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Dating and Relationship Experiences of Gay and Lesbian College Students

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DATING AND RELATIONSHIP EXPERIENCES OF GAY AND LESBIAN
COLLEGE STUDENTS

PROFESSIONAL DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

OF

THE SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY
WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY

BY

AUBREY DAWN MORRISON, PSY.M.

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF
DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

Dayton, Ohio   September, 2013

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WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

June 12, 2012

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY **AUBREY D. MORRISON** ENTITLED **DATING AND RELATIONSHIP EXPERIENCES OF GAY AND LESBIAN COLLEGE STUDENTS** BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY.

_____
Heather Wilder, Psy.D.
Dissertation Director

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La Pearl Logan Winfrey, Ph.D.
Associate Dean

Abstract

In response to an identified need in the psychological literature for current research on topics related to same-sex dating and relationships, this Professional Dissertation was developed to gain a better understanding of contemporary gay and lesbian dating and intimate relationships within the college/university student population. A total of 159 self-identified gay and lesbian college/university students in the United States and Canada completed an online survey about their dating and relationship experiences. The survey was developed by the researcher based on a review of the literature and was designed to collect broad-based quantitative and qualitative data on the topic of study. Findings were compared to the literature on dating and relationships in the larger gay and lesbian population to identify points of consistency and inconsistency. Areas of strength and resiliency as well as challenges faced by gay and lesbian college/university students in this area of their lives are highlighted. Implications of the results and recommendations for helping professionals working with gay and lesbian college/ university students are discussed. Additionally, limitations of the current study are addressed and proposed directions for future research are identified.

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This dissertation was developed based on an identified need in the psychological literature for additional research on topics pertaining to same-sex dating and relationships. For example, Alonzo (2005) noted that there is a lack of broad-based literature on same-sex couples, which serves as an obstacle to appropriate treatment of such couples and of individuals experiencing problems in their same-sex relationships. Some specific topics which authors have identified as in need of further research include the balance of power in same-sex relationships, the impact of stigma and discrimination on same-sex relationships, and the sexual attitudes and behaviors of gay and lesbian individuals since the AIDS epidemic and since the topic of same-sex marriage has been the focus of more media attention (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). Other areas identified as needing further research include issues of sexual monogamy versus openness in same-sex relationships, and the relationship experiences of ethnic minority lesbians and gay men (Peplau, Fingerhut, & Beals, 2004). Peplau and Fingerhut (2007) also noted that much of the research that is available on the topic of same-sex relationships may be outdated, having been conducted in the 1980s and 90s, and that there is a need for more current research to update the knowledge base (e.g., Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007).

A review of the existing research in this area revealed that studies of same-sex dating and relationships within the college population in particular are almost nonexistent. Because cohort and age-related factors are influential in the process of

identity development for sexual minority as well as other individuals (Fassinger &

Arseneau, 2007), it is plausible that the dating and relationship experiences of current gay

and lesbian college students may not be entirely consistent with those of the larger gay

and lesbian population. Furthermore, because the formation of intimate relationships is

typically considered to be among the central developmental tasks of early adulthood

(Brown & Bulanda, 2008), it is important that psychologists and others have an

understanding of how these issues are experienced by individuals in this age group,

including those who are gay or lesbian. Based on all of these considerations, it is clear

that there is a need not only for more current additions to the research base on same-sex

dating and relationships in general, but even more so in regards to particular

subpopulations such as gay and lesbian college students. This research study was

designed to address some of these needs.

Sexual minorities are typically considered to include those who identify as

lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and intersex (LGBTQQI), and this

varied group of individuals may at times be addressed collectively in the psychological

literature. However, this dissertation was designed to focus specifically on sexual

orientation rather than gender identity, and on gay and lesbian individuals in particular.

Although same-sex relationships are not limited to gay and lesbian individuals, the

decision was made to focus on individuals who self-identify as such due to the

complexity of concurrently addressing the experiences of several groups of individuals

who are likely to confront unique issues. The dating and relationship experiences of

other sexual minorities merit attention in the body of psychological research, but they are

beyond the scope of this study.

The information obtained in this study will be of particular interest to mental health professionals working with gay and lesbian college students, but it is also relevant for other college personnel and helping professionals working with gay and lesbian individuals. Students themselves may benefit from this information as it may normalize and contextualize their experiences. Furthermore, because western culture holds many myths and stereotypes about gay and lesbian individuals and about same-sex relationships, research in these areas has an important role in dispelling inaccurate beliefs and assumptions, increasing the visibility of pertinent issues relevant to this population, and aiding efforts in the realm of advocacy and the promotion of LGBT rights.

Literature Review

Contextual Factors

In order to gain an understanding of issues pertaining to the dating and intimate relationships of gay and lesbian college students, it is important to consider the context in which these interactions occur. Contextual factors can be highly influential—in both negative and positive ways—in the lives of these individuals and in the relationships they develop.

Oppressive climate. In the United States and Canada, as in many countries, lesbians, gay men, and other sexual minorities often face significant oppression from the larger society. This includes various forms of prejudice, discrimination, antigay and antilesbian violence, hate crimes, microaggressions, inequitable personal and civil rights, and other forms of oppression occurring on both individual and institutional levels. In a survey conducted by the National Gay and Lesbians Task Force Policy Institute in 1993 (as cited by Klinger & Stein, 1996), 28% of gay, lesbian, and bisexual respondents reported that they had been assaulted or physically abused in the previous 12 months because of their sexual orientation and 50% of respondents reported that they had been harassed. Berrill (1992) also noted that studies have found lesbians and gay men of color, particularly African American and Hispanic, to be at an even greater risk of victimization because of their sexual orientation. Although college campuses are often thought to be among the more accepting environments for sexual minorities, campus climates vary widely from one institution to another. Even those that are thought to be

among the most diversity-conscious are not immune to the oppressive forces of our society. For example, several of the students who participated in Diehm and Lazzari's (2001) study of human rights promotion on a university campus in the western United States reported that having a diverse student body helps to establish an environment that is supportive of diversity, but that students still do not always feel safe.

The risk of violence and victimization can be significant for sexual minority students, both on and off campus. Research conducted by Comstock in 1991 (as cited by Diehm & Lazzari, 2001) found that gay and lesbian college students were verbally and/or physically assaulted at four times the rate of heterosexual students. Studies such as that of Duncan (as cited by Diehm & Lazzari, 2001) have also found that gay and lesbian college students are significantly more likely to be sexually victimized than their heterosexual counterparts. Almost all gay and lesbian students, whether or not they have been attacked or victimized in some way because of their sexual orientation, will experience some degree of fear of such victimization (Klinger & Stein, 1996). The experience of antigay or antilesbian violence and/or the threat of such violence, as well as other forms of oppression, can have a significant impact on the overall well-being of lesbians and gay men. The oppressive environment in which lesbians and gay men live often leads to internalized homophobia and can have a negative impact on many aspects of their lives. Gay and lesbian individuals may come to believe—whether they are consciously aware of it or not—some of the negative messages they receive from society and harbor negative thoughts and feelings about their sexual orientation and about who they are. This can be particularly detrimental if protective factors such as an affirming support system are not in place.

One of the many areas in the lives of lesbians and gay men that may be impacted by oppressive forces is that of dating and relationships. This may be particularly true given that lesbians and gay men are stigmatized both on an individual level and a couple level (Otis, Rostosky, Riggle, & Hamrin, 2006). For this reason, some lesbians and gay men may hesitate to initiate relationships to begin with. Elze (2002) stated the following about this issue: "Well-founded fears of physical victimization, verbal harassment, peer rejection, and public humiliation further constrain the ability to seek out dating partners and romantic relationships (Savin-Williams, 1996)" (p. 19). For those who do establish relationships, the effects of oppression and internalized homophobia may create a strain on those relationships that many heterosexual couples do not have to endure. For example, in their study of the association between minority stress and same-sex relationship quality, Otis, Rostosky, and colleagues (2006) found that higher levels of internalized homophobia and discrimination were associated with less positive perceptions of relationship quality among their gay and lesbian participants. Other studies, such as those of Balsam and Szymanski (2005) and Mohr and Daly (2008) have found similar results. Green and Mitchell (2002) explained that these factors can negatively impact relationship functioning by increasing depression, interpersonal withdrawal, and inhibited sexuality.

Mental health. Clearly, lesbians and gay men face considerable stressors related to being members of an oppressed group. According to Klinger and Stein (1996), the consequences of this may include "a heightened sense of vulnerability about and reluctance to disclose sexual orientation, depression, inappropriate denial, and a range of other psychological and emotional problems" (p. 804). When lesbians and gay men

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internalize societal homophobia, the effects can include loneliness, low self-esteem, identity development dysfunctions, somatic symptoms, distrust, distancing, anxiety, anger, suicide, shame, guilt, and any number of mental health symptoms (Miller & House, 2005; Peterson & Gerrity, 2006). Evans and D'Augelli (1996) argued that these mental health issues may be particularly acute during the college years. They noted that suicide and other self-destructive behaviors are major problems among gay and lesbian college students, and that much of this can be attributed to conflict about sexual orientation. According to a review by Miller and House (2005), research suggests that approximately 20-30% of lesbians and gay men are dependent on drugs or alcohol, and that the high incidence of substance abuse in this population is related to internalized homophobia and minority stress. Alonzo (2005) noted that various addictive behaviors can result from frustrated attempts to cope with feelings of helplessness and hopelessness that can accompany oppression and internalized homophobia. Because substance abuse is so prominent in the LGBT population as well as among the college student population, gay and lesbian college students may be at an especially high risk of using this form of coping.

Many lesbians and gay men have the added stress of dealing with past abuse. While individuals of any sexual orientation may have had these experiences, research suggests that childhood sexual abuse in particular may be slightly more common among gay men then among heterosexual men (Klinger & Stein, 1996), and that lesbians—like all women—are at a high risk due to the high rates of sexual abuse of female children (Kerewsky & Miller, 1996). Anyone who has been abused as a child may experience significant mental health consequences and may face a long journey toward healing from

this experience. For lesbians and gay men who were sexually abused as children, internalized homophobia can further complicate this healing process (Klinger & Stein, 1996). In the context of a same-sex relationship, as in any relationship, the dynamics related to recovery from childhood sexual or other abuse can create conflict (Alonzo, 2005) and place additional strain on the relationship. Overall, in same-sex relationships, poorer mental health has been found to predict higher levels of conflict and lower levels of intimacy and relationship satisfaction (Otis, Riggle, & Rostosky, 2006).

It should be noted that while many lesbians and gay men struggle with various mental health issues, often influenced at least in part by being a member of an oppressed group, there are also many lesbians and gay men who demonstrate positive psychological adjustment and resilience in the face of oppression. Evans and D'Augelli (1996) noted that these individuals are typically among those who have achieved high levels of sexual identity development. Similarly, in the context of same-sex relationships, many individuals find support and affirmation from their partner and others, which can help buffer against the detrimental effects of oppression.

Diversity. Lesbians and gay men are a diverse group of individuals, many of whom face multiple marginalizations and stressors (Green, 2007). Take for example gay men and lesbians who are also ethnic minorities. These individuals must negotiate all of the developmental tasks of other lesbians and gay men while also negotiating additional tasks and additional forms of oppression based on their ethnic identity. Savin-Williams (1996b) explained that these individuals have the task of developing and defining both their ethnic and sexual identity, resolving potential conflicts between the two aspects of their identity and identification with the two groups or communities, and dealing with

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both homophobia and racism. Unfortunately, racist attitudes are prevalent in gay and lesbian communities, which tend to be predominantly white—at least among the more visible members of the community—and often fail to recognize within-group cultural differences. Additionally, homophobic prejudice may be even more pervasive in ethnic minority communities than in the mainstream white culture (Savin-Williams, 1996b). Fassinger and Arseneau (2007) explained this as follows:

> Higher levels of homophobia in certain racial and ethnic communities that force sexual minority individuals to choose between disjunctive communities of support have been tied to a belief that lesbian or gay identity is a manifestation of undesirable assimilation into the dominant (White) culture (Greene, 2000). (pp. 32)

Individuals who are both sexual and ethnic minorities may experience confusion, isolation, and invisibility due to conflict associated with their dual identities and may feel that it is impossible to acknowledge and honor both facets of their identities without sacrificing their ties to a community and their sense of belonging (Savin-Williams, 1996b). Evans and D'Augelli (1996) noted that, on a predominantly white college campus, gay and lesbian students of color may experience significant isolation. These authors explained that many of these students choose not to come out during college as they rely on support from other students of color and fear that they may be rejected and lose this support if their sexual orientation is revealed. Consequently, these students may have to further delay developmental tasks associated with dating and relationships or maintain significant secrecy in this area of their lives.

Different cultures will have different expectations of appropriate sex role behaviors. The pressures of having to reconcile one's sexual desires with culturally proscribed sex role behaviors can, as Savin-Williams (1996b) stated, "undermine psychological integrity and identity formation and sabotage the maturation of a healthy self-concept" (p. 161). While some ethnic minority communities are evidencing shifting expectations and greater acceptance with regards to gender roles and sexual orientation (Savin-Williams, 1996b), lesbians and gay men in these communities are still likely to experience some pressure and conflict. Some may find solace in the various ethnic minority gay and lesbian subcultures that continue to be formed across North America (Savin-Williams, 1996b).

Religion is another aspect of diversity that is often very relevant in the lives of lesbians and gay men. Many authors have written about the various ways in which the religion-based institutionalized and internalized homonegativity can obstruct the development of a positive gay or lesbian identity and negatively impact the mental health of gay and lesbian individuals (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007). In fact, Schuck and Liddle (2001) found that, among their 66 lesbian, gay, and bisexual participants, nearly two-thirds reported that they had experienced conflicts between their religion and sexual orientation and many reported that their reactions to these conflicts included shame, greater difficulty coming out, depression, and suicidal ideation. The ways in which these participants reported resolving these conflicts included shifting from identification as religious to spiritual, finding alternative ways of interpreting religious teachings, changing affiliations, choosing not to attend religious services while still remaining religious, and giving up religion altogether.

Other aspects of diversity—such as disability, socioeconomic status, nationality, geographic location, age, gender, etc.—are also relevant to the identity development and relationships of lesbians and gay men. For example, lesbians and gay men with certain disabilities may be restricted access to gay and lesbian communities in various ways and consequently have difficulty meeting others who share their sexual orientation, including potential partners (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007). Dual or multiple minority status typically involves additional layers of oppression and stigma which can complicate the already difficult process of coming to terms with one's sexual orientation and establishing and maintaining healthy relationships.

Couples in which partners differ in terms of diversity variables often must negotiate their unique interacting variables, which can add another level of complexity to the relationship (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007). McWhirter and Mattison (1996) stated the following about this matter:

Couples coming from different socioeconomic, religious, ethnic, or family backgrounds often have difficulty finding compatibility in their relationship simply because they were reared with different expectations, values, and ways of behaving. Understanding the differences in backgrounds and how they affect relationships can be one of the most effective means of resolving problems in some relationships. (pp. 331-332)

An additional consideration in this realm is that these differences may also contribute to unspoken power dynamics within the relationship (Alonzo, 2005).

Dating

In his review of the literature on dating and romantic relationships of gay, lesbian, and bisexual youths, Savin-Williams (1996a) explained that dating is a way for individuals to practice, pursue, and establish romantic relationships and that it has an important role in a young person's development. He further explained that dating serves a number of functions, including entertainment, recreation, socialization, development of interpersonal skills, etc. For gay and lesbian young people, dating and the establishment of relationships can also play a key role in their development of a positive gay or lesbian identity. Savin-Williams (1996a) contended that lacking the opportunity to date and potentially initiate romantic relationships can have detrimental effects on an individual's sense of self, both personally and in relation to others. Due to factors related to homophobia and heterosexism, many gay and lesbian young people do not have the opportunity to date same-sex partners until they leave home (Savin-Williams, 1996a). For many, beginning college represents their first opportunity to break free from the expectations of family and friends and explore same-sex dating (Evans & D'Augelli, 1996; Pope, Singaravelu, Chang, Sullivan, & Murray, 2007). Of note is that, according to Pope and colleagues (2007), " it is common for gay men who came out well after adolescence to have all the problems associated with those of teenagers who have just begun dating" (p. 67). Gay and lesbian individuals just beginning to date same-sex partners often have a lot to sort out, particularly given the lack of guidance that is typically available to them in this process.

Qualities sought in potential partners. One of the first steps in the dating process is finding potential dating partners. According to literature reviews such as that

of Peplau and Spalding (2003), studies have found that most individuals, regardless of sexual orientation, seek similar qualities in dating partners. These include qualities such as being honest, intelligent, affectionate, and dependable, as well as sharing similar interests and values (Engel and Saracino, 1986). Gender differences have been found, however, as men of all sexual orientations are more likely than women to place greater emphasis on the physical attractiveness of potential partners, while women of all sexual orientations are more likely than men to place greater emphasis on personality characteristics of potential partners (Peplau & Spalding, 2003). Other researchers have investigated whether lesbians and gay men tend to seek stereotypically masculine or feminine traits in potential partners as the "butch-femme" stereotype may suggest, but Peplau and Spalding (2003) note that this stereotype has generally not been supported by the available research. Various researchers have found that gay men most often tend to prefer partners with more traditionally masculine physical and personality traits, while the research has been mixed regarding the preferences of lesbians in "masculine" or "feminine" partners (e.g., Bailey, Kim, Hills, & Linsenmeier, 1997; Davidson, 1991).

Meeting potential partners. Meeting potential dating partners can be a challenge for some lesbians and gay men due to limited visibility and small dating pools. In her study of the dating experiences of self-identified lesbian and bisexual women between the ages of 13 and 18, Elze (2002) found that 22% of lesbian participants and 15% of bisexual participants described trying to find potential dating partners as a negative event. Despite barriers and difficulties, the majority of participants in this study were able to find dating partners and reported meeting them in many of the same places and ways that heterosexual young people tend to meet partners. These included meeting

dating partners at school (24%), through friends (13%), and at various events and recreational settings such as concerts, conferences, beaches, coffeehouses, etc. (27%). A number of participants also reported meeting dating partners at sexual minority youth group engagements (22%) (Elze, 2002). Researchers such as Bryant and Demian (as cited by Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007) have investigated this issue in the adult gay and lesbian population and found that participants reported meeting potential dating partners at work, at bars, through friends, and at social events, which are again similar to the reports of heterosexual individuals. While lesbians and gay men in large urban areas may have access to more visible gay and lesbian communities and, accordingly, increased opportunities to meet potential dating partners, the Internet has facilitated this process for many lesbians and gay men of all ages and in all locales (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007).

Specific to lesbians and gay men in college, Evans and D'Augelli (1996) noted that the process of meeting others who are similar to themselves, including potential dating partners, can be facilitated for those students who are willing to participate in lesbian or gay-identified settings and student organizations. The authors also note that feminist social and political groups on campus often provide safe places for lesbian and bisexual women to meet and interact.

Dating scripts. According to Klinkenberg and Rose (1994) and other researchers interested in cognitive script theory, it appears that, much like heterosexual men and women, lesbians and gay men tend to rely on scripts when going on dates with new partners. According to authors such as Rose, Zand, and Cini (as cited by Peplau & Spalding, 2003), scripts are fairly conventional cognitive representations of a typical

sequence of events for a particular situation, such as a date. Klinkenberg and Rose

(1994) stated the following about same-sex dating scripts:

> A public and well-defined cultural script does not exist for same-sex courtship as
> it does for heterosexual relations. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that gay men
> and lesbians will have to draw on a heterosexual model to some extent in
> developing a variant cultural script.... However, because they are not interacting
> with a partner who assumes the traditional complementary heterosexual role, they
> also are likely to have more opportunities to develop new scripts based on
> personal abilities or desires. (pp. 24-25)

These researchers examined same-sex first date scripts by asking a predominantly

white, well-educated, middle-class sample of 51 gay men and 44 lesbians to describe in

twenty steps either their most recent first date or what they believed was a typical first

date. Common actions cited in the hypothetical first date scripts of 50% or more of both

male and female participants included discussing plans for the date, getting dressed,

getting to know one's date, going to a movie, and going to eat. It was found that the

hypothetical scripts of the gay male participants were more sexually-oriented than those

of the lesbian participants and more often included drinking alcohol. In terms of actual

first date scripts, the actions cited by 50% or more of gay male participants were "drank

alcohol" and "initiated physical contact," and the action cited by 50% or more of lesbian

participants was "initiated physical contact." Nearly half of the male participants stated

that they had sex on their most recent first date, while only 12% of the female

participants reported doing so. The actual first date scripts of the lesbian participants

tended to include more features of emotional intimacy than those of the gay male

participants. Overall, Klinkenberg and Rose (1994) concluded that the results of this

study suggest that same-sex first-date scripts are in fact clearly defined and that they are

quite similar to heterosexual scripts, at least within the demographics of their sample.

This conclusion was based on the fact that over half of the actions identified by the gay

and lesbian participants in this study overlapped with those reported by the young

heterosexual adults studied by Rose and Frieze in 1989. However, differences were also

found between same-sex and heterosexual first date scripts when Klinkenberg and Rose

(1994) compared the results of their study to those of Rose and Frieze (1989). For

example, Klinkenberg and Rose (1994) noted that some gender differences appear to be

expressed more strongly in same-sex as compared to opposite-sex dating scripts. They

suggested that the scripts of gay men may tend to be more sexual than the scripts of

others as neither dater has generally been socialized to adopt the "gatekeeper"—or sexual

limit setter—role that the female dater often adopts in opposite-sex dating situations,

while lesbians have typically not been socialized to adopt a "sexual initiator" role and

must negotiate that within the relationship. Furthermore, women have typically been

socialized to believe that it is inappropriate for them to express sexuality outside of a

committed relationship (Sprecher & Hatfield, 1996).

Specific to a college student population, with no reference to sexual orientation,

Bartoli and Clark (2006) found that third and fourth year students were more likely than

first year students to include sexual activities in their scripts for a typical date and that

individuals with more sexual experience held greater expectations for sexually related

behaviors on a typical date. The results of this study also showed sexual limit setting was

expected only of women; a finding which has been corroborated by other studies of

contemporary heterosexual dating in college (e.g., Schleicher & Gilbert, 2005). Bartoli and Clark (2006) also found that older students were more likely than younger students to include alcohol-related contexts in their dating scripts, which the authors suggested may further increase the likelihood of sexual activities as alcohol and sexuality are often found to be linked in American society (Abbey, 1991; Abbey & Harnish, 1995).

Dating scripts are not limited to conceptualizations of individual dates and can apply more broadly to patterns of relationship formation. One such script that has been described by numerous authors has been labeled a "friendship script." Rose et al. (as cited by Peplau & Spalding, 2003) have explained that, generally speaking, the steps involved in a friendship script include first being friends, then falling in love, and later beginning a sexual relationship. Rose and Zand (2000) have found that this script is followed by many lesbian women, although some report that the ambiguity of this script can be problematic as it may be unclear whether a friendship is making this shift to a romantic connection and whether the friend is interested in sexual involvement. Despite this potential drawback, many lesbians prefer this script as they feel it provides a more secure foundation from which to develop a committed relationship (Rose & Zand, 2000). Rose and Zand (2000) found that, among the sample they studied, which consisted of 38 predominantly white lesbians between the ages of 22 and 63, the friendship script was the most commonly followed relationship formation script and was preferred by half of the participants. The other half preferred a "romance script," which was characterized by emotional intensity and a strong physical and sexual attraction. A third script under study, labeled a "sexually explicit script," was characterized by a primary emphasis on physical and sexual attraction. While 63% of participants had followed the sexually

explicit script at least once and both positive and negative outcomes were reported, it was not the preferred script of any of the participants.

Rose and Zand (2000) concluded from the results of their study that lesbian dating does not conform significantly to a heterosexual model of dating, as over two thirds of participants cited various ways in which lesbian dating is unique. For example, participants expressed that, in comparison to heterosexual dating, lesbian dating is characterized by less conformity with gender roles, an increased level of intimacy and friendship, the impact of societal prejudice (e.g. limiting how openly they could date), and a more rapid pace of relationship development. It should be noted that the rapid pace response was provided by significantly more participants in the midlife age range than in other age ranges. Midlife lesbian participants were also distinguished from younger participants in that those in midlife more often had the goal of establishing a serious commitment when dating and were more likely to have asked someone for a date rather than always waiting to be asked. It was generally found that the woman who initiated the date also tended to adopt other aspects of the traditionally male initiator role, such as planning the date, paying for the date, and initiating physical contact. Interestingly, if one woman adopted a more reactive rather than initiator role in a lesbian dating situation, there was no correspondence to also assuming the sexual limit setting role often adopted by women in opposite-sex dating situations. Overall, many indications were found in the results of this study that many aspects of heterosexual dating scripts are frequently rejected or modified in lesbian dating (Rose and Zand, 2000).

Problems in "casual" and "involved" dating. Zusman and Knox (1998) studied the most frequently experienced relationship issues reported by 620 never married

undergraduate students of unspecified sexual orientations and compared the responses of individuals who were casually dating to those of individuals who reported being in a more emotionally involved "reciprocal love" relationship. These two groups were labeled "casual" and "involved" daters, respectively. Overall, across both male and female participants and across both casual and involved daters, the most frequently cited dating problem was communication. This finding was supported by previous studies, such as that of Asmussen and Shehan in 1992 (as cited by Zusman & Knox, 1998). These researchers found that 45% of their 414 undergraduate participants cited communication as the most difficult dating problem they experienced. Despite the consistency with which communication tops the list of reported dating problems, Zusman and Knox (1998) found that there were differences between the problems reported by casual and involved daters. For casual daters, the ten most frequently cited problems were communication (19.6%), lack of commitment (12.5%), jealousy (12.1%), other problems (9.6%), no problems (8.3%), different values (7.9%), honesty (7.5%), shyness (5.4%), unwanted sexual pressure (2.1%), and acceptance (1.7%). For involved daters, the ten most frequently reported problems were communication (22.3%), other problems (15.3%), jealousy (13.9%), no problems (13.2%), time for the relationship (9.1%), lack of money (5.2%), places to go (4.9%), honesty (4.2%), different values (3.1%), and lack of commitment (2.4%). Zusman and Knox speculated that "other problems" may have included such problems as sexual dysfunctions, substance abuse, depression, self-concept issues, and different levels of interest in sexual involvement, as these issues had been anonymously identified by the students of these authors as relevant to their relationships. Overall, Zusman and Knox concluded that, while over 85% of both casual and involved

daters in their study reported dating problems, the types of problems that are experienced most frequently seem to shift depending on the level of involvement in the relationship.

Committed Relationships

Like their heterosexual counterparts, gay and lesbian individuals form romantic relationships for a variety of reasons, but perhaps most commonly to satisfy what Cabaj and Klinger (1996) described as "universal human needs for love, companionship, growth, acceptance, and sexual expression" (p. 486). While same-sex couples encounter many of the same issues as opposite-sex couples, same-sex couples have the added task of managing those issues within a context of oppression (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007).

Lack of models. Growing up, most lesbians and gay men do not have positive role models of gay or lesbian adults available to them as their families of origin are likely to be primarily heterosexual, the sexual orientation of gay and lesbian teachers and other adults in their lives are often not revealed, and positive media attention given to lesbians and gay men is limited (Stein & Cabaj, 1996; Klinger, 1996). Not only does this contribute to confusion in the identity development process, but also in the development of same-sex relationships, as young lesbians and gay men have typically been exposed to few, if any, positive models of such relationships. Alonzo (2005) stated the following about this issue:

> … although increasing numbers of LGBT people are featured in television and films, very few stable, well-adjusted same-sex couples receive any kind of accurate media portrayal…. Same-sex couples have trouble locating the relational role models that can demonstrate resilience, longevity, and humor in the face of oppression (Greenan & Tunnell, 2003)." (pp. 372)

Unfortunately, the relative lack of models of same-sex relationships may put young lesbians and gay men at a disadvantage in their early relationships as they have not had the opportunity to observe and learn from successful relationships of similar others (Evans & D'Augelli, 1996). This relative lack of guidance and experience with same-sex relationships, coupled with the strain of heterosexism and homophobia, contribute to a tendency for volatile first relationships among young lesbians and gay men (Evans & D'Augelli, 1996). However, as these individuals begin to resolve some of this uncertainty and gain experience with same-sex relationships, the very circumstance that was initially a disadvantage can become an asset as partners may be more likely to flexibly and creatively negotiate the framework of their relationships rather than adhering to rigidly-defined expectations (Klinger, 1996).

Social support. The issue of social support is highly relevant for gay and lesbian individuals and for same-sex relationships. Unfortunately, many lesbians and gay men experience significant rejection from others, including family members and society in general, based on their sexual orientation. A national survey conducted in 2001 by the Kaiser Family Foundation (as cited by Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007) found that 34% of gay and lesbian respondents reported that their families had refused to accept them due to their sexual orientation. Research has consistently shown that the perceived level of support from families of origin is significantly lower for lesbians and gay men then for heterosexual individuals (Kurdek, 2005; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). Comparing lesbians and gay men in terms of perceived social support, Kurdek (2003) found that they tend to report similar levels, and that friends rather than family are most often their primary sources of support. He argued that, because both lesbians and gay men experience stigma

based on their sexual orientation, they seem to learn how to obtain the support they need from the sources that are most likely to provide it; that being other lesbians and gay men or other friends. Peplau and Fingerhut (2007) stated the following about social support in this population:

> Some gay men and lesbians have strong and supportive family ties that are undoubtedly a valuable source of aid and comfort in times of need. At the other extreme, some lesbians and gay men have negative relations with their families, ranging from grudging acceptance to outright rejection of them and/or their partner. There is evidence that greater social support from relatives is associated not only with greater personal well-being but also with greater relationship satisfaction in same-sex couples (Kurdek, 1988, 1995b). (pp. 417)

Clearly, social support—or the lack thereof—has a significant impact on gay and lesbian individuals and couples and, given its importance, many find ways to attain support despite the obstacles. For example, Carrington (as cited by Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007) and a number of other authors have noted that many lesbians and gay men create what has been termed "families of choice" by developing a close network of loving and supportive friends and others who function much like other families. For example, Carrington (as cited by Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007) noted that families of choice often celebrate holidays together, share leisure activities, and offer assistance to one another when needed.

Regarding support of same-sex relationships, Kurdek (2005) noted the following: The lack of family support for one's primary close relationship is often viewed as a unique stressor for gay men and lesbians and perhaps represents the overall lack

of legal, social, political, economic, and religious support that gay and lesbian

partners experience for their relationships. (pp. 252)

In the context of a society that often does not recognize or accept same-sex

relationships as valid or equal to opposite-sex relationships, gay and lesbian couples may

experience considerable stress and isolation. While partners can be a major source of

support for one another, this may become problematic in some cases if partners put

pressure on one another to meet their every need (Alonzo, 2005). This may be especially

true of couples who are not "out."

Coming out and being out. The process of "coming out," or disclosing one's

non-heterosexual sexual orientation to others, has been described as a life-long process as

sexual minority individuals continually face decisions about whether and to whom to

disclose their sexual orientation (Falco, 1996). Falco (1996) explained that "Such

choices are best made in light of considerations of personality style, needs for privacy or

for openness, the personal costs of either hiding or disclosing, and the impact of potential

responses from others" (p. 400). Although research often links greater disclosure with

greater psychological health, depending on the specific circumstances, it may or may not

be safe or in an individual's best interest to disclose that they are gay or lesbian (Falco,

1996). Unfortunately, the emotional or psychological weight of secrecy can take a toll on

closeted gay and lesbian individuals and couples. Falco (1996) explained this as follows:

…the psychological phenomenon of nondisclosure generalizes to other

psychological areas of the patient's life. The act of nondisclosure requires self-

censoring, carefully chosen words, and vigilance. A rigidity can ensue that

generalizes to many other areas of life, particularly in interpersonal relationships.

(pp. 401)

In some cases, partners disagree about the level of disclosure or "outness" that is best for themselves and for the relationship, which can be a source of conflict in some gay and lesbian relationships (Bepko & Johnson, 2004; Otis, Rostosky, et al., 2006; Peplau et al., 1996). Some authors have suggested that these types of conflict may be particularly common among interracial couples due to differing cultural expectations and norms (Smith, 1997). Presumably, this may be true of any couple in which partners differ in terms of various other diversity variables (e.g., religion, age, disability status, etc.) as well. Even if couples do agree on decisions about coming out and being out, stress and conflict may still arise in the relationship if the results of those decisions are painful and difficult to manage (e.g., negative reactions from others, etc.) (Peplau et al., 1996).

Relationship quality and satisfaction. Contrary to the stereotype held by many in our society that lesbians and gay men do not have happy and well-adjusted intimate relationships, research has repeatedly found that there is no significant difference between the relationship quality and satisfaction of same-sex couples as compared to opposite-sex couples (Peplau et al., 1996; Kurdek, 2001 as cited by Kurdek, 2005). In his review of the literature on this topic, Alonzo (2005) stated the following: "On almost every variable tested—intimacy, partner similarity, attachment, trust, liking, use of maintenance behaviors, to name a few—lesbians and gay men are as satisfied with their relationships as heterosexuals" (p. 374). While couples do tend to show a decline in

relationship quality over time, this trend is consistent across both same- and opposite-sex couples (Kurdek, 1998).

Gottman, Levenson, Gross, and colleagues (2003) investigated the factors associated with relationship satisfaction among gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples and concluded that satisfaction is related to similar emotional qualities across all of these couples. More specifically, they found that a higher level of relationship satisfaction was generally associated with lower perceived costs, higher perceived benefits, a higher expectancy of positive interaction, and greater empathy. Comparing the lesbian participants to the gay male participants, the researchers found that relationship satisfaction was more highly correlated with affection for the lesbian couples whereas relationship satisfaction was more highly correlated with validation for the gay male couples. Gottman, Levenson, Gross, et al. (2003) explained this difference as follows:

> This appears to be a difference in the nature of the emotional expression that the two relationships may need. Affection is a more loving, overtly demonstrative act, whereas validation is a more cognitive act. Both convey support, but they do it differently. (pp. 41)

Overall, the available literature on this topic indicates that, despite the obstacles they may face, lesbians and gay men can and do have satisfying, loving, and well-adjusted intimate relationships (Alonzo, 2005).

Intimacy. In our society, men are generally socialized to be independent, analytical, and competitive, while women are generally socialized to value closeness and intimacy (Peplau & Spalding, 2003; Klinger, 1996; Gray & Isensee, 1996). Authors such as Stein and Cabaj (1996) explain that, while all men do not relate in stereotypically

masculine ways and all women do not relate in stereotypically feminine ways, individuals will on average tend to possess more of the traits typically associated with their gender than would individuals of another gender. Therefore, these authors argue that it is not unreasonable to expect that same-sex relationships will tend to be characterized by the relational style socially prescribed for that gender. After all, both partners have typically been socialized to adopt similar approaches to intimacy, communication, and other aspects of relating, whether or not they adopted all of those approaches. Addressing issues of socialization and intimacy in gay male relationships in particular, Stein and Cabaj (1996) stated the following:

> Because male socialization in our society involves being taught that anxiety and stigma are associated with sexual and emotional attachments between men, gay men not only have to overcome masculine characteristics that work against intimacy in general but also have to surmount explicit prohibitions on such relationships with other men… problems in forming and maintaining satisfying relationships due to gender socialization constitute a significant area of concern for individual gay men presenting for psychotherapy… (pp. 426)

Alonzo (2005) noted that much of the literature on gay male couples has historically focused on issues such as disengagement and difficulty with intimacy, although authors such as Bepko and Johnson (2000) caution that disengagement among male couples is not as widespread as may be suggested by stereotypes or clinical samples.

With regards to female couples, Alonzo (2005) noted that much of the literature has focused on the opposite extreme, which has typically been labeled "fusion,"

"merger," or "enmeshment." The idea behind this concept—as presented by authors such as Krestan and Bepko (as cited by Alonzo, 2005)—is that, because women are typically socialized to be relationship-oriented and focus on the needs of others, women in same-sex relationships may have a tendency to become so close and their lives so intertwined that partners lose their individuality and enter a state of "undifferentiation." While some authors have explained fusion as a protective act of turning toward one another in response to a hostile and homophobic environment (e.g. Slater & Mencher, 1991), Alonzo (2005) and others have noted that discussions of lesbian "merger" or "fusion" have typically implied pathology. More recently though, many authors have begun to adopt a more positive stance by highlighting the strong emotional bond and sense of connection that merger allows (Gray & Isensee, 1996) and by focusing more on the potential benefits of female socialization (Alonzo, 2005). For example, Alonzo (2005) stated the following about this issue: "Perhaps women are able to leave behind patriarchal assumptions and use their relational abilities to produce empathy and intimacy, making possible both closeness and independence (Marvin & Miller, 2000)" (p. 378-379). In fact, research findings by Kurdek (1998) offer support for this proposition as, compared to members of heterosexual married couples, lesbian partners were found to report higher levels not only of intimacy but also of autonomy.

Sex. In their review article of gay and lesbian relationships, Peplau and Fingerhut (2007) noted that, among the existing studies of gay and lesbian couples, the topic of sexuality has been given considerable attention. Researchers who have studied the frequency of sex in these relationships have generally found that, like heterosexual couples, gay and lesbian couples tend to report declines in sexual frequency over the

course of the relationship (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007; Coleman & Rosser, 1996). While

this trend—which may be related both to the duration of the relationship as well as to

aging—may be viewed as "normal" (Coleman & Rosser, 1996), some couples may find

the change distressing while others may not. Incompatibilities in desired sexual

frequency may also be problematic for some couples, regardless of sexual orientation

(Coleman & Rosser, 1996). Comparisons of gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples in

terms of sexual frequency have typically indicated that, while there is significant

variability between couples, gay male couples tend to report the highest frequency of sex,

particularly in the early stage of their relationships, and that, overall, lesbian couples tend

to report the lowest frequency of sex (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007; Peplau et al., 2004). A

number of explanations have been suggested for the finding that lesbian couples tend to

have sex the least frequently in comparison to gay male and opposite-sex couples. These

proposed explanations, as outlined by Peplau and Fingerhut (2007), have included that

female gender role socialization encourages women to suppress their sexuality; that

women tend to have difficulty being sexually assertive and initiating sexual contact; and

that women tend to naturally have a lower sex drive, and that the effects of these

dynamics are magnified in relationships between two women. Other potential

explanations that have been suggested in the literature include the idea that the ways in

which researchers ask participants about sexuality may be problematic (e.g., use of the

term "intercourse") and that traditional conceptions of what constitutes "sex" may not be

appropriate when applied to female couples (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). As stated by

Peplau et al. (2004), "In Western cultural traditions, sex is what you do with your

genitals, real sex means heterosexual intercourse, and penile penetration is the gold

standard of human sexuality" (p. 362). A broader conceptualization of sex is necessary in order to capture the range of behaviors that many lesbians, and others, may categorize as sexual activities, particularly considering the finding that lesbians tend to place a high value on nongenital physical contact within their sexual relationships (Herbert, 1996).

An additional controversial issue is whether low sexual frequency in a relationship, if that is in fact the case, should even be considered a problem (Peplau et al., 2004). In fact, some lesbian couples, among others, have satisfying and lasting intimate relationships in the absence of any genital sexual contact (Peplau et al., 2004; Fassinger & Arsenau, 2007).

Beyond sexual frequency, sexual satisfaction is another topic that has been given considerable attention in the literature on the sexuality of gay and lesbian couples. Across a variety of samples, including predominantly white adults, African Americans, and students and young adults, researchers have found that lesbians and gay men tend to report high levels of sexual satisfaction (see review by Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). Referring to the pioneering research in the late 1970s by Masters and Johnson, Coleman and Rosser (1996) made the following statement:

> These researchers [Masters and Johnson] observed that gay and lesbian couples appear to have an advantage over heterosexual couples: partners in same-sex relationships appeared better able to intuit their partner's desires, were less focused on simultaneous orgasms, and were more engaged in mutuality… (pp. 709)

In fact, studies have found that orgasm tends to occur more often in the sexual interactions of lesbians than of heterosexual women (Peplau et al., 2004). Nonetheless,

comparative studies have typically found that there is a considerable degree of similarity between same- and opposite-sex couples in terms of sexual satisfaction (Peplau et al., 2004). For lesbian and gay male couples, there tends to be a reciprocal association between sexual satisfaction and overall relationship satisfaction (Peplau et al., 2004).

Another topic which is often addressed in writings pertaining to sexuality is that of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). In their chapter on gay and bisexual male sexuality, Coleman and Rosser (1996) noted that unprotected anal intercourse, which is a high-risk sexual behavior for the transmission of HIV, has generally decreased among gay and bisexual men. However, gay men appear to be less likely to engage in safer sex (e.g., using condoms, avoiding fluid exchange, getting tested regularly for HIV) with their primary partners in a committed relationship than with casual partners (Coleman & Rosser, 1996; Peplau et al., 2004). McWhirter and Mattison (1996) noted that HIV infection or AIDS in one or both partners brings with it an array of issues. If partners are HIV positive, they may draw closer together in response to the life-threatening illness. If one partner is HIV positive and the other is HIV negative (i.e., the couple is "serodiscordant"), a study by Mattison and McWhirter in 1994 (as cited by McWhirter & Mattison, 1996) found that expectations of sexual exclusivity tend to increase. However, Peplau et al. (2004) reported that research indicates that many serodiscordant couples still engage in extradyadic sex, and that, while many serodiscordant couples practice safer sex, others do not. On a more emotional level, discordant HIV status can impact couples in a range of ways, from intense turmoil and loss to an increased sense of emotional intimacy (Powell-Cope, 1995).

Another issue that may be encountered in the realm of sexuality is that of sexual dysfunction. Sexual dysfunctions that may be experienced by gay men include aversion to sex or certain types of sex (e.g., anal intercourse), lack of sexual desire, difficulties achieving or maintaining erections, rapid ejaculation, inability to ejaculate, and pain during sex (Coleman & Rosser, 1996). Coleman and Rosser (1996) noted that sexual dysfunctions appear to be common concerns of gay men and are likely underreported. In 1994, Rosser (as cited by Coleman & Rosser, 1996) found that, among the 200 gay men attending a sexual education seminar in Minnesota who participated in his study, 97.5% reported that they had experienced a sexual dysfunction at some point in their lifetime and 52.3% reported current difficulties with sexual dysfunction. While a study conducted by Matthews, Hughes, and Tartaro (2006) found that their lesbian participants had fewer indicators of sexual dysfunction than their heterosexual female participants, these researchers cautioned that the measure they used may not have been a valid measure of sexual dysfunction for lesbians as it tended to be more relevant to the sexual experiences of heterosexual women (e.g., investigating pain associated with intercourse). The prevalence of sexual dysfunctions among lesbians is unclear as the available studies on this topic have reported mixed results (Matthews et al., 2006). Beyond prevalence rates, issues pertaining to the potential causes of sexual dysfunctions among lesbians and gay men have also been addressed by some authors. Coleman and Rosser (1996) maintained that, while sexual dysfunctions may have organic causes in many cases, the development of sexual dysfunctions in gay and lesbian individuals is often directly influenced by the harmful effects of institutionalized homophobia and heterosexism on self-esteem and sexual identity development.

Issues of monogamy and nonmonogamy. Researchers such as Peplau & Spalding (2003) have explained that while sexual monogamy versus nonmonogamy is an issue for all couples, gay male couples are more likely than heterosexual and lesbian couples to have nonmonogamous relationships. That being said, some researchers have found that rates of nonmonogamy among gay men have shown a decrease as a result of the AIDS epidemic (e.g., Deenen, Gijs, & van Naerssen, 1995). Still, among many contemporary male couples, sexual exclusivity is not an expectation (McWhirter & Mattison, 1996; Peplau et al., 2004), although accurate estimates of the prevalence of nonmonogamous gay male relationships is lacking (Alonzo, 2005). Alonzo (2005) summarized the issue of monogamy and nonmonogamy in the context of gay male relationships as follows:

> There is great variance in the way that gay men conduct their relationships because, as mentioned before, they create their relationships outside the context of accepted societal norms, and also because men are socialized to separate sex and emotion. Research does show that many male couples maintain closed relationships. Others develop mutually agreeable guidelines to keep the emotional primacy of the relationship while allowing for extradyadic sex (e.g., not having outside sex with the same person twice, only having sex when away on a business trip, never with a friend, never in our house; Hickson et al., 1992). (pp.377)

Authors have noted that female couples, on the other hand, demonstrate a strong tendency to be monogamous (Peplau & Spalding, 2003), a trend that many authors have attributed to female gender role socialization (Alonzo, 2005).

In terms of the impact of monogamy and nonmonogamy on relationships, Alonzo (2005) reported in his chapter on same-sex couples that most of the available research indicates that nonmonogamous couples do not experience lower levels of satisfaction than those who are monogamous. However, it should be noted that problems may occur when partners hold different values or expectations about sexual and emotional fidelity (McWhirter & Mattison, 1996). A study by LaSala (2004) of extradyadic sex in 121 gay male couples found that while strictly monogamous couples and openly nonmonogamous couples were found to be equally well-adjusted on measures of relationship quality, couples in which an agreement to be monogamous was made and broken tended to be among the least adjusted and satisfied with their relationships. The results of this study suggested that while all gay men do not engage in extradyadic sexual contact (approximately one third of the couples in this study were in monogamous relationships with no extradyadic sexual contact), those who do wish to engage in extradyadic sex can maintain functional and satisfying primary relationships if both partners agree to be sexually nonmonogamous.

Long-distance relationships. One relationship circumstance that is becoming increasingly common and often brings many challenges for couples is that of being geographically separated. Knox, Zusman, Daniels, and Brantley (2002) studied this phenomenon among college students specifically and found that, in their sample of 438 undergraduate students between the ages of 17 and 48 ($Mdn = 19$), 19.9% were in a long-distance relationship at the time and 36.5% had previously been in such a relationship. The reports of the participants who had experience with long-distance relationships indicated that the geographic separation created relationship problems in the majority of

cases. More specifically, 21.5% reported breaking up, 20% reported that the distance worsened their relationship, and 33% reported a "mixed effect." Those who broke up reported that they would not be interested in becoming involved in long-distance relationship again. A minority of participants who had experience with long-distance relationships did not report negative effects, with 9% reporting "no effect" and 18% reporting that the distance had a positive effect on their relationship (Knox et al., 2002). These findings suggest that long-distance relationships are a common experience among college students and that such relationships are difficult to maintain, though not impossible.

Cohabitation. With many college students living outside of their families' homes for the first time, some of those who are in a relationship take the opportunity to move in with a partner, perhaps as a show of love, a step towards increased commitment, an effort to facilitate closeness, a test of compatibility, or for pragmatic reasons like sharing financial expenses. Knox, Zusman, Snell, and Cooper (1999) studied the occurrence of cohabitation among university students and found that, among their sample of 620 never married undergraduate students of unspecified sexual orientations, 15% were living with a partner at the time or had previously done so and 86% were open to living with a partner. The researchers investigated the characteristics of those students who had experience with cohabitation as compared to those students without such experience and found that there were no significant differences in terms of gender or race but that three significant distinguishing characteristics did emerge. These characteristics included that cohabitants were significantly more likely to be older (third and fourth year students rather than first or second year students), to have had experience with or to be

open to interracial dating, and to endorse what the authors termed hedonistic sexual values such as "If it feels good, do it" as opposed to absolutist sexual values such as "moral codes dictate what is right or wrong" (Knox et al., 1999).

Children. Although the majority of college students do not have children, and even fewer gay and lesbian college students have children, issues related to parenthood may be relevant for some gay and lesbian college students. Some studies have indicated that, as is also often true for heterosexual couples, same-sex couples may show a decline in relationship satisfaction shortly after the birth of a child (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). The transition to parenthood can certainly be stressful and place an added strain on the relationship. It may also occur that a lesbian, or less frequently a gay man, enters into a same-sex relationship having had children in a previous, often opposite-sex, relationship. Negotiating this situation in the context of the new relationship may have its challenges (Alonzo, 2005).

Although college students with children balance multiple roles (e.g., parent, partner, student, employee, etc.) and face multiple stressors, research has indicated that many of them still report a high level of well-being, particularly when they feel supported and safe in their relationships (Quimby & O'Brien, 2006). However, research investigating issues pertaining to parenthood as a college student is limited, and no studies were found on the topic of parenthood as a gay or lesbian college student.

An issue that may come up in the relationships of gay and lesbian college students is the decision of whether or not to have or adopt children in the future. Alonzo (2005) noted that this decision can be difficult as lesbians and gay men must consider factors

pertaining to institutionalized heterosexism and the relative lack of support for same-sex parents.

Division of labor, power, and decision making. Peplau, Veniegas, and Campbell (1996) noted that while many contemporary North Americans endorse an equal balance of power as ideal for intimate relationships, this view is especially strong among young adults. Equality in intimate relationships also tends to be highly valued in the gay and lesbian community (e.g., Kurdek, 1995). This is of course not to say that all of those who value such an ideal always achieve it. A study conducted by Caldwell and Peplau (1984) found that, while nearly 100% of the 77 lesbians who participated in their study reported that they desired an equal balance of power in their relationships, only 61% felt that they had attained such equality. Other studies of the balance of power in same-sex relationships have produced similar findings (Peplau & Spalding, 2003).

In terms of the division of labor, power, and decision making, traditional gender roles have specified that men are to be leaders and breadwinners in their relationships, with greater power and decision-making authority, while women are to be followers and homemakers (Peplau et al., 1996; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). However, many individuals and couples reject these traditional roles and find their own patterns of relating (Peplau et al., 1996). Peplau et al. (1996) noted that while masculine-feminine roles may have historically been the model for many gay and lesbian relationships (e.g., "butch" and "femme" or "husband" and "wife" roles), contemporary same-sex relationships do not typically follow this pattern. Instead, these authors explained that most same-sex relationships are made up of two working individuals, each with some economic independence, and that tasks and responsibilities are often shared or divided in

a flexible manner based on personal preferences, skills, and work schedules. While labor

may not be divided in a perfectly equal manner in these relationships, the distribution of

tasks does tend to be more balanced and fair in same-sex relationships than in typical

opposite-sex relationships (Kurdek, 2005). When comparisons are made between lesbian

and gay male couples, lesbian couples are typically found to endorse a greater degree of

equality in their relationships (Klinger, 1996).

Overall, whether referring to the division of labor, power, or decision making,

same-sex relationships tend to be more egalitarian and flexible than the majority of

opposite-sex relationships. In fact, same-sex relationships are even referenced at times as

models of equality and sharing between partners, largely due to their relative freedom

from the rigid opposing gender roles so often seen in heterosexual relationships (Peplau

et al., 1996; Peplau & Spalding, 2003). Klinger (1996) noted that while this tendency

towards flexibility and less adherence to rigid gender roles can be a major asset in same-

sex relationships, it can at times also be confusing and anxiety-provoking for some

couples. This may be particularly true when members of these couples are early in the

coming-out process and have little exposure to models of how to negotiate roles in same-

sex relationships (Klinger, 1996).

Conflict. All couples experience conflict, and in fact research evidence from

Kurdek's 2004 study of the family context of lesbians and gay men (as cited by Kurdek,

2005) indicated that the most frequent sources of conflict among gay, lesbian, and

heterosexual couples were largely the same. These included issues related to finances,

affection, sex, criticism, driving style, and household tasks. In terms of frequency and

intensity of arguments, Metz, Rosser, and Strapko (1994) also found similarity in the reports of gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples.

Although many aspects of conflict appear to be similar across gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples, research suggests that the ways in which conflicts are handled tend to differ between same-sex and opposite-sex couples. For example, Gottman and colleagues (2003) studied the conflict interactions of samples of committed gay and lesbian cohabiting couples and heterosexual married couples by observing them engaging in various types of conversations. Couples were either told to discuss the events of the day, a topic of continuing conflict and disagreement in the relationship, or a mutually agreed upon pleasant topic, and their interactions were coded for various facets of expressed affect. The results indicated that, during conflict interactions, gay and lesbian couples tended to present and receive issues in a positive way while heterosexual couples tended to present and receive issues in a more negative way. More specifically, when members of the gay and lesbian couples initiated conflict issues, they exhibited less negative affect (e.g., less belligerence, less domineering, less fear/tension, less sadness, and less whining) and more positive affect (e.g., more affection, more humor, and more joy/excitement) than did members of the heterosexual couples when they initiated conflict issues. The members of the gay and lesbian couples who were at the receiving end of the conflict issues also exhibited less negative affect (e.g., less belligerence, less domineering, and less fear/tension) and used more humor than did the receiving partners of the conflict issues in the heterosexual couples. At the same time, it was also observed that if a partner became "too positive" and did not appear to be taking an issue seriously, gay and lesbian partners were more effective at damping this down than were partners in

heterosexual couples. The researchers also noted that the pattern of results suggested

that, in comparison to members of the heterosexual couples, members of the gay and

lesbian couples appeared to have a more positive influence on their partners in the

positive affect ranges and a less negative influence on their partners in the negative affect

ranges, although there was insufficient power to test these results. In terms of conflict

regulation, it was found that when a couple's interaction did become negative, gay male

partners were less effective at repairing harm than were partners in other couples.

Comparisons of the interactions of the gay couples with those of the lesbian couples

suggested that the lesbian participants were more emotionally expressive than were the

gay male participants. For example, lesbian initiators of issues demonstrated more anger,

but also more humor and enjoyment/joy than did gay male initiators of issues, and lesbian

partners responded with more humor and showed more interest than did gay male

partners. Gottman et al. (2003) concluded the following based on their results:

> … heterosexual relationships may have a great deal to learn from homosexual
>
> relationships insofar as homosexual relationships seem to have found a way to
>
> begin conflict discussions in a more positive and less negative manner, and to
>
> continue to have a positive rather than a negative influence on one another. (pp.
>
> 87)

Kurdek (2004) found similar results in his analysis of longitudinal survey data

regarding aspects of relationship health collected from heterosexual married couples with

children and gay and lesbian cohabiting couples without children (N at first assessment =

80, 80, and 53 couples, respectively). He found that members of gay and lesbian couples

resolved conflict more positively than members of heterosexual married couples. More

specifically, the data indicated that—in comparison to heterosexual married participants—gay and lesbian partners tended to argue and resolve conflict more effectively, were less likely to adopt a pattern of communication in which one partner demands and the other withdraws, and were more likely to use symmetrical positive communication such as both partners offering potential solutions and compromises. For both same-sex and opposite-sex couples, a low level of relationship satisfaction was associated with a high level of ineffective arguing and conflict management (Kurdek, 2004).

As far as why same-sex couples may tend to be better at conflict resolution than opposite-sex couples, Kurdek (2005) presented the following as a potential explanation:

In heterosexual couples, conflict is often thought to occur because of systematic differences in how men and women perceive their worlds. If this view of relationship conflict is valid, then one might expect that partners from same-sex couples would resolve conflict better than partners from heterosexual couples do because they perceive their worlds through similar lenses. Research supports this expectation. (pp. 252)

Domestic violence. Authors who have reviewed the literature on domestic violence in same-sex relationships often note that the issue was largely unrecognized until the 1990s, and some have offered a variety of possible explanations for this (Klinger & Stein, 1996). For example, Renzetti (as cited by Klinger & Stein, 1996) hypothesized that this lack of recognition may have been due to the belief that only men are perpetrators of domestic violence and that only women are the victims as well as the belief that same-sex relationships are characterized by equality and therefore not

susceptible to domestic violence. Renzetti (as cited by Klinger & Stein, 1996) also proposed other reasons for this lack of recognition, including the institutionalized homophobia that is so often present in the legal system and shelters for victims of domestic violence, and the desire of members of the gay and lesbian community to keep issues such as intimate partner violence private so as not to add to the stigma already placed on same-sex relationships. Over the past two decades, however, research on this issue and awareness of the occurrence of domestic violence in same-sex relationships has increased, although further research is still needed. While we do know that intimate partner violence is not limited to opposite-sex couples, the prevalence of its occurrence in same-sex relationships is difficult to estimate given that incidents are unlikely to be reported to the police or other authorities for some of the same reasons previously mentioned. Some researchers have suggested that intimate partner violence occurs in gay and lesbian couples at approximately the same rate (e.g., 12-50%) as it occurs in heterosexual couples (Rohrbaugh, 2006), although Peplau and Fingerhut (2007) caution that existing research on the frequency of same-sex domestic violence is based on small, unrepresentative samples and that estimates are likely inaccurate. While it is still unclear how often domestic violence occurs in same-sex couples, gay and lesbian victims of intimate partner violence are likely to face considerable difficulty seeking intervention due to factors such as invisibility, lack of support, and seemingly less concern from authorities.

While it is widely recognized that dynamics related to power and control generally play a significant role in domestic violence in all couples, there may be factors unique to same-sex couples that also play a role in violence within these relationships.

For example, Waldner-Haugrud, Gratch, & Magruder (1997) noted that it is not only power differentials and aspects of gender socialization that likely contribute to domestic violence in same-sex couples, but also the higher likelihood of being isolated from other couples and the impact of widespread heterosexist oppression.

Waldner-Haugrud and colleagues (1997) investigated violence in gay and lesbian relationships and found that the most common forms of intimate partner violence reported by their sample of 283 lesbians and gay men were threats, slapping, pushing, and punching. Of course, intimate partner abuse is not limited to physical violence and also includes various forms of verbal abuse, emotional or psychological abuse, sexual coercion or other forms of sexual abuse, destruction of property, etc. While there is much overlap in terms of the types of abuse occurring in same-sex and opposite-sex relationships, there are also particular forms of abuse that are unique to gay and lesbian couples. For example, abuse in gay and lesbian relationships may involve threats of "outing" one's partner to family members, friends, work colleagues and supervisors, and others (Rohrbaugh, 2006; Speziale & Ring, 2006). Rohrbaugh (2006) noted that this can be a powerful threat for some gay and lesbian individuals as exposure of their sexual orientation could mean the loss of their job, home, or educational opportunities, and may result in damage to, and even loss of, relationships with family members and friends. In some cases, partners may also threaten to take children away as few states offer protection for nonbiological parents in same-sex relationships. Biological parents may also be at risk for losing custody of their children if their sexual orientation is exposed (Rohrbaugh, 2006).

Murray and Kardatzke (2007) reviewed the available literature regarding dating violence among college students specifically and noted several key themes. First, it was apparent that physical and sexual dating violence are common among college students. Estimated rates of physical dating violence in this population were found to range from 16.7% to 48%, and research findings regarding sexual dating violence suggested that approximately 1 in 3 female college students and approximately 1 in 10 male college students may be victims of this type of violence. In actuality, these rates may be even higher due to underreporting. Murray and Kardatzke (2007) also noted that psychological abuse from a partner appears to be even more common than physical and sexual dating violence, as various studies have found that 75-88% of their college student participants had been psychologically abused. A number of individual risk factors for college student dating violence were identified in the literature and were categorized as family history, peer influence, personal belief, alcohol use and abuse, and psychological factors, and relationship dynamics such as those related to power and control were also highlighted as risk factors (Murray & Kardatzke, 2007). Finally, it was noted that college students experiencing dating violence are more likely to disclose the experience to friends than to counselors and/or law enforcement. Consequently, dating violence may not always be identified by college counselors when students cite other issues as their presenting problems (Murray & Kardatzke, 2007).

Relationship dissolution. For gay and lesbian couples, as for any couple, relationship dissolution can occur for a wide variety of reasons. Kurdek (1991) investigated the experience of relationship dissolution among a sample of 26 gay and lesbian individuals (92% white) who originally made up six gay (mean age 31.50) and

seven lesbian (mean age 33.07) couples before their separation. These couples were among those who separated while participating in a 4-year longitudinal study of relationship quality in gay and lesbian cohabiting couples conducted by the same researcher. They were included in Kurdek's (1991) study as both partners completed a separation survey following the dissolution of their relationship. Analyzing the data obtained from these separation surveys, Kurdek (1991) found that there were no differences between the gay and lesbian participants in terms of the reasons they cited for their separation, their level of emotional adjustment to the separation, or problems they experienced following the separation. In the survey, participants were asked about the reasons for the separation in both an open-ended and a rating format. In the open-ended format, the most frequently cited reasons were categorized as non-responsiveness (e.g., lack of communication and support), partner problems (e.g., substance abuse problems), and sexual issues (e.g., sexual infidelity). The categories of fusion, incompatibility, and control also appeared in the responses of some participants, though less frequently. In the rating format, 11 issues were rated based on the degree to which participants felt they contributed to the decision to separate. In descending order, the most highly rated issues across participants were frequent absence, sexual incompatibility, mental cruelty, lack of love, infidelity, job or school commitments, excessive demands, and financial problems.

Just as the reasons for relationship dissolution vary across couples, so too do the responses of the individuals involved. When participants in Kurdek's (1991) study were asked about their emotional reactions to the dissolution of their relationships, the most frequently cited responses were personal growth, loneliness, and relief from conflict. The most commonly cited problems encountered following the separation were the

relationship with the former partner and financial stress. Participants who expected the separation were more likely to be emotionally well-adjusted and were less likely to experience problems following the separation. Individuals who adjusted well to the separation also tended to be highly educated, kept their finances separate from their partner, reported a low level of love for the partner, placed less value on attachment to the partner, and reported less severe psychological distress. Kurdek (1991) noted that there was much similarity between these findings and the findings from studies involving heterosexual participants.

In terms of the frequency of relationship dissolution among gay and lesbian couples, findings from some studies suggest that there may not be a significant difference between gay and lesbian couples. For example, among the 134 gay and 121 lesbian couples who participated in Kurdek's (2003) longitudinal study of gay and lesbian cohabiting couples, 19% of the gay couples and 23% of the lesbian couples separated at some point over the course of the study. Although this suggests a similar frequency of separation between gay and lesbian couples, the findings may not be generalizeable to the larger gay and lesbian population due to the predominantly white and nonrepresentative sample used in this study. Kurdek (2004) later analyzed the data from this longitudinal study to make comparisons between heterosexual married couples and gay and lesbian cohabiting couples. He found that the participating gay and lesbian couples more frequently ended their relationships than did the participating heterosexual married couples, particularly the heterosexual couples with children. Kurdek (2004) concluded that this is consistent with the differences between these groups in terms of

institutionalized barriers to relationship dissolution. Kurdek (2005) later summarized this

issue as follows:

> Unlike spouses from married heterosexual couples who experience social,
>
> religious, and legal barriers to leaving their relationships, cohabiting couples—
>
> whether gay, lesbian, or heterosexual—have no such institutionalized barriers.
>
> Further, although some gay and lesbian couples raise children, the majority do not
>
> (Simons & O'Connell, 2003), thereby removing another significant barrier to
>
> dissolution. Thus, perhaps what is most impressive about gay and lesbian couples
>
> is not that they may be less stable than heterosexual married couples, but rather
>
> that they manage to endure without the benefits of institutionalized supports. (pp.
>
> 253)

For many gay and lesbian couples, fewer barriers to relationship dissolution in

comparison to heterosexual married couples may have the positive effect of enabling

them to more easily leave unhappy and/or unhealthy relationships. However, that is not

to say that all gay and lesbian couples have this experience. Many do face barriers and

obstacles to leaving their relationships, such as children, the emotional turmoil that may

follow dissolution (Kurdek, 2004), pooled financial resources (Kurdek, 1991), the

potential loss of friendships with the partner and/or mutual friends, barriers pertaining to

cohabitation, etc., so the emotional and logistical difficulties associated with relationship

dissolution in same-sex couples as in any couple should not be underestimated or

disregarded.

An additional finding relevant to same-sex relationship dissolution is that gay and

lesbian individuals are particularly likely to remain friends with ex-partners (Bepko &

Johnson, 2000; Solomon, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2004; Weinstock, 2004). While authors such as Weinstock (2004) have noted that the reasons for this have yet to be thoroughly researched, they have suggested that some possible factors include the small size of some gay and lesbian social networks, the norms of some gay and lesbian communities, and various benefits that may result from maintaining ties with former partners. One example of such a benefit is that maintaining a friendship with someone who shares one's gender and sexual orientation can serve to support one's identity and help protect against the effects of oppression (Weinstock, 2004).

Research Questions of the Present Study

The research questions of the proposed study include the following: (1) In what ways do various forms of oppression impact the relationships of gay and lesbian college students? (2) What are the consistencies and inconsistencies between the reported experiences of gay and lesbian college students and the literature on dating and relationships in the larger gay and lesbian population? (3) What are the primary dating and relationship issues reported by participants that require more in-depth investigation? (4) What are some of the major challenges faced by gay and lesbian college students in the realm of dating and relationships? (5) What are some of the primary indications of strength and resiliency in the reports of gay and lesbian college students regarding their experiences with dating and relationships?

Method

Participants

Participants in this study were self-identified gay and lesbian college/university students, 18 years of age or older, who volunteered to participate. A total of 206

individuals accessed the link for the online survey, with a total of 159 meeting full criteria for participation in the study. All surveys were completed between June 27 and August 15, 2011. Any data from the 47 individuals who did not meet the full participation criteria was excluded from the analysis. Among the 159 participants who met the inclusion criteria for the study, 80 (50.3%) indicated that they identified as lesbian and 79 (49.7%) identified as gay. Also among this group of participants, 82 (51.6%) identified as female, 76 (47.7%) identified as male, 3 (1.9%) identified as transgender male to female, 7 (4.4%) identified as transgender female to male, and 1 (0.6%) identified as intersexed. Note that there is some overlap as participants were able to select more than one descriptor if applicable. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 45 years, with a mean age of 22.2, and a modal and median age of 21. Racial self-identification of the 159 participants was as follows: 81.8% White/Caucasian, 6.3% Black or African American, 6.3% Asian or Asian American, 5.7% Hispanic or Latino/Latina, 5.0% Mixed Race, 5.0% Other, 2.5% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 2.5% Biracial. Note that there is overlap between these groups as participants were asked to select all racial categories that applied to them. In terms of current college/university enrollment, 128 (80.5%) indicated that they were attending an institution in the United States, while 31 (19.5%) indicated that they were attending an institution in Canada. A total of 25 U.S. states and 5 Canadian provinces were represented among participants in terms of where they reported currently living. The majority of participants indicated that they live in urban (40.9%) or suburban (39.0%) areas, with an additional 17.6% living in rural areas, and 2.5% indicating other or unknown. A minority of participants (5.4%) indicated that they were currently

international students. When all participants were asked in what country they were primarily raised, 118 indicated the U.S. (74.2%), 26 indicated Canada (16.4%), 8 (or 5.0%) indicated other countries, and 7 did not respond (4.4%). When asked about religious identification, 27.0% selected "Agnostic," followed by 23.3% "Atheist," 14.5% "Other," 13.2% "Catholic," 13.2% "Other Christian," 3.1% "Wicca, Faery, Earth, or Goddess," 2.5% "Buddhist," 1.3% "Jewish," 0.6% "Muslim," and 0.6% "Hindu." One individual (0.6%) did not respond. When those who selected "Other" in response to this question were asked to specify, responses included "None" or "Non-identified" ($n = 7$), "Universal Unitarian" ($n = 5$), "Spiritual" ($n = 4$), "Undecided" or "Exploring" ($n = 3$), "New Age" ($n = 1$), "Non-denominational" ($n = 1$), and "Shaman" ($n = 1$).

In terms of disability status, 91.7% of the 156 respondents to this survey item indicated that they were able-bodied or had no known disabilities, 7.7% of item respondents indicated that they had mental/emotional disabilities, 1.9% reported physical disabilities, and 1.3% reported cognitive disabilities. Regarding HIV status, 147 or 92.5% of the 159 respondents to this item indicated that they are HIV Negative, while one or 0.6% indicated that they are HIV Positive, and 11 or 6.9% selected Unknown or Prefer Not to Disclose.

Both undergraduate and graduate students participated, with 126 (79.2%) identifying as undergraduate students and 33 (20.8%) identifying as graduate students. More specifically, the break-down in terms of current year in college/university was as follows: 3 (1.9%) first year undergraduate, 27 (17.0%) second year undergraduate, 38 (23.9%) third year undergraduate, 37 (23.3%) fourth year undergraduate, 21 (13.2%) fifth year or higher undergraduate, 11 (6.9%) first year graduate, 13 (8.2%) second year

graduate, 3 (1.9%) third year graduate, 4 (2.5%) fourth year graduate, and 2 (1.3%) fifth year or higher graduate. The majority of participants described the institution they were attending as a university (81.1%), as public (62.9%) rather than private (20.8%), and as co-ed (54.1%) rather than all male (0%) or all female (0.1%).   Other institution descriptors included religiously affiliated (5.7%), technical (1.9%), community or junior college (0.6%), agricultural (0.6%), historically black (0.6%), and other (4.4%; e.g., professional, liberal arts, nonprofit, etc.). Note that participants were able to select as many institution descriptors as applicable.

When asked whether they were currently in a same-sex relationship, 75 (47.2%) indicated "Yes", and 84 (52.8%) indicated "No." For participants who had been in one or more relationships, the approximate length of their current or most recent relationship ranged from less than one month to 8 years.

Sampling Procedures

Participants were recruited for this research study in the summer of 2011 via electronic mailing lists of various gay- and lesbian-related groups, organizations, and university centers across the United States and Canada. An e-mail was sent to the administrators of these groups and organizations describing the study and asking that they forward the recruitment e-mail to members of their electronic mailing lists. Copies of the recruitment e-mail can be found in Appendix A of this report. Requirements for participation included a minimum age of 18 years, self-identification as gay or lesbian, and current enrolment in a college or university in the United States or Canada. Respondents who did not report that they met these requirements were not provided access to the survey by the webserver on which it was hosted. No compensation was

provided for participation in the study. Efforts were made to obtain data from a diverse sample, such as by specifying in the recruitment e-mail that it is important to get a representative sample of gay and lesbian college/university students and requesting help from recipients in obtaining this goal, contacting groups in different geographic areas across the United States and Canada, and contacting college/university-based LGBT groups for students of color.

The survey used in this study was hosted on an online survey website. All data transfer was protected with encryption technology. The survey did not ask for any identifying information and even the researcher did not have access to information that could identify participants. The IP addresses of participants was not used to identify them or traced to their computers. Therefore, the collection of data for this study was not a risk to the confidentiality of participants. Participants who were concerned about their privacy from other users of their computer were prompted to close their browsers and clear their computer's history to prevent other users from viewing the website they visited or the content of their responses.

Even as far back as 2001, Harris Interactive (as cited by Riggle, Ristosky, & Reedy, 2005) estimated that two-thirds of the American adult population had access to the internet. While adults over the age of 65 are less likely to have access to the internet than other demographic groups, this was not the target population of the current study. In 2002, Greenspan (as cited by Riggle et al., 2005) reported that other demographic groups such as men, women, African Americans, and Hispanics, have been found to use the internet proportionate to their population, and individuals with more education are among the most likely to have access to the internet. Research also suggests that LGBT

individuals have at least proportionate access to the internet and may even use the

internet in greater numbers than non-LGBT individuals (Riggle et al., 2005). With the

internet currently being commonplace on college campuses in North America, the vast

majority of college students today have access to the internet either at home, at school, or

elsewhere, and most are experienced internet users (Jones, Johnson-Yale, Millermaier, &

Perez, 2009). Given that the target population for the current study was gay and lesbian

college students, an online survey was determined to be a practical and convenient

method of data collection with the potential to reach a diverse sample of participants.

Because confidentiality and anonymity are important issues in LGBT research (Riggle et

al., 2005), it was presumed that an online methodology may be the most likely to reach

potential participants who may be concerned about the risk of exposure. An alternative

interview or paper-and-pencil survey format would require some degree of visibility and

would presumably be less likely to reach more "closeted" gay and lesbian individuals.

All participants in the current study were required to provide informed consent

prior to completing the survey in accordance with the ethical requirements of the

American Psychological Association. A copy of the informed consent form can be found

in Appendix B of this report. This project was approved by the IRB of Wright State

University prior to the initiation of recruitment and data collection.

Measures

A survey was created by this researcher for the purpose of this study based on the

literature review of various aspects of dating and intimate relationships relevant to gay

and lesbian college students. This survey, which can be found in Appendix C of this

report, is a multiple-item self-report questionnaire designed to obtain both quantitative

and qualitative data from participants in the areas of study. Both closed- and open-ended questions were used in order to obtain direct feedback from participants about their experiences while maximizing the amount of data and facilitating both data collection and analysis. Participants were also asked to respond to a series of demographic questions at the beginning of the survey. Including the consent and demographic questions, the survey contained a total of 77 questions. Skip logic was utilized at certain points on the online survey so that participants were automatically directed to or skipped past follow-up questions that did not apply to them based on their responses.

<div align="center">

Results

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Participants' responses to the online survey items were transferred to statistical analysis software for analysis. Various statistical analyses were performed with the usable data from 159 participants. Results from both quantitative and qualitative analyses are presented below under the subheadings in which they were discussed in the literature review.

Contextual Factors

Oppressive climate. Participants rated the campus climate at their colleges/universities for gay and lesbian students on a four-point scale from 1 (Highly unsatisfactory) to 4 (Highly satisfactory). Ratings across all 159 participants ranged from 1 to 4, with a mean of 3.18, a median and mode of 3.00, and a standard deviation of 0.67. Ratings of the sensitivity of participants' colleges/universities to the needs of gay and lesbian college students ranged from 1 (Highly insensitive) to 4 (Highly sensitive). The mean rating for this variable across 158 valid responses was also 3.18, with a median and mode of 3.00, and a standard deviation of 0.71. The frequency and percentage of

responses to these two questions among all respondents and based on the sexual

orientation of respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Frequency and Percentage of Respondents' Ratings of Campus Climate and Sensitivity to

the Needs of Gay and Lesbian Students

Survey Item & Response	Overall		Gay		Lesbian	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Q: How would you rate the campus climate at your current college/university for gay and lesbian students?						
1 – Highly unsatisfactory	1	0.6	1	1.3	0	
2 – Somewhat unsatisfactory	21	13.2	7	8.9	14	17.5
3 – Somewhat satisfactory	85	53.5	47	59.5	38	47.5
4 – Highly satisfactory	52	32.7	24	30.4	28	35.0
Total Number Respondents	159		79		80	
Q: How sensitive do you feel your current college/university is to the needs of gay and lesbian students?						
1 – Highly insensitive	4	2.5	2	2.6	2	2.5
2 – Somewhat insensitive	16	10.1	8	10.3	8	10.0
3 – Somewhat sensitive	85	53.8	42	53.8	43	53.8
4 – Highly sensitive	53	33.5	26	33.3	27	33.8
Total Number Respondents	159		78		80	

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that there was no significant

difference between the ratings of gay versus lesbian participants on either of these two

survey items, nor was there a difference on either item between respondents enrolled in

colleges/universities in the United States compared to Canada or between respondents

who identified as White/Caucasian only compared to respondents who reported other

racial identifications. Significant differences were found on both of these questions

based on the type of area in which respondents live (i.e., urban, suburban, or rural, with

other/unknown being excluded due limited representation and lack of variance). A one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference between respondents living in urban, suburban, and rural areas on their perceptions of the campus climate for gay and lesbian students at their colleges/universities ($F(2, 152) = 4.30, p = .015$). A Tukey post-hoc test revealed that ratings of campus climate were statistically significantly higher (i.e., more positive) among respondents living in urban areas ($3.37 \pm .575, p = .018$) than those living in suburban areas ($3.05 \pm .711$), but that no other differences on this item based on type of area were statistically significant. To examine differences on ratings of perceived sensitivity of colleges/universities to the needs of gay and lesbian students based on type of area, the Welch test was used due to violation of the assumption of homogeneity of variances. The Welch ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference between the ratings on this item of respondents living in urban, suburban, and rural areas ($F*(2,70.74) = 5.55, p = .006$). A Tukey post-hoc test revealed that ratings of perceived college/university sensitivity to the needs of gay and lesbian students were statistically significantly higher (i.e., more positive) among respondents living in urban areas ($3.38 \pm .578$) compared to those living in suburban areas ($3.08 \pm .836, p = .043$) and rural areas ($2.96 \pm .649, p = .026$), but that the difference between suburban and rural groups was not statistically significant ($p = .749$).

Participants were asked to indicate in an open-ended format the ways in which factors associated with societal oppression have impacted their same-sex relationships. This qualitative data was analyzed by grouping responses into themes. These included the stress of being part of multiple oppressed groups ($n = 3$), having to hide the relationship ($n = 10$), experiencing a lack of role models ($n = 1$) and limited support for

the relationship ($n = 2$), feeling that the relationship is not regarded as legitimate or is viewed as inferior to heterosexual relationships ($n = 4$), and feeling inaccurately stereotyped ($n = 1$). One respondent noted that the couple's children do and will face overt and covert discrimination ($n = 1$).

Also in response to this item, many participants noted safety concerns in public ($n = 7$), and the need to be cautious and vigilant of one's surroundings, behaviors, and verbal disclosures ($n = 10$). Some reported that they had been threatened with violence ($n = 1$), had been kicked out of public establishments for holding hands with or kissing a partner ($n = 2$), and experience microaggressions ($n = 1$), unwanted attention because of being "different" as a couple ($n = 2$), inappropriate sexual propositions when out with a partner ($n = 1$), and various other forms of harassment (e.g., stares, verbal insults, yelling, things being thrown at them, stalking, etc.) when together in public ($n = 13$). Many indicated that they feel the need to limit or avoid public displays of affection due to fear ($n = 29$), and some stated that they feel they cannot acknowledge a partner in public ($n = 3$). Some respondents indicated that societal oppression delayed or limited their experience with same-sex relationships ($n = 3$) due to difficulty in coming out ($n = 3$), finding potential dating partners ($n = 2$), approaching individuals of interest ($n = 2$), and because a same-sex relationship would be unacceptable to family or others ($n = 1$). Many reported that oppression led to family-related problems in their same-sex relationships, including the relationship being dismissed by family members ($n = 2$), not being known or acknowledged by a partner's family ($n = 4$), being excluded from a partner's family or family events ($n = 3$), family members trying to separate the couple ($n = 2$), discomfort or not being allowed to "act gay" around family ($n = 3$), hurtful comments from family

members ($n = 1$), and preferential treatment for the heterosexual relationships of siblings ($n = 1$). Some reported the loss of relationships with friends and family members due to homophobia ($n = 2$), being hurt by even seemingly supportive others who do not understand what it is like to be in a same-sex relationship ($n = 1$), and feeling like an outcast and excluded from social activities with others ($n = 1$). Some noted feeling hurt when one's partner does not feel comfortable identifying as non-heterosexual due to fear of others' reactions ($n = 2$), and some experienced conflict in the relationship associated with different levels of "outness" ($n = 2$). Some respondents indicated that they experienced a sense of shame or guilt due to oppressive societal messages ($n = 3$), or held erroneous beliefs that one cannot be happy in a same-sex relationship due to such messages ($n = 1$).

Also in response to this question, some participants noted that homophobia is a primary source of stress and tension in the relationship ($n = 1$), and that factors associated with societal oppression lead to conflict between partners ($n = 1$). Some noted that societal oppression led to the end of the relationship ($n = 2$), and, in one case, the suicide of a partner ($n = 1$). Respondents cited a variety of feelings or internal experiences related to the impact of societal oppression, including stress ($n = 3$), anxiety ($n = 3$), lack of self-confidence ($n = 3$), frustration ($n = 1$), anger toward society ($n = 1$), a feeling of being limited by oppressive forces ($n = 4$) or of things being more difficult ($n = 9$), and fear of negative responses from others (e.g., judgment, rejection, disapproval from important others, ridicule, threats to physical safety, etc.) ($n = 10$).

Additionally, many respondents to this question mentioned issues related to rights, including limited or lack of rights for the relationship ($n = 4$), limited options for

marriage ($n = 9$), experiencing financial disadvantage due to the inability to secure the

legal benefits that marriage would provide ($n = 3$), discontent with the individuals' and

couple's rights to equality being openly debated ($n = 1$), and having to figure out complex

legal issues (e.g., where to get married, what will happen if one partner gets hurt,

insurance coverage, adoption, legal parental status of children, etc.) ($n = 5$). Because of

these issues, some stated that they experience stress about the future ($n = 1$) or they need

to consider the different rights in different locations when determining where to live as a

couple ($n = 1$). Others noted dealing with the consequences of institutional

discrimination (e.g., couple kicked out of a religiously affiliated school) ($n = 1$), facing

discrimination in the workplace or having to hide one's relationship at work for fear of

losing employment due to a homophobic employer ($n = 2$), or fearing the loss of one's

housing for living with a same-sex intimate partner ($n = 1$). One respondent noted that

such inequality led them to become involved in politics ($n = 1$).

Some participants responded to this question by stating more generally that they

personally and/or their same-sex relationships have been impacted and in some cases

significantly impacted by various forms of societal oppression ($n = 10$). Others stated

that they have not personally experienced much oppression regarding their same-sex

relationships ($n = 7$), or that, whether or not they have experienced societal oppression,

their relationships have not been impacted by it ($n = 3$). Some stated that they felt this

was because they have had few, or only short-term same-sex relationships thus far ($n = 5$), or because they live in more accepting areas ($n = 2$). Another participant stated that

they were unsure if or how societal oppression had impacted their same-sex relationships

(*n* = 1). One positive impact was noted, which was that the couple developed a sense of

solidarity over the common oppressed status (*n* = 1).

Mental health. Participants rated the degree to which they feel that mental health

issues have impacted their relationships on a four-point scale from 1 (No impact) to 4

(Significant impact). Among the 134 valid responses, ratings ranged from 1 to 4, with a

mean of 2.45, a median of 2.5, a mode of 3, and a standard deviation of 1.05. The

frequency and percentage of responses to this survey item among all respondents and

based on the sexual orientation of respondents are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Frequency and Percentage of Respondents Reporting Varying Degrees of Mental Health

Impact on Their Relationship(s)

	Overall		Gay		Lesbian	
Survey Response	n	%	n	%	n	%
1 – No impact	32	23.9	21	32.3	11	15.9
2 – Little impact	35	26.1	18	27.7	17	24.6
3 – Moderate impact	42	31.3	18	27.7	24	34.8
4 – Significant impact	25	18.7	8	12.3	17	24.6
Total Number Respondents	134		65		69	

Several participants provided additional comments related to this item, many of

which specified the mental health issues that respondents and/or their current or past

same-sex partners experienced and, in some cases, how those issues impacted the

relationship. In terms of types of mental health issues, comments made reference to

diagnosable mental disorders such as depression (*n* = 21), bipolar disorder (*n* = 9),

anxiety (*n* = 9), substance abuse or dependence (*n* = 6), eating disorders (*n* = 3),

obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) ($n = 1$), post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) ($n = 1$), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) ($n = 1$), antisocial personality disorder ($n = 1$), and borderline personality disorder ($n = 1$). Some also made reference to suicidal thoughts or attempts ($n = 2$), a partner committing suicide following bullying ($n = 1$), self-injury ($n = 1$), past sexual assault or trauma ($n = 4$), abuse ($n = 7$), or other trauma ($n = 2$). Some comments referred to other mental health-related difficulties such as problems with anger ($n = 1$), paranoia ($n = 1$), opening up to others ($n = 2$), physical intimacy ($n = 3$), insecure attachment ($n = 1$), trust ($n = 2$), and self-esteem or self-worth ($n = 3$). Some respondents noted that the mental health issues they or their partners experienced were well managed through medication or others means ($n = 7$), while others made broad reference to the idea that mental health issues in their same-sex relationships "complicated" or strained the relationships, made them more difficult, had a negative impact, or otherwise created obstacles ($n = 10$). Some specified that these issues led to relapses in one another's mental health disorders ($n = 1$), termination of the relationship ($n = 2$), prolonging an unhealthy relationship ($n = 1$), feelings of needing to "protect" one's partner from stress to prevent relapse ($n = 2$), pressure to "get over it" and consequently self-hate and resentment of one's partner ($n = 1$), feelings of frustration ($n = 1$), fearfulness or difficulty trusting others following abuse ($n = 4$), decreased sex drive or other problems with physical intimacy ($n = 4$), sexual promiscuity ($n = 1$), and difficulty expressing emotions or relating and connecting openly ($n = 4$), or understanding a partner's difficulties or pain ($n = 2$). One respondent expressed feelings about the association between mental illness and harassment or stigma related to sexual orientation, in addition to other trauma experienced in one's life, as well as the importance of

recognizing how one's past is affecting one's relationship and what may still be needed to heal and recover.

Diversity. Participants indicated whether or not they have dated or been in an intimate relationship with someone who does not share their race/ethnicity, disability status, age (greater than 10 years difference), religious identification, socioeconomic status, or nationality. Of the 159 participants, 110 (69.2%) responded "Yes" to this item, while 49 (30.8%) responded "No." Those who responded "Yes" were asked to select from a list of differences all of those that applied to their current or past relationships. From the overall sample of 159 participants, 71 (44.7%) indicated that "Differences in Religious identification" applied to their current or past relationships, 70 (44.0%) endorsed "Differences in Race/Ethnicity," 57 (35.8%) endorsed "Differences in socioeconomic status," 28 (17.6%) endorsed "Differences in Nationality," 13 (8.2%) endorsed "Differences in Disability status," 13 (8.2%) endorsed "Differences in Age (greater than 10 years difference," and 3 (1.9%) selected "Other." Those who selected "Other" were asked to specify, and indicated differences in sexuality ($n = 2$) and differences in educational background ($n = 1$).

A one-way ANOVA examined whether there is a difference in participants' ratings of difficulty meeting potential partners based on disability status. No significant difference was found on these ratings between participants who identified as able-bodied or had no known disability and those who reported having one or more disabilities (including physical, cognitive, mental/emotional, or other). These analyses were also conducted based on type of disability. No significant differences were found on ratings of difficulty meeting potential partners between those reporting physical disabilities and

those not reported such disabilities, or between those reporting mental/emotional disabilities and those not reporting such disabilities. Too few respondents reported cognitive disabilities to run further analysis.

Several one-way ANOVAs were performed to examine differences in outness and experience with same-sex dating between participants whose racial self-identification was White/Caucasian only and those who reported other racial identifications (i.e., Black or African American, Asian or Asian American, Hispanic or Lantino/Latnia, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native, Biracial, Mixed Race, or Other). No significant differences were found between these two groups with regards to the age at which they first disclosed their sexual orientation to another individual, approximate number of same-sex relationships prior to college/university or since college/university, or the degree to which they are currently out to coworkers, neighbors, members of their church or religious community, or close LGBT friends. However, statistically significant differences were found between self-identified White/Caucasian only respondents and those with other racial identifications with regards to age of first experience with same-sex dating ($F(1,154) = 6.669$, $p = .011$), and degree of outness to immediate family ($F(1,157) = 4.194$, $p = .042$), extended family ($F(1,156) = 8.531$, $p = .004$), and close straight friends ($F^*(1,49.847) = 5.452$, $p = .024$). The 118 respondents who self-identified as single race White/Caucasian had their first experience with same-sex dating at a statistically significantly later age ($M = 17.85$ years, $SD = 3.648$) than the 38 respondents who reported other racial identifications ($M = 15.87$ years, $SD = 5.308$). White/Caucasian only respondents reported currently being "out" to a greater degree than respondents with other racial self-identifications to immediate family,

extended family, and close straight friends. Means and standard deviations for

participant responses to "outness" items are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Summary of Means and Standard Deviations for Ratings of Outness to Various Groups

As a Function of Race

Item: Out to…	Overall		White/Caucasian Only		Other Racial Identification	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Close LGBT friends	3.94	.312	3.93	.335	3.95	.226
Close straight friends	3.68	.619	3.76*	.550	3.45*	.760
Immediate family	3.23	1.086	3.33*	1.060	2.92*	1.124
Coworkers	2.80	1.272	2.88	1.262	2.55	1.288
Extended family	2.28	1.082	2.42*	1.074	1.84*	1.001
Neighbors	1.94	1.325	1.98	1.313	1.82	1.373
Members of Church/ Religious Community	.84	1.266	.86	1.337	.79	1.018

Note. Ratings are based on a scale in which 1 = None, 2 = Some, 3 = Most, and 4 = All.
Comparisons of means were conducted between White/Caucasian Only and Other Racial
Identification groups of respondents.
*$p < .05$

Dating

Participants were asked to list their top three reasons for dating. The most

commonly cited responses, which appeared with frequencies of five or greater, were

categorized as "friendship/companionship" (*n* = 58), "to find a potential partner" (*n* =

49), "fun/enjoyment" (*n* = 32), "physical intimacy/sex" (*n* = 32), "emotional intimacy" (*n*

= 28), "love" (*n* = 27), and "connection with another person" (*n* = 27). Other common

but less frequently cited response categories included "growth/learning about self and

others" (*n* = 16), "avoid loneliness" (*n* = 14), "socialize/meet new people" (*n* = 13), "happiness/fulfillment" (*n* = 9), "attraction" (*n* = 8), and "security/stability" (*n* = 7).

Qualities sought in potential partners. Similar qualitative analyses were conducted on participants' responses to a question regarding the top three qualities they seek in potential dating partners. The most common responses, cited by five or more respondents, were categorized as "sense of humor/funny" (*n* = 53), "intelligence" (*n* = 51), "attractive (physically or otherwise)" (*n* = 43), "kindness/good heart" (*n* = 35), "personality" (*n* = 24), "honesty" (*n* = 23), "loyalty" (*n* = 15), "trustworthiness" (*n* = 13), "similar interests" (*n* = 10), "fun" (*n* = 9), "drive/ambition" (*n* = 8), "communication" (*n* = 7), "open-mindedness" (*n* = 7), "confidence" (*n* = 6), and "outgoing" (*n* = 5).

Meeting potential partners. Participants rated how easy or difficult it is for them to meet potential dating partners on a scale of 1 (Very easy) to 4 (Very difficult). Among the 135 valid responses, ratings ranged from 1 to 4, with a mean of 2.72, a median and mode of 3.00, and a standard deviation of 0.90. No significant difference was found between the ratings on this item of gay compared to lesbian respondents (*p* = .516). A visual comparison of rating means on this item between participants who live in different types of areas suggests a trend in which those living in urban areas reported the least difficulty in meeting potential dating partners (*M* = 2.63), followed by those living in suburban areas (*M* = 2.75), then those living in rural areas (*M* = 2.87). However, an ANOVA found no significant difference (*p* = .681).

Participants were also asked an open-ended question about where/how they typically meet potential dating partners. Qualitative data was analyzed by grouping responses into themes, which are displayed with frequencies in Table 4.

Table 4

Thematic Categories for Where/How Participants Meet Potential Dating Partners

Response Theme	Frequency
Through Friends	69
School[a]	52
Internet	40
Extracurriculars[b]	21
Bars/Nightclubs	15
Parties/Social Gatherings	10
LGBT Organizations/Functions	10
Work/Professional Activities	8
None-specific	7
Other Social Settings	6
In the Community	3
Church	1

[a]Example responses include on campus, in class, at campus activities/events, etc..
[b]Example responses include clubs, other student organizations, volunteering, sports teams, activist involvement, etc.

Dating scripts. Participants were asked to indicate whether they expect that there will be sexual contact on a typical first date. Of the 134 participants who responded to this question, 88 (65.7%) indicated "No," 31 (23.1%) indicated "Unsure," and 15 (11.2%) indicated "Yes." While the majority of both gay ($n = 42$) and lesbian ($n = 46$) participants indicated on this survey item that they do not expect sexual contact on a typical first date, a significantly greater proportion of gay ($n = 13$) than lesbian participants ($n = 2$) indicated that they do expect sexual contact on a typical first date ($F(1,132) = 9.345$, $p = .003$). No significant difference was found in participants' responses to this item based on their current year in college/university.

Another survey item asked whether participants are most often friends with someone before dating or beginning a relationship with them. Among the 133 respondents to this question, 81 (60.9%) indicated "Yes" and 52 (39.1%) indicated "No."

A 2 × 2 contingency table revealed a statistically significant association between participants' responses to this item and their identified sexual orientation, χ^2 (1, $N = 133$) = 9.317, $p = .002$). A significantly greater proportion of lesbian respondents ($n = 50$ or 73.5%) than gay respondents ($n = 31$ or 47.7%) indicated that they are most often friends with someone before dating or beginning a relationship with them.

Participants were also asked to select among three options (Friendship, Romance, or Sexually explicit), that which best describes their typical pattern of dating or relationship formation, with the option of selecting more than one descriptor if equally typical for them. A total of 133 participants responded to this question. The majority ($n = 104$ or 78.2% of respondents) selected "Friendship," 85 (63.9%) selected "Romance," and 38 (28.6%) selected "Sexually explicit." A large number of participants (76 or 57.1% of item respondents) selected more than one type of dating or relationship formation pattern as equally typical for them. No significant differences were found based on sexual orientation.

Problems in "casual" and "involved" dating. Participants were asked to list the top three problems they tend to encounter when casually dating and the top three problems they tend to encounter when in a committed relationship. Qualitative data was analyzed by categorizing responses into themes, which are displayed with frequencies in Table 5. Due to the large number of response themes, only those with frequencies of five or greater are included in Table 5.

Table 5

Thematic Categories for Top Three Problems Encountered in Relationships

Response Theme	Frequency
Q: When CASUALLY DATING, what do you feel are the top three problems that you tend to encounter?	
Differences in Desired Commitment	38
Communication Difficulties	25
Differing Sexual Expectations	20
Lack of Compatibility/Connection	18
Differences in Strength of Feelings/Attachment	18
Ambiguity	15
Lack of Shared Interests	14
Personality Issues	14
Lack of Time	14
Lack/Loss of Interest	13
Dishonesty/Insincerity	12
Other Sex-Related Problems	12
Differing Priorities/Expectations	12
Jealousy	11
Anxiety/Worry/Lack of Confidence	9
Awkwardness/Discomfort	7
Moves Too Quickly	7
Poor Chemistry	6
Superficial/Lack of Depth	6
Lack of Physical Attraction	5
Difficulty Finding Dating Partners	5
Q: When in a COMMITTED RELATIONSHIP, what do you feel are the top three problems that you tend to encounter?	
Communication Issues	44
Time Together (Too Much/Too Little)	25
Sex-Related Problems	24
Commitment Issues	20
Jealousy	19
Boredom/Monotony	19
Trust Issues	18
Insecurities/Worries/Doubt	17
Lack of Compatibility	11
Conflict About Level of "Outness"	10
Different needs/wants/goals	10
Family-Related Issues	9
Infidelity	9
Long-Distance	8

Financial Problems	7
Conflict & Conflict Management	6
Dishonesty	6
Personality Differences	6
Societal Oppression	6
Minor Everyday Problems/Annoyances	5
Enmeshment/Loss of Self	5
Emotional Distance/Disengagement	5

Committed Relationships

Responses to the question of whether or not participants are currently in a same-sex relationship were compared based on sexual orientation. Among the 80 lesbian respondents, 43 (53.8%) indicated "Yes" and 38 (47.5%) indicated "No." Among the 79 gay male participants, 33 (41.8%) indicated "Yes" and 46 (58.2%) indicated "No." No significant difference was found in responses to this item based on sexual orientation. Participants were also asked to indicate approximately how many intimate relationships they have had (not including casual sex partners) both prior to college/university and since being in college/university, and how many of those relationships were same-sex. This data is presented in Table 6. For prior to college/university, the reported number of overall relationships ranged from 0 to 19 ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 2.567$, mode = 0) and the reported number of same-sex relationships ranged from 0 to 12 ($M = 1.06$, $SD = 1.706$, mode = 0). For since being in college/university, the reported number of overall relationships ranged from 0 to 10 ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 1.853$, mode = 1) and the reported number of same-sex relationships ranged from 0 to 8 ($M = 1.92$, $SD = 1.518$, mode = 1).

Table 6

Frequency and Percentage of Respondents Reporting Number of Relationships

Reported Number of Relationships	Prior to College/University		Since Being in College/University	
	Overall *n* (%)	**Same-Sex** *n* (%)	**Overall** *n* (%)	**Same-Sex** *n* (%)
0	45 (29.0)	81 (52.6)	15 (9.4)	17 (10.9)
1	32 (20.6)	34 (22.1)	47 (29.6)	58 (37.2)
2	28 (18.1)	18 (11.7)	42 (26.4)	42 (26.9)
3	15 (9.7)	8 (5.2)	25 (15.7)	18 (11.5)
4	12 (7.7)	7 (4.5)	12 (7.5)	11 (7.1)
5	11 (7.1)	2 (1.3)	7 (4.4)	4 (2.6)
6	4 (2.6)	2 (1.3)	5 (3.1)	3 (1.9)
7	1 (0.6)	0	2 (1.3)	2 (1.3)
8	2 (1.3)	1 (0.6)	2 (1.3)	1 (0.6)
9	4 (2.6)	0	1 (0.6)	0
10+	1 (0.6)	1 (0.6)	1 (0.6)	0
Total Number Respondents	155	154	159	156

Lack of models. In response to a survey item asking participants to rate the level of exposure they have had to models of successful same-sex intimate relationships on a scale of 1 (Very low) to 4 (Very high), ratings from 135 valid responses ranged from 1 to 4, with a mean of 2.20, a median and mode of 2.00, and a standard deviation of 0.82. No differences were found in ratings based on the type of area in which respondents live (i.e., urban, suburban, rural, other/unknown) or by comparing the responses of gay and lesbian participants.

Several respondents also provided additional comments related to the question of level of exposure to models of successful same-sex intimate relationships. These included comments about having little exposure in one's life to role models of successful same-sex as well as opposite-sex partnerships ($n = 1$), finding that the same-sex couples they know are not positive models of such relationships ($n = 2$), not knowing any gay or lesbian individuals prior to college or adulthood and still not knowing any in successful relationships ($n = 2$), some not knowing anyone in same-sex relationships at all ($n = 2$), and others not having any exposure to models of such relationships until recently ($n = 4$). Some noted that their level of exposure to same-sex couples increased when they came out themselves ($n = 2$). Some respondents made reference to models of successful same-sex relationships among their LGBT friends ($n = 7$), family members ($n = 6$), mentors (e.g., teachers) ($n = 2$), LGBT staff members on their college campus ($n = 1$), neighbors ($n = 1$), family friends ($n = 1$), or that they met through volunteering ($n = 1$), work ($n = 1$), or church ($n = 2$). Some stated that they are immersed in the LGBT community and see a lot of successful same-sex couples ($n = 2$). Others noted that they had a high level of exposure to models of successful same-sex relationships because they actively seek out such models ($n = 2$), or because they lived in metropolitan areas where there was greater visibility of same-sex couples ($n = 1$). Regarding models of same-sex intimate relationships in the media, some respondents made reference to seeing examples of such couples on television shows ($n = 4$), in documentaries or other movies ($n = 2$), on the internet ($n = 1$), and in literature ($n = 2$). Some stated that exposure to successful same-sex couples or same-sex couples at all in the media was limited during their childhood ($n = 3$), with some noting that the level of media exposure has greatly increased since that

time (n = 1), though others stated that media portrayals of same-sex couples generally

continue to be negative (e.g., unstable, stereotypical) (n = 3). Some commented that the

media is beginning to show more positive representations of gay families and

relationships, but that most "are a joke" (n = 1). Several respondents made specific

reference to Ellen DeGeneres and Portia de Rossi as positive models of successful same-

sex relationships in the media (n = 4).

A follow-up question in the survey asked whether participants feel that the level

of exposure they have had to successful models of same-sex intimate relationships has

impacted their relationships. Of the 133 participants who responded to this question, 57

(42.9%) indicated "Unsure," 39 (29.3%) indicated "Yes," 37 (27.8%) indicated "No."

There was no significant difference in the way that participants responded to this item

based on the number of same-sex relationships they have had, the number of relationships

they have had overall, or the amount of exposure they had to role models of successful

same-sex intimate relationships. Some respondents provided additional comments

related to this question. Some commented that limited exposure to models of same-sex

intimate relationships contributed to discomfort with their sexuality (n = 1), confusion (n

= 1), and difficulty developing higher aspirations (n = 1). Others noted that they feel

uncertain about how to act in relationships, but that they believe this is related to their

own insecurities rather than a lack of exposure to models (n = 1). Some respondents

stated that they were able to determine what they wanted their same-sex relationship to

look like based on the negative and positive aspects of whatever relationship models were

available, even if they were heterosexual relationships (n = 1). Others noted that they

learned more about relationships from their own experiences than from models of

relationships (*n* = 1). Some respondents who were exposed to models of successful same-sex relationships commented broadly that this exposure had a positive effect (*n* = 1), or more specifically that it gave them hope (*n* = 2), let them know that LGBTQ relationships are possible and healthy (*n* = 1), influenced their decision about the type of relationship in which they would like to be involved (*n* = 1), increased their confidence (*n* = 1), provided them with someone with whom to relate (*n* = 1), taught them not to hold back in love (*n* = 1), and showed them what lifestyles are possible and that they can make a life outside of the norm if it suits them (*n* = 1).

Social support. One multiple-item survey question asked participants to rate the level of support they feel they receive for their same-sex intimate relationships from various sources (Family, Friends, Groups or organizations to which they belong, Society) on a scale of 1 (Very low) to 4 (Very high). Missing and "N/A" responses were excluded from the analyses. In terms of support from Family, ratings from the 121 valid responses ranged from 1 to 4, with a mean of 2.63, a median and mode of 3.00, and a standard deviation of 1.10. With regards to support from Friends, ratings from the 130 valid responses ranged from 2 to 4, with a mean of 3.74, a median and mode of 4.00, and a standard deviation of 0.51. When asked about support from Groups or Organizations to which participants belong, ratings from the 117 valid responses ranged from 2 to 4, with a mean of 3.46, a median and mode of 4.00, and a standard deviation of 0.65. Finally, concerning support from Society, ratings from the 125 valid responses ranged from 1 to 4, with a mean of 2.03, a median and mode of 2.00, and a standard deviation of 0.63. The frequency and percentage of responses to this question among all respondents and based on the sexual orientation of respondents are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Frequency and Percentage of Respondents' Ratings of Support for Their Same-Sex

Intimate Relationships From Various Sources

Item: Level of support from…	Overall		Gay		Lesbian	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Family						
1 – Very low	28	23.1	17	30.4	11	16.9
2 – Somewhat low	19	15.7	10	17.9	9	13.8
3 – Somewhat high	44	36.4	18	32.1	26	40.0
4 – Very high	30	24.8	11	19.6	19	29.2
Total Number Respondents	121		56		65	
Friends						
1 – Very low	0		0		0	
2 – Somewhat low	4	3.1	1	1.6	3	4.5
3 – Somewhat high	26	20.0	13	20.6	13	19.4
4 – Very high	100	76.9	49	77.8	51	76.1
Total Number Respondents	130		63		67	
Groups or organizations to which you belong						
1 – Very low	0		0		0	
2 – Somewhat low	10	8.5	6	10.5	4	6.7
3 – Somewhat high	43	36.8	18	31.6	25	41.7
4 – Very high	64	54.7	33	57.9	31	51.7
Total Number Respondents	117		57		60	
Society						
1 – Very low	22	17.6	8	13.6	14	21.2
2 – Somewhat low	78	62.4	37	62.7	41	62.1
3 – Somewhat high	24	19.2	13	22.0	11	16.7
4 – Very high	1	0.8	1	1.7	0	
Total Number Respondents	125		59		66	

Note. N/A responses were excluded.

No statistically significant correlations were found at the .05 level between the

ratings presented in Table 7 and the age of respondents, although a marginally significant

negative correlation was found between age and perceived support from society ($r = -$

$.181, p = .054$). A one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference

between the ratings of gay and lesbian respondents on perceived support from family only ($F(1, 119) = 4.207$, $p = .042$), with lesbian respondents reporting higher levels of perceived support from family ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 1.044$) than gay male respondents ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 1.125$). No significant correlation was found between ratings of perceived support from family and ratings of relationship satisfaction for participants currently in same-sex relationships.

Some respondents also provided comments regarding the level of support they feel they receive for their same-sex intimate relationships from the listed sources. Regarding support from family, some commented that their family does not agree with or affirm their gay identity and are not open to getting to know their same-sex partners ($n = 2$), others stated that their family has a "no comment" policy regarding such issues ($n = 1$), others reported feeling very supported by family ($n = 2$), while others noted differences between the level of support received from different family members ($n = 1$) or from their family in comparison to their partner's family ($n = 1$). Still others commented that their family has not seen them in a same-sex relationship and that they are uncertain as to how supportive they would be ($n = 2$). Regarding support from friends, various respondents noted that their friends were highly supportive ($n = 2$) or would not be their friends ($n = 1$), while others commented on differences in the level of support received from different friends or groups of friends ($n = 2$) and referred to religious reasons for the disapproval expressed by some friends or fears of some friends that the individual's relationship with his or her partner would be more important than the friendship. Regarding support from groups or organizations to which respondents belong, some comments made reference to feeling support by their cohort in their

academic program ($n = 1$), difficulties with their church ($n = 1$), and having to hide their

same-sex relationship from coworkers and employers due to homophobia in the

workplace ($n = 1$). Regarding support from society, several respondents noted that it

depends on geographic location ($n = 5$), while others noted that even in areas in which

same-sex marriage is legal and better protections for sexual minorities exist, they still feel

that they will be judged, ostracized, or hurt if they express their love for a same-sex

partner in public ($n = 1$). Some comments expressed belief and hope that societal

conditions for same-sex individuals and couples are slowly improving ($n = 1$), and others

noted that they find strength and their own voice through circumstances in which they are

denied support ($n = 2$).

An open-ended question was also included in the survey which asked participants

to indicate who their primary source of support is. Participants' responses to this item

were grouped by the researcher into categories for coding. While participants often cited

more than one person as their primary source of support, and some differentiated between

financial support (most often themselves) and emotional support, the most common

response was in the category of "friends" ($n = 76$). This included a best friend, a group of

friends, gay friends, straight friends, childhood friends, friends from college/university,

etc. The second most common category of responses was "family" ($n = 37$). Some

participants cited one or more specific family members, while others indicated family as

a whole. The third most common category was "partner" ($n = 20$), and the fourth most

common response was "self" ($n = 8$). Other categories of responses with three or fewer

responses in each included "helping professional" (e.g., therapist, LGBT graduate

assistant), "partner's family," "coworkers," "former partner," "classmates," "mentors,"

"church group," and "extracurricular group members." A one-way ANOVA found that, among respondents who reported currently being in a same-sex relationships, those who indicated that their partner was their primary source of support reported statistically significantly higher current same-sex relationship satisfaction than those who did not (F*(1,54.818) = 8.529, p =.005).

Coming out and being out. Participants were asked to rate how frequently they experience conflicts with their partner(s) regarding level of "outness" on a scale of 1 (Never) to 4 (Very often). Missing and "N/A" responses were excluded from the analysis. Among the 125 valid responses, ratings ranged from 1 to 4, with a mean of 2.01, a median and mode of 2.00, and a standard deviation of 0.88. The frequency and percentage of responses to this item among all respondents and based on the sexual orientation of respondents are presented in Table 8. No significant correlation was found between these ratings and the age of respondents, but a one-way ANOVA found a statistically significant difference among the ratings of respondents to this item based on the type of area in which they live (F (3,121) = 2.869, p = .039). Post hoc analysis indicated significant differences between the ratings of those living in suburban areas (M = 2.26, SD = .952) compared to those living in urban areas (M = 1.85, SD = .826), and compared to those living in rural areas (M = 1.78, SD = .671). No significant correlation was found between reported frequency of conflicts with one's partner about "outness" and ratings of relationship satisfaction.

Table 8

Frequency and Percentage of Respondents Reporting Varying Levels of Conflict With

Partners Regarding Level of "Outness"

Survey Response	Overall		Gay		Lesbian	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
1 – Never	37	29.6	15	25.4	22	33.3
2 – Occasionally	61	48.8	35	59.3	26	39.4
3 – Often	16	12.8	4	6.8	12	18.2
4 – Very often	11	8.8	5	8.5	6	9.1
Total Number Respondents (N/A excluded)	125		59		66	

Some participants provided additional comments related to the topic of conflict

with one's partner about level of "outness." These comments varied from references to

both partners being "out" to most people in their lives, both being "closeted," both

generally being "out" but disagreeing at times about how to act together in certain

situations or company (e.g., expressions of physical affection), a partner claiming to be

comfortable being "out" but not showing this through their actions, a partner viewing

themselves as straight and the other as gay, or one partner being "out" and the other being

less so or being "closeted." Some of the feelings expressed in these comments by

participants whose partners were less "out" ranged from acceptance and understanding to

feeling that their partner is ashamed or embarrassed of them or their relationship, that the

partner is not fighting for the relationship, or that they are not fully part of their partner's

life or do not fully know their partner because they are excluded from aspects of their

life. There was also some reference to pressuring one's partner to tell people before they

were ready. Some respondents commented that being "out" is important to them and that a partner being "closeted" is a deal breaker for them. Others noted that conflict about "outness" was the reason they broke up.

Relationship quality and satisfaction. In one survey item pertaining specifically to participants who identified as currently being in a relationship, participants were asked to rate their overall level of relationship satisfaction on a scale of 1 (Very low) to 4 (Very high). Missing and "N/A" responses were excluded from the analysis. Among the 65 valid responses, ratings ranged from 2 to 4, with a mean of 3.52, a median and mode of 4.00, and a standard deviation of 0.66. No significant correlation was found between ratings of relationship satisfaction and length of the relationship, nor was there a significant difference between the relationship satisfaction ratings of gay compared to lesbian respondents.

Some respondents made additional comments about their response to this item. Themes included references to wanting or planning to get married or spend their life with that partner ($n = 4$), difficulties related to long-distance ($n = 3$), planning to end the relationship soon ($n = 2$), satisfaction in some areas but not others ($n = 2$), the relationship in question being in the developing stages and satisfaction yet to be determined ($n = 2$), experiencing a decrease in satisfaction over time ($n = 1$), and experiencing a high level of satisfaction but ending the relationship due to differences in goals ($n = 1$).

Intimacy. There were several survey items concerning intimacy in committed relationships. One asked participants to rate the level of emotional intimacy between themselves and their current or most recent partner on a scale of 1 (Very low) to 4 (Very

high). Missing and "N/A" responses were excluded from the analysis. Among the 126

valid responses, ratings ranged from 1 to 4, with a mean of 3.25, a median of 3.00, a

mode of 4.00, and a standard deviation of 0.79. Response frequencies and percentages on

this item among all respondents and based on the sexual orientation of respondents are

presented in Table 9.

Table 9

Frequency and Percentage of Respondents' Ratings of Emotional Intimacy with Their

Current or Most Recent Partner

	Overall		Gay		Lesbian	
Survey Response	n	%	n	%	n	%
1 – Very low	2	1.6	1	1.6	1	1.5
2 – Somewhat low	21	16.7	12	19.7	9	13.8
3 – Somewhat high	46	36.5	27	44.3	19	29.2
4 – Very high	57	45.2	21	34.4	36	55.4
Total Number Respondents (N/A excluded)	126		61		65	

A one-way ANOVA found a marginally statistically significant difference

between the ratings on this item of gay as compared to lesbian respondents ($F(1, 124) =$

$3.760, p = .055$), with the emotional intimacy ratings of lesbian respondents ($M = 3.38$,

$SD = .784$) being higher than those of gay male respondents ($M = 3.11, SD = .777$).

Some respondents provided additional comments for this item. Themes included

references to one partner being more open or expressive than the other ($n = 3$), being best

friends with the partner in question ($n = 2$), finding that the emotional intimacy was

initially high but decreased towards the end of the relationship ($n = 1$), that the level of

emotional intimacy in the relationship in question was not typical of their other

relationships ($n = 1$), and expectations that the emotional intimacy in a developing

relationship will continue to increase ($n = 1$).

Another survey item asked participants to indicate whether they feel that they and

their current or most recent partner were overly enmeshed. Of the 132 participants who

responded to this question, the majority (96 respondents or 72.7%) indicated "No," 20

(15.2%) indicated "Yes," and 16 (12.1%) indicated "Unsure." A similar item asked

participants to indicate whether they feel that they and their current or most recent partner

were overly disengaged. Of the 133 participants who responded to this question, the

majority (90 respondents or 67.7%) indicated "No," 29 (21.8%) indicated "Yes," and 14

(10.5%) indicated "Unsure." No significant differences were found among the responses

of gay as compared to lesbian participants on either of these two items.

Sex. There were also several survey items related to sex and committed

relationships. One item asked participants to rate their level of sexual satisfaction with

their current or most recent partner (on a scale of 1= Very low to 4 = Very high).

Missing and "N/A" responses were excluded from the analysis. Among the 122 valid

responses to this item, ratings ranged from 1 to 4, with a mean of 2.99, a median and

mode of 3.00, and a standard deviation of 0.86. There were no significant differences in

ratings of sexual satisfaction when the responses of gay male participants were compared

to those of lesbian participants. No significant correlation was found between ratings of

sexual satisfaction and ratings of relationship satisfaction. Some respondents also

provided comments related to this item. These included references to great

communication, similar sexual interests, satisfaction with the sexual intimacy but desiring

more frequent sexual contact, differences in sex drive, shifts in sexual satisfaction at different times in the relationship, a decrease in initial sexual satisfaction over time, an imbalance in initiation of sexual contact or sexual satisfaction between partners, difficulties related to geographic distance or limited time for sexual contact, difficulty achieving orgasm, physical limitations (e.g., difficulty experiencing sensation or inability to engage in certain sexual acts), and difficulties related to recovery from past sexual trauma.

Another item asked participants to select from a list of options that which best approximates how frequently they engage in sexual activities with a partner (casual or committed). A total of 130 participants responded to this question. Among those responses, the descriptor that was most frequently selected was "Several times per week" (46 respondents, or 35.4%), followed by "Weekly" (31 respondents, or 23.8%), "Monthly" (18 respondents, or 13.8%), "A few times a year" (16 respondents, or 12.3%), "Biweekly" (11 respondents, or 8.5%), "Several times per day" (3 respondents, or 2.3%) and "Never" (3 respondents, or 2.3%), and finally "Daily" (2 respondents, or 1.5%). There were no significant differences between the responses to this item of gay male compared to lesbian participants, nor was there a significant correlation with the age of respondents. There was a statistically significant positive correlation between frequency of sexual activities and ratings of sexual satisfaction ($r = .233$, $p = .011$), which was also found when a partial correlation was conducted controlling for whether or not respondents are currently in a same-sex relationship ($r = .217$, $p = .018$). There was a marginally significant positive correlation between reported frequency of sexual activities and ratings of relationship satisfaction for those currently in a same-sex intimate

relationship ($r = .237$, $p = .058$). There was a marginally significant positive correlation between reported frequency of sexual activities and length of current or most recent relationship ($r = .166$, $p = .059$), but the correlation was not significant when controlled for whether or not respondents are currently in a same-sex relationship ($r = .127$, $p = .150$).

In a two-part question, participants were asked to indicate how often (1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Frequently, 4 = Always, or N/A) they follow safer sex guidelines with a primary committed partner and with a casual partner. Missing and N/A responses were excluded from the analyses. Regarding safer sex with a primary committed partner, the 123 valid responses ranged from ratings of 1 to 4, with a mean of 2.44, a median of 2.00, multiple modes (1,2, &3), and a standard deviation of 1.10. Regarding safer sex with a casual partner, the 99 valid responses ranged from ratings of 1 to 4, with a mean of 3.14, a median of 3.00, a mode of 4.00, and a standard deviation of 0.95. A statistically significant positive correlation was found between ratings of following safer sex guidelines with a primary committed partner and ratings of following safer sex guidelines with a casual partner ($r = .543$, $p = .000$). However, a one-way ANOVA also found a statistically significant difference between respondents' ratings of following safer sex guidelines with a primary committed partner as compared to with a casual partner (F (3,89) = 13.019, $p = .000$). One-way ANOVAs were also conducted to compare responses to this item based on sexual orientation, and statistically significant differences were found between gay male and lesbian respondents on ratings of following safer sex guidelines with both committed ($F(1,121) = 32.465$, $p = .000$) and casual partners

(F^*(1,120.583) = 22.152, p = .000), with gay male respondents having higher ratings in both cases.

Participants were also asked whether they have experienced any sexual dysfunctions in their current or past relationship(s). Of the 133 participants who responded to this question, the majority indicated "No" (78 respondents or 58.6%), 42 (31.6%) indicated "Yes," and 13 (9.8%) indicated "Unsure." Among the 69 lesbian respondents to this item, 18 (26.08%) selected "Yes," 46 (66.66%) selected "No," and 5 (7.25%) selected "Unsure." Among the 64 gay respondents to this item, 24 (37.5%) selected "Yes," 32 (50%) selected "No," and 8 (12.5%) selected "Unsure." No significant difference was found between the responses of gay and lesbian participants on this item. When participants were asked to further specify for this item, if willing, comments included references to sexual dysfunctions or other sex-related problems experienced by participants themselves or by their partners, including low sex drive or lack of desire (n = 6), sexual side effects of psychotropic medications (n = 4), fear or anxiety (n = 4), erectile dysfunction (n = 3), difficulty achieving orgasm (n = 3), sexual difficulties related to substance abuse (n = 3), depression (n = 2), sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (n = 2), sexual incompatibility (n = 2), painful oversensitivity of erogenous zones (n = 1) or undersensitivity (n = 1), other pain during sex (n = 1), past sexual abuse (n = 1), premature ejaculation (n = 1), vaginismus (n = 1), bleeding during penetrative sex (n = 1), and inability to experience penetration (n = 1).

Issues of monogamy and nonmonogamy. Participants were asked to select the monogamy/nonmonogamy descriptor from a list of options which best applied to their current or most recent relationship. The descriptors were as follows: "Completely

monogamous," "Agree to be monogamous but agreement broken by at least one partner,"

"Nonmonogamous/open relationship with no explicit agreement," "Agree to be

nonmonogamous/open," and N/A. The frequency and percentage of responses to this

question among all respondents and based on the sexual orientation of respondents are

presented in Table 10. No significant difference was found between the responses of gay

and lesbian participants to this item, nor was there a significant difference between

selected monogamy/nonmonogamy descriptors and overall relationship satisfaction

ratings.

Table 10

Frequency and Percentage of Respondents Selecting Monogamy/Nonmonogamy

Relationship Descriptors

	Overall		Gay		Lesbian	
Descriptor	n	%	n	%	n	%
Completely monogamous	80	60.2	35	53.9	45	66.2
Agree to be monogamous but agreement broken	26	19.5	16	24.6	10	14.7
Nonmonogamous with no explicit agreement	12	9.0	5	7.7	7	10.3
Agree to be nonmonogamous	6	4.5	3	4.6	3	4.4
N/A	9	6.8	6	9.2	3	4.4
Total Number Respondents	133		65		68	

A follow-up question asked participants to rate how satisfied they are with this

(i.e., the status of their current or most recent relationship in terms of monogamy or

nonmonogamy) on a scale of 1 (Very dissatisfied) to 4 (Very satisfied). Among the 127

participants who responded to this question, ratings ranged from 1 to 4, with a mean of 3.14, a median and mode of 4.00, and a standard deviation of 1.04. With N/A responses excluded from the analysis, a one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference between the selected monogamy/nonmonogamy relationship descriptors of respondents and their ratings of satisfaction with this ($F*(3,17.501) = 27.735$, $p = .000$). A Tukey post-hoc test revealed that monogamy/nonmonogamy satisfaction ratings were statistically significantly higher among respondents who selected "Completely monogamous" ($3.69 \pm .591$) compared to those who selected "Agree to be monogamous but agreement broken by at least one partner" ($1.96 \pm .958$, $p = .000$) or "Nonmonogamous/open relationship with no explicit agreement" ($2.58 \pm .793$, $p = .000$). Similarly, monogamy/nonmonogamy satisfaction ratings were also statistically significantly higher among respondents who selected "Agree to be nonmonogamous/open" ($3.50 \pm .548$) compared to "Agree to be monogamous but agreement broken by at least one partner" ($1.96 \pm .958$, $p = .000$) or "Nonmonogamous/open relationship with no explicit agreement" ($2.58 \pm .793$, $p = .050$).

A second follow-up question also asked participants to rate the degree to which they felt that this (i.e., the status of their current or most recent relationship in terms of monogamy or nonmonogamy) has contributed to the problems in the primary relationship on a scale of 1 (Not at all) to 4 (Significantly). Among the 130 participants who responded to this question, ratings ranged from 1 to 4, with a mean of 1.76, a median and mode of 1.00, and a standard deviation of 1.00. Some respondents provided additional comments related to this item, including references to issues of jealousy in nonmonogomous relationships as well as in completely monogamous relationships,

mutual contentment with monogamy, suppressing urges for sexual contact outside of the relationship so as not to hurt one's partner, problems in the relationship being "bigger than" issues of monogamy or nonmonogamy, agreeing to be nonmonogamous but not having acted on it, and managing any potential problems with nonmonogamy by coming to mutual agreements on the specific acts that are acceptable with others (e.g., dancing, kissing, sex if partner is also present) and those that are not. Others made reference to initial discomfort with the nontraditional idea of a nonmonogamous relationship but finding that it helped meet sexual needs, and uncertainty about one's comfort level with non-monogamy so planning to maintain open communication and adjust the agreement as necessary.

With N/A responses excluded from the analysis, a one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference between the selected monogamy/nonmonogamy relationship descriptors of respondents and their ratings of the degree to which this has contributed to problems in the primary relationship ($F(3,119) = 19.819$, $p = .000$). A Tukey post-hoc test revealed that degree of contribution to problems ratings were statistically significantly higher among respondents who selected "Agree to be monogamous but agreement broken by at least one partner" ($2.88 \pm .1.071$) compared to those who selected "Completely monogamous" ($1.43 \pm .763$, $p = .000$), "Nonmonogamous/open relationship with no explicit agreement" ($1.58 \pm ..793$, $p = .000$), or "Agree to be nonmonogamous/open" ($1.83 \pm .753$, $p = .033$). No other significant differences were found.

Long-distance relationships. One survey item asked participants whether or not they are currently in what they consider to be a long-distance relationship. Among the

133 participants who responded to this item, the majority (n = 110 or 82.7%) indicated "No," while 23 (17.3%) indicated "Yes." Those who responded "No" to this item were asked whether or not they have ever been in a long-distance relationship. Among the 109 valid responses to this item, 61 respondents (56.0%) indicated "Yes" and 48 (44.0%) indicated "No." For participants who responded "Yes" to either of these two questions, a follow-up question asked them to indicate whether the effects of the distance have been positive or negative by selecting one of three options (Mostly negative, Mostly positive, Equally positive and negative). Of the 86 participants who responded to this item, the majority (n = 48 or 55.8%) selected "Mostly negative," followed by "Equally positive and negative" (n = 36 or 41.9%), and the fewest (n = 2 or 2.3%) selected "Mostly positive." Several respondents to this question also provided additional comments related to the positive and/or negative effects of long-distance. Negative effects cited in some of these comments include difficulty coordinating conflicting or busy schedules to see or speak to one another (n = 4), the termination of the relationship (n = 3), missing one another (n = 3), stress (n = 2), difficulty negotiating available means of communication (i.e., phone, internet, etc.) (n = 2), limited physical affection or intimacy (n = 2), inability to solidify an integrated life (n = 1), increased conflict (n = 1), family or others keeping them apart (n = 1), loneliness, emotional exhaustion (n = 1), not feeling complete (n = 1), jealousy or insecurity (n = 1), inability to comfort one another in person during difficult times (n = 1), clinginess (n = 1), financial costs and time requirements for visiting (n = 1), and lack of satisfaction of emotional and physical needs (n = 1). Positive effects cited in some of these comments included greater appreciation of one another and of time together (n = 4), an emphasis on emotional closeness (n = 2), time and freedom to pursue

individual interests and activities ($n = 2$), greater independence and provision of necessary space ($n = 2$), and commitment to making it work ($n = 2$), more time to maintain friendships outside of the relationship ($n = 1$), slowing down to get to know one another before becoming intimate ($n = 1$), and the establishment of clear and open communication ($n = 1$),. In these comments, some respondents indicated the amount of distance, ranging from living one hour apart to living on different continents than their partner. Others indicated the frequency with which they saw their partner in person, ranging from every weekend to months between visits.

Cohabitation. Participants were asked two survey questions pertaining to cohabitation: whether they currently live with a partner and whether they have ever lived with a partner while dating or in a relationship with that person. The frequency and percentage of responses to these questions among all respondents and based on the sexual orientation of respondents are presented in Table 11. A one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference between current cohabitation of gay compared to lesbian participants ($F(1,157) = 5.033$, $p = .026$), as well as between overall cohabitation experience of gay compared to lesbian respondents ($F*(1,129.943) = 5.023$, $p = .027$). In both cases, lesbian respondents reported higher frequencies of cohabitation than gay male participants.

Table 11

Frequency and Percentage of Respondents with Cohabitation Experience

Survey Item & Response	Overall		Gay		Lesbian	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Q: Do you live with a current partner?						
Yes	26	16.4	6	7.6	20	25.0
No	80	50.3	44	55.7	36	45.0
Not currently partnered	53	33.3	29	36.7	24	30.0
Total Number Respondents	159		79		80	
Q: Have you ever lived with a partner while you were dating or in a relationship with him/her?						
Yes	55	41.7	20	31.7	35	50.7
No	77	58.3	43	68.3	34	49.3
Total Number Respondents	132		63		69	

Additional analyses of this item revealed no significant difference in current cohabitation based on current year in college/university or age when participants who are not currently partnered were excluded from the analysis. However, with "Yes" coded as 1 and "No" coded as 2, bivariate correlation analyses revealed statistically significant correlations between experience with cohabitation (i.e., not limited to current cohabitation) and current year in college/university (r = -.295, *p* = .001), as well as between experience with cohabitation and age (*r* = .356, *p* = .000), such that older or more advanced students were more likely to have had experience with cohabitation at some point. No significant correlation was found between experience with cohabitation and experience with interracial or interethnic dating.

Children. Various survey items concerned the topic of children. One item asked participants whether or not they have children. Among the 133 participants who

responded to this item, the vast majority (*n* = 130 or 97.7%) indicated "No," while 3

respondents (2.3%) indicated "Yes." Another item asked participants whether or not

their current or most recent partner has children. Of the 130 respondents to this question,

the majority (*n* = 124 or 95.4%) indicated "No" while 6 (4.6%) indicated "Yes."

Participants were also asked whether the decision of whether or not to have/adopt

children has been discussed in their current or most recent relationship. Among the 131

participants who responded to this question, 64 (48.9%) selected "Yes," 63 (48.1%)

selected "No," and 4 (3.1%) selected "Unsure." Some respondents made additional

comments related to this question. Themes among these comments included references

to both partners wanting to have and/or adopt children in the future (*n* = 8), having briefly

or casually discussed the idea of children but not in depth (*n* = 6), being too young for

children (*n* = 5), it being too early in the relationship to have such a discussion (*n* = 3),

experiencing conflict around differing parenting ideas (*n* = 1), never wanting children (*n*

= 1), and not being geographically stable enough for a child (*n* = 1).

Division of labor, power, and decision making. Participants were asked to rate

how equally they feel the chores, responsibilities, power, and decision making have

generally been divided or shared in their current or most recent relationship on a scale of

1 (Very unequally) to 4 (Very equally). Missing and "N/A" responses were excluded

from the analysis. Among the remaining 104 responses, ratings ranged from 1 to 4, with

a mean of 2.95, a median and mode of 3.00, and a standard deviation of 0.82. Response

frequencies and percentages on this item among all respondents and based on the sexual

orientation of respondents are presented in Table 12. No significant differences were

found on this item based on sexual orientation or age.

Table 12

Frequency and Percentage of Respondents Reporting Varying Levels of Equality in

Division of Labor, Power, and Decision Making

	Overall		Gay		Lesbian	
Survey Response	n	%	n	%	n	%
1 – Very unequally	5	4.8	3	6.5	2	3.4
2 – Fairly unequally	22	21.2	10	21.7	12	20.7
3 – Fairly equally	50	48.1	23	50.0	27	46.6
4 – Very equally	27	26.0	10	21.7	17	29.3
Total Number Respondents (N/A excluded)	104		46		58	

Conflict. Various survey questions were focused on the issue of conflict in committed relationships. One item asked participants to list the three most common sources of conflict in their casual or committed relationships. Qualitative data was analyzed by grouping responses into themes, which are displayed with frequencies in Table 13

Thematic Categories for Sources of Conflict in Relationships

Response Theme	Frequency
Communication Issues	42
Time Together/Schedules	23
Sex	18
Personality Issues	18
Jealousy	17
Level of "Outness"	16
Commitment	16
Physical Distance	12
Emotional Connection/Attachment	11
Monogamy/Nonmonogamy & Infidelity	11
Chores & Other Responsibilities	10
Finances	9
Trust	9
Insecurities	9

Social Networks	9
Dishonesty	7
Future Plans	7
Different wants/needs	7
Different views/beliefs/values	6
Substance Use	6
Family	6
Religion	5
Power & Control	5
Activities/Interests	5
Stress	5

Another item asked participants to rate the frequency of conflicts in their current or most recent relationship on a scale of 1 (Very infrequent) to 4 (Very frequent). Missing and "N/A" responses were excluded from the analysis. Among the remaining 125 responses, ratings ranged from 1 to 4, with a mean of 2.10, a median and mode of 2.00, and a standard deviation of 0.90. The frequency and percentage of responses to this question among all respondents and based on the sexual orientation of respondents are presented in Table 14. No significant differences were found between the conflict frequency ratings of gay compared to lesbian respondents, nor was there a significant correlation between conflict frequency ratings and the age of respondents.

Participants were also asked to rate the conflict management/resolution skills of themselves and their partner(s) in their current or most recent relationship on a scale of 1 (Very poor) to 4 (Excellent). Missing and "N/A" responses were excluded from the analysis. Among the remaining 121 responses, ratings ranged from 1 to 4, with a mean of 2.87, a median and mode of 3.00, and a standard deviation of 0.77. The frequency and percentage of responses to this question among all respondents and based on the sexual orientation of respondents are presented in Table 14. No significant differences were found between the conflict management/resolution ratings of gay compared to lesbian

respondents. A bivariate correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant positive

correlation between ratings of conflict management/resolution skills and ratings of

relationship satisfaction ($r = .494$, $p = .000$).

Table 14

Frequency and Percentage of Respondents' Ratings of Conflict Frequency and Conflict

Management/Resolution Skills

	Overall		Gay		Lesbian	
Survey Item & Response	n	%	n	%	n	%
Q: Please rate the frequency of conflicts in your current or most recent relationship.						
1 – Very infrequent	37	29.6	21	36.2	16	23.9
2 – Somewhat infrequent	47	37.6	21	36.2	26	38.8
3 – Somewhat frequent	33	26.4	13	22.4	20	29.9
4 – Very frequent	8	6.4	3	5.2	5	7.5
Total Number Respondents (N/A excluded)	125		58		67	
Q: In your current or most recent relationship, how would you rate the conflict management/resolution skills of you and your partner(s)?						
1 – Very poor	6	5.0	4	7.1	2	3.1
2 – Somewhat poor	27	22.3	10	17.9	17	26.2
3 – Good	65	53.7	32	57.1	33	50.8
4 – Excellent	23	19.0	10	17.9	13	20.0
Total Number Respondents (N/A excluded)	121		56		65	

Domestic violence. Participants were asked whether they have ever experienced

abuse (emotional, physical, mental, or sexual) in a same-sex relationship. The frequency

and percentage of responses to this item are presented in Table 15. Respondents who

selected "Yes" or "Unsure" were presented with a follow-up question which asked them

to select all that applied from a list of forms of abuse (Physical abuse, Verbal abuse,

Emotional/psychological abuse, Sexual abuse, Property damage, N/A, Other). The

frequency with which each indicated form of abuse was endorsed by respondents is presented in Table 15. Participants who selected "Other" in response to this item were asked to please specify. Comments primarily reflected circumstances that respondents felt may be constitute some form of relationship abuse, but were unsure.

An additional follow-up question asked whether participants have experienced barriers in seeking help/intervention for relationship abuse based on their sexual orientation. The frequency and percentage of responses to this item are presented in Table 15. Participants were asked to further specify, if willing, regarding their response to this item. Comments included that intervention was not sought for fear of ridicule given that the abuse occurred within a same-sex relationship ($n = 1$), that local health centers are not equipped to deal with such issues ($n = 1$), and that whether or not individuals experience barriers is dependent on the presence or absence of LGBT allies in helping positions ($n = 1$).

No significant differences were found between the responses of gay compared to lesbian respondents on any of the three survey items included in Table 15.

Table 15

Frequency of Respondents Reporting Same-Sex Relationship Abuse and Barriers in Seeking Help/Intervention

	Overall		Gay		Lesbian	
Survey Item & Response	n	%	n	%	n	%
Q: Have you ever experienced abuse (emotional, physical, mental, or sexual) in a same-sex relationship?						
Yes	31	23.5	14	22.2	17	24.6
No	92	69.7	43	68.3	49	71.0
Unsure	9	6.8	6	9.5	3	4.3
Total Number Respondents	132		63		69	

Q: If you have experienced abuse in a same-sex relationship, please specify (select all that apply)

Emotional/Psychological abuse	32	--	15	--	17	--
Verbal abuse	24	--	10	--	14	--
Physical abuse	13	--	6	--	7	--
Sexual abuse	5	--	4	--	1	--
Other	4	--	2	--	2	--
Property damage	0	--	0	--	0	--

Q: Have you ever experienced barriers in seeking help/intervention for relationship abuse based on your sexual orientation?

Yes	3	7.5	3	15.0	0	0.0
No	10	25.0	4	20.0	6	30.0
Did not seek help/intervention	25	62.5	12	60.0	13	65.0
Unsure	2	5.0	1	5.0	1	5.0
Total Number Respondents	40		20		20	

Relationship dissolution. Participants were asked to indicate whether or not they have experienced one or more break-ups in the past. Of the 131 participants who responded to this item, 118 (90.1%) indicated "Yes" and 13 (9.9%) indicated "No." No significant differences were found between the responses of gay compared to lesbian participants to this item. Participants who responded "Yes" to this item were presented with three additional survey items regarding relationship dissolution. Those who selected "No" were directed to the final survey item.

One item asked participants to list the top three reasons for their past break-ups. Qualitative data was analyzed by grouping responses into themes, which are displayed with frequencies in Table 16. Only themes with frequencies of five or greater are listed.

Table 16

Thematic Categories for Top Three Reasons for Past Break-Ups

Response Theme	Frequency
Nonmonogamy or Infidelity	28
Physical Distance	27
Lack/Loss of Interest/Love/Attraction	25
Irreconcilable Differences[a]	23
Issues Related to Sexual or Gender Identity	14
Frequent Conflict/Arguing	13
Grew Apart	12
Commitment Issues	12
Incompatibility	11
Dishonesty	10
Abuse (emotional, verbal, physical, etc.)	9
Communication Issues	9
Moved Away	9
Issues Related to "Outness"	8
Time Together (Too Much/Too Little)	8
Disapproval from Others	7
Mental or Emotional Health & Stability	7
Wanted to See Other People/Explore Options	7
Not the Right Time/Not Ready	7
Emotional Distance	7
Sexual Concerns	6
Not the Right Person	6
Boredom/Monotony	6
Met Someone Else	6
Immaturity	5
Jealousy	5

[a]Examples include differences in goals, values, beliefs, personalities, etc.

Another item asked participants to rate how emotionally difficult break-ups tend to be for them on a scale of 1 (Not difficult at all) to 4 (Very difficult). Among the 116 valid responses to this item, ratings ranged from 1 to 4, with a mean of 2.95, a median and mode of 3.00, and a standard deviation of 0.89. No significant differences were found between the ratings of gay compared to lesbian respondents to this item.

The final quantitative item asked participants whether they tend to remain friends with ex-partners. Among the 117 valid responses to this item, 35 (29.9%) were "No," 30 (25.6%) were "Yes," and 52 (44.4%) were "Equally yes and no." No differences were found between the responses of gay compared to lesbian participants on this item. Participants also had the option of adding comments for this survey item, such as reasons why they remain friends with ex-partners or why they do not. Some respondents commented that they have tried to remain friends with ex-partners but that it has not worked ($n = 3$), with some explaining that their ex-partner was unwilling to reciprocate ($n = 2$), that they ended up fighting and emotionally hurting one another ($n = 1$), that they still had feelings for one another ($n = 1$), that it was too difficult to shift from a romantic to a platonic connection ($n = 1$), that the friendship faded after a period of time ($n = 1$), or that the friendship ended when one or the other started dating someone else ($n = 1$). Others stated that they are not friends with the people they date ($n = 1$), that their relationships often end on bad terms ($n = 1$), that there tends to be unresolved sexual tension ($n = 1$), that it brings back too many feelings ($n = 1$), that it is too uncomfortable given their previous physical intimacy ($n = 1$), or that they need a complete separation in order to move on ($n = 1$). Some stated that they chose not to maintain a friendship if the connection was not very strong ($n = 1$), or if they feel that their ex-partner needs mental health treatment and will not seek it ($n = 1$). Some respondents commented that whether or not they remain friends depends on the break-up ($n = 3$), with friendship being less likely when break-ups are "messy" ($n = 2$), and more likely if both individuals are committed to honesty and the best interests of the other ($n = 1$). Some respondents stated that they continue to be friends with ex-partners, but that there are times when it becomes

difficult for one or the other ($n = 2$), that some "fence-mending" was required ($n = 1$), that it took time to get to the point of friendship ($n = 4$), or that clear boundaries were necessary ($n = 1$). Some stated that they are very close and even best friends with ex-partners ($n = 4$), while others stated that they are only "moderately" good friends ($n = 1$), or that they only remained friends because they are part of the same social circle ($n = 1$). One respondent reported having casual sex with an ex-partner with whom they had remained friends, which they felt was possible because neither had continued romantic feelings. Reasons cited for remaining friends with ex-partners included being friends before they were partners ($n = 3$), valuing the deep friendship that was built too much to lose it ($n = 2$), having things in common ($n = 2$), enjoying talking to one another ($n = 1$), and liking them as a person ($n = 1$).

Finally, in an open-ended question, participants were asked what they perceive as the major benefits from and/or sources of strength in their same-sex intimate relationships. It should be noted that some respondents noted that this question was phrased in a confusing way, such that some were unclear as to what exactly was being asked, so this question should be rephrased or clarified if used in a future study. Still, a large number of participants responded to the item, and qualitative data was analyzed by categorizing responses into common themes. Some respondents identified perceived benefits from and/or sources of strength in their relationships that they associated with the fact that they and their partners are of the same gender. These included greater ability to relate with and understand one another ($n = 14$), greater equality in the relationship ($n = 5$), facilitation of an emotional connection ($n = 3$), greater ease in physical intimacy and knowledge of one another's bodies ($n = 3$), better communication ($n = 2$), a relative lack

of confining gender roles (n = 2), lack of accidental pregnancy concerns (n = 1), and greater comfort with one's body (n = 1). Some respondents noted perceived benefits or sources of strength related to being in a relationship with another sexual minority, including having a partner with whom to be "out" (n = 2), not taking the relationship for granted and drawing strength from facing challenges associated with a relative lack of societal support (n = 2), and the happiness that comes with knowing one's identity and not having to suppress any part of oneself (n = 1). A related response was that being gay can drive people to work to develop self-acceptance regardless of what others think and ultimately strengthen the relationship (n = 2). Other perceived benefits or sources of strength in the relationship related to being sexual minorities included closeness that can result from common struggles (n = 7), support from the LGBTQ community and allies (n = 3), resiliency (n = 2), coping through humor (n = 1), and a feeling of "us versus the world" (n = 1). Other respondents stated that they believe the benefits from and/or sources of strength in their same-sex relationships are generally the same as in heterosexual relationships (n = 7). Themes among other responses included various sources of strength or beneficial aspects of respondents' relationships, including mutual love and caring (n = 15), strong emotional connection (n = 12), sex and physical intimacy (n = 11), companionship (n = 10), mutual support (n = 10), learning about oneself and growing as a person (n = 6), open communication (n = 6), trust (n = 5), attraction (n = 5), really knowing and understanding one another (n = 5), friendship (n = 5), similarity of views/goals/interests (n = 5), happiness (n = 4), comfort (n = 4), fulfillment (n = 3), and having someone to turn to or depend on (n = 3). Less commonly cited responses included a sense of being needed or wanted (n = 2), ability to be oneself (n = 2), safety or

security (*n* = 2), fun (*n* = 2), self-confidence (*n* = 2), intellectual stimulation (*n* = 2),

mutual willingness to work for the relationship (*n* = 1), romance (*n* = 1), affection (*n* = 1),

kindness (*n* = 1), mutual encouragement (*n* = 1), honesty (*n* = 1), reassurance (*n* = 1), a

special bond (*n* = 1), and respect (*n* = 1).

Discussion

The purpose of this dissertation was to increase our understanding of

contemporary gay and lesbian dating and intimate relationships, particularly within the

college student population. Research questions included identifying ways that oppression

impacts the relationships of gay and lesbian college students, consistencies and

inconsistencies between the reported experiences of these students and those of the larger

gay and lesbian population, and dating and relationship issues reported by participants

that require more in-depth investigation. Furthermore, the researcher sought to highlight

challenges faced by gay and lesbian college students in the realm of dating and

relationships as well as some of the primary indications of strength and resiliency in the

reports of these students regarding their experiences with dating and relationships.

Survey results were examined for key findings in each area of the current study

and were compared to relevant existing literature to determine whether the experiences of

college/university students in these areas are congruent with those of the broader gay and

lesbian population.

In terms of participants' perceptions of the climate for gay and lesbian students on

their college/university campuses, results supported the idea that campus climates for

sexual minorities vary widely from institution to institution, as participants' ratings of

their campus climate ranged from highly unsatisfactory to highly satisfactory. However,

the large majority of participants were somewhat to highly satisfied with their campus climate, and very few described their campus climate as highly unsatisfactory for gay and lesbian students. Very similar ratings were obtained when participants were asked about the sensitivity of their academic institution to the needs of gay and lesbian students. This data seems to support the common thought that college campuses tend to be relatively accepting environments for sexual minorities, although there is still room for improvement in this area. It was found in this study that significant differences emerged in participant ratings on these two survey items when comparisons were made between urban, suburban, and rural areas. Respondents living in urban areas reported significantly more positive ratings of campus climate for gay and lesbian students and sensitivity within the academic institution to the needs of gay and lesbian students than those living in other types of areas. This is not surprising when it is considered that there tends to be more visible LGBT communities in urban compared to other environments, but it does highlight a particular need for colleges/universities in rural and suburban areas to address these issues at an institutional level and actively work to foster a safer, more inclusive, welcoming, and respectful environment for LGBT students.

Of note is that perceptions of campus climate and sensitivity of the educational institution to the needs of gay and lesbian students did not differ significantly between Caucasian respondents and those who identified with other races, or as biracial or multiracial. This was somewhat unexpected given Berrill's (1992) report that lesbians and gay men of color, particularly those who identify as African American and Hispanic, have been found to be at greater risk of victimization based on their sexual orientation. It may be that the findings to which Berrill (1992) was referring are outdated or that the

differences have become less pronounced in general or on college campuses specifically. At the same time, the survey questions used in the current study did not ask about victimization specifically, but more broadly about institution climate and sensitivity based on sexual orientation, so racial differences in victimization based on sexual orientation should be more directly examined in future research.

Regarding the ways in which factors associated with societal oppression may impact the same-sex relationships of gay and lesbian college students, the most frequently cited response in this study—which was reported by 29 participants—was that they feel the need to limit or avoid public displays of affection with their partner due to fear. Other common responses in this study—cited by ten or more participants—related to having to hide the relationship, fearing negative responses from others (e.g., judgment, rejection, disapproval, ridicule, threats to physical safety, etc.), experiencing various forms of harassment when together in public, and having to be cautious and vigilant of one's surroundings, behaviors, and verbal disclosures. This is not inconsistent with much of the background literature related to the impact of oppressive forces on gay and lesbian students and their relationships. A wide range of other ways in which participants' same-sex romantic relationships have been impacted by factors associated with societal oppression were also reported in the current study, supporting the notion that oppressive forces can negatively impact gay and lesbian students on both an individual and couple level in a variety of ways (Otis et al., 2006). In the current study, a minority of respondents reported that they do not believe they have personally experienced this oppression in their relationships or that their relationships have not been impacted by it, in some cases because of limited relationship experience or living in more accepting

areas, and in other cases perhaps because of resiliency. Cited directly by only one respondent, but of interest because of the strengths-based perspective, was the idea that the couple developed a sense of solidarity over the common oppressed status.

In terms of mental health issues, the results of this study do suggest that such issues have a fairly large impact on the relationships of many gay and lesbian college/university students, as half of participants perceived such issues as having had a moderate to significant impact on their relationships and less than a quarter of respondents reported that it had no impact. Participants also provided qualitative data specifying a variety of mental health issues that they and/or their same-sex partners have experienced and of ways that those issues have impacted the relationships. Many of these comments reflected the common effects of internalized homophobia and minority stress that have been reported in the literature, such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, shame, distrust, distancing, anger, suicide, substance abuse, and other mental health symptoms (e.g., Alonzo, 2005; Evans & D'Augelli, 1996; Klinger & Stein, 1996; Miller & House, 2005; Peterson & Gerrity, 2006). Many comments also reflected the effects of childhood sexual or other abuse and other trauma, which research suggests may occur somewhat more frequency among lesbians and gay men (Kerewsky & Miller, 1996; Klinger & Stein, 1996), and the conflict and strain that this can create within relationships (Alonzo, 2005).

While mental health issues, influenced in many cases by being a member of an oppressed group, are clearly relevant to the lives and relationships of a large number of gay and lesbian college/university students, this is not a universal experience for these students. In the current study, fifty percent of gay and lesbian participants reported that

mental health issues had little to no impact on their relationships, which may be viewed as a testament to the resiliency of these students given the stress often associated with being a member of an oppressed group.

In the area of diversity, the majority of participants in this study (69.2%) reported that they had dated or been in an intimate relationship with someone who differed from them with regards to one or more diversity variables, most commonly in religious identification (44.7% of participants), race/ethnicity (44.0%), socioeconomic status (35.8%), and/or nationality (17.6%). Since, according to various authors, this can add a layer of complexity to a relationship (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007) and lead to difficulties in finding compatibility with one's partner (McWhirter & Mattison, 1996), many gay and lesbian college students may be concerned with how to negotiate such differences (e.g., in terms of potentially different expectations, values, ways of behaving, etc.) and prevent them from negatively impacting their relationships. Helping professionals may be able to be of assistance in this realm.

Although authors such as Fassinger and Arseneau (2007) have noted that lesbians and gay men with certain disabilities may have more difficulty meeting potential partners due to restricted access to gay and lesbian communities in various ways, the results of the current study did not reveal significant differences between ratings of difficulty meeting potential partners between able-bodied respondents and those reporting various types of disabilities. This was the case both when comparing able-bodied respondents to those who reported disabilities of any type, and when separated by type of disability (e.g., physical, mental/emotional, etc.). One possibility is that the college/university environment provides increased access to an LGBT community for gay and lesbian

students with disabilities compared to other environments, and thus more equal access to a dating pool. However, a note of caution in interpreting this finding is that only a small number of respondents in the current study self-identified as having one or more disabilities, and this small group may not be representative of gay and lesbian college/university students with disabilities. Consequently, this topic should be further studied with a larger sample of gay and lesbian students with disabilities in order to clarify these issues.

Based on the literature attesting to the different experiences of gay and lesbian racial or ethnic minorities compared to gay and lesbian members of the dominant white culture (e.g., Evans & D'Augelli, 1996; Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007; Savin-Williams, 1996b), the current study examined differences in outness and experience with same-sex dating between participants in these two groups. Although no differences were found in age of first disclosure of sexual orientation to another individual, number of same-sex relationships, or degree of outness to coworkers, neighbors, members of their church or religious community, or close LGBT friends, other significant differences were found. Interestingly, respondents who identified as single race white/Caucasian reported having their first same-sex dating experience at a significantly later age (mean of 17.85 years of age) than respondents who reported other racial identifications (mean of 15.87 years of age), although the reported age for the racial minority group varied more (i.e., standard deviation of 5.3 years, compared to 3.6 years for the white/Caucasian group). On the other hand, the results showed that white/Caucasian only respondents were significantly more "out" to immediate family, extended family, and close straight friends at the time they completed the survey than were respondents with other racial self-identifications.

To interpret these findings, consideration was given to reports in the literature of increased homophobic prejudice within some racial/ethnic minority communities related to perceptions of assimilation into the dominant white culture (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007), and of the importance of ties to family and other people of color in providing the support necessary to manage race-based oppression and stress. Consequently, the risks of losing this support can be particularly great for students of color, which could explain why they were less likely to be out to important others such as immediate family, extended family, and close straight friends than were Caucasian participants in the current study. Although one might expect these factors to also be associated with delays in same-sex dating and relationship experience for gay and lesbian students of color, one possible explanation for the lack of such findings in the current study is that students of color may be less afraid than their Caucasian counterparts of judgment from the larger society if they engage in same-sex dating because they already experience judgment and oppression from society based on their race. So long as close others are not aware, gay and lesbian individuals of color may perceive less risk in terms of losing status in societal hierarchies by engaging in these behaviors than might members of the dominant white culture. This hypothesis and others merit further investigation as earlier same-sex dating experience among students of color was an unexpected finding.

When it comes to dating, several authors have noted that gay and lesbian young people often do not have the opportunity to explore same-sex dating until they leave home, such as when they begin college (Evans & D'Augelli, 1996; Pope et al., 2007; Savin-Williams, 1996a), and data from the current study seem to support this. Just over half of participants reported that they did not have any same-sex relationships prior to

attending college/university, and the vast majority of participants reported having at least one same-sex relationship since starting college/university. Clearly, many gay and lesbian college/university students are experiencing their first same-sex relationships during their college years. Consequently, according to Pope et al. (2007), many of these students may have tumultuous relationships as they navigate these relationships for the first time, much like the problems experienced by younger adolescents who are just beginning to date. In a sense, most often due to factors related to homophobia and heterosexism, this aspect of their development has been delayed in comparison to youth who had the opportunities and freedom to explore dating at a younger age. Helping professionals may be able to provide guidance to these students in navigating these early relationships, and/or normalize and contextualize the difficulties they are experiencing.

Authors such as Savin-Williams (1996a) have discussed the purposes of and functions served by dating and romantic relationships for sexual minority young people, and the current study sought to gather information about this topic from gay and lesbian college students themselves. The participants in the current study identified various factors among their top three reasons for dating. The top ten most frequently cited reasons in descending order were friendship/companionship, to find a potential partner, fun/enjoyment, physical intimacy/sex, emotional intimacy, love, connection with another person, growing/learning about self and others, avoiding loneliness, and socializing/meeting new people. Many of these are in line with those cited by Savin-Williams (1996a), such as practicing, pursuing, and establishing romantic relationships, entertainment, recreation, socialization, the development of interpersonal skills, and assisting in the development of a positive gay or lesbian identity.

The current study also sought to gather information about the most common

qualities sought by gay and lesbian college students in potential partners. The ten

qualities that were cited most frequently by participants, in descending order, included

sense of humor/funny, intelligence, attractive (physically or otherwise), kindness/good

heart, personality, honesty, loyalty, trustworthiness, similar interests, and fun. Many of

these are quite consistent with those found by previous researchers, even as far back as

the 1980s (Engel & Saracino, 1986).

While participants in this study varied widely in terms of their reports of how easy

or difficult it is for them to meet potential dating partners, the majority found it to be

somewhat to very difficult. Still, most were able to find dating partners despite

difficulties and barriers, which is consistent with previous research (Elze, 2002).

Although the pattern of results indicated that participants living in urban areas reported

experiencing less difficulty in meeting potential dating partners than those in suburban

and rural areas, and that those in rural areas reported experiencing the most difficulty, the

difference was not statistically significant. This may be related to Peplau and Fingerhut's

(2007) statement that the Internet is facilitating the process of meeting dating partners for

lesbians and gay men in all locales. It may also be that the college environment helps

facilitate this often difficult process, and that gay and lesbian young adults who do not

attend college could have more difficulty finding partners. Future research should

explore this issue with non-college gay and lesbian young adults.

When participants were asked where or how they typically meet potential dating

partners, the most common responses—cited by ten or more participants and presented in

descending order—included through friends, school, the internet, extracurriculars,

bars/nightclubs, parties/social gatherings, and LGBT organizations/functions. This is largely consistent with previous research, both of lesbian and bisexual adolescent women (Elze, 2002) and of gay and lesbian adults (Bryant & Demian as cited by Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). It would also support both of the previously stated hypotheses that the internet and/or the college environment facilitated the process of meeting potential partners for gay and lesbian students.

In terms of expectations for a typical first date, the majority of participants in this study (65.7%) indicated that they do not expect that there will be sexual contact. Only a minority of participants (11.2%) indicated that they expect that there will be sexual contact on a typical first date, while others were unsure. Gay participants were significantly more likely than lesbian participants to report having this expectation, which is consistent with Klinkenberg and Rose's (1994) finding that the hypothetical dating scripts of gay male participants were more sexually-oriented than those of lesbian participants. These researchers suggested that this difference is likely due to gender socialization regarding sexual roles and rules for appropriate sexual expression, the effects of which may be more pronounced in same-sex dating. Contrary to findings by Bartoli and Clark (2006) that third and fourth year college students—with no reference to sexual orientation—were more likely than first year students to expect sexual activities on a typical date, no significant differences were found in expectations of sexual contact in the current study based on current year in college/university. However, it should be noted that the current study asked about a typical first date, whereas Bartoli and Clark's findings were referring to a typical date in general.

Also pertaining to dating and relationship formation scripts, the majority of participants in the current study indicated that they are most often friends with someone before dating or beginning a relationship with them, although further analysis revealed that this trend held true for lesbian participants but not for gay participants. Gay participants were slightly more likely to indicate that they most often are not friends before dating or beginning a relationship with someone. The results of the current study are consistent with Rose and Zand's (2000) finding that many lesbians follow a "friendship script" when it comes to dating and relationship formation. Consequently, many lesbian college/university students who take this approach may also experience some of the drawbacks reported by participants in Rose and Zand's (2000) study, namely that it can be unclear whether a friendship is shifting into a romantic connection and whether or not the friend is interested in sexual involvement. Still, they may weigh the potential drawbacks of this approach against its potential benefits, as many lesbians in Rose and Zand's (2000) study felt that the friendship script provided a more secure foundation for a committed relationship. Although the results of the current study revealed that the "friendship script" to dating and relationship formation was most commonly followed by participants overall, following a "romance script" also appears to be highly typical of gay and lesbian college students. Much less common, but still a frequent pattern for over a quarter of participants in the current study, is following a "sexually explicit script." These findings are consistent with those of Rose and Zand (2000) in their study of lesbians between the ages of 22 and 63. Each of these scripts may have both pros and cons and helping professionals may help gay and lesbian students explore which patterns suit them best, as individuals differ in terms of their

preferred scripts (Rose & Zand, 2000) and, like the majority of participants in the current study, individuals can follow more than one script.

In terms of problems encountered in "casual" and "involved" dating, participants in the current study cited a number of different factors. The most frequently reported problems when casually dating—cited by ten or more participants and presented in descending order—included differences in desired commitment, communication difficulties, differing sexual expectations, lack of compatibility/connection, differences in strength of feelings/attachment, ambiguity, lack of shared interests, personality issues, lack of time, lack/loss of interest, dishonesty/insincerity, other sex-related problems, differing expectations/priorities, and jealousy. On the other hand, the most frequently reported problems in committed relationships—cited by ten or more participants and presented in descending order—were communication issues, time together (too much/too little), sex-related problems, commitment issues, jealousy, boredom/monotony, trust issues, insecurities/worries/doubt, lack of compatibility, conflict about level of "outness," and different needs/wants/goals. While some problems topped both lists, differences also existed between casual and involved dating problems, which is similar to findings by Zusman and Knox (1998) in their study of undergraduate students of unspecified sexual orientations.

Consistent with the general thought in the LGBT psychological literature (e.g., Alonzo, 2005; Evans & D'Augelli, 1996; Klinger, 1996; Stein & Cabaj, 1996), most gay and lesbian participants in the current study described the level of exposure they have had to positive models of same-sex relationship as somewhat to very low. While various authors have noted that this relative lack of models can contribute to difficulties in the

early relationships of gay and lesbian individuals (e.g., Evans & D'Augelli, 1996; Klinger, 1996), participants in the current study seemed to be somewhat divided on this issue. The most frequent response of participants to the question of whether they feel that the level of exposure they have had to models of successful same-sex intimate relationships has impacted their relationships was that they were unsure, and the remaining respondents were split relatively equally between affirmation and denial of this impact. It may be that this is an issue to which many gay and lesbian college students have not given much thought on a conscious level, or it may also be related to the complex ways that a relative lack of models can impact same-sex relationships. For example, Klinger (1996) asserted that, while a relative lack of models of these relationships may initially serve as a disadvantage, it can transform into an asset that allows greater flexibility and creative negotiation of the framework of one's relationships than the more rigidly-defined expectations that may be experienced by those entering heterosexual relationships with significant exposure to models. Participants in the current study who provided additional comments related to these issues provided some insights, but only a minority (18-33%) of respondents provided these optional comments, which may or may not be representative of the overall sample of participants.

Data from this study also supports much of what the general psychological literature says about social support received by lesbians and gay men. The results suggest that current gay and lesbian college/university students report obtaining the most support from friends. Although cited much less frequently, family was the second most commonly cited primary source of support. This is consistent with Kurdek's (2003) finding that friends rather than family are most often the primary sources of support for

lesbians and gay men, and provides further support for the notion that many lesbians and gay men create "families of choice" through loving and supportive friends and others. Many of the participants who are in relationships also identified their partner as a primary source of support, which was the third most commonly cited response. Of note was that respondents who indicated that their partner was their primary source of support also reported significantly higher relationship satisfaction than others. However, Alonzo (2005) cautions that this can become problematic in certain instances if, out of isolation, partners pressure one another to be the sole source of support to meet their every need. Helping professionals working with gay and lesbian students should be cognizant of this potential, particularly in cases when individuals or couples are not "out," so that they can help these students utilize this positive source of support without overwhelming their partner, such as by finding additional sources of support to relieve some of the pressure.

In terms of ratings of perceived support for their same-sex relationships, the vast majority of gay and lesbian college students in the current study reported experiencing a very high level of support from their friends. However, they were very split in terms of perceived support for their relationships from family. Each rating category from very low support to very high support was selected by a number of participants on this item of the survey. Clearly, these experiences differ greatly from one individual and family to the next. As stated by Peplau and Fingerhut (2007), some gay men and lesbians have strong, positive relations with family, while others have negative relations that range from grudging acceptance to complete rejection. Most experience a low level of support from society in general, as frequently discussed in the literature and supported by the results of the current study. However, as previously mentioned, these individuals appear

to find ways to obtain support despite these obstacles. The large majority of gay and lesbian college students in the current study reported obtaining a high level of support from the groups and organizations to which they belong, and, although not one of the most frequently cited primary sources of support, many participants mentioned LGBT groups and organizations on their college/university campuses or in their communities as significant sources of support.

The current study also examined issues related to coming out and being out as they pertain to same-sex relationships. When participants were asked to rate how frequently they experience conflicts with their partner(s) regarding level of "outness," most reported that such conflict occurs, but only occasionally. Although some authors have noted that being closeted can take a toll on gay and lesbian individuals and couples (e.g., Falco, 1996), the current study did not find a significant correlation between frequency of conflicts with a partner about outness and ratings of relationship satisfaction. The current study could not verify the suggestion in the literature that these conflicts may occur more often among interracial couples (Smith, 1997), as such data was not gathered, so future research examining such a relationship may be beneficial.

Stereotypes held by some that lesbians and gay men do not have happy, well-adjusted intimate relationships have repeatedly been disproven by research comparing same-sex and opposite-sex couples (Alonzo, 2005; Kurdek, 1998; Kurdek, 2001 as cited by Kurdek, 2005; Peplau et al. 1996). The current study also found that the majority of gay and lesbian participants who are currently in a relationship report high levels of relationship satisfaction, with none reporting very low satisfaction. Clearly, gay and lesbian college students can and do have satisfying same-sex intimate relationships.

Contrary to the finding that both same- and opposite-sex couples tend to experience a decline in relationship quality over time (Kurdek, 1998), no significant correlation was found in the current study between ratings of relationship satisfaction and length of the relationship. However, this may be related to the fact that most of the participants in the current study are young adults and have had relationships of relatively limited durations.

Another measure of relationship quality, namely intimacy, was also examined. The majority of respondents rated the level of emotional intimacy in their current or most recent relationship as somewhat to very high. These ratings were marginally statistically significantly higher among lesbian respondents than among gay male respondents, though ratings were generally high for both groups. This difference is not inconsistent with previous literature which states that same-sex relationships may on average tend to be characterized by the relational style socially prescribed for that gender, such that socialization may facilitate emotional intimacy in lesbian relationships more than in gay male relationships (Stein & Cabaj, 1996). However, the current study also produced results consistent with writings of Bepko and Johnson (2000) that emotional disengagement may not be as common among male couples as suggested by stereotypes, clinical samples, and historical literature on the topic. The majority of participants did not feel that they and their current or most recent partner were overly disengaged or emotionally detached, and no significant differences were found between lesbian and gay male respondents on this item. Similarly, the majority of participants also denied feeling that they and their current or most recent partner were overly enmeshed, and again no significant differences were found between the responses of gay and lesbian participants. It appears that most gay and lesbian college students may tend to view their same-sex

relationships as highly emotionally intimate rather than characterized by extremes of excessive disengagement or enmeshment. Again, this supports the contention that gay and lesbian individuals, in this case within the college student population specifically, are quite capable of having happy, well-adjusted same-sex intimate relationships.

Regarding the topic of sex in the same-sex relationships of gay and lesbian college students, most participants reported high levels of sexual satisfaction with their current or most recent partner, which is consistent with previous research of lesbians and gay men (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). This appears to be a strength of these relationships, which some authors have attributed to better understanding of a partner's desires, less focus on simultaneous orgasms, and increased mutuality among same-sex couples compared to heterosexual couples (Masters & Johnson as cited by Coleman & Rosser, 1996). Contrary to previous research which found a reciprocal association between sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction among lesbian and gay male couples (Peplau et al., 2004), the current study did not find a significant correlation between the two. Future research may help clarify this disparity.

Regarding frequency of sexual activities with a casual or committed partner, responses from most to least frequently selected by participants were several times per week, weekly, monthly, a few times a year, biweekly, several times per day, never, and finally daily. While previous research has found that gay and lesbian couples, like heterosexual couples, tend to report declines in sexual frequency over the course of the relationship (Coleman & Rosser, 1996; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007), the results of the current study did not support this. Again, this may be related to the age of most participants in the current study and the relatively limited duration of their relationships,

but further research may be helpful in clarifying these issues. Although previous research

has also found that gay male couples tend to report more frequent sex than lesbian

couples (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007; Peplau et al., 2004), no significant differences were

found in the current study between the reported frequency of sexual activities of gay

compared to lesbian respondents. This disparity may be related to differences between

the gay and lesbian college student population and the larger gay and lesbian population,

but additional research should be conducted to gain further insight.

There was considerable variability in the responses of participants related to how

often they follow safer sex guidelines with a primary committed partner and a casual

partner. While those who were more likely to follow safer sex guidelines with a primary

committed partner were also more likely to follow such guidelines with a casual partner,

participants were significantly more likely to do so with a casual partner. This is

consistent with previous research of gay men (Coleman & Rosser, 1996; Peplau et al.,

2004). With both types of partners, gay male respondents reported following safer sex

guidelines more often than lesbian respondents. This may be related to the increased

susceptibility to transmitting sexually transmitted infections between men than between

women.

A final topic related to sex that was explored was that of sexual dysfunctions.

The majority of participants indicated that they have not experienced sexual dysfunctions

in their current or past relationship(s), while 31.6% reported that they had, and an

additional 9.8% were unsure. While not unsubstantial, this percentage is considerably

lower than that found by Rosser in 1994 (as cited by Coleman & Rosser, 1996) among

gay men, which may be related to the young age of participants in the current study. No

significant differences were found between the responses of gay and lesbian participants on this item.

With regards to issues of monogamy and nonmonogamy, the majority of participants (60.2%) described their current or most recent relationship as completely monogamous, while 19.5% reported that they agreed to be monogamous but that the agreement was broken by at least one partner, 9% indicated that the relationship was open or nonmonogamous but with no explicit agreement, and only 4.5% reported an agreement to be open or nonmonogamous. The remainder selected not applicable. Contrary to previous findings that gay male couples are more likely than other couples to have nonmonogamous relationships (Peplau & Spalding, 2003), the current study found no significant difference between the responses of gay compared to lesbian participants in this area. Consistent with existing research (Alonzo, 2005), however, no significant difference was found between monogamy/nonmonogamy and ratings of relationship satisfaction. Just over half of respondents in the current study reported being very satisfied with the monogamy/nonmonogamy status of their relationship, with another quarter of participants indicated that they are somewhat satisfied with it. Of note is that respondents who reported completely monogamous relationships as well as those who reported agreement to be nonmongamous/open were significantly more satisfied with this status than those whose agreement to be monogamous was broken and those who were nonmonogamous/open but had no explicit agreement related to this. When asked about the degree to which this monogamy/nonmonogamy status contributed to the problems in the primary relationship, most indicated that it did not contribute at all. However, ratings of the degree to which this status contributed to problems in the primary relationship

were significantly higher among respondents who reported broken agreements to be monogamous than those with all other monogamy/nonmonogamy identifications. These findings are consistent with previous research of gay male couples by LaSala (2004), in which completely monogamous and openly nonmonogamous couples were found to be equally well-adjusted in terms of relationship quality, while those with broken agreements to be monogamous were among the least adjusted and satisfied. These results suggest that, while only a minority of gay and lesbian college students identify as openly nonmonogamous in their relationships, those who did are no less satisfied or well-adjusted in their relationships. Broken agreements to be monogamous tend to be the most detrimental, followed by being nonmonogamous with no explicit agreement about this. This may be helpful information for individuals who are considering nonmonogamy in their relationships.

The results of the current study indicate that long-distance relationships are common among gay and lesbian college students. While only a minority of participants (17.3%) indicated that they are currently in what they consider to be a long-distance relationship, over 60% of respondents reported that they have had one or more long-distance relationships. These numbers are similar to those found in a study of undergraduate students conducted by Knox et al. (2002). When participants with long-distance relationship experience were asked to characterize the effects of the distance as mostly negative, mostly positive, or equally positive and negative, most indicated that they had been mostly negative, followed by equally positive and negative. Very few indicated mostly positive effects. While these results support findings by Knox et al. (2002) that geographic separation created relationship problems in the majority of cases,

they also support the finding that the impact can be neutral and even positive in some cases. Participants in the current study who provided additional comments related to the effects of long-distance on their relationships identified a number of both negative and positive effects which provide some insight into this topic. Clearly, long-distance relationships are common experiences of gay and lesbian college students and, while challenging, can also be successful.

A relationship circumstance that was less common but still frequently experienced among participants in the current study is cohabitation. While the majority of participants reported that they have not yet lived with a partner, and only 16% reported currently living with a partner, almost 42% of respondents have had experience with cohabitation. This percentage is much higher than the 15% of undergraduate students in Knox et al.'s (1999) study of undergraduate students of unspecified sexual orientations who indicated that they were living with a partner or had previously done so. There may be several potential explanations for this. It may be that gay and lesbian college students are particularly likely to live with a partner or that the Knox et al. (1999) results are outdated and no longer reflect the current realities of college students. On the other hand, the difference may be related to the inclusion of graduate as well as undergraduate students in the current study, while the Knox et al. (1999) study was limited to undergraduate students. This is quite possible as a significant positive correlation was found in the current study between experience with cohabitation and current year in college/university as well as with age. The finding that older and more advanced students were more likely to have had experience with cohabitation is consistent with Knox et al.'s (1999) finding that one distinguishing characteristic of students who had

experience with cohabitation was that they were more likely to be older (third and fourth year students rather than first or second year). Knox et al. (1999) found that another distinguishing characteristic of these students was that they were more likely to have had experience with or be open to interracial dating. Although the current study did not investigate openness to interracial dating, experience with interracial or interethnic dating was examined, and no significant correlation was found between such experience and experience with cohabitation.

In the current study, only a small minority of participants reported that they or their current or most recent partner has children. Because parenthood is so rare among gay and lesbian college students, little research has been conducted on the topic. However, the decision of whether or not to have/adopt children at some point was much more relevant to participants in the current study. Just under half of participants reported that this decision had been discussed in their current or most recent relationship, although almost an equal percentage of respondents reported that it had not been, with a very small minority indicated that they were unsure. Because, as stated by Alonzo (2005), this decision can be difficult due to factors pertaining to institutional heterosexism and relative lack of support for same-sex parents, helping professionals may be of assistance to gay and lesbian individuals or same-sex couples if they familiarize themselves with some of the primary considerations and options relevant to this topic.

Another relationship issue that was explored in the current study was the division of labor, power, and decision making. Consistent with literature stating that young adults and members of the gay and lesbian community are especially likely to endorse an equal balance of power as ideal for intimate relationships (Caldwell & Peplau, 1984; Kurdek,

1995; Kurdek, 2005; Peplau et al., 1996; Peplau & Spalding, 2003), the large majority of participants in the current study reported that chores, responsibilities, power, and decision making were shared fairly equally or very equally in their current or most recent relationship. As stated by various other authors (e.g., Klinger, 1996; Peplau et al., 1996; Peplau & Spalding, 2003), the relative freedom from rigid opposing gender roles in same-sex relationships seems to facilitate this more egalitarian and flexible division of labor and power. This may be viewed as a significant strength of same-sex relationships, although Klinger (1996) cautions that less adherence to rigid gender roles can at times be confusing and anxiety-provoking for some, particularly early in the coming-out process and with little exposure to models of such relationships. This may be an area in which helping professionals can provide some information and guidance to help couples who may be struggling in this area to negotiate some of these issues.

Contrary to existing literature which states that lesbian couples typically endorse a greater degree of equality in their relationships than gay male couples (Klinger, 1996), no significant differences were found in the current study between gay and lesbian participants in this area. It may be that this is an area in which existing literature is outdated, or that findings in the larger gay and lesbian population do not generalize to the experiences of current gay and lesbian college students. Future research on this topic may be warranted to help clarify this disparity.

Issues pertaining to conflict in the relationships of gay and lesbian college students were also explored in the current study. The most frequently reported sources of conflict in the casual or committed relationships of participants in this study—cited by ten or more participants and presented here in descending order—included

communication issues, time together/scheduling issues, sex, personality issues, jealousy, level of outness, commitment, physical distance, emotional connection/attachment, monogamy/nonmonogamy and infidelity, and chores and other responsibilities. These differed to some degree from those identified in previous research of gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples (Kurdek 2004, as cited by Kurdek, 2005), although both studies identified sex and household tasks as common sources of conflict. The finding in previous research that the reported frequency of arguments is similar among gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples (Metz et al., 1994), however, is consistent with the results of the current study. The majority of both gay and lesbian participants in the current study reported somewhat to very infrequent conflicts in their current or most recent relationship, and no significant differences were found between gay and lesbian respondents in this area. Also consistent with literature attesting to the generally strong conflict management and resolution skills in same-sex relative to opposite-sex couples (Kurdek, 2004), most participants in the current described the conflict management/resolution skills in their current or most recent relationship as "good" to "excellent," and no significant differences were found between responses of gay and lesbian participants. This also appears to be a strength of many gay and lesbian relationships, which authors such as Kurdek (2005) have related to freedom in same-sex relationships from the conflict-inducing influence of systematic differences in how men and women perceive their worlds. Also consistent with the findings of previous research (Kurdek, 2004), a significant positive correlation was found in the current study between ratings of conflict management/resolution skills and ratings of relationship satisfaction.

While lesbians and gay men as a group may tend to exhibit strong conflict management/resolution skills in their intimate relationships, they are still susceptible to domestic violence just as are opposite-sex couples. The current study found that 23.5% of respondents reported experiencing some form of abuse in a same-sex relationship, and an additional 6.8% were unsure. These percentages are within the range of estimates in the literature of the prevalence of intimate partner violence in gay and lesbian couples, such as Rohrbaugh's (2006) reported estimate of 12-50%. No significant differences were found in the current study between gay and lesbian respondents on this issue, so clearly perpetrators of domestic violence are not exclusively male and victims exclusively female. The most common forms of abuse experienced by participants— presented here in descending order—were emotional/psychological abuse and verbal abuse, followed by less frequent reports of physical abuse, and even fewer reports of sexual abuse. This is not inconsistent with previous research, such as Waldner-Haugrud et al's (1997) finding that threats, slapping, pushing, and punching were the most commonly reported forms of intimate partner violence among their sample of lesbians and gay men. This is also consistent with Murray and Kardatzke's (2007) finding that psychological abuse from a partner is more common than physical and sexual dating violence among college students. An issue that may be more unique to same-sex relationships, though, is that of barriers to intervention created by institutionalized homophobia (e.g., in the legal system and shelters for victims of domestic violence, as well as general stigma placed on same-sex relationships). In the current study, 62.5% of respondents reported that they did not seek help/intervention for the relationship abuse they experienced, and 7.5% of those who did seek help/intervention experienced barriers

based on their sexual orientation, with an additional 5% being unsure. Of note were

some comments provided by respondents that intervention was not sought due to fear of

ridicule, that local centers are not equipped to deal with such issues, and that the presence

or absence of LGBT allies in helping positions determines whether or not these

individuals experience barriers in seeking help/intervention for relationship abuse.

An additional topic addressed in the current study was that of relationship

dissolution. Over 90% of respondents indicated that they have experienced one or more

break-ups in the past, and no significant differences were found between gay and lesbian

participants. The most frequently reported reasons for past break-ups—cited by ten or

more participants and presented here in descending order—were categorized as

nonmonogamy or infidelity, physical distance, lack or loss of interest/love/attraction,

irreconcilable differences, issues related to sexual or gender identity, frequent

conflict/arguments, growing apart, commitment issues, incompatibility, and dishonesty.

In terms of the emotional difficulty of break-ups for participants, most reported that they

tend to be difficult to very difficult, with very few respondents reporting that that are not

difficult at all. This did not differ significantly between gay and lesbian respondents,

which is consistent with previous findings of emotional adjustment to relationship

dissolution among lesbians and gay men (Kurdek, 1991). Participants in the current

study were somewhat split in terms of whether or not they tend to remain friends with ex-

partners. Most indicated equally yes and no in response to this question, while 29.9%

indicated that they do not tend to remain friends with ex-partners and 25.6% reported that

they do. A variety of comments were provided by participants related to the

circumstances in which they are more or less likely to remain friends with ex-partners,

some of the problems they have encountered in attempting to maintain a friendship, and the reasons they do or do not tend to remain friends, which helps provide some insights into this topic that are not sufficiently addressed in existing literature.

When participants were asked about what they perceive as the major benefits from and/or sources of strength in their same-sex intimate relationships, a wide variety of responses were provided. Some of these benefits or sources of strength related to the fact that the partners are of the same gender (e.g., greater ability to relate with and understand one another). Other related to fact that the partners are both sexual minorities (e.g., closeness resulting from common struggles). Some respondents stated that they believe the benefits from and/or sources of strength in their same-sex relationships are generally the same as in heterosexual relationships. Other respondents cited a variety of specific sources of strength or beneficial aspects of their relationships, the most common of which (cited by ten or more participants and presented in descending order) were mutual love and caring, strong emotional connection, sex and physical intimacy, companionship, and mutual support.

It should be noted that some respondents commented that this final question was phrased in a confusing way, and that they were unsure what exactly was being asked, so future research should adjust the wording of this item to make it more clear. Although considerable qualitative data was still generated by this item, this may be viewed as a limitation of the current study. Another limitation was that there was an insufficient number of participants in some groups (e.g., type of college/university) to conduct analyses based on these groups. In particular, the sample of gay and lesbian students with disabilities and of those who identify as transgender in the current study were quite

limited and future studies should gather more focused samples to better ensure representativeness of these groups and more accurate examination of their dating and relationship experiences. Additionally, participants in the current study were recruited from gay- and lesbian-related groups, organizations, and university centers, which may not have elicited a fully representative sample of gay and lesbian college students. Some closeted students may be less likely to subscribe to such mailing lists, and some colleges/universities or communities may not have such groups/organizations.

With so much rich data obtained from participants' survey responses in the current study, future directions include conducting additional analyses that were not performed for this dissertation in order to examine a number of topics in more depth. Furthermore, the researcher proposes that a similar study be conducted with other groups of sexual minority college students (e.g., bisexual, pansexual or omnisexual, etc.). It was noted that several individuals visited the survey website for the current study but did not meet the criteria for participation as they did not identify as gay or lesbian. Some individuals also e-mailed the researcher expressing their concern that other sexual minorities were being excluded from the study. While inclusion of all sexual minority groups was beyond the scope of the current study, the researcher recognizes that valuable data could be obtained by conducting a similar study with those other groups.

Some issues that were identified in the current study should also be further explored in future studies. For example, a more detailed study into the perceptions of gay and lesbian college students of campus climate and sensitivity of educational institutions to the needs of gay and lesbian students could be beneficial in finding ways of improving identified issues.

Implications for the results of the current study may include informing psychotherapeutic interventions and other contact by various helping professionals with gay and lesbian college students, potentially informing campus policies and services with this population, helping to clarify some of the areas of confusion or ambiguity in the extant literature, and identifying relationship issues experienced by gay and lesbian college/university students that merit more in-depth exploration.

Appendix A

Recruitment E-mail

Gay and Lesbian Research Participants Needed! 15-30 Min Online Survey

Hello. My name is Aubrey Morrison. I am a doctoral student at the Wright State University School of Professional Psychology. I am recruiting self-identified lesbians and gay men who are 18 years or older and currently enrolled in college or university in the United States or Canada to participate in my research study. The topic of the research is dating and relationship experiences of gay and lesbian college students. Data is collected using an online survey and should take about 15 to 30 minutes to complete. If you meet these requirements, and would like to know more, you can find complete details by selecting the link below.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/78YVCZR

It is important that I get a representative sample of gay and lesbian college/university students. This data will contribute to the knowledge base related to gay and lesbian dating and relationship experiences, particularly in the college population, thus helping to dispel myths and potentially improve services for this population.

If you are aware of individuals, or email groups etc., who might meet these requirements, I would appreciate you forwarding this email to them. Your help and consideration is appreciated.

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of Wright State University.

The survey will close on or before August 15, 2011.

Please do not respond directly to this email.
You can reach me at: morrison.34@wright.edu
My advisor, Dr. Heather Wilder, may be reached at heather.wilder@wright.edu

Thank you again,
Aubrey Morrison

Gay and Lesbian Research Participants Needed! 15-30 Min Online Survey

Hello. My name is Aubrey Morrison. I am a doctoral student at the Wright State University School of Professional Psychology conducting research on the gay and lesbian college/university student population. I plan to use the data from my research to build on the knowledge base related to gay and lesbian dating and relationship experiences, particularly in the college/university population, thus helping to dispel myths and improve services for this population.

 As I am sure you understand, it is very important to get a representative sample in order to produce valid data, so I need your help. I deeply thank you for your consideration. If you also feel that this is a worthy cause, please forward the information below to your group(s).

Once individuals click on the link, they are taken to a complete informed consent, which tells them everything they need to know in order to make an informed decision about participating. No identifying information is collected and participant identities are protected. Even I, as the researcher, will have no way of identifying participants or their responses.

Individuals, whether they choose to participate or not, may email me at morrison.34@wright.edu to obtain the results of this study.

Thank you for your time,
Aubrey Morrison

(Minimum Information to be forwarded below)

_____
Gay and Lesbian Research Participants Needed! 15-30 Min Online Survey

Hello. My name is Aubrey Morrison. I am a doctoral student at the Wright State University School of Professional Psychology. I am recruiting self-identified lesbian and gay college/university students in the United States and Canada who are 18 years or older to participate in my research study. Data is collected using an online survey and should take about 15 to 30 minutes to complete. If you meet these requirements, and would like to know more, you can find complete details by selecting the link below.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/78YVCZR

It is important that I get a representative sample of gay and lesbian college/university students. This data will contribute to the knowledge base related to gay and lesbian dating and relationship experiences, particularly among college/university students, thus helping to dispel myths and improve services for this population.

If you are aware of individuals, or email groups etc., who might meet these requirements, I would appreciate you forwarding this email to them. Your help and consideration is appreciated.

The survey will close on or before August 15, 2011.

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of Wright State University. Questions may be directed to this researcher at morrison.34@wright.edu. My advisor, Dr. Heather Wilder, may be reached at heather.wilder@wright.edu.

Thank you again,
Aubrey Morrison

Appendix B

Informed Consent

Dear Friend,

You are invited to participate in a research study designed to examine the dating and intimate relationship experiences of self-identified gay and lesbian college/university students. It involves answering questions regarding a variety of topics related to dating and relationships. This questionnaire should take approximately 15 to 30 minutes to complete. Your answers will be treated as strictly confidential and will be accessible only to those in the research group. Your answers will remain completely anonymous and no identifying information will be collected from your answers. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could connect you in any way to this study.

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of contemporary gay and lesbian dating and intimate relationships within the college/university student population. The hope is that contributing to the knowledge base in this area will help dispel myths, update outdated information, and improve service delivery to gay and lesbian college students. You may find answering the questions interesting or even helpful as you explore your thoughts and feelings about these issues. While you may experience these indirect benefits, there is no direct benefit to you for your participation in this study.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any stage before completing the questionnaire. You are also free to refuse to answer any questions. However, the research team encourages you to make the effort and complete the questionnaire. The data provided by you will be of higher value for us if provided in the most complete manner possible.

The risks to your privacy in this research are very low. However, we are legally required to elaborate on any potential risks no matter how small.

The research requires that your computer's IP address needs to be checked to prevent multiple submissions. This information will be held in encrypted files until the research is completed, but will not be available to the researchers and will not be used to identify any individuals.

There is a very small risk that participation in this research may compromise your privacy. Your responses will be submitted over a secure connection, but in rare instances unauthorized third parties have intercepted such information using sophisticated tools. For this study we have utilized software to protect against third party interception of your information to the best of our ability. Your IP address, although encrypted and secure, could potentially be obtained by a determined hacker. Our survey software allows only the researchers involved in this study access to your information, and this information cannot in any way be associated with you or your IP address in the unlikely event that an outside party accesses it.

Please be advised that your personal computer stores information regarding websites you have visited in your browser's history list. This list can be cleared at any time (see your browser's Help menu for instructions). However, your answers to this survey are only stored on your computer until you close your browser window.

If you contact the researcher or faculty advisor by email concerning this study, there is a risk that others using your computer or sharing your email account will be able to read your email or the researcher's reply. However, no email contact is required to complete the survey.

Having read the information explaining this study, I agree to participate. I understand that all information is anonymous and I will not be identified as a participant in this study. I understand the risks of transmitting data electronically over the Internet. I also understand that if I wish to withdraw from this study at any time, I can simply close the Internet browser.

Please verify that each of these conditions is true of you:
• 	I am 18 years of age or older
• 	I self-identify as gay or lesbian
• 	I am currently enrolled in a college or university in the United States or Canada

Please continue only if all three of the conditions are applicable to you.

If you would like to participate in this study please select "yes" below after reading this page. Selecting "yes" indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study and verify that you are 18 years of age or older. If you do not wish to participate in this study or do not meet the above criteria for participation, select "no" below to close this window.

If you would like a copy of this statement, please use your browser's print command to print it before continuing.

Please feel free to contact the researcher or my faculty advisor with any questions or concerns.

Researcher contact information: 	Aubrey Morrison, Psy.M.
	morrison.34@wright.edu

Faculty advisor contact information: 	Heather Wilder, Psy.D.
	heather.wilder@wright.edu
	937-775-4300

If you have general questions about giving consent or your rights as a research participant in this research study, you may call the Wright State University Institutional Review Board in Dayton, OH at 937-775-4462.

1. **Do you consent to participate?**

    ○   Yes, I consent to participate in this study.

    ○   No, I do not wish to participate at this time.

Appendix C

Demographic Survey Questions

2. **Do you identify as:**
   ○ Gay

   ○ Lesbian

   ○ Neither

3. **Are you currently enrolled in a college/university in**
   ○ The United States

   ○ Canada

   ○ Neither

4. **Current year in college/university**

	Undergraduate Studies	OR	Graduate studies
1st year	○		○
2nd year	○		○
3rd year	○		○
4th year	○		○
5th year +	○		○

5. **Type of college/university you are currently attending (select all that apply)**

   ○ Private   ○ Public   ○ Unknown or N/A

   ○ All female   ○ All male   ○ Female and male

   ○ University   ○ Community or junior college ○ Agricultural

   ○ Technical   ○ Religiously affiliated ○ Historically black college

   ○ Other _____

6. **Your age:** _____

7. **Your gender**
   ○ Female

   ○ Male

○ Transgender Male to Female

○ Transgender Female to Male

○ Intersexed

8. **In what state or province do you live?** _____

9. **Are you currently an international student?**

   ○ Yes　　　　　　　○ No

10. **In what country were you primarily raised?** _____

11. **Your Race (select all that apply)**

    ○ Black or African American

    ○ Asian or Asian American

    ○ Hispanic or Latino/Latina

    ○ White/Caucasian

    ○ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

    ○ American Indian or Alaska Native

    ○ Biracial

    ○ Mixed Race

    ○ Other (please specify) _____

12. **Current religious identification**

    ○ Catholic

    ○ Other Christian

    ○ Muslim

    ○ Jewish

    ○ Buddhist

    ○ Hindu

    ○ Sik

    ○ Wicca, Feaery, Earth, or Goddess

    ○ Baha'i

○ Atheist

○ Agnostic

○ Other (please specify) _____

13. **In what type of area do you currently live?**

○ Urban

○ Suburban

○ Rural

○ Other or Unknown

14. **HIV Status**

○ HIV Positive

○ HIV Negative

○ Unknown or Prefer Not to Disclose

15. **Disability Status**

○ Able-bodied/No known disability

○ Physical Disability

○ Cognitive Disability

○ Mental/Emotional Disability

○ Other

If willing, please specify the disability/disabilities _____

16. **Are you currently in a same-sex relationship?**

○ Yes   ○ No

17. **Approximately how many intimate relationships have you had (not including casual sex partners), and how many of those relationships have been same-sex?**

	Number of Relationships Overall	Number of Same-Sex Relationships
a) Since being in college/university	_____	_____
b) Prior to college/university	_____	_____

18. **Your current or most recent partner is/was**
    - ○ Female
    - ○ Male
    - ○ Transgender Male to Female
    - ○ Transgender Female to Male
    - ○ Intersexed

19. **At approximately what age were you first attracted to someone of the same-sex? (may indicate unknown)** _____

20. **At approximately what age was your first experience with same-sex dating?**
    _____

21. **Do you currently date (please select one)**
    - ○ Only same-sex
    - ○ Primarily same-sex
    - ○ Both same- and opposite-sex
    - ○ Primarily opposite-sex
    - ○ Only opposite-sex

22. **Do you live with a current partner?**
    - ○ Yes
    - ○ No
    - ○ Not currently partnered

23. **At what age did you first begin to identify as gay or lesbian? (may indicate unknown)** _____

24. **At what age did you first disclose your sexual orientation to another individual? (If you have not disclosed, please respond with N/A)**
    _____

25. Are you "out" to others about your sexuality? (Please select one response per row)

	None	Some	Most	All	N/A
Out to immediate family	○	○	○	○	○
Out to extended	○	○	○	○	○
Family	○	○	○	○	○
Out to close LGBT friends	○	○	○	○	○
Out to close straight friends	○	○	○	○	○
Out to coworkers	○	○	○	○	○
Out to neighbors	○	○	○	○	○
Out to members of your church or religious community	○	○	○	○	○

26. Approximately how long have you been in your current or most recent relationship? (Please select closest response) _____

27. Current relationship commitment

○ Married

○ Held ceremony

○ Civil Union

○ Wear rings

○ Verbal commitment

○ Uncommitted

○ Not currently in a relationship

○ Other (please describe) _____

Survey Questions

28. **How would you rate the campus climate at your current college/university for gay and lesbian students? (i.e., how welcoming, inclusive, and respectful do you feel the campus environment is)**

1 - Highly unsatisfactory	2 - Somewhat unsatisfactory	3 - Somewhat satisfactory	4 - Highly satisfactory
○	○	○	○

29. **How sensitive do you feel your current college/university is to the needs of gay and lesbian students? (please rate)**

1 - Highly insensitive	2 - Somewhat insensitive	3 - Somewhat sensitive	4 - Highly sensitive
○	○	○	○

30. **Have you dated or been in an intimate relationship with someone who does not share your race/ethnicity, disability status, age (greater than 10 years difference), religious identification, socioeconomic status, or nationality?**

   ○ Yes   ○ No

31. **If yes, please specify all that apply to your current or past relationships**

   ○ Differences in Race/Ethnicity

   ○ Differences in Disability status

   ○ Differences in Age (greater than 10 years difference)

   ○ Differences in Religious identification

   ○ Differences in Socioeconomic status

   ○ Differences in Nationality

   Other/Comments: _____

32. **What are the top three qualities you seek in potential dating partners?**

   1) _____

   2) _____

   3) _____

33. **Where/how do you typically meet potential dating partners?** _____

   _____

   _____

34. How easy or difficult is it for you to meet potential dating partners? (please rate)

1 - Very easy	2 - Somewhat easy	3 - Somewhat difficult	4 - Very difficult
○	○	○	○

35. What are you top three reasons for dating?

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

36. Do you expect that there will be sexual contact on a typical first date?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Unsure

37. Would you say that you are most often friends with someone before dating or beginning an intimate relationship with them?

○ Yes   ○ No

38. Which of the following do you feel best describes your typical pattern of dating or relationship formation? (may select more than one if equally typical for you)

○ Friendship

○ Romance

○ Sexually explicit (i.e., sex is the primary focus)

39. When CASUALLY DATING, what do you feel are the top three problems that you tend to encounter?

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

40. When in a COMMITTED RELATIONSHIP, what do you feel are the top three problems that you tend to encounter?

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

41. **To what degree do you feel that mental health issues (e.g., mental illness, substance abuse, recovery from past abuse or other trauma, etc.) have impacted your relationship(s)? (please rate)**

1 - No impact	2 - Little impact	3 - Moderate impact	4 - Significant impact
○	○	○	○

Any comments: _____

42. **Please rate the level of exposure you have had to role models of successful same-sex intimate relationships (e.g., in the media, in public, among friends and family members, etc.) up until this point in your life.**

1 - Very low	2 - Somewhat low	3 - Somewhat high	4 - Very high
○	○	○	○

Any comments: _____

43. **Follow-up question: Do you feel that the level of exposure you have had to such models has impacted your relationship(s)?**

○ Yes   ○ No   ○ Unsure

Any comments: _____

44. **Please rate the level of support you feel you receive for your same-sex intimate relationships from the following sources:**

	1 - Very low	2 - Somewhat low	3 - Somewhat high	4 - Very high	N/A
Family	○	○	○	○	○
Friends	○	○	○	○	○
Groups or organizations to which you belong	○	○	○	○	○
Society	○	○	○	○	○

Any comments: _____

45. **Who is your primary source of support? (please indicate their relationship to you)** _____

46. **How frequently do you experience conflicts with your partner(s) regarding level of "outness"?**

1 - Never	2 - Occasionally	3 - Often	4 - Very often	N/A
○	○	○	○	○

Any comments: _____

47. **If you are currently in a relationship, please rate your overall level of relationship satisfaction.**

1 - Very low	2 - Somewhat low	3 - Somewhat high	4 - Very high	N/A
○	○	○	○	○

Any comments: _____

48. **How would you rate the level of emotional intimacy between you and your current or most recent partner?**

1 - Very low	2 - Somewhat low	3 - Somewhat high	4 - Very high	N/A
○	○	○	○	○

Any comments: _____

49. **Do you feel that you and your current or most recent partner were overly enmeshed (e.g., your lives were so intertwined that you lost your individuality)?**

○ Yes   ○ No   ○ Unsure

50. **Do you feel that you and your current or most recent partner were overly disengaged (e.g., emotionally detached)?**

○ Yes   ○ No   ○ Unsure

51. **Please rate your level of sexual satisfaction with your current or most recent partner.**

1 - Very low	2 - Somewhat low	3 - Somewhat high	4 - Very high	N/A
○	○	○	○	○

Any comments: _____

52. **On average, how frequently do you engage in sexual activities with a partner (casual or committed)?**

○ Never

○ A few times a year

○ Monthly

○ Biweekly

○ Weekly

○ Several times per week

○ Daily

○ Several times per day

53. **Do you follow safer sex guidelines (e.g., using condoms, dental dams, or other protection; avoiding fluid exchange; getting tested regularly for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections; etc.)?**

	Never	Rarely	Frequently	Always	N/A
a) With a primary committed partner	○	○	○	○	○
b) With a casual partner	○	○	○	○	○

54. **Have you experienced any sexual dysfunctions in your current or past relationship(s)?**

○ Yes   ○ No   ○ Unsure

If willing, please specify: _____

55. **Please indicate that which best applies to your current or most recent relationship:**

○ Completely monogamous

○ Agree to be monogamous but agreement broken by at least one partner

○ Nonmonogamous/open relationship with no explicit agreement

○ Agree to be nonmonogamous/open

○ N/A

56. Follow-up question: How satisfied are you with this? (please rate)

1 - Very dissatisfied	2 - Somewhat dissatisfied	3 - Somewhat satisfied	4 - Very satisfied
○	○	○	○

57. Follow-up question (related to monogamy/nonmonogamy): To what degree do you feel that this has contributed to problems in the primary relationship?

1 - Not at all	2 - Slightly	3 - Somewhat	4 - Significantly
○	○	○	○

Any comments: _____

58. Are you currently in what you consider to be a long-distance relationship?

○ Yes   ○ No

59. Have you ever been in a long-distance relationship?

○ Yes   ○ No

60. If yes, have the effects of the distance been positive or negative?

○ Mostly negative

○ Mostly positive

○ Equally positive and negative

Any comments: _____

61. Have you ever lived with a partner while you were dating or in a relationship with him/her?

○ Yes   ○ No

62. Do you have children?

○ Yes   ○ No

Any comments: _____

63. Does your current or most recent partner have children?

○ Yes   ○ No

Any comments: _____

64. Has the decision of whether or not to have/adopt children been discussed in your current or most recent relationship?

○ Yes   ○ No   ○ Unsure

Any comments: _____

65. **Generally speaking, how equally do you feel the chores, responsibilities, power, and decision making have been divided or shared in your current or most recent relationship?**

1 - Very unequally	2 - Fairly unequally	3 – Fairly equally	4 - Very equally	N/A
○	○	○	○	○

Any comments: _____

66. **What have been the three most common sources of conflict in your casual or committed relationships?**

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

67. **Please rate the frequency of conflicts in your current or most recent relationship:**

1 - Very infrequent	2 - Somewhat infrequent	3 - Somewhat frequent	4 - Very frequent	N/A
○	○	○	○	○

68. **In your current or most recent relationship, how would you rate the conflict management/resolution skills of you and your partner(s)?**

1 - Very poor	2 - Somewhat poor	3 - Good	4 - Excellent	N/A
○	○	○	○	○

69. **Have you ever experienced abuse (emotional, physical, mental, or sexual) in a same-sex relationship?**

○ Yes   ○ No   ○ Unsure

70. **If you have experienced abuse in a same-sex relationship, please specify (select all that apply):**

○ Physical abuse

○ Verbal abuse

○ Emotional/Psychological abuse

○ Sexual abuse

○ Property damage

○ N/A

○ Other (please specify) _____

71. Have you experienced barriers in seeking help/intervention for relationship abuse based on your sexual orientation?

○ Yes   ○ No   ○ Did not seek   ○ Unsure
Help/intervention

If so, please specify (or skip if prefer not to disclose): _____
_____
_____

72. In what ways have factors associated with societal oppression (e.g., discrimination, homophobia and heterosexism, violence or threat of violence, unequal personal and civil rights, etc.) impacted your same-sex relationship(s)?
_____
_____
_____

73. Have you experienced one or more break-ups in the past?

○ Yes   ○ No

74. What have been the top three reasons for your past break-ups?

1) _____
2) _____
3) _____

75. Emotionally, how difficult do break-ups tend to be for you? (please rate)

1 - Not difficult at all	2 - Slightly difficult	3 - Difficult	4 - Very difficult
○	○	○	○

76. Do you tend to remain friends with ex-partners?

○ Yes   ○ No   ○ Equally yes and no

Any comments (e.g., why or why not): _____

77. What do you perceive as the major benefits from and/or sources of strength in your same-sex intimate relationships? _____
_____
_____

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