelings of guilt for believing they have caused their child’s same-sex orientation (Floyd et al., 1999).

While many of the reasons for anxiety surrounding the disclosure of sexual orientation to family members tend to vary from person to person, common themes appear. The fear of a negative reaction from parents seems to be the most commonly
reported concern when contemplating coming out (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003). Additional reasons for apprehension include the fears of being emotionally rejected, having their emotions dismissed, physical violence, and the fear of hurting or disappointing their parents or causing their parents to feel guilty (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003). It is important to note, that while many gay, lesbian, and bisexual adults fear a negative reaction from parents, which may include expulsion from the home or physical violence, some research has shown that such extreme reactions happen, but are rarely the case (Beeler & Di Prova, 1999; Henderson, 1998).

In a recent study, parents of gay or lesbian adolescents expressed an ongoing effort to sustain a positive relationship with their child, but also a prominent reaction of fear for their child (Freedman, 2003). The research suggests there may be incongruence between perceived parent and child experiences in regard to attitudes toward sexual orientation. In one study measuring parents’ first reactions to their sons coming out as gay or bisexual, it was found that almost half of the mothers responded with disbelief or denial. Also in this study, one half of the fathers responded with silence or disbelief (Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998). In fact, the most common feelings in response to their child’s disclosure reported by parents are those of disappointment, guilt, anger, fear for their child’s well-being, a sense of loss, shock, and less commonly, denial (Beeler & Di Prova, 1999; Saltzburg, 2004; Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998; Williamson, 1998). It is most probable that parents feel responsible for the outcome of their child’s orientation,
and are likely to respond with feelings of guilt, shame, and humiliation, believing that they had somehow caused a flaw in their child’s sexual orientation (Williamson, 1998).

Parents report that their initial negative reactions to a child’s disclosure are fueled by concerns for their child’s safety and future in a society that strongly values and favors heterosexual behaviors. Some concerns expressed by parents included fears that their child would be alone and unhappy, would suffer from prejudice, harassment, and rejection from the larger community, would be exposed to sexually transmitted diseases, and would lose touch with many of the family’s values and beliefs (Beeler & DiProva, 1999; Ben-Ari, 1995). Additional concerns expressed by parents were fears that their children would not produce grandchildren; feelings of alienation from their child and their child’s community; worry that their children as well as they themselves would experience marginalization, vulnerability, stigmatization, and discomfort with integrating a child’s partner into the larger family; and, ultimately, the grief associated with the loss of an ideal image for the future, hopes, and dreams they once held for their child (Beeler & DiProva, 1999; Ben-Ari, 1995).

Initial Parental Reactions

Research has shown that parents may experience a variety of reactions to their child’s initial disclosure of sexual orientation. While some researchers have described the initial parental response to their child’s disclosure as traumatic, this may in part be due to the many changing emotions and challenges parents may experience as they adapt to the
child’s sexual orientation (Floyd et al., 1999). Disclosure prompts a difficult progression of adjustment during which parents attribute negative stereotypes to their child and may even experience feelings of guilt for having caused their child’s same-sex orientation (Floyd et al., 1999).

Fears of a negative reaction from parents are often warranted. Several studies have found that disclosure negatively impacts family dynamics and relations (Ben-Ari, 1995; D’Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998; Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998; Waldner & Magruder, 1999). Within the context of the family, D’Augelli, Hershberger, and Pilkington (1998) found that negative reactions to their child’s disclosure were more common with fathers than mothers. Fifty-one percent of mothers were reported to be accepting of their child’s orientation where only 27% of fathers were reported as accepting (D’Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998). Families may be less accepting of lesbian, gay, or bisexual children or family members because of family structures, ethnic or cultural norms, or negative stereotypes (American Psychological Association, 2000). In fact, parents’ political ideologies and religious beliefs have both been found to relate to the degree of acceptance following disclosure, with religiosity identified as contributing the most to negative reactions (Walder & Magruder, 1999).

In a study conducted by Robinson, Walters, and Skeen (1989), nearly two-thirds of the 402 parents surveyed admitted that their initial response to their child’s disclosure of non-heterosexual orientation was negative, with grief-like reactions. Almost half of those responding indicated that they experienced guilt because of their child’s orientation
(Robinson, Walters, & Skeen, 1989). Also influencing the negative reactions by parents are disparaging stereotypes of the gay community in a society that discourages gay and lesbian behaviors (Walder & Magruder, 1999).

The Gay Male Experience

Perhaps the most damaging stigmatization affecting public attitudes toward the gay community has been the association between gay and bisexual men and AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) (Hereck & Capitanio, 1999). Though it has been over 20 years since the discovery of the AIDS virus, most of the heterosexual public continues to equate homosexuality and bisexuality with AIDS, and this association is correlated with higher levels of sexual prejudice (Hereck & Capitanio, 1999). In a 1997 study, Hereck and Capitanio found that 67.7% of the 1,309 people surveyed continued to associate gay men with AIDS (Hereck & Capitanio, 1999). It was also found in this survey that those who associated AIDS with homosexuality or bisexuality also held more negative attitudes toward gay men (Hereck & Capitanio, 1999). A majority of those surveyed expressed little understanding of the epidemiology of the HIV virus and AIDS. Approximately 40% of the respondents still held the belief that two uninfected gay men could still contract AIDS if they were to engage in sexual relations with each other, and 27% expressed concern about contracting AIDS through the touching of clothing or drinking from a sterilized glass once used by a person with AIDS (Hereck & Capitanio, 1999). As indicated by the respondents in this study, the widespread ignorance of the manner in
which AIDS is contracted and by whom, continues to be associated with negative attitudes toward gay men in the American culture (Hereck & Capitanio, 1999). This research also suggests that it may not be this ignorance of AIDS transmission alone that contributes to negative stereotypes. Hereck and Capitanio assert that common misperceptions about homosexuality and AIDS have been exploited by antigay individuals and organizations in order to maintain ignorance of AIDS transmission and bolster sexual prejudice against homosexuals (Hereck & Capitanio, 1999).

There appears to be a gender difference in attitudes toward homosexuality, with men consistently holding more negative views than women (Brown, 1997; Herek, 2002; Kite & Whitley, 1996; Steffens, 2005). Steffens (2005) writes that men’s attitudes toward homosexuality tend to be more negative than women’s, especially when evaluating gay men. Steffen’s study of implicit and explicit attitudes toward lesbians and gay men also found that gay men were consistently evaluated more negatively than were lesbians (Steffens, 2005).

Additional research also supports the findings that attitudes toward gay men are more negative than attitudes toward lesbian females. Kite and Whitley assert, in a 1996 meta-analysis, that beliefs about gender roles are linked to attitudes toward homosexuality (Herek, 2002; Kite & Whitley, 1996). Because gender roles, gender associated traits, and gender-appropriate physical appearance are more rigidly defined for men than for women, the violation of gender roles by gay men are more serious than role violations by lesbian women (Kite & Whitley, 1996). The findings of this meta-analysis
strongly supported the hypothesis that while men evaluated other gay men more negatively than women rated gay men and lesbians, attitudes toward gay men were consistently found to be more negative regardless of the gender of the evaluator (Kite & Whitley, 1996).

*The Lesbian Experience*

Though attitudes toward lesbian women appear to be less negative than those expressed in to regard gay men, lesbians are not free from negative attitudes and stereotypes. As seen with gay males, attitudes toward lesbians are also influenced by attitudes toward gender associated social roles (Herek, 2002). While gender roles do appear to be more rigid for men, gender associated traits, roles, and expectations are also indicated in attitudes toward lesbians (Kite & Whitley, 1996). Negative parental reactions following disclosure by lesbians may be strongly influenced by traditional gender role beliefs that daughters are held more responsible for the continuation of the generation than sons. A lesbian daughter’s sexual orientation may be perceived as a threat to parents’ sense of continuation of the family (Ben-Ari, 1995).

In reviewing the literature, it was found that proportionately less research has been focused on the lesbian experience in comparison to research conducted on the lives of gay males. Viss and Burn (1992) noted this lack of research, and theorized that the lack of focus on lesbian issues may be due to a more lenient societal attitude toward lesbians and a possible lack of concern with female sexuality in general (Viss and Burn,
A number of studies have also noted the lack of research focusing on lesbian issues (Szymanski, 2005; Viss and Burn, 1992), and have also asserted that this may in part be due to the overuse of the term “homosexual” in previous research and the term’s typical association with gay males.

Research conducted with lesbian women as the focus shows that perceived parental attitudes toward their lesbianism are generally more negative than positive. Murphy (1989) found that most of the women participants in her study indicated that their parents had negative responses to her lesbianism; seventy percent of the participants reported that either one or both their parents disapproved of her lesbianism (Murphy, 1989). In addition to this disapproval, the families of lesbians were also found to engage in other behaviors that further had a negative impact on lesbian offspring. Regardless of a parent’s expression of approval or disapproval, families were found to engage in additional “closeting” behaviors in which family members were reluctant to talk about their lesbian daughters or share information regarding their lesbian daughter’s partnership with other close friends or family (Murphy, 1989). The family’s closeting of an out lesbian woman and her partner and the lack of recognition of the relationship further contribute to feelings of loss of support from family members (Murphy, 1989). Also frequently reported by lesbian women was the loss of certain “heterosexual privileges” enjoyed by heterosexual siblings such as bridal showers, weddings, and baby showers (Murphy, 1989). The families’ lack of participation or contribution to these rites further
exacerbate feelings of alienation and highlight the loss of more overt parental support (Murphy, 1989).

*The Bisexual Experience*

Among both heterosexual and homosexual communities, bisexuality is often regarded as a transitional or experimental phase rather than a lasting sexual orientation (Mohr & Rochlen, 1999). Mohr and Rochlen (1999) found that some have even gone so far as to say that people identifying as bisexual are confused, indecisive “fence-sitters” who are in transition or in denial about their true orientations (Mohr & Rochlen, 1999). Similar research by Eliason (1997) also indicated similar attitudes regarding bisexual people as confused, promiscuous, and obsessed with sex (Eliason, 1997). While respondents in Eliason’s study indicated 39% and 50% acceptance of bisexual males and females respectively, another interesting pattern emerged. On a list of statements given about bisexuality, participants were to endorse their agreement or disagreement with the statement. On 8 of the 22 statements about bisexuality, participants more frequently indicated that they did not know enough to agree or disagree with the statement (Eliason, 1997).

It is possible that Eliason’s research (1997) indicates that at this time, there may not be a great deal of focus placed on bisexuality, and people identifying as bisexual may therefore be less subject to harmful stereotypes as those experienced by gay men and lesbian women. It is also possible that this research symbolizes the degree to which
bisexual individuals have been marginalized in relation to homosexual or heterosexual orientations. Eliason states that the dichotomization of sexual orientation as either heterosexual or homosexual has left those identifying as bisexual less visible in the eyes of the larger public as well as researchers studying sexuality (Eliason, 1997).

**Parental Reactions Over Time**

According to previously conducted research, evidence indicates that while initial parental response may be negative, parental attitudes toward their GLB children may improve over time (Ben-Ari, 1995; Cramer and Roach, 1988; Savin-Williams, 1996, as cited in American Psychological Association, 2000; Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998). Families may need time to adjust to the feelings of loss associated with the presumption of homosexuality (Savin-Williams, 1996, as cited in American Psychological Association, 2000). Many other researchers have also proposed that the stages parents go through upon learning their child’s sexual orientation are those of adjustment and are similar to those described by Kubler-Ross in one’s mourning of death (Beeler & DiProva, 1999; Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998). Savin-Williams and Dube (1998) add that shock will be the initial phase for some parents when applying this particular stage model to the coming out process; followed by denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and ultimately acceptance (Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998). As parents progress through these stages, it may contribute to overall greater acceptance of their children as well as improvement in parent-child relationships.
Research indicates that parental relationships following disclosure improve over time and has revealed that parents who have known about their offsprings’ gay or lesbian sexuality for more than two years are less homophobic and report less stereotyped attitudes than the parents who have known for short periods of time (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003). On the basis of retrospective accounts of adult gay men, Cramer and Roach (1998) found that after an initial decline in the parent and child relationship, it improved significantly, often to a better-quality of relationship than existed prior to coming out (Cramer & Roach, 1988). Parents and gay and lesbian children alike indicated that increased honesty was the greatest benefit to disclosure, and a majority of parents said that the relationship with their children improved over time following the disclosure (Ben-Ari, 1995).

**Online Research**

The internet is a burgeoning and potentially valuable way by which researchers can collect survey participants (Whittier, Seeley, & St. Lawrence, 2004) and offers a number of advantages over paper-based collection. Online survey collection can be a way to collect a higher number of responses at a significantly lesser cost in a brief period of time (Whittier, Seeley, & St. Lawrence, 2004). In addition to cost and time efficiency, online surveys have the potential to reach a much wider geographical population than do traditional participant recruitment techniques (Whittier, Seeley, & St. Lawrence, 2004). Quantitative studies using closed-ended question formats and Likert-scale formats are
easily adapted for use in online survey collection (Riggle, Rostoksy, & Reedy, 2005). Studies also indicate that online surveys increase feelings of participant confidentiality and anonymity and are less affected by responding in a socially desirable manner (Riggle, Rostoksy, & Reedy, 2005; Whittier, Seeley, & St. Lawrence, 2004).

Because the gay and lesbian community is a sexual minority and subject to a degree of stigmatization and negative stereotypes, these individuals may consequently be more difficult to recruit using more traditional and public methods due to smaller numbers and issues of confidentiality. Online collection of surveys lends itself to further fostering a sense of anonymity and safety for GLB individuals for whom trust is a significant factor. Participants are more inclined to be more honest and revealing than with traditional paper surveys or face-to-face interviews (Riggle, Rostoksy, & Reedy, 2005). In addition to the likelihood of more honest responses, using an open access survey (one in which any potential participant is able to link directly to the survey) there are the advantages of additional anonymity whereby the participant does not need to contact the researcher at any time, and by eliminating the need for researcher contact, less motivated participants are more likely to complete an open access online survey (Riggle, Rostoksy, & Reedy, 2005).

The numbers of LGB adults using the internet makes the world wide web fertile ground for the recruitment of participants for LGB research. A Harris Interactive Poll estimated that two-thirds of American adults have access to the internet in some capacity or another, and approximately 10.6% of internet users consisted of LGB adults (Harris
Interactive, 2001, as cited in Riggle, Rostoksy, & Reedy, 2005). LGB internet users report disproportionately higher use of the internet for banking and commerce; and communication and information than heterosexual users (Harris Interactive, 2001, as cited in Riggle, Rostoksy, & Reedy, 2005).
HYPOTHESES

This study attempted to research the perceived parental attitudes following the disclosure of sexual orientation by lesbian, gay, and bisexual offspring. The principal hypotheses were:

**Hypothesis 1**: Parental relationships with their lesbian, gay, and bisexual offspring will be perceived by offspring as more negative following disclosure of sexual orientation than before disclosure.

**Hypothesis 2**: Parental relationships with lesbian and bisexual offspring following disclosure of sexual orientation will be perceived by offspring as more positive in comparison to relationships with gay male offspring following disclosure.

**Hypothesis 3**: Parental relationships with lesbian, gay, and bisexual offspring will be perceived by offspring as more positive as the length of time since disclosure increases.
METHOD

Eligibility and Recruitment of Participants

Participants for this study were solicited by announcements posted on prominent national web-sites and in online communities pertaining to LGB people and issues. Announcements seeking participants were placed in several LGB communities on Planetout.com, Yahoo Groups, and the popular (web-logging) site Livejournal.com. Participants were eligible for inclusion in this study if they met the following criteria: (a) they were at least 18 years of age, and (b) they had disclosed their sexual orientation to at least one parent.

The 111 participants included in the analysis of this study were comprised of 27 gay men, 47 lesbian women, 10 bisexual, males and 27 bisexual females, with ages 18 to 63 ($M = 24.58$ years). The mean length of time since disclosure was 5.08 years. The mean age of disclosure was 19.5 years. Fifty-four respondents were eliminated from this study because they did not meet the criteria for inclusion or data were missing from their responses.

A power analysis was conducted, using the method of Murphy and Myors (1998). This analysis indicated that when comparing four groups by testing the traditional null hypothesis, at least 105 participants would be needed in order to detect a moderate effect size of .10 or a group difference of .67 standard deviation with a power of .80. The actual number of participants meets this requirement.
**Measures**

An anonymous self-report measured respondents’ perception of affective quality of relationship, parental facilitation of independence, and parents as a source of support. The Parental Attachment Questionnaire (PAQ; Kenny, 1987) is a 55 item self report questionnaire designed to assess young adults’ and older adolescents’ perceptions of their current relationship with parents.

The Parental Attachment Questionnaire was designed to assess the following: perceived parental availability, understanding, acceptance, respect, and facilitation of autonomy; adult children’s interest in interaction with parents and offsprings' affect toward parents during visits; adult child help-seeking behavior in situations of stress; and offsprings' satisfaction with help obtained from parents. Participants were asked to answer each of the 55 items on a 5-point Likert scale with the response that best describes their relationship and experiences with their primary parent(s): (1) not at all, (2) somewhat, (3) a moderate amount, (4) quite a bit, (5) very much (Kenny, 1987). Participants were asked to provide a single rating to describe his or her parents and his or her relationship with them. If only one parent was living, or if a participant’s parents were divorced, they were asked to respond with reference to the living parent or the parent with whom the participant felt closest.

The Parental Attachment Questionnaire used in this study was found to have strong reliability and validity. Cronbach's alpha for the three PAQ subscales were reported as .96 for Affective Quality of Relationships and .88 for both the Parents as
Facilitators of Independence and Parents as a Source of Support subscales (Kenny & Donaldson, 1991). Test–retest reliability over a 2-week interval was .92 for the entire measure and ranged from .82 to .91 for the three subscales. Predictable relationships between the PAQ scales and subscales of the Moos Family Environment Scale support the validity of the PAQ (Kenny & Donaldson, 1991). Kenny and Donaldson reported significant correlations between PAQ Affective Quality of Relationships and FES Cohesion, $r = .51, p < .001$; between PAQ Parental as a Source of Support and FES Cohesion, $r = .45, p < .001$; and between PAQ Parents as Facilitators of Independence and FES Expressiveness, $r = .33, p < .01$, FES Independence $r = .33, p < .01$, and FES Control, $r = -.40, p < .01$ (Kenny & Donaldson, 1991).

In addition to the Parental Attachment Questionnaire, participants were also asked to complete a short survey to assess additional demographic characteristics. Questions included participant's age, gender and sexual orientation, disclosure status, and length of time since disclosure. Participants were asked to state specifically in years and months the length of time since disclosure (the point at which the primary caregiver(s) or parent(s) became clearly aware of the adult child’s sexual orientation). Participants were also asked to indicate to the best of their recollection their perception of their relationship with parents before and immediately following disclosure of sexual orientation using a 5-point Likert scale with the response that best describes their recalled relationship with their primary parent(s) or primary caregiver(s) as either (1) much worse, (2) worse, (3) about the same, (4) better, or (5) much better, compared to their current relationships.
Procedure

Surveys were solicited through notices placed on online community bulletin boards and discussion groups asking participants to complete an online survey. Informed consent was obtained for each participant. Participants were required to acknowledge understanding of their rights as participants, state that they had disclosed their sexual orientation to at least one of their parents or primary care-giver(s), and indicate that they were at least 18 years of age before they were directed to the survey. Any person who met the criteria for taking the online survey was able to access the survey and respond via the internet. To ensure participant confidentiality, no identifying information was collected from participants. In addition, internet service provider addresses were removed from the completed survey results which were sent to a data file on the Humboldt State University web server. The only exceptions to confidentiality were participants who gave identifying information when requesting to know the results of the study.
RESULTS

The participants included in the analysis of this study were comprised of 27 gay men, 47 lesbian women, 10 bisexual males and 27 bisexual females (n=111) ages 18 to 63, with a mean age of 24.58 years (SD = 7.89). The mean length of time since disclosure was 5.08 years (SD = 6.34). The mean age of disclosure was 19.50 years (SD = 5.48). Table 1 shows means and standard deviations for age, time since disclosure, and age at time of disclosure in years for each group and the entire sample.

Oneway analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that there were no significant differences between the four groups on age $F(3,107) = 2.13, p = .10, \eta^2 = .06$, and age at time of disclosure $F(3,107) = .18, p = .91, \eta^2 = .01$. The groups used for comparison in this study were homogenous in regard to age and age at time of disclosure. Oneway analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that there was a significant difference between groups for length of time since disclosure, $F(3,107) = 3.30, p = .02, \eta^2 = .09$. Tukey post-hoc comparisons and also Ryan-Einot-Gabriel-Welsch F post-hoc comparisons showed that bisexual females disclosed their sexual orientation significantly more recently than did lesbian females and gay males, $p < .05$. However, a Bonferroni adjustment, to control for Type I error over the three $F$ tests, adjusted the required alpha level from .05 to .017, and thus the difference is no longer considered significant.

Hypothesis #1: It was expected that perceived parental relationships immediately following disclosure of sexual orientation would be rated as more negative following
Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Age, Time Since Disclosure, and Age at Time of Disclosure in Years for Each Group and the Entire Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age in Years</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian Female</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>25.51</td>
<td>6.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25.74</td>
<td>11.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21.30</td>
<td>5.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25.90</td>
<td>9.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entire Sample</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>24.58</td>
<td>7.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length of Time Since Disclosure in Years</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian Female</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>6.09</td>
<td>5.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6.46</td>
<td>9.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>2.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>7.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entire Sample</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>6.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 (Continued)

Means and Standard Deviations for Age, Time Since Disclosure, and Age at Time of Disclosure in Years for Each Group and the Entire Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age at Time of Disclosure in Years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian Female</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>19.42</td>
<td>3.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19.28</td>
<td>8.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19.40</td>
<td>5.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20.73</td>
<td>3.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entire Sample</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>19.05</td>
<td>5.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
disclosure than before disclosure. Mean scores on a 5-point scale were calculated on perceived parental relationships before disclosure relative to current time for all of the groups \((n = 111, M = 3.13, SD = 0.72)\). Mean scores on a 5-point scale were calculated on perceived parental relationships immediately following disclosure relative to current time for all of the groups \((n = 111, M = 2.56, SD = 1.01)\). A paired-samples \(t\) test comparing the mean scores before disclosure and immediately after disclosure revealed that there was a significant difference between scores before and scores immediately following disclosure, \(t(110) = 4.11, p < .001, \eta^2 = .13\), with lower mean scores immediately following disclosure than before disclosure. This comparison is still significant after Bonferroni adjustment of alpha from .05 to .017 for the three \(t\) tests in this section.

One-sample \(t\) tests were conducted comparing the mean scores before disclosure and immediately after disclosure relative to their current perceived relationship with parents to a neutral score of 3 (“about the same” as the current time) in order to determine whether differences between the means of the two scores existed. The Likert scale used for these items used the score of 3 as the neutral response; indicating that participants perceived their relationships with their parents were “about the same”, and neither “better” nor “worse”, before disclosure or immediately following disclosure compared to the present time. The \(t\) test showed that there was no significant difference between mean scores on perceived parental relationships before disclosure, \(t(110) = 1.86, p = .07, \eta^2 = .03\), when compared to 3. The \(t\) test revealed that there was a significant difference between mean scores on perceived parental relationships immediately following
disclosure when compared to 3, \( t(110) = -4.62, p < .001, \eta^2 = .16 \). This comparison is still significant after Bonferroni adjustment of alpha from .05 to .017. This difference indicates that participants in this study perceived having statistically worse relationships with their parents immediately following disclosure, relative to current time.

Hypothesis #2: It was expected that perceived parental relationships with lesbian, bisexual female, and bisexual male offspring following disclosure of sexual orientation will be more positive in comparison to attitudes toward gay male offspring following disclosure, and therefore that lesbian and bisexual female and male offspring would have higher composite scores than the gay male offspring on the Parental Attachment Questionnaire.

Means and standard deviations for scores on the PAQ were calculated for each group. The range of composite scores on the PAQ for all groups was 123–255. Table 2 shows the distributions of group responses to the subscale and composite scores on the PAQ. There were no significant differences in mean scores on the PAQ found between lesbian women (\( M = 194.43, SD = 39.99 \)), gay males (\( M = 183.78, SD = 38.25 \)), bisexual females (\( M = 185.81, SD = 44.08 \)), and bisexual males (\( M = 173.50, SD = 42.96 \)), \( F(3,107) = .93, p = .43, \eta^2 = .03 \). Lesbians had the highest mean PAQ score, and bisexual males had the lowest mean PAQ score of all of the groups, however the differences in the means were not found to be significant. Based on the composite scores on the Parental Attachment Questionnaire, there was no significant difference in parental relationships as perceived by lesbian, bisexual, or gay male participants.
Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations on the Composite Scale and the Three Subscales of the Parental Attachment Questionnaire for Each Group and the Entire Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Composite Score on the Parental Attachment Questionnaire (55 Items)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian Female</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>194.43</td>
<td>39.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>183.78</td>
<td>38.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>185.81</td>
<td>44.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>173.50</td>
<td>42.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entire Sample</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>187.86</td>
<td>40.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subscale 1: Affective Quality of Relationships (27 Items)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian Female</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>99.68</td>
<td>23.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>93.00</td>
<td>22.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>95.52</td>
<td>24.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>85.10</td>
<td>28.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entire Sample</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>95.73</td>
<td>23.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 (Continued)

Mean Scores on the Parental Attachment Questionnaire \((n = 111)\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>(n)</th>
<th>(M)</th>
<th>(SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subscale 2: Parents as Facilitators of Independence (14 Items)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian Female</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>52.04</td>
<td>10.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>48.00</td>
<td>11.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>48.44</td>
<td>12.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>48.30</td>
<td>13.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Total</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>49.85</td>
<td>11.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subscale 3: Parents as a Source of Support (14 Items)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian Female</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>42.70</td>
<td>10.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>42.41</td>
<td>6.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>41.07</td>
<td>11.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33.50</td>
<td>9.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Total</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>41.41</td>
<td>10.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Subscales do not contain the same number of items.
In addition, there were no significant differences found between the four groups on the PAQ subscales, including Subscale 1 Affective Quality of Relationships, $F(3,107) = 1.22, p = .31, \eta^2 = .03$, Subscale 2 Parents as Facilitators of Independence, $F(3,107) = 1.03, p = .38, \eta^2 = .03$, and Subscale 3 Parents as a Source of Support, $F(3,107) = 2.50, p = .06, \eta^2 = .07$.

Hypothesis #3: It was expected that perceived parental relationships as measured by the Parental Attachment Questionnaire with lesbian, gay, and bisexual children will be more positive as the length of time since disclosure increases; higher composite scores on the PAQ were expected to correlate positively with longer lengths of time since disclosure. Means and standard deviations for composite scores on the PAQ ($M = 187.86, SD = 40.83$) and length of time since disclosure in years ($M = 5.08, SD = 6.34$) were calculated for all participants. A small but significant positive Pearson correlation was found between composite scores on the PAQ and the length of time since disclosure, $r(109) = .24, p = .01, \eta^2 = .06$. These findings indicate that there may be a relationship between scores on the PAQ and time since disclosure of sexual orientation. However, this correlation is no longer considered significant after Bonferroni adjustment of alpha from .05 to .004.

Small but significant positive Pearson correlations were found between scores on Subscale 1, Affective Quality of Relationships and the length of time since disclosure $r(109) = .27, p = .004, \eta^2 = .03$, and scores on Subscale 2, Parents as Facilitators of Independence and the length of time since disclosure, $r(109) = .25, p = .01, \eta^2 = .03$. 
After Bonferroni adjustment of alpha from .05 to .004, the correlation between scores on Subscale 1 and length of time since disclosure is still significant, and the correlation between scores on Subscale 2 and length of time since disclosure is no longer considered significant. There was no significant Pearson correlation found between scores on Subscale 3, Parents as a Source of Support and the length of time since disclosure, \( r(109) = .12, p = .22, \eta^2 = .07 \). These findings indicate that as time passes from the time of disclosure, lesbian, gay, and bisexual offspring perceive more positive experiences relating to affective quality of relationships, but not to parents as facilitators of independence and parents as a source of support.

A small but significant positive Pearson correlation was found between composite scores on the PAQ and age, \( r(109) = .28, p = .003, \eta^2 = .06 \). Small but significant positive Pearson correlations were found between scores on Subscale 1 Affective Quality of Relationships and age, \( r(109) = .30, p = .001, \eta^2 = .06 \), and scores on Subscale 2 Parents as Facilitators of Independence and age, \( r(109) = .25, p = .01, \eta^2 = .06 \). After Bonferroni adjustment of alpha from .05 to .004, the correlations between composite scores on the PAQ and age and scores on Subscale 1 and age are still significant, but the correlation between scores on Subscale 2 and age is no longer considered significant. There was no significant Pearson correlation found between scores on Subscale 3 Parents as a Source of Support and age, \( r(109) = .14, p = .16, \eta^2 = .06 \). A significant positive Pearson correlation was found between length of time since disclosure and age, \( r(109) = .72, p < .001, \eta^2 = .06 \). This indicates that the older the participants were, the longer it has been
since they disclosed their sexual orientation, and the age of the participant may be related to the increase in perceptions of positive parental relationships.

In order to determine if age was related to higher scores on the PAQ or to the length of time since disclosure, there was a need to determine if there were any correlations between age at time of disclosure and increased scores on the PAQ. There were no significant Pearson correlations found between age at time of disclosure and scores on Subscale 1 Affective Quality of Relationships \( r(109) = .12, p = .23, \eta^2 = .01; \) scores on Subscale 2 Parents as Facilitators of Independence \( r(109) = .130, p = .17, \eta^2 = .01; \) scores on Subscale 3 Parents as a Source of Support \( r(109) = .06, p = .53, \eta^2 = .01; \) and composite scores on the PAQ, \( r(109) = .11, p = .23, \eta^2 = .01. \)

An examination of partial correlations statistically controlling for age as a covariate revealed that time since disclosure no longer correlated with composite scores on the PAQ, \( r(108) = .07, p = .48. \) Additional partial correlations controlling for age also revealed that time since disclosure no longer correlated with scores on Subscale 1 Affective Quality of Relationships \( r(108) = .09, p = .37, \) scores on Subscale 2 Parents as Facilitators of Independence \( r(108) = .06, p = .54; \) and scores on Subscale 3 Parents as a Source of Support \( r(108) = .03, p = .78. \) The results found when controlling for age as a covariate indicate that perceptions of a better relationship are more likely a result of other age-related factors rather than the time since initial disclosure.
DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings in this study are partially consistent with the expectations derived from reviewing the literature of past studies on parental reactions following disclosure of sexual orientation and current stereotypes of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community. Previous studies indicated that familial relationships are negatively impacted during the coming out process (Ben-Ari, 1995; D’Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998; Floyd et al., 1999; Murphy, 1989; Saltzburg, 2004; Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998; Waldner & Magruder, 1999; Williamson, 1998). In this sample, it was found that there was a significant difference in parental relationships before disclosure and relationships immediately following disclosure. Participants rated relationships before disclosure about the same as their current relationship. The results indicate that immediately following disclosure, relationships with parents were more negative, but improved over time. This study supports the hypothesis posed here and findings of previous research. LGB adults in this sample rated their perceived relationship with their parents as significantly worse immediately after disclosure than their perceived relationship with their parents before disclosing their sexual orientation.

Some of the reasons given for the variations of parental reactions to disclosure relevant to their children’s sexual orientation were based on reported parental perceptions of loss or fear for their child, attitudes toward gender-role violation, and stereotypes of
each gender and orientation (Brown, 1997; Eliason, 1997; Floyd et al., 1999; Freedman, 2004; Herek, 2002; Kite & Whitley, 1996; Mohr & Rochlen, 1999; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003; Steffens, 2005; Waldner & Magruder, 1999).

In this sample, no significant differences in perceptions of parental relationships were found between gay men, lesbians, bisexual males or bisexual females based on scores on the Parental Attachment Questionnaire. The findings of this study do not support previously conducted research (Ben-Ari, 1995; D’Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998; Floyd et al., 1999; Murphy, 1989; Saltzburg, 2004; Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998; Walder & Magruder, 1999; Williamson, 1998), nor do they support the hypothesis posed in this study, that there would be differences between the four groups. It is possible that no difference was found due to the lack of a large and equal number of participants in each of the four groups.

A significant correlation between length of time since disclosure and scores on the Parental Attachment Questionnaire revealed a positive relationship between length of time since disclosure quality of parental attachment, including affective quality of relationships was found to be no longer significant following a Bonferroni adjustment. When controlling for age as a covariate, time since disclosure was no longer correlated with composite scores on the PAQ or any of the subscales. These findings do not support the results of previous studies that found that while parental reactions may initially be impacted negatively; parental relationships are perceived to improve over time (Ben-Ari,
1995; Cramer & Roach, 1988; Savin-Williams, 1996; Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998), and do not support the hypothesis posed in this study.

These findings indicate that perceived improvement in parental relationships may be due to age, maturation, or other age related factors of the offspring rather than the passing of time since disclosure. It is possible that as people in this age group get older, mature, or develop, what is needed from parental relationships differ.

In addition to the differences and correlations initially examined in this study, an interesting difference between the groups was noted. Bisexual females may have disclosed their orientation significantly more recently than did lesbians and gay males but not bisexual males. It is possible that due to the level of marginalization and lack of visibility experienced by bisexuals (Eliason, 1997), the process of identity formation or integration may be more difficult or take longer than it does for lesbians or gay males.

Limitations

In conducting this survey exclusively online, it is important to note that collection of participants was limited to those who not only had internet access, but to those who visit online LGB web communities. While the use of the internet for the recruitment of participants lends itself to a larger geographical and cultural demographic, omission of participants without internet access and those not using LGB communities may limit the generalizability of this study. In addition, information regarding participants’ geographic location was not collected. Solicitations for online participants were placed on several national web communities, and while participation was open to a wide North American
audience, it is also possible that these pages could be viewed world-wide. Additional information about geographic location would help to ensure not only that the survey recruited from a geographically diverse population, but that it was also limited to a more generalizable population (ie, North America).

Previously conducted research indicates that there are significant gender differences in attitudes toward homosexuality, with men generally holding more negative attitudes toward homosexuality than women (Brown, 1997; Herek, 2002; Kite & Whitley, 1996; Steffens, 2005). The questionnaire used in this study did not separate perceived mother and father relationships, which may have contributed to uncertainty on the part of the participant in how to respond to some of the questions asked. In responding to parental relationships as a whole, participants may have been confused by how to answer questions in which a difference between parents existed. Participants may have responded using their perceptions of the relationship with the more positive or more negative parent. In future research, it is suggested to separate mother and father relationship responses.

Nationality and cultural and ethnic backgrounds as well as degrees of religiosity play a significant role in how one views homosexuality and should be considered an important factor in whether or not an LGB child chooses to disclose his or her orientation (Savin-Williams, 1994; Waldner & Magruder, 1999). Information regarding the participants’ or participants’ parents’ nationality, cultural, ethnic, or religious identification was not collected. While the focus of this study was to ascertain the perceived experience of the individual from their primary identification as gay, lesbian,
or bisexual, additional information about cultural influences may be beneficial. Because cultural or ethnicity information was not collected, it may also impact the generalizability of this study, as it is not certain that proportionate and representative numbers of cultural or ethnic participants were included in the study.

It is important to note, as well, that the questionnaire used in this study was designed for use with adolescents and young adults. Some of the questions asked regarding relationships with parents may not be applicable to all age groups taking this survey. While the questionnaire used in this study is titled Parental Attachment Questionnaire, the author of the questionnaire, Kenny (1987), states that the survey assesses the quality of parental relationships, and for this reason, the use of this questionnaire is found to be appropriate for this study.

A very important limitation to this study is that it is based on perceptions of relationships, and data were only collected from the offsprings’ point of view. More accurate data measuring whole relationship experiences would incorporate the perceptions of the relationship from the parent(s) of LGB offspring. Including both the parent and child experience would broaden and make more accurate the information from which researchers could make deductions and predictions for future work.

A major part of this study relied on the recollection of relationship perceptions. For some participants, several years had passed since the initial disclosure of their sexual orientation. As participants aged following disclosure, experiences, memory, and life-events may have contributed to a change in perception of actual events. It is also
important to note that the questions used in this study to assess the perceptions of parental relationships had not been tested for reliability or validity. Because the psychometric properties of the two additional questions were not tested,

Demographics of the groups used in this study are homogenous in regard to age, age at time of disclosure, and composite scores on the PAQ, however, consideration should be given to the fact that the number of participants in each group was not equal. Lesbian women outnumbered all of the other groups, making up 42% of all participants. Gay men (24%), bisexual females (24%), and bisexual males (9%) were disproportionately represented in this study, and this difference in group size should be taken into account. The National Social Life Survey (1992) reported twice as many gay males than lesbian females in the general national population. The relative proportions of lesbians and gay males is significantly different in the current sample, $\chi^2(1, n = 74) = 40.26, p < .001$. Thus, it appears that gay males are not proportionately represented in this study.

Recommendations

One suggestion for future research is to consider more effective ways of eliciting participation from a wider audience. As previously stated, this study focused solely on recruitment from online communities and therefore excluded a large part of the LGB community that may not frequent these areas of the internet or the internet as a whole. Consideration in this area should also be given to more effective ways of collecting an equal number of participants in each group. Female participants made up two-thirds of
the total population in this study, and bisexual males in particular had a small number of participants relative to the other groups. It is possible that women are more likely than men to either frequent such online communities or respond to surveys such as these. Future research should consider participant solicitation from a variety of sources such as members of national organizations such as PFLAG, Gay-Straight Alliances, or other clubs in schools and universities, and print solicitation in national magazines or newspapers. Attempts should be made to recruit from environments that appeal to each gender and orientation.

Another consideration is to collect the ethnographic, geographic, and religious information of the participants and participants’ parents. This information would be invaluable in providing information specific to more in-depth multicultural aspects of those identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. It would also be important in determining if those participating in research are representative of the LGB community and general population at large. Generalizability of findings and collection more in-depth information specific to the multicultural experience of LGB adults are both very important areas to consider in future research.

Future research should consider a collection of perceptions from both the parent and child experience of the coming out process. Additional information from the parental point of view is very important in gaining understanding of the complexities of the coming-out process and its effects on the family. As previously mentioned, future research should consider administering separated questionnaires for each parent and also
gather information about the gender of the parent for whom the participant is responding. This would allow for more certainty on the part of the participant in providing answers specific to each parental experience as well as create the opportunity for more information on both the male parent and female parent experience. Gaining a more in-depth understanding of how the family as a whole experiences this process has implications not only in the field of future research, but also for those providing mental health services to families in the midst of coming out.

Another recommendation for research is to reflect on the use of appropriate language that does not exclude, alienate, or offend potential participants. Some participants in this study preferred the term “queer” rather than the more traditional gay or lesbian. It would be beneficial to look into a wider variety of terminology used by the community at large, investigate current trends in the community to determine the language commonly being used, or allow for participants to specify the identifying term of their choice.

As previously stated in the review of the literature, there seems to be disproportionately less research focused on the lives and experiences of both lesbians and bisexuals. As implicated by previous research, the experiences of lesbians, gay males, and bisexuals may be different for various reasons. While a large amount of research has been conducted around homosexuality, additional and specific research focusing on the experience of lesbian and bisexual adults is essential.
In this study, there were no significant differences found between groups for the age of disclosure, and the mean age of disclosure was approximately 19-20 years of age. Consideration should be given to future research focusing on this particular age group, especially if conducting research focusing on the coming out process. Additional research into identity formation, development, and protective factors at the time of coming out should pay special attention to LGB adults in this age group. While this study was not able to support previous research finding that relationships improve over time, age was found to be very important to the perceptions of improved relationships. Future research would benefit from looking more closely at the age of adults in the coming out process and what factors specific to age contribute to the perceptions of improved parental relationships and family dynamics in general.

Issues surrounding coming out and the family experience are far more complex than could be addressed in a single study. Future research is needed to further explore the depth of both the individual and family experience. This research is simply a piece of the puzzle contributing to a greater understanding of the life experiences of LGB individuals and their families. Therefore, a final consideration should be given to the interpretation and generalization of the results of this study. All efforts should be made to avoid any biased interpretations of this study and overgeneralization of the results found here. Respect should be given to the serious nature of this research and to the participants’ experiences shared therein.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A
Informed Consent

HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY
COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH

CONSENT TO ACT AS RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I hereby agree to participate in the following survey conducted by Erica Baltezore for research purposes.

This questionnaire will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete, and will be conducted online. The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect relevant information regarding perceived parental relationships and attitudes following disclosure of lesbian, gay, or bisexual sexual orientation.

I understand that the procedures described may involve the possible risk of emotional discomfort, either immediate or delayed, as a result of exploring family relationships. The procedures also have the possible benefit of collecting valuable information relevant to more effective counseling of lesbian, gay, or bisexual clients.

I understand that Erica will answer any questions I may have concerning this investigation or the procedures at any time. I also understand that my participation in any study is entirely voluntary and that I may decline to enter this study or may withdraw from participation at any time without jeopardy. I understand that the investigator may terminate my participation in the study at any time.

I understand that results from surveys submitted online will be stored electronically in a password protected filing system, and any identifiable information will be separated from the actual data. All identifiable information given by the participants will be kept separate from the questionnaires, and will be kept strictly confidential. Upon completion of this study, all information collected will be destroyed immediately.

If I have any questions regarding the survey and/or my participation, or if I would like references to counseling as a result of the nature of this research, I can contact Erica Baltezore, graduate student in Psychology, at balto215@yahoo.com or Dr. Emily Sommerman, Assistant Professor of Psychology, at es47@humboldt.edu.

I hereby acknowledge that I have read and understand the implications of this research and by continuing to the following survey, I give my consent to participate, and therefore also declare that I am at least 18 years of age and thus eligible for participation in this study.
APPENDIX B
Parental Attachment Questionnaire

The following pages contain statements that describe family relationships and the kinds of feelings and experiences frequently reported by young adults. Please respond to each item by filling in the number on a scale of 1 to 5 that best describes your parents, your relationship with your parents, and your experiences and feelings. Please provide a single rating to describe your parents and your relationship with them. If only one parent is living, or if your parents are divorced, respond with reference to your living parent or the parent with whom you feel closer. For the purpose of this questionnaire, if raised by someone other than biological parents, please respond to the term parent as pertaining to your caregiver.

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<td>Not at All (0-10%)</td>
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<td>A Moderate Amount (36-65%)</td>
<td>Quite A Bit (66-90%)</td>
<td>Very Much (91-100%)</td>
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In general, my parents.... . .

1. are persons I can count on to provide emotional support when I feel troubled.
2. support my goals and interests.
3. live in a different world.
4. understand my problems and concerns.
5. respect my privacy.
6. restrict my freedom or independence.
7. are available to give me advice or guidance when I want it.
8. take my opinions seriously.
9. encourage me to make my own decisions.
10. have provided me with the freedom to experiment and learn things on my own.
11. are too busy or otherwise involved to help me.
12. have trust and confidence in me.
13. try to control my life.
14. protect me from danger and difficulty
15. ignore what I have to say.
16. are sensitive to my feelings and needs
17. are disappointed in me.
18. give me advice whether or not I
10. are critical of what I can do.  want it.

11. impose their ideas and values on me.  24. respect my judgment and decisions, even if different from what they would want.

12. have given me as much attention as I have wanted

13. are persons to whom I can express differences of opinion on important matters.

14. have no idea what I am feeling or thinking.

25. do things for me, which I could do for myself.

26. are persons whose expectations I feel obligated to meet.

27. treat me like a younger child.

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During recent visits or time spent together, my parents were persons . . .

28. I looked forward to seeing.

29. with whom I argued.

30. with whom I felt relaxed and comfortable.

31. who made me angry.

32. I wanted to be with all the time.

33. towards whom I felt cool and distant.

34. who got on my nerves.

35. who aroused feelings of guilt and anxiety.

36. to whom I enjoyed telling about the things I have done and learned.

37. for whom I felt a feeling of love.

38. I tried to ignore.

39. to whom I confided my most personal thoughts and feelings.

40. whose company I enjoyed.

41. I avoided telling about my experiences.
Following time spent together, I leave my parents...

___42. with warm and positive feelings. ___43. feeling let down and disappointed by my family.

When I have a serious problem or an important decision to make...

___44. I look to my family for support, encouragement, and/or guidance. ___47. I work it out on my own, without help or discussion with others.
___45. I seek help from a professional, such as a therapist, college counselor, or clergy. ___48. I discuss the matter with a friend.
___46. I think about how my family might respond and what they might say. ___49. I know that my family will know what to do.
___50. I contact my family if I am not able to resolve the situation after talking it over with my friends. (go to next column)

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When I go to my parents for help...

___51. I feel more confident in my ability to handle the problems on my own. ___54. I feel confident that things will work out as long as I follow my parent’s advice.
___52. I continue to feel unsure of myself. ___55. I am disappointed with their response.
___53. I feel that I would have obtained more understanding and comfort from a friend.
Demographic Questionnaire

Age:_____ 

Please indicate the best description of your gender and sexual orientation:

___ Lesbian Female    ___ Bisexual Female
___ Gay Male          ___ Bisexual Male

Have your parents become aware of your sexual orientation?
___ Yes    ___ No    ___ Unsure

If yes, please indicate as accurately as possible the length of time since disclosure of sexual orientation to parent(s):
Years _____    Months _____

Please respond to the following items by filling in the number on a scale of 1 to 5 that best completes the following statements.

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Much Worse</td>
<td>Worse</td>
<td>About The Same</td>
<td>Better</td>
<td>Much Better</td>
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Compared to my relationship with my parents as it stands right now…

___ 1. to the best of my recollection, my relationship with my parents before disclosing my sexual orientation was…

___ 2. to the best of my recollection, my relationship with my parents immediately following disclosing my sexual orientation was …

Any further comments on this topic would be greatly appreciated: