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## Parental Disclosures of Homosexual Identities: Variables Influencing Levels of Acceptance

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## Abstract

There are a growing number of homosexual parents caring for children conceived through previous heterosexual relationships. It has been shown that parents and children have healthier development when parents disclose their homosexuality than when it is kept a secret. This being so, it is important to identify variables that may predict children's acceptance of homosexual parents who disclose their identities. The current study examined the influence of four aspects of self-consciousness (shame-proneness, guilt-proneness, externalization, and detachment-unconcern), attitudes toward lesbians and gay men, and quality of the parent-child relationship with mothers and fathers on the level of acceptance reported for a mother and a father's hypothetical disclosure of a homosexual identity. A multiple regression analysis revealed that high levels of guilt-proneness and positive attitudes toward lesbians predicted high levels of acceptance for a mother's disclosure of a lesbian identity. A multiple regression analysis also revealed that high levels of guilt-proneness, positive attitudes toward gay men, and high quality of relationships with fathers predicted high levels of acceptance for a father's disclosure of a gay identity. Additionally, lesbian mothers were more accepted than gay fathers and more positive attitudes were held towards lesbians than gay men. There was no significant difference between acceptance levels of male and female participants for either parent. These results imply that, although a stigma is associated with homosexual individuals, including parents, proneness to experiencing feelings of guilt may influence individuals to report high levels of acceptance that may not reflect their true feelings. Additionally, acceptance levels for fathers are influenced by the quality of the relationship and this may be due to the greater societal stigma associated with gay men as

opposed to lesbians. As a result of which, it may be easier to reject a gay father than a lesbian mother.

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Lesbian and gay parents with children from previous heterosexual relationships are faced with the choice of whether to disclose or not disclose their homosexual identity to their children. This is an area of stress for these families due to concern over the children's reactions to the disclosure. Also, when a homosexual parent does not disclose his or her sexual orientation, stress is experienced due to the constant threat of possible disclosure of the homosexual parent's sexual orientation (van Dam, 2004). It has been shown that offspring have a range of reactions when parents disclose a homosexual identity. Some respond with denial of their parents' homosexuality, which can later lead to anger and resentment (van Voorhis & McClain, 1997). Other reactions include shock (Lewis, 1980), negative reactions such as fear and shame (Dunne, 1987; Goldberg, 2007b), and positive reactions (Goldberg, 2007b). The reactions in turn affect the parent's and the family's functioning. Therefore, identifying variables which best predict positive feelings and acceptance by offspring of parents who disclose their homosexuality is an important area of study. The proposed study aims to identify some of these variables and provide a quantitative analysis to an area that has previously been studied using mainly qualitative strategies.

The areas to be reviewed in relation to the proposed study include the effects of children's reactions, both positive and negative, to parental disclosure of a homosexual identity, and variables that have previously been shown to influence reactions to a parent's disclosure, as well as, those being introduced as novel variables that may influence reactions. Also, the results of a parent's nondisclosure of a homosexual

identity and the results of a parent's disclosure of a homosexual identity will be discussed. Additionally, the factors that influence the parent's choice to disclose a homosexual identity will be presented.

### Effects of Reactions to a Parent's Disclosure

#### *Level of Parental Disclosure*

The child's reaction to the parent's disclosure of a homosexual identity has been found to have implications for both the child and the parent. One area that is influenced by the child's reaction is the level to which the parent discloses his or her homosexuality to the general public. Lynch (2000) conducted interviews with lesbian and gay stepfamilies to examine areas in which they were the same as or different from heterosexual stepfamilies. Lynch found lesbian and gay stepfamilies to be largely child-centered, especially in decisions concerning disclosure of the parent's homosexuality. The decisions that parents made concerning how disclosed to be revolved around the child's comfort level. This influenced how disclosed the parents would be outside of the home and inside the home, with increased levels of child comfort associated with increased levels of disclosure. Disclosure outside of the home involved such activities as participating in gay community events. Disclosure inside the home included displays of affection. The parents also reported generally high levels of comfort when their children were young, but not during their adolescence.

Another study conducted by Lynch (2004) reported similar findings. Lynch interviewed lesbian and gay stepfamilies to examine the process that lesbian and gay biological parents undergo regarding identity transformation and issues regarding identity disclosure. The child's level of comfort was a major influence on the parent's decision to

disclose his or her homosexuality to others. Participants stated that concern for the children and the effects their identity disclosure may have on them were a primary concern when choosing to disclose their homosexuality. Children with higher levels of discomfort had parents with higher levels of concern and stress regarding this issue.

Lynch and Murray (2000) found similar results in an interview study which examined the coming out process of lesbian and gay parents and stepparents. The interviews included questions regarding the couple's relationship and family relationships. With regard to coming out, issues were addressed concerning the decision to disclose. Participants were also asked how these decisions affected them and what the reactions and consequences were to their disclosure decisions. Lynch and Murray found that the degree to which the parent disclosed his or her homosexuality depended on the child's level of comfort. Parents were more disclosed if they had children with higher comfort levels. The child's level of comfort was shown to be influenced by age, with adolescents having the lowest level of comfort.

#### *Child Behavior and Emotional Problems*

Negative reactions have also been shown to be associated with higher levels of behavior and emotional problems in children. Bos, van Balen, van den Boom, and Sandfort (2004) measured the child's level of behavior and emotional problems using the Child Behavior Checklist. Rejection in the social realm was associated with internalizing behavior problems, externalizing behavior problems, and the total behavior problems of the child. This provided evidence for a positive correlation between rejection and the child's emotional and behavioral problems. The rejection children experienced was



likely to have influenced their behavior, which consequentially was associated with increased levels of parental stress.

Ross (1988) reported a case study in which behavior problems were present in a daughter of a lesbian mother. The lesbian mother was romantically involved with another female, and soon after the disclosure of her homosexuality to the daughter, problems began to develop with the child's behavior. The child began to act out and this caused conflict within the family unit as well.

### *Family Pride*

The acceptance of offspring for the parent's disclosure of a homosexual identity is associated with the development of family pride. Goldberg (2007b) assessed the disclosure methods used by offspring of homosexual parents. Interviews were used to inquire about the ways in which the offspring disclosed information regarding the sexual orientation of parents to others. Offspring who knew of their parents' homosexuality from very young ages were found to be accepting of their parents' sexual orientation and reported that this enhanced their sense of family pride when they were adults.

## Variables Influencing Children's Reactions

### *Relational Factors*

Relational factors have been examined regarding their influence on the child's outcomes. Fulcher, Sutfin, Chan, Scheib, and Patterson (2006) conducted interviews with lesbian mothers and administered questionnaires pertaining to the mental health of the mothers, couple functioning, and child adjustment. The authors concluded that variables such as the parent's adjustment and the parent's significant other's adjustment were more important to the child's outcome than the parent's sexual orientation. The

child's outcome was measured using a checklist which measured behavior problems, with higher levels of behavior problems associated with lower levels of parental adjustment. Therefore, although some children develop behavior problems after the disclosure of a parent's homosexual identity, the parent's level of adjustment and adaptation may mediate the relationship and be more important to understanding the child's outcomes.

This area has also been studied using samples of homosexual individuals who disclose their homosexuality to their parents. Willoughby, Malik, and Lindahl (2006) investigated the effects of family cohesion, adaptability, and parenting style on parental reactions to sons' disclosures. To assess family adaptability and cohesion, the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales were completed. Participants also reported their perceptions of their parents' parenting styles through the Authoritative Parenting Measure. This measure included two subscales: strictness-supervision subscale and acceptance-involvement subscale. Additionally, the participants were asked to retrospectively judge their parents' reactions to their disclosure of a homosexual orientation through the Perceived Parental Reactions Scale. This scale assessed such aspects as homophobia, anger, and acceptance among others. Higher levels of family cohesion and adaptability were associated with reduced levels of negative perceptions regarding the parents' reactions to the disclosures. Also, sons with authoritative parents perceived less negative reactions upon their disclosure. Family relationship variables can modify the levels of negative reactions associated with the disclosure of a homosexual identity.

### *Stereotypes*

Some children of lesbian and gay parents hold stereotypes of what a normal family should be, regardless of their actual family structure. Ross (1988) conducted a case study in which a lesbian stepfamily was having trouble with their adolescent daughter's behavior. The daughter held a view that a normal family should consist of a man, a woman, and children. She did not view her own family as being normal due to the differences between the stereotypical view of family and her actual family. The daughter wished that she had a family with the same structure she considered a normal family to have, which may have influenced her behavior problems and rejection of her mother's sexual orientation.

Perlesz et al. (2006) found similar results through interviews conducted with lesbian-parented families. The goal of the interviews was to assess how lesbian-headed families viewed themselves and the way in which they described their family to others. The families included in the study held the major societal stereotype of what a family should be, which created disagreement between what the children experienced and what they viewed a normal family to be. A tension developed between the stereotypical view of family and the type of family that the children actually had. This influenced how they viewed their own family, with families not matching the stereotypical view being seen as less than ideal.

### *Heterosexual Parent's Reaction*

Another area that has been found to influence reactions to the homosexual parent's disclosure is the reaction of the heterosexual parent. Spouses have been shown to have a range of reactions. Some heterosexual parents show acceptance of homosexual

parents' disclosures, whereas others show anger toward homosexual parents (Lynch, 2004). The heterosexual parent may sometimes discourage the child from accepting the homosexual parent's sexual orientation, which can influence the child's reactions by decreasing the child's likelihood of providing acceptance (Lynch, 2000). Children who experience this are less likely to recognize and accept the new family unit to which they belong (Lynch, 2000).

### *Sex of the Parent*

Murray and McClintock (2005) found that children of homosexual fathers endured more negative experiences than did children of homosexual mothers. This conclusion was derived from participants' answers when asked to report how the homosexual orientation of parents had affected them. Half of the children with homosexual fathers had reported that the homosexual orientation of the fathers affected them in a negative manner. The authors explained that this may be due to cultural attitudes and higher societal acceptance of lesbian women compared to gay men. Another reason for these differences is that lesbian mothers came out to children at younger ages compared to homosexual fathers. The length of time the parent's homosexuality is kept a secret may influence later experiences of children.

Herek (2002) measured the influence of gender on perceptions of homosexual individuals through interviews. The interviews covered such aspects as civil rights attitudes, beliefs about homosexuality in terms of choosing sexual orientation and popular stereotypes, personal discomfort, affective reactions, and sexual orientation. More negative attitudes were displayed toward homosexual men than women. Respondents rated homosexual men more negatively than homosexual women on affective reactions

and more often rated homosexual men as being child molesters and mentally ill.

Adoption was also less supported for homosexual men than homosexual women. When controlling for the sexual orientation of the respondents, it was found that women did not display differences in their reactions of homosexual men and women. However, heterosexual men were shown to be accepting of homosexual women, but not of homosexual men.

### *Sex of the Child*

The sex of the child has also been found to play a role in the level of acceptance experienced by the child of the parent's disclosure. Lewis (1980) conducted interviews with children of lesbian mothers and found that sons were more hostile and had higher levels of rejection than did daughters. The sons reportedly directed the anger toward the mothers' significant others. The author stated that this redirection of hostility and anger took place because it was easier to direct it toward an unrelated person when the anger may have actually been toward the mother.

Another study provides some insight into why sons may not be as accepting as daughters. A participant in Goldberg's (2007b) study made a statement regarding the lower number of sons than daughters who participated in the study. The participant addressed the issue by stating that it was more acceptable to be a woman with a homosexual parent than to be a man with a homosexual parent. The participant went on to explain that this is because having a gay parent questions a son's masculinity. Goldberg suggests that this may influence the rates at which individuals are willing to participate in studies and could possibly explain why a son is less accepting of a parent's disclosure of a homosexual orientation than a daughter.

Herek (2002) also investigated how the sex of respondents affected their reactions to the disclosure of homosexual identities in others. This was done through interviews in which respondents rated their reactions to others' disclosures. The female respondents were shown to be more accepting of homosexual individuals than the male respondents. Male respondents were less accepting in general toward homosexuals than female respondents. This was portrayed through their evaluations of negative affective responses and their attribution of negative stereotypes and characteristics being displayed more negatively toward homosexual males than homosexual females. This effect was further established when heterosexual male respondents rated their reaction to homosexual males.

#### *Age of the Child*

The age of the child has consistently been found to influence the child's acceptance or rejection of the parent's homosexuality. Younger children are more accepting of a parent's homosexuality than older children (Lynch & Murray, 2000). O'Connell (1993) examined the effects of lesbian mothers' disclosures on children. The study was conducted using qualitative methodology, employing open-ended interviews with mothers and children. The interviews addressed an array of issues including the importance of friendships and the impact of the mother's lesbian identity on the child's relationships. O'Connell found that the younger the child was at the time of disclosure, the more accepting the child of the mother's homosexuality. The younger children were found to be the most comfortable with the homosexuality of the mothers. This pattern was shown to change when the disclosure occurred in adolescence.

Younger children have also been shown to be prouder of homosexual parents than adolescents. Litovich and Langhout (2004) found that younger children spoke more freely about their parents' homosexuality and displayed higher levels of pride than adolescents. There was a change when entering into adolescence due to concern over the reactions of peers. The children began to associate disclosure with negative reactions from their peers, leading to decreased levels of openness with peers regarding the parent's homosexuality and decreased levels of family pride.

Across age groups, adolescents have been shown to have the most difficulty with parents who disclose homosexual orientations (Crosbie-Burnett & Helmbrecht, 1993; Johnston & Jenkins, 2004; Lynch & Murray, 2000; Tasker & Golombok, 1995). O'Connell (1993) found that lesbian parents who disclosed their homosexuality to adolescent children experienced negative reactions including anger, shock, and disbelief. Typically, adolescents have been shown to develop problems with their parents' sexual orientations when entering junior high (Lynch & Murray, 2000) and have been shown to be secretive about their parents' sexual orientations (Crosbie-Burnett & Helmbrecht, 1993). This has been attributed to children's concern during adolescence about their peers' reactions (Tasker & Golombok, 1995).

The concern over reactions from peers may also be associated with the increased levels of homophobia that are experienced as children get older. The National Lesbian Family Study is a longitudinal study following lesbian parents and children from conception to the age of 25 years old. Through this study it has been shown that younger children experience lower levels of exposure to homophobia than older children (Gartrell, Banks, Reed, Hamilton, Rodas, & Deck, 2000). The study reported in 2000, when the

children were five years old, revealed that only 18% had experienced homophobia.

However, in the study reported in 2005, when the children were 10 years old, 57% of the children had experienced homophobia (Gartrell, Deck, Rodas, Peyser, & Banks, 2005).

The children reported that these experiences influenced them to feel the negative emotions of anger and sadness. The children who experienced homophobia also had higher levels of behavior and emotional problems.

#### *Reactions of Child's Peers*

As mentioned above, concern over the reactions of peers also influences children's reactions to parental disclosure of a homosexual identity. This apprehension over the reaction of peers has been shown to develop when children reach school age and influences them to view their parents in a negative manner and to develop shame regarding their parents' sexual orientations (Goldberg, 2007b). When children reach school age, they face the reaction of their peers and society regarding their parents' sexual orientations. This is associated with an increase in worry over the child's self-image, which can lead to higher levels of rejection of the parent's homosexuality. This concern has been found more often to arise as a major issue when the children reach adolescence when compared to other age groups (Lynch & Murray, 2000; Perlesz et al., 2006; Tasker & Golombok, 1995).

There are a few reasons why this problem may develop during adolescence. One is concern over peers' perceptions of the adolescent's sexual orientation, with adolescents being afraid that others will view them as homosexual because they have a homosexual parent (Bozett, 1987; Lewis, 1980; Ross, 1988; Tasker & Golombok, 1995). Adolescents also develop problems with the homosexuality of parents during this period because they



become more status conscious and fear rejection by their peers (Ross, 1988; van Voorhis & McClain, 1997). Some children of homosexual parents suggest that disclosure of their parents' homosexuality would ruin their own social identity (Bozett, 1987). Children with homosexual parents share concern about being different from their peers and not being viewed as normal (O'Connell, 1993). This leads to problems with peer relationships when compelled to lie to others because of concern over losing friendships (O'Connell, 1993). This also decreases family pride and increases levels of secrecy (Litovich & Langhout, 2004).

Concern for others' reactions is common for those in stigmatized groups. This has also been shown in homosexual individuals who disclose their homosexuality to others. Wells and Kline (2001) investigated the coming out process of homosexual men and women through open-ended interviews. The interviews addressed questions pertaining to whom the individual disclosed their homosexuality, why they did so, what the benefits and risks were, how they disclosed the information, and under what circumstances this took place. The interviews revealed that concern over the reactions of others was a primary concern when choosing to disclose a homosexual identity. The concern was related to fear of ridicule and alienation from others. This was threatening and often led the participants to lie to others and use deception. It is also likely that these same concerns are present for other stigmatized groups, such as children of homosexual parents.

#### *Secrecy Regarding Parent's Sexuality*

Some homosexual parents express a need for their children to keep the parents' homosexuality a secret. This has effects on the children's relationships with others, as

well as their perceptions of the parents' identities. Secrecy about a parent's homosexuality has been found to create isolation from peers in young children (Lewis, 1980). The adolescent in the case study presented by Ross (1988) also began to develop behavior problems after being told to keep her parent's homosexuality a secret. Ross reported that this was due to stigmatization that surrounded the parent's homosexuality partially because of the desire to keep the disclosure a secret. This creates tension within the family unit due to the need to maintain the parent's homosexuality as a secret from others and the constant threat of possible disclosure. Also, children of lesbian mothers have been shown to be more accepting when parents are more open and relaxed concerning their homosexuality (Pennington, 1987).

The need for secrecy influences the child's views of the parent's homosexuality. Some children of homosexuals have expressed that they feel as if something is wrong with their parents and their family because they were instructed to keep it a secret (Goldberg, 2007b; Ross, 1988). In the case study presented by Ross, the daughter was unable to cope with the family secret partially due to the parents' internalized homophobia that precipitated their decision for the daughter to keep the sexual orientation of her parents a secret from others. The need for secrecy has been shown to increase the child's feelings of shame and fear (Goldberg, 2007b). Participants in the study conducted by Goldberg reported that they internalized these emotions due to the need for secrecy. They felt that if they were to keep their parents' sexual orientations a secret then something was wrong with it, which led to the internalization of these maladaptive thoughts and emotions. This has also been shown to create problems within the family relationships and increase conflict (Ross, 1988).

Some children develop a need for secrecy during adolescence due to concern over peers' reactions. O'Connell (1993) found that some children had concerns over others' opinions of them, and some children had concerns regarding their peers' level of comfort with homosexuality. These two factors motivated the children to keep the homosexuality of parents a secret from others. Some children reported lying to peers, and some even reported participating in homophobic joking to fit in and to make others comfortable. These children reported that their secrecy later caused them isolation and pain due to feelings of shame. The loyalty children had for their mothers were conflicting with their actions, which caused conflict within the children, later causing them feelings of pain.

### *Social Status*

Homosexual individuals are part of a stigmatized group which is often thought of as having a lower social status than heterosexual individuals. One area in which this observation is apparent is the world of sports. Gough (2007) conducted a qualitative analysis of self reports written by gay male athletes. These reports revealed that the athletes held a fear of social rejection because of their homosexual identities. The participants stated that this was due to the dissonance between the stereotypical male athlete and the stereotypical homosexual male. This dissonance being that the athlete is considered to have a more masculine role while the homosexual male is thought of as having feminine characteristics. In conclusion, the author observed that the act of disclosing a homosexual identity was acceptable to the teammates of the participants. However, although the actual act of disclosing was acceptable, acting gay was not. This was apparent through teammates making jokes about the homosexual athletes' sexual orientations.

Sirin, McCreary, and Mahalik (2004) also demonstrated that homosexual individuals were thought of as having lower social status in a study examining how males and females who violate gender norms are viewed by others. The participants were asked to rate targets described in vignettes on the following variables: social status, homosexual orientation, and similarity of personal values. The results showed that females who violated social gender norms were seen more leniently than males. The males who did not comply with accepted social gender norms were seen as having lower social status, more likely to be homosexual, and were viewed as having dissimilar values to the participants.

The reaction of children to parents who disclose a homosexual identity may also be influenced by social status. Because their parents may be viewed as having lower social status due to the disclosure of homosexual identities, the children may share concern that this may reflect a lowering of their social status as well. Goldberg (2007b) touches on this issue when discussing the reasons why the participants in her study chose not to disclose the homosexual identity of their parents. One reason was worry over the participants' reputations. The participants in another study had similar apprehensions which developed during adolescence due to concern over social status (van Voorhis & McClain, 1997). Concern about loss of social status may also explain why males tend to be less accepting of a parent's homosexuality than females. Theory in evolutionary psychology holds that males are more sensitive to issues that may threaten social status because of its limit to reproductive success in the evolutionary past (Buss, 2008).

*Self-Consciousness*

Self-consciousness is composed of two elements: shame and guilt. These both involve the evaluation of the self, but from differing aspects. Shame deals with the view of the self due to the reactions of others and is seen as being more public (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Guilt, however, deals primarily with other actions or thoughts in relation to the self (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). This being so, self-consciousness and proneness to shame may be underlying constructs that influence a child's acceptance or rejection of a parent who discloses a homosexual identity. This could be primarily due to concern over how others will view the children for having parents who are homosexual.

Self-consciousness and proneness to shame have not been directly studied in relation to acceptance of homosexual parents. The introduction of this construct in the evaluation of reactions of children to parental disclosure of a homosexual orientation stems from a review of experiences of offspring in this situation. Snow (2004) provided various examples of offspring's experiences of having parents to come out as gay and lesbian. These offspring ranged in age from 7 years old to 31 years old and some had a father to come out as a gay while others had a mother to come out as lesbian.

Throughout the disclosures of these offspring, it becomes apparent that a major worry perpetuated through a large portion of their stories is the concern over the reactions of others. The offspring showed concern over various aspects, such as not fitting in with friends and worries about being teased by peers. One child expressed that she was treated poorly by other family members due to her mother's disclosure of a homosexual identity. A number of the offspring stated that they held concerns over the reactions of others. This being so, this is an important construct to evaluate in relation to this context.

Shame has been studied in other contexts such as in relation to internalized homophobia in gay men. Allen and Oleson (1999) found that shame may be a principle factor of internalized homophobia due to their findings that gay men with increased levels of internalized homophobia also had increased levels of shame. The results also showed that gay men with increased levels of self-esteem had lower levels of shame. This shows that shame may be a leading factor in gay men's acceptance of themselves and of homosexuality. This lends support to the notion that shame could also influence a child's reaction to a parent's disclosure due to the close ties between a parent and child and concern about how others will view the child due to the parent's homosexuality.

Another study examined whether being in a stigmatized group influenced the levels of self-consciousness experienced. Santuzzi and Ruscher (2002) performed an experiment in which individuals were assigned to act as an interviewer who was a student, an interviewer who was a lesbian and did not disclose a lesbian identity during the interview, or an interviewer who was a lesbian and did disclose a lesbian identity during the interview. The role of the interviewee was played by a confederate. The goals of the experiment were to examine whether having a concealable stigma influenced the degree of self-consciousness felt by the individual and if this was increased by the disclosure of the stigmatized identity. The results revealed that for the interviewers who played the role of a lesbian, regardless of if they disclosed the identity or not, there were increased levels of self-consciousness. Also, in a second experiment, it was revealed that these levels were higher for those who disclosed compared to those that did not. Children of homosexuals are themselves a stigmatized group and therefore, may also have higher levels of self-consciousness.

### Parent's Nondisclosure of a Homosexual Identity

#### *Increased Levels of Anxiety*

One area that has been reported to be affected by nondisclosure is anxiety levels. Dunne (1987) reported on a group intervention that was conducted to assist gay fathers in coming out to their children. The fathers were very cautious about disclosing their homosexual identities to their children. In the group intervention, seven fathers met weekly to discuss issues related to the coming out process. None of the fathers had officially disclosed their homosexuality to their children; however, one father did state that his child may have known from the mother. Through these group intervention sessions, the fathers were exposed to some of the literature on gay fathers and later participated in role-playing situations. These situations were divided into two categories which were proactive situations and reactive situations. In the proactive situations, the fathers initiated interactions concerning identity disclosure. In the reactive situations, the fathers were approached by others concerning their identity. The intervention used the methods stated to reduce the levels of stress that were experienced regarding identity disclosure. Prior to intentional disclosure there is a risk of accidental disclosure which increases anxiety for gay fathers. If the father does not wish to disclose his homosexuality, the risk of disclosure brings with it a pressing need for the gay father to be conscious of his actions to ensure that he does not accidentally disclose his homosexuality.

Another study examined the relationship between ego identity, social anxiety, social support, and self-concealment in lesbian, gay, and bisexual participants (Potoczniak, Aldea, & DeBlaere, 2007). The goal of the study was to create a model of

the mediating roles of social support and self-concealment in relation to social anxiety and ego identity. Ego identity was measured on two continuums, exploration and commitment, using the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire. Exploration consists of the individual making an effort to obtain relevant information about him- or herself in order to further develop a sense of identity. Commitment consists of holding fast to parts of one's identity. Social support was measured using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support which measured social support from a significant other, family, and friends. Self-concealment was measured using the Self-Concealment Scale which assessed the individual's likelihood to keep information secret, keeping negative and stressful information secret, and anxiety concerning disclosure of this information. Also, social anxiety was measured using a subscale of the Self-Consciousness Scale which addressed discomfort in social situations.

Potoczniak, Aldea, and DeBlaere (2007) found that social support correlated negatively with social anxiety. As well, social support increased as scores on ego identity on both continuums increased. Finally, social support mediated the relationship between self-concealment and social anxiety. This indicates that as social anxiety increased, social support decreased, and this may be related to increased levels of self-concealment.

Increased levels of anxiety were also found to be associated with nondisclosure in a study conducted by Jordan and Deluty (1998) that examined the relationship between disclosure and psychological adjustment. An array of variables was assessed, including socioeconomic status, sexual orientation and lesbian identity, involvement in the lesbian community, disclosure of lesbian identity, and anxiety. Disclosure of a lesbian identity was measured using two scales. The first measured the percentage of people in the



participant's family, gay and lesbian friends, heterosexual friends, and co-workers who knew of the participant's homosexuality. The second scale examined the way that participants came out through a rating scale that assessed the degree to which participants were disclosed to particular target people. Anxiety was measured using the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory.

Jordan and Deluty (1998) found that the more disclosed participants were, the less anxiety they experienced. The disclosure decreases the need for participants to hide their identity which is thought to decrease anxiety levels. Also, disclosure enables the individual to form healthy support systems which have also been shown to decrease levels of anxiety. Therefore, anxiety is lowered when individuals disclose their homosexuality to others due to increased levels of openness and the development of a social support network.

The claim that anxiety levels are higher in nondisclosed gay men was also supported by a study conducted by Schmitt and Kurdek (1987). Gay male participants in the study completed questionnaires regarding various personality traits, including anxiety and depression. The results revealed that individuals who had not disclosed their homosexual identity had higher levels of trait anxiety. These individuals also had higher levels of worry, rumination, and depression. These results are consistent with the studies mentioned above and provide support for the argument that nondisclosure is associated with heightened levels of anxiety and other psychological constructs.

#### *Increased Health Risks*

Nondisclosure has also been associated with increased health risks for gay men. Cole, Kemeny, Taylor, and Visscher (1996) examined the relationship between

nondisclosure in gay men and rates of cancer and infectious disease. Nondisclosure was measured using a categorical system in which participants indicated how disclosed they were about their homosexuality. Health status was measured using interviews that inquired about whether the participants had cancer or infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and pneumonia. Gay men who did not disclose their homosexuality were found to have higher rates of physical illness, with higher levels of concealment associated with higher levels of cancer and infectious disease. The rates of cancer and infectious diseases increased steadily as the level of nondisclosure increased.

Increased levels of cardiovascular risks are also associated with nondisclosure in gay men. Perez-Benitez, O'Brien, Carels, Gordon, and Chiro (2007) examined the effects of nondisclosure on cardiovascular functioning in a group of gay men. Cardiovascular functioning included evaluations of heart rate, systolic blood pressure, and diastolic blood pressure. The degree of disclosure was measured using an outness inventory that measured the degree to which others knew of the participants' sexual orientations. In order to assess whether the actual disclosure affected cardiovascular functioning, participants were asked to disclose personal information regarding their concealment of a homosexual identity. Participants who were high in concealment but disclosed more during the task had greater levels of cardiovascular recovery. This was seen through a reduction in heart rate and increased levels of contraction in the heart during the cardiac cycle.

The effects of thought suppression on immune functioning were examined by Petrie, Booth, and Pennebaker (1998). Participants were instructed to conduct writing exercises in which some were instructed to write about an emotional event of importance

to them and the others were instructed to write a description of the previous day's events. After doing this, some participants were instructed to actively try to suppress thoughts about the topic they had been writing about and others were not told to do so. Blood was drawn from each participant before and after completion of the tasks. The blood analyses showed that when participants were actively suppressing thoughts there were lower levels of T lymphocytes, showing that suppression of thoughts can have an impact on immune functioning.

Similar findings have been found with a sample of gay men. Cole, Kemeny, Taylor, Visscher, and Fahey (1996) conducted a study to examine the relationship between the concealment of a homosexual identity and the progression of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). The longitudinal study took place over a 9-year period and included male participants who identified as gay and had been diagnosed as HIV positive. Participants completed measures related to various psychosocial measures such as affect, mood, and social support. Participants also reported the extent to which they disclosed their homosexual identity according to categories ranging from "definitely in the closet" to "completely out of the closet". The following were used to measure the progression of HIV: diagnosis of HIV, diagnosis of AIDS, AIDS related mortality, and decreased T lymphocyte levels. This was done by assessing the amount of time from HIV diagnosis to each of the above markers.

The results showed that for all psychosocial measures, disclosure of a homosexual identity significantly improved the ability to predict the degree of HIV progression. These results demonstrated that individuals who were more concealed regarding their homosexuality had higher rates of progression of HIV. This was evident through all

assessments of HIV progression: time to critically low levels of T lymphocytes, time to AIDS diagnosis, and time to AIDS related mortality. These results are similar to those found in the study conducted by Petrie, Booth, and Pennebaker (1998) due to nondisclosure involving the suppression of thoughts regarding homosexuality and disclosure.

### *Relational Issues*

Nondisclosure has been shown to have negative consequences on homosexual individuals as well as their children. Cain (1991) reported on interviews conducted with gay men. Gay men who chose to keep their homosexuality secret developed problems in establishing relationships and developed an inability to become close to others. Keeping their homosexuality a secret also resulted in feelings of emotional distancing from others. This inhibits the individual's ability to increase his or her support system due to difficulties forming close bonds which has been shown in other studies to be associated with increased levels of anxiety (Jordan & Deluty, 1998; Potoczniak, Aldea, & DeBlaere, 2007).

Lowered levels of relationship intimacy between the parent and his or her significant other have also been reported in nondisclosed homosexuals. Lynch and Murray (2000) found that parents who hid their homosexuality were not as satisfied with their intimate relationships because keeping the parent's sexuality a secret meant decreasing the significance of the relationship. This works against the parent's ability to establish and maintain significant relationships. The increased levels of secrecy decreased the intimacy between the partners.

Berger (1990) also found that nondisclosure increased relationship problems between homosexual participants and their romantic partners. This was found through examining the impact of passing (appearing to others as a heterosexual) on the relationship. The following were measured to evaluate the participants' degree of passing: being known to distant others, being known to significant others, desire for passing, and concealment. Relationship quality was measured by assessing love and relationship satisfaction. The analysis of these variables showed that passing only significantly affected relationship satisfaction when the passing was done with significant others, such as close family members. Also, this affected relationship satisfaction, but not love.

LaSala (2000) found that nondisclosure also negatively impacted the couple's relationship in a sample of gay men. Standardized open-ended interviews were conducted and the results that emerged indicated that gay men who were nondisclosed to parents experienced more conflict within their romantic relationships than those who were disclosed. The gay men who were disclosed experienced more relationship satisfaction than those not disclosed due to not having to hide their sexual orientation from parents. The participants believed that this provided validation for their relationships which was not present prior to disclosure. Disclosure also allowed for romantic partners to become included in family functions and receive social support from the family. These results were substantiated for both participants with accepting and nonaccepting parents.

There is some controversy around the issue of relationship quality in homosexual individuals as a function of level of disclosure. Although Cain (1991), LaSala (2000),

and Lynch and Murray (2000) argue that nondisclosure increases relationship problems, Beals and Peplau (2001) came to a different conclusion in a study conducted with lesbian partners. The following aspects of the participants' romantic relationships were assessed: relationship satisfaction, relationship conflict, social involvement, couple time together, self-disclosure of sexual orientation, parental acknowledgement of the relationship, and personal support from parents. The participants' levels of disclosure did not affect the quality of the romantic relationships. This is contrary to other findings in which increased levels of disclosure were associated with higher levels of relationship quality. The authors stated that the consequences of disclosing a homosexual orientation are mixed; some people experience positive reactions and some experience rejection. This being so, the contradictory findings could be reflective of differing characteristics of the samples utilized in different studies.

#### Parent's Disclosure of a Homosexual Identity

##### *Enhanced Relationship between Parent and Child*

Homosexual parents who disclose their homosexuality to their children have reported various ways in which relationships with children have benefited. Some parents report a sense of relief and an increased sense of closeness to children (Dunne, 1987). Disclosure also helps establish honesty in the relationship, which strengthens the bond between the parent and the child (van Voorhis & McClain, 1997). Additionally, disclosure fosters openness between family members which can enhance experiences within the family unit (Lynch & Murray, 2000).

Generally, disclosure has been found to enhance relationships between parents and children. Wyers (1987) evaluated this by having lesbian and gay parents

retrospectively judge the initial impact and the current impact of the disclosure on their children. A higher percentage of lesbian mothers reported that disclosure had an overall positive than negative or uncertain initial impact on children, with 48.4% reporting a positive initial impact, 24.3% reporting a negative initial impact, and 27.2% reporting uncertainty about the impact. For gay fathers the percentage was lower than that of lesbian mothers regarding an initial positive impact. However, it was still higher than the percent who viewed the disclosure as having a negative or uncertain impact, with 40% reporting a positive initial impact on children, 25% reporting a negative initial impact on children, and 35% reporting uncertainty about the initial impact on children.

Wyers (1987) also had participants judge the current impact on children with regard to the parent-child relationship. For lesbian mothers, 60.6% reported that disclosure had a positive impact and had enhanced their relationship with their children, 24.3% reported that it had a negative impact on the relationship, and 15.1% were uncertain of the impact that it had on the relationship. For gay fathers, 50% reported that there was a positive impact on their relationship with their children, 5% reported a negative impact, and 45% were uncertain of the impact.

#### *Increased Levels of Tolerance in the Child*

Disclosure of a parent's homosexuality has also been shown to increase children's tolerance for diversity (Goldberg, 2007a). During an interview study, children of homosexual parents reported feeling open-minded due to their parents' sexuality which taught them to be more tolerant and empathetic of diversity in others (Goldberg, 2007a). Children have also been shown to have increased levels of understanding regarding prejudice (O'Connell, 1993). These children have experienced what it is like to be

discriminated against and to be in a stigmatized group, teaching them how to treat others with respect and understanding.

Similar results were found by Saffron (1998) in a sample of children raised by lesbian mothers. The children participated in interviews which revealed several benefits to having a lesbian mother. The children reported that they were more accepting and open-minded than children raised by heterosexual parents. This was partially due to growing up with parents who were considered part of a stigmatized group. The parents reportedly modeled acceptance of others which was passed on to the children. Children also had positive views of homosexuality and increased understandings of prejudice. Participants had experienced forms of oppression that led them to develop an acceptance of diversity in others.

#### *Prepare Child for Heterosexism*

Parental disclosure of homosexuality has also been shown to prepare children for the experiences of heterosexism they may encounter. Litovich and Langhout (2004) evaluated how children and parents in lesbian parented families coped with heterosexism and what effects this had on the children's resiliency. Through the use of semi-structured interviews with the children and parents, the authors concluded that parents initially reported that children had not encountered any instances of heterosexism. However, they did report several instances in which the children had experienced difficulty in the social realm due to the parents' sexual orientations. The parents stated that open communication was maintained with the children in order to prepare their children for the possible heterosexism that may be experienced. The parents also reported supporting the children's use of language regarding homosexuality, such as the words gay and lesbian,



in order to enable communication. Therefore, parental openness and disclosure can prepare children for heterosexism that may be experienced in society and may also provide them with a way to cope through communication with parents. This is important because some styles of coping have been shown to moderate the relationship between stigmatization and self-esteem (Gershon, Tschann, & Jemerin, 1999).

*Parent Fully Integrates Identity*

In addition to the aforementioned benefits that disclosure has for parents of relieving stress and enhancing relationships with children, disclosure also allows parents to fully integrate their homosexuality within themselves. There are several models available describing the formation of a homosexual identity. A six stage model developed by Cass (1979) portrays the formation of a homosexual identity as a developmental process that is established through an interaction between the person and environment. The model is characterized by a general progression in the amount of acceptance of a homosexual identity and amount of involvement with other homosexuals.

The process begins with the stage of identity confusion, in which the person realizes he or she may have homosexual thoughts and feelings. The second stage is identity comparison and is marked by the realization that it is possible the person may be a homosexual and the person begins to feel alienated from society due to this. The third stage is identity tolerance, in which the person has a greater commitment to the possibility that he or she may be homosexual. The fourth stage is identity acceptance. During this stage, the person has increasing contact with other homosexuals and accepts his or her homosexual identity instead of tolerating it. The fifth stage is identity pride, in which the person develops a positive emphasis on homosexuality. The final stage is

identity synthesis, also known as identity integration. During this stage, the person fully integrates his or her personal and public sexual identities. This stage finalizes the formation of a homosexual identity.

The use of this six stage model was tested by Cass (1984) through the use of two measures. The first measure, the Stage Allocation Measure, presented the participants with paragraphs which portrayed what a person would be like in each of the stages of the model. The participants were then asked to choose which one they thought best matched their stage. The second measure, the Homosexual Identity Questionnaire, measured such areas as commitment, group identification, and social interaction. The model proposed by Cass was supported by the results of the study. The analyses showed that there was a developmental process and that individuals progressed through the six stages. Also, the characteristics that participants reported matched those Cass previously described as being attributed to each stage of identity formation. Initially, there was a low level of distinction between stages one and two and between stages five and six. However, further analysis revealed that there were six distinct stages present in the identity formation of homosexual individuals.

Although Cass (1984) provided evidence of six distinct stages, different results were found in a study by Johns and Probst (2004) in which empirical validation of the model was again attempted. The participants completed the Attitudes towards Sexual Orientation Scale to measure progression through the stages. Through factor analysis, only two distinct phases of identity formation emerged. These phases were unintegrated identity and integrated identity. Although six stages were not identified, these two themes may be underlying elements of the stages that were previously theorized.

To further evaluate the use of this model, Halpin and Allen (2004) examined the levels of psychosocial well-being that were associated with each of the stages. To measure well-being, questionnaires were used that assessed depression and happiness, satisfaction with life, loneliness and sociability, and self esteem. In order to examine how these relate to each of the stages, participants completed the Gay Identity Questionnaire, consisting of a subscale for each stage. The different stages were associated with different levels of psychosocial well-being. The most distress was experienced during the middle stages of the model, identity tolerance and identity acceptance. Lower levels of distress were experienced during the initial stages and the final stages. More specifically, the last stages of identity pride and identity synthesis were associated with increased levels of self esteem and life satisfaction. These stages were also associated with decreased levels of loneliness and increased levels of happiness. This shows the benefit to the individual of reaching the final stage of homosexual identity formation.

Identity integration has been found to be a central part of identity formation for homosexual individuals. In the intervention study conducted by Dunne (1987), one aspect addressed during the process of coming out is identity integration. Completing this step in the coming out process is enhanced by disclosing the parent's homosexuality to the child. Therefore, due to the positive impact that disclosure has on the parent and the child, identifying variables that can assist in successful disclosure will help enhance later positive outcomes for the family.

## Variables Influencing Parent's Choice to Disclose

### *Child's Needs*

The needs of children are a primary consideration for homosexual parents choosing to disclose their homosexuality (Hare, 1994; Lynch, 2000; Lynch & Murray, 2000). Lynch (2004) reported that one of the most important issues for parents disclosing their identity was the effect that it would have on the well-being of children. If the parent saw that the disclosure would not harm the child, the parent was more likely to disclose his or her homosexuality.

Another area associated with children's needs is concern over stigmatization. Gay fathers have been shown to fear disclosing their identity due to concern that it may damage the child (Wyers, 1987). This concern often stems from fear of stigmatizing their children (Berger, 1998). Concern for stigmatizing children is also shared by lesbian mothers (Hare, 1994). Parents express that they do not want to burden their children with the stigma they have experienced due to their homosexuality.

Stigmatization has been shown to be associated with lower levels of self-esteem. Gershon, Tschann, and Jemerin (1999) employed the use of interviews and questionnaires to assess the interplay between stigmatization, self-esteem, and coping using a sample of adolescents with lesbian mothers. Self-esteem was measured using the Harter Self Perception Profile for Adolescents, which measured several types of self-esteem. These included scholastic competence, social acceptance, athletic competence, physical appearance, behavioral conduct, close friendships, and global self-worth. Experience with stigmatization was assessed using a questionnaire which addressed the adolescent's views of other's attitudes about children with homosexual parents. Higher

levels of experience with stigma were shown to be associated with lower levels of self-esteem in all of the aforementioned areas except scholastic competence and athletic competence.

### *Custody*

Custody issues are another primary concern for homosexual parents. The decision to disclose a parent's homosexuality is influenced by this because many homosexual parents fear they will lose custody of their children (van Dam, 2004; Johnston & Jenkins, 2004; Lynch & Murray, 2000; Wyers, 1987). This is a very reasonable concern, especially for parents who conceived children while in previous heterosexual relationships because, as mentioned earlier, the reaction of the heterosexual parent can sometimes be hostile and angry (Lynch, 2004). An evaluation of lesbian mothers concerning demographics and variables related to the coming out process revealed that about 90% of the sample of 2,432 participants had children through a previous heterosexual marriage (Morris, Balsam, & Rothblum, 2002). Of the total sample, 30% had experienced threats regarding child custody due to their homosexuality. The threats did not come only from previous spouses; they also came from family members of both the heterosexual and homosexual parents.

### Summary

The literature shows that the reactions of offspring to homosexual parents' disclosures has effects on the level the parents are disclosed, behavior and emotional problems in the children, and family pride. Negative reactions are associated with more negative outcomes for the offspring and parents. There are several variables that have previously been shown, primarily through the use of qualitative methods, to influence the

reactions of offspring. These include the following: relational factors between the parent and child, stereotypes, the heterosexual parent's response, sex of the parent, sex of the child, age of the child, the reaction of the child's peers, and secrecy. It is healthier for the parent and the relationship with the child to disclose the homosexuality of the parent than for the parent's homosexuality to remain nondisclosed.

Nondisclosure has been associated with increased levels of anxiety and health risks and relational problems. However, disclosure has several positive impacts on the parent and child. Disclosure enhances the relationship between the parent and child, increases understandings of prejudice in children, prepares children for heterosexism, and allows the parent to fully integrate his or her homosexual identity which is a very integral aspect of homosexual identity formation. The parents are influenced largely by issues regarding the children when choosing to come out. These issues include the needs of children and concern over custody.

#### Rationale for the Proposed Study

There are a growing number of gay and lesbian parents who care for children conceived from previous heterosexual relationships. The disclosure of the parent's identity to the child is an area that deserves further study due to the effects that it has on the parent and the child. The child's acceptance of the parent's identity has been previously linked with positive outcomes, and the condition under which this takes place has been identified as an important area to study (Lambert, 2005; Lynch, 2000). Most studies to date have examined reactions to a parent's disclosure of a homosexual identity from a qualitative perspective. The proposed study will add to the literature in this area by providing a quantitative analysis of the influence of the parent-child relationship,

attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, and four aspects of self-consciousness: shame-proneness, guilt-proneness, externalization, and detachment-unconcern.

The proposed study will measure the individual and combined influences of factors to best predict positive attitudes and acceptance of parents who disclose a homosexual identity. Any individual's parent could disclose a homosexual identity, although few probably think of the issue with regard to their own parents. Participants will be asked to evaluate their level of acceptance if their mother and father hypothetically disclosed homosexual orientations. This will provide a direct judgment of initial reactions instead of a retrospective analysis by offspring whose parents have already disclosed homosexual identities. The following variables will be evaluated as predictors of acceptance levels of a lesbian mother: attitudes toward lesbians, quality of the relationship with the participant's mother, and the four aspects of self-consciousness (shame-proneness, guilt-proneness, externalization, and detachment-unconcern). The following variables will be evaluated as predictors of acceptance levels of a gay father: attitudes toward gay men, quality of the relationship with the participant's father, and the four aspects of self-consciousness (shame-proneness, guilt-proneness, externalization, and detachment-unconcern). It is hypothesized that certain variables will predict acceptance and positive attitudes toward parents who disclose a homosexual identity, while others will predict less positive reactions.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants included 129 individuals (29 men and 100 women) ranging in age from 18 to 58 years old ( $M = 25$  years old). Seventy participants identified as White, 37

identified as Hispanic, 10 identified as Black, 5 identified as Asian American, and 7 identified as other. Of the 129 participants, 98 identified as heterosexual, 16 identified as bisexual, 14 identified as homosexual, and 1 participant did not respond. Fifty-two participants reported that their parents were currently married, 40 participants reported that their parents were separated or divorced, 36 participants reported that their parents were never married, and 1 participant did not report the parents' marital status. The participants were recruited for online participation through the following Internet websites: [www.socialpsychology.org/expts.htm](http://www.socialpsychology.org/expts.htm) and [psych.hanover.edu/research/exponent.html](http://psych.hanover.edu/research/exponent.html). The study was also advertised in the psychology department of Barry University through the use of a flyer. Participants who attended Barry University and were enrolled in a psychology course were eligible to receive extra credit for participation.

### *Materials and Procedure*

Participants completed the following measures in the order indicated below.

*Demographics.* Participants reported their age, gender, and ethnicity. They also reported both parents' known sexual orientation and marital status. Additionally, participants reported their own sexual orientation as either heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual (see Appendix B).

*Self-consciousness.* A modified version of the short form of the Test of Self-Conscious Affect – 3 (TOSCA-3; Tangney & Dearing, 2002) was used to measure the degree to which participants are prone to experience self-conscious affects (see Appendix C). The TOSCA-3 is composed of 11 short scenarios followed by four options depicting different reactions to each scenario. Each of the four options represents one of the



following aspects of self-consciousness: shame-proneness, guilt-proneness, externalization, and detachment-unconcern. Each participant indicated the likelihood that he or she would respond in the way characterized by each reaction on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*not likely*) to 5 (*very likely*). The original version on the scale included an example question at the beginning of the survey. Because the study was conducted online, this example question was deleted due to formatting restrictions.

A scale score for the shame subscale was created by summing each participant's responses to the following items: 1a, 2b, 3a, 4c, 5a, 6b, 7d, 8b, 9b, 10a, and 11c. Higher scores on this subscale indicated higher levels of shame-proneness. A scale score for the guilt subscale was created by summing each participant's responses to the following items: 1c, 2a, 3c, 4d, 5d, 6d, 7c, 8d, 9c, 10c, and 11b. Higher scores on this subscale indicated higher levels of guilt-proneness. A scale score for the externalization subscale was created by summing each participant's responses to the following items: 1d, 2c, 3b, 4a, 5b, 6a, 7b, 8c, 9a, 10b, and 11d. Higher scores on this subscale indicated an increased likelihood that the participant engages in externalization. A scale score for the detached-unconcerned subscale was created by summing each participant's responses to the following items: 1b, 2d, 3d, 4b, 5c, 6c, 7a, 8a, 9d, 10d, and 11a. Higher scores on this subscale indicated higher levels of detachment and unconcerned attitudes.

The short version of the TOSCA-3 has been shown to be reliable and valid. Estimates of internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha) have been shown to range from .76 to .88 for the shame scale, .70 to .83 for the guilt scale, .66 to .80 for the externalization scale, and .60 to .77 for the detachment-unconcern scale. The shame and guilt scales of the short version of the TOSCA-3 have been shown to be highly correlated with the

respective scales in the full length version of the measure (.94 and .93 respectively). In the current study, the shame subscale had a Cronbach's Alpha of .80, the guilt subscale had a Cronbach's Alpha of .82, the externalization subscale had a Cronbach's Alpha of .78, and the detachment-unconcern subscale had a Cronbach's Alpha of .75.

*Level of acceptance.* The Acceptance of Lesbian Mothers Scale (ALMS) was created for the purposes of this study (see Appendix D). The ALMS consisted of 13 items that measured the level of acceptance participants would exhibit if their mothers were to disclose lesbian identities. Participants rated their responses to each item on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

The ALMS was created to address variables previously identified as influential to acceptance levels of parents who disclose homosexual identities. The ALMS contained items that addressed acceptance of a mother's disclosure of a lesbian identity as a function of the method of disclosure (direct vs. from another person), parental desire for secrecy, the heterosexual parent's response, feelings of shame, influence of peers, pride in the mother's disclosure, and the presence of a romantic partner for the mother. A scale score was created by summing the answers across all 13 items for each participant. Higher scores indicated higher levels of acceptance of a mother's disclosure of a lesbian identity.

The Acceptance of Gay Fathers Scale (AGFS) was created for the purposes of this study (see Appendix E). The AGFS consisted of 13 items that measured the level of acceptance participants would exhibit if their fathers were to disclose gay identities. Participants rated their responses to each item on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

The AGFS was created to address variables previously identified as influential to acceptance levels of parents who disclose homosexual identities. The AGFS contained items that addressed acceptance of a father's disclosure of a gay identity as a function of the method of disclosure (direct vs. from another person), parental desire for secrecy, the heterosexual parent's response, feelings of shame, influence of peers, pride in the father's disclosure, and the presence of a romantic partner for the father. A scale score was created by summing the answers across all 13 items for each participant. Higher scores indicated higher levels of acceptance of a father's disclosure of a gay identity.

*Attitudes towards homosexuals.* The six-item short form of the Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men scale (ATLG; Herek & Capitanio, 1995) was completed by each participant to evaluate their perceptions of homosexuals (see Appendix F). The scale consists of two subscales. One subscale evaluated perceptions of lesbians (Attitudes Towards Lesbians; ATL) and the other subscale evaluated perceptions of gay men (Attitudes Towards Gay Men; ATG). Responses were measured on a 9-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 9 = *strongly agree*). Responses for items 3 and 6 were reverse scored. A scale score was created for the ATL and ATG by summing each participant's responses to the three items on each subscale. Higher scores on each scale demonstrated higher levels of negative attitudes towards gay men and lesbians. Both subscales have been shown to have an internal consistency of .71 (Herek, 2002). In the current study, the ATL had a Cronbach's Alpha of .76 and the ATG had a Cronbach's Alpha of .85.

*Quality of parent-child relationship.* The Quality of Relationships Inventory (QRI; Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1991) was used to assess the quality of the relationship the participants had with their mothers and fathers separately (see Appendix G). The

QRI consists of 25 items measured on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all*, 2 = *a little*, 3 = *quite a bit*, 4 = *very much*) assessing the quality of the relationship with a significant other. The participant completed the scale items once to assess the direct relationship with a mother and once to assess the direct relationship with a father separately.

The QRI consists of three scales: the support scale, conflict scale, and depth scale. The support scale consists of items 1, 3, 5, 8, 15, 18, and 22. The conflict scale consists of items 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 14, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, and 25. The depth scale consists of items 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, and 17. The items for the conflict scale were reverse scored and all 25 items were summed to create a scale score that represented the overall quality of the parent-child relationship. A separate scale score was computed for the relationship with the mother (QRI-M) and the father (QRI-F). Higher scores indicated a better relationship with the parent.

When measuring a relationship between a child and mother, the QRI has demonstrated internal consistency levels of .83, .88, and .83 respectively for the support, conflict, and depth scales. When measuring a relationship between a child and a father, the QRI has demonstrated internal consistency levels of .88, .88, and .86 respectively for the support, conflict, and depth scales.

### *Design*

To assess the variables that influence the level of acceptance for a mother's disclosure of a lesbian identity, a multiple regression analysis was conducted with level of acceptance as the dependent variable and scores on the ATL, TOSCA-3 (shame, guilt, externalization, and detachment-unconcern subscales), and QRI-M as the independent variables. To assess the variables that influence the level of acceptance for a father's

disclosure of a gay identity, a multiple regression analysis was conducted with level of acceptance as the dependent variable and scores on the ATG, TOSCA-3 (shame, guilt, externalization, and detachment-unconcern subscales), and QRI-F as the independent variables. To assess whether lesbian mothers were more accepted than gay fathers, a paired-samples t test was conducted. Also, to assess whether attitudes were more positive towards lesbians than gay men, a paired-samples t test was conducted.

### Hypotheses

Several variables will be evaluated in the proposed study regarding their ability to predict positive feelings and acceptance for parents who disclose homosexual identities.

Specific hypotheses are as follows:

H1: It is hypothesized that women will be more accepting than men of both a mother and a father's disclosure of a homosexual identity.

H2: It is hypothesized that low levels of shame-proneness will predict high levels of acceptance for a mother's disclosure of a lesbian identity.

H3: It is hypothesized that low levels of guilt-proneness will predict high levels of acceptance for a mother's disclosure of a lesbian identity.

H4: It is hypothesized that low levels of externalization will predict high levels of acceptance for a mother's disclosure of a lesbian identity.

H5: It is hypothesized that low levels of detachment-unconcern will predict high levels of acceptance for a mother's disclosure of a lesbian identity.

H6: It is hypothesized that positive attitudes toward lesbians will predict high levels of acceptance for a mother's disclosure of a lesbian identity.

H7: It is hypothesized that high quality of relationships with mothers will predict high levels of acceptance for a mother's disclosure of a lesbian identity.

H8: It is hypothesized that low levels of shame-proneness will predict high levels of acceptance for a father's disclosure of a gay identity.

H9: It is hypothesized that low levels of guilt-proneness will predict high levels of acceptance for a father's disclosure of a gay identity.

H10: It is hypothesized that low levels of externalization will predict high levels of acceptance for a father's disclosure of a gay identity.

H11: It is hypothesized that low levels of detachment-unconcern will predict high levels of acceptance for a father's disclosure of a gay identity.

H12: It is hypothesized that positive attitudes toward gay men will predict high levels of acceptance for a father's disclosure of a gay identity.

H13: It is hypothesized that high quality of relationships with fathers will predict high levels of acceptance for a father's disclosure of a gay identity.

H14: It is hypothesized that lesbian mothers will be more accepted than gay fathers.

H15: It is hypothesized that more positive attitudes will be held for lesbians than gay men.

## Results

A reliability analysis was conducted for the ALMS, AGFS, QRI-M, and QRI-F.

The ALMS and AGFS were created for the purpose of this study and were found to have a high level of reliability as evidenced by Cronbach's Alpha levels of .95 and .97 respectively. Additionally, the QRI is composed of three subscales; however, for the

purposes of this study, the three scales were combined to create a scale score reflecting the overall quality of the relationship. For the relationship with a mother, the QRI-M had a Cronbach's Alpha of .93 and for the father the QRI-F had a Cronbach's Alpha of .94.

A correlation matrix was created to assess the relationships between the variables evaluated in the current study: gender, quality of relationships with mothers, quality of relationships with fathers, attitudes toward lesbians, attitudes toward gay men, shame-proneness, guilt-proneness, externalization, detachment-unconcern, acceptance of a mother's disclosure of a lesbian identity, and acceptance of a father's disclosure of a gay identity (see Table 1). The hypothesis that women will be more accepting than men of both a mother and a father's disclosure of a homosexual identity (H1) was not supported. There was not a significant relationship between gender and acceptance of a mother's disclosure of a lesbian identity,  $r(127) = -.03, p = .73$ . Also, there was not a significant relationship between gender and acceptance of a father's disclosure of a gay identity,  $r(125) = -.15, p = .09$ .

To address H2 – H7, a linear multiple regression analysis was performed with acceptance level of a mother's disclosure of a lesbian identity as the dependent variable and shame-proneness, guilt-proneness, externalization, detachment, attitudes toward lesbians, and quality of the mother-child relationship as predictors. It was hypothesized that low levels of shame-proneness, guilt-proneness, externalization, and detachment-unconcern, positive attitudes toward lesbians, and high quality of relationships with mothers would predict high levels of acceptance for a mother's disclosure of a lesbian identity. A significant amount of the overall variability in acceptance for a mother's disclosure of a lesbian identity was explained by the set of predictor variables ( $R^2 = .304$ ,

Table 1

## Correlations Between All Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	-										
2	.01	-									
3	-.02	.20*	-								
4	-.06	-.14	.13	-							
5	.14	-.16	.16	.80**	-						
6	-.23**	-.19*	-.08	-.05	-.20*	-					
7	-.23**	.13	.06	-.27**	-.26**	.50**	-				
8	-.01	-.18	-.01	-.04	.04	.31**	-.01	-			
9	.05	-.15	.13	-.20*	-.18*	.19*	.06	.64**	-		
10	-.15	.18*	.11	-.54**	-.57**	.08	.30**	-.01	.14	-	
11	-.03	.17	-.04	-.54**	-.44**	.06	.34**	.01	.18*	.83**	-

*Note.* 1 = Gender; 2 = Quality of Relationship Inventory for relationship with mother; 3 = Quality of Relationship Inventory for relationship with father; 4 = Attitudes Towards Lesbians; 5 = Attitudes Towards Gay Men; 6 = Test of Self-Conscious Affect Shame Subscale; 7 = Test of Self-Conscious Affect Guilt Subscale; 8 = Test of Self-Conscious Affect Externalization Subscale; 9 = Test of Self-Conscious Affect Detachment-Unconcern Subscale; 10 = Acceptance of Gay Fathers Scale; 11 = Acceptance of Lesbian Mothers Scale.

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$



$F(6, 112) = 8.15, p < .001$ ). Examination of the predictor variables revealed that positive attitudes towards lesbians ( $\beta = -.44, p < .001$ ) and high levels of proneness to guilt ( $\beta = .21, p < .05$ ) significantly contributed to the prediction of acceptance for a mother's disclosure of a lesbian identity, while the contribution of shame-proneness, externalization, detachment-unconcern, and quality of the mother-child relationship were not significant (see Table 2). These results support H3 and H6, but fail to support H2, H4, H5, and H7.

To address H8 – H13, a linear multiple regression analysis was performed with acceptance level of a father's disclosure of a gay identity as the dependent variable and shame-proneness, guilt-proneness, externalization, detachment, attitudes toward gay men, and quality of the father-child relationship as predictors. It was hypothesized that low levels of shame-proneness, guilt-proneness, externalization, and detachment-unconcern, positive attitudes toward gay men, and high quality of relationships with fathers would predict high levels of acceptance for a father's disclosure of a gay identity. A significant amount of the overall variability in acceptance for a father's disclosure of a gay identity was explained by the set of predictor variables ( $R^2 = .354, F(6, 107) = 9.78, p < .001$ ). Examination of the predictor variables revealed that attitudes toward gay men ( $\beta = -.541, p < .001$ ), guilt-proneness ( $\beta = .219, p < .05$ ), and quality of the relationships with fathers ( $\beta = .182, p < .05$ ) significantly contributed to the prediction of acceptance of a father's disclosure of a gay identity, while the contribution of shame-proneness, externalization, and detachment-unconcern were not significant (see Table 3). These results support H9, H12, and H13 respectively that low levels of guilt-proneness, positive attitudes toward gay men, and high quality of relationships with fathers will predict high levels of

Table 2

Summary of Linear Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Participants'

Levels of Acceptance for Mothers' Disclosures of Lesbian Identities (N = 119)

Variable	B	SE B	$\beta$
TOSCA Shame Subscale	-.19	.25	-.08
TOSCA Guilt Subscale	.57	.27	.21*
TOSCA Externalization	-.17	.31	-.06
TOSCA Detached-Unconcern	.25	.29	.09
Attitudes Toward Lesbians	-1.40	.27	-.44**
Quality of Relationship with Mother	.10	.12	.07

*Note.*  $R^2 = .304$ ,  $F(6, 107) = 8.15$ ,  $p < .001$ .

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .001$

Table 3

Summary of Linear Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Participants'

Levels of Acceptance for Fathers' Disclosures of Gay Identities (N = 114)

Variable	B	SE B	$\beta$
TOSCA Shame Subscale	-.42	.27	-.15
TOSCA Guilt Subscale	.69	.29	.22*
TOSCA Externalization	.22	.36	.07
TOSCA Detached-Unconcern	-.12	.33	-.04
Attitudes Toward Gay Men	-1.75	.27	-.54**
Quality of Relationship with Father	.26	.12	.18*

*Note.*  $R^2 = .354$ ,  $F(6, 107) = 9.776$ ,  $p < .001$ .

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .001$

acceptance for a father's disclosure of a gay identity, but fail to support H8, H10, and H11.

To address H14, a paired-samples *t* test was conducted to compare the acceptance level for the disclosure of a homosexual identity by a mother and by a father. There was a significant difference between the levels of acceptance for a mother's disclosure of a lesbian identity and the level of acceptance for a father's disclosure of a gay identity,  $t(126) = -3.32, p < .001$ . H14 was supported with acceptance levels being higher for a mother's disclosure of a lesbian identity ( $M = 64.29, SD = 21.13$ ) than acceptance levels for a father's disclosure of a gay identity ( $M = 60.26, SD = 24.51$ ).

To address H15, a paired-samples *t* test was conducted to compare attitudes toward lesbians and attitudes toward gay men. There was a significant difference between the attitudes toward lesbians and the attitudes toward gay men  $t(125) = -2.95, p < .01$ . H15 was supported with more positive attitudes exhibited toward lesbians ( $M = 9.53, SD = 6.60$ ) than gay men ( $M = 12.72, SD = 7.53$ ).

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine variables that may influence the level of acceptance individuals would have if their mothers and fathers disclosed homosexual identities. The variables that were hypothesized to predict high levels of acceptance for a mother's disclosure of a lesbian identity were low levels of shame-proneness, guilt-proneness, externalization, and detachment-unconcern, positive attitudes toward lesbians, and high quality of relationships with mothers. The variables that did not have a significant influence on the acceptance level for a lesbian mother were shame-proneness,

externalization, detachment-unconcern, and quality of the relationship with the mother.

The significant predictors of high levels of acceptance for a mother's disclosure of a lesbian identity were positive attitudes toward lesbians and high levels of guilt-proneness.

The variables that were hypothesized to predict high levels of acceptance for a father's disclosure of a gay identity were low levels of shame-proneness, guilt-proneness, externalization, and detachment-unconcern, positive attitudes toward gay men, and high quality of relationships with fathers. The variables that did not have a significant influence on the acceptance level for a gay father were shame-proneness, externalization, and detached-unconcern. The variables that significantly contributed to the prediction of high levels of acceptance for a father's disclosure of a gay identity were high levels of guilt-proneness, positive attitudes toward gay men, and high quality of relationships with fathers.

As was expected, positive attitudes toward lesbians and positive attitudes toward gay men predicted high levels of acceptance for lesbian mothers and gay fathers respectively. This variable was the strongest predictor of acceptance for lesbian mothers and gay fathers. These results suggest that preexisting attitudes toward homosexuals are influential in the level of acceptance experienced for a parent's disclosure of a homosexual identity and these attitudes influence acceptance levels more than self-consciousness and quality of the parent-child relationship.

In addition to this, high levels of guilt-proneness were associated with high levels of acceptance. It is possible that although a stigma is still associated with homosexual identities, individuals who are more prone to experiencing feelings of guilt would feel guilty if they rejected their parents due to their sexual orientations and therefore, report

higher levels of acceptance. Proneness to guilt may serve as a buffer against the direct expression of negative attitudes toward homosexuals and, in this case, homosexual parents. A previous study conducted by Lewis (1980), revealed that sons may redirect anger toward a mother's lesbian partner instead of rejecting the mother due to her sexual orientation. This redirection of anger and hostility may have been due to the sons experiencing feelings of guilt associated with negative reactions to their mothers' disclosures of lesbian identities. This appears to be likely based on the results of the current study.

The quality of the parent-child relationship was also found to influence acceptance levels for gay fathers but not lesbian mothers. This demonstrates that acceptance levels of gay fathers are more susceptible to influence from the relationship between the parent and child, whereas acceptance of lesbian mothers does not appear to be. Research has demonstrated there is a greater societal stigma associated with male homosexuality as opposed to female homosexuality (Herek, 2002). It is possible that this may make it easier to reject a gay father as opposed to a lesbian mother. As the results in the current study showed, lesbian mothers were more accepted than gay fathers and more positive attitudes were held toward lesbians than gay men. Because lesbian mothers were more accepted than gay fathers, this could mean that the acceptance levels may be more easily modified by the quality of the parent-child relationship for fathers than mothers. In addition, it is possible that relationships with mothers have a higher quality than relationships with fathers and this may also make it easier to reject a father than a mother.

Homosexuality and parental status are generally seen as socially discordant identities. It is possible that because lesbians are more accepted in society than gay men

(Herek, 2002) that this can be generalized to homosexual parents as well. When examining homosexual identities from a social perspective, lesbians are often stereotyped as being butch or masculine and gay men are often stereotyped as being effeminate. In a previous study conducted by Fingerhut and Peplau (2006), gay fathers were rated as more feminine than other gay men. This violation of gender roles could also influence levels of acceptance and could be an underlying reason why negative attitudes were held toward gay fathers. Although lesbian identities are also associated with gender nonconformity, lesbian stepfamilies have been previously found to be rated as having higher levels of satisfaction and security than heterosexual stepfamilies (Claxton-Oldfield & O'Neil, 2007). This being so, gender nonconformity may not have as much of an influence on perceptions of lesbian mothers as it does for gay fathers.

In previous studies, it has been found that sons have higher levels of rejection than daughters of a lesbian mother's disclosure (Lewis, 1980). Additionally, in Goldberg's (2007b) study, participants suggested that it was more acceptable to be a daughter with a homosexual parent than to be a son with a homosexual parent because to have a homosexual parent questions a son's masculinity. Further, in a study conducted by McLeod, Crawford, and Zechmeister (1999), sons with gay fathers were perceived to be more confused regarding sexual orientation and gender identities. In the current study, the results failed to support the hypothesis that women would be more accepting than men of both a mother and father's disclosure of homosexual identities. Although this hypothesis was not supported, a possible explanation is the small amount of male participants included in the sample, with 29 men and 100 women. If more male participants had been included, it is possible that a significant difference would have been

found between the levels of acceptance men and women experienced for parental disclosures of homosexual identities.

One limitation of the current study is that participants were mainly women. Had the number of male participants been higher, it is possible that a significant difference could have been found between the levels of acceptance of male and female participants for a parent's disclosure of a homosexual identity. Another limitation is that the study measured participants' reactions to a parent's hypothetical disclosure of a homosexual identity. Although the rationale for the use of this is to provide a measure of the initial reaction participants would have, it is possible that they would behave and react differently if the situation actually happened to them. Taking this into consideration, the average age of participants was 25 years old and they may not have thought it feasible for their parents to disclose homosexual identities due to the age of their parents.

Future research in this area could explore the influence of additional variables, as well as provide quantitative analyses to variables that have previously been studied from qualitative perspectives. Novel variables suggested for future research include concern for social status, comfort with gender role nonconformity, and concern for others' perceptions of the offspring's sexuality. Variables that have been previously studied from a qualitative perspective that would be beneficial to study from a quantitative perspective include the endorsements of stereotypes of what a family consists of, reactions of heterosexual parents, sex of the parent, sex of the offspring, age of the offspring, reactions of peers, and parental desire for secrecy. The current study took a portion of these variables into consideration when constructing the ALMS and AGFS, but future studies may wish to examine the individual influence of each variable on the level



of acceptance experienced. Future studies should also address these variables in samples of individuals who have already had a parent to disclose a homosexual identity after previously identifying as heterosexual. It would also be beneficial to examine other samples, such as children conceived through artificial insemination, from surrogate parents, or adopted children. Additionally, it would be beneficial to examine reactions of different age groups to the hypothetical disclosure of a parent's sexual orientation.

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## Appendix A: Cover Letter

**Barry University  
Cover Letter**

Dear Research Participant:

Your participation in a research project is requested. The title of the study is Parental Disclosure of a Homosexual Identity. The research is being conducted by Julia Puckett, a graduate student in the psychology department at Barry University, and is seeking information that will be useful in the field of gay and lesbian research. The aims of the research are to examine psychological factors associated with parents who disclose a homosexual identity. We anticipate the number of participants to be 200.

If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to do the following: answer 5 questionnaires. The questionnaires will measure the participant's reactions to situations occurring in everyday life, reactions to parental disclosure of a homosexual identity, attitudes towards homosexuals, the participant's relationship with parents, and demographic information such as age and gender. Based on a pilot study, the amount of time it will take to complete the questionnaires is approximately 20 minutes.

Your consent to be a research participant is strictly voluntary and should you decline to participate or should you choose to drop out at any time during the study, there will be no known adverse effects on you. There are no known risks to you and you may skip any items you do not want to answer. Barry University students enrolled in a psychology course may receive extra credit for participation; there are no other direct benefits to study participants. For those receiving extra credit for participation, please print this consent form as proof of participation. If you choose to end your participation at any time, this will have no adverse effects on your ability to receive extra credit. Although there will be no other direct benefits to you, your participation will contribute to scientific knowledge in this area.

As a research participant, information you provide will be kept anonymous, that is, no names or other identifiers will be collected on any of the instruments used. The researcher will not be provided any information regarding the IP address of participants and no IP addresses will be link to individual survey responses. SurveyMonkey may collect your IP address for its own purposes and the privacy policy of SurveyMonkey is outlined below:

SurveyMonkey.com collects IP addresses for system administration and record keeping. Your IP address is automatically assigned to your computer when you use the World Wide Web. Our servers record incoming IP addresses. The IP addresses are analyzed only in aggregate; no connection is made between you and your computer's IP address. By tracking IP addresses, we can determine which sites refer the most people to SurveyMonkey.com. (Think of an IP address like your zip code; it tells us in general terms where you are from.) We follow generally accepted industry standards to protect the personal information submitted to us, both during transmission and once we receive it. No method of transmission over the Internet, or method of electronic storage, is 100% secure, however. Therefore, while we strive to use commercially acceptable means to protect your personal information, we cannot guarantee its absolute security.

It is the researcher's intention to collect an anonymous data set. However, your anonymity is ensured in this study only to the extent described in the SurveyMonkey.com privacy policy. Breaches to your anonymity are possible. However, reasonable and appropriate protections will be implemented by the researcher and SurveyMonkey.com to make the chances of such a threat minimal. Data will be kept in a password protected file on the researcher's computer. By completing this survey you acknowledge that you are at least 18 years old and agree to participate in the study.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study or your participation in the study, you may contact me, Julia Puckett, at (910) 234-4787, my supervisor, Dr. Frank Muscarella, at (305) 899-3275, or the Institutional Review Board point of contact, Barbara Cook, at (305) 899-3020.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,  
Julia Puckett

## Appendix B:

### Demographics:

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity:

- ☐ Asian American
- ☐ Black
- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ Native American
- ☐ White
- ☐ Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate the appropriate information to the following demographic questions.

Gender:	Male	Female	
How do you identify your sexual orientation?	Heterosexual	Bisexual	Homosexual
Marital status of parents:	Never Married	Separated or Divorced	Married
Sexual orientation of mother:	Heterosexual	Bisexual	Homosexual
Sexual orientation of father:	Heterosexual	Bisexual	Homosexual

## Appendix C:

**TOSCA-3** (Tangney & Dearing, 2002)

Below are situations that people are likely to encounter in day-to-day life, followed by several common reactions to those situations.

As you read each scenario, try to imagine yourself in that situation. Then indicate how likely you would be to react in each of the ways described. We ask you to rate all responses because people may feel or react more than one way to the same situation, or they may react different ways at different times.

1. You make plans to meet a friend for lunch. At 5 o'clock, you realize you stood him up.

a) You would think: "I'm inconsiderate."

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

b) You would think: "Well, they'll understand."

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

c) You'd think you should make it up to him as soon as possible.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

d) You would think: "My boss distracted me just before lunch."

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

2. You break something at work and then hide it.

a) You would think: "This is making me anxious. I need to either fix it or get someone else to."

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

b) You would think about quitting.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

c) You would think: "A lot of things aren't made very well these days."

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

d) You would think: "It was only an accident."

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

3. At work, you wait until the last minute to plan a project, and it turns out badly.

a) You would feel incompetent.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

b) You would think: "There are never enough hours in the day."

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

c) You would feel: "I deserve to be reprimanded for mismanaging the project."

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

d) You would think: "What's done is done."

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

4. You make a mistake at work and find out a co-worker is blamed for the error.

e) You would think the company did not like the co-worker.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

f) You would think: "Life is not fair."

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

c) You would keep quiet and avoid the co-worker.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

d) You would feel unhappy and eager to correct the situation.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

5. While playing around, you throw a ball and it hits your friend in the face.

a) You would feel inadequate that you can't even throw a ball.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

b) You would think maybe your friend needs more practice at catching.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

c) You would think: "It was just an accident."

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

d) You would apologize and make sure your friend feels better.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

6. You are driving down the road, and you hit a small animal.

a) You would think the animal shouldn't have been on the road.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

b) You would think: "I'm terrible."

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

c) You would feel: "Well, it was an accident."

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

d) You'd feel bad you hadn't been more alert driving down the road.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

7. You walk out of an exam thinking you did extremely well. Then you find out you did poorly.

a) You would think: "Well, it's just a test."

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

b) You would think: "The instructor doesn't like me."

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

c) You would think: "I should have studied harder."

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

d) You would feel stupid.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

8. While out with a group of friends, you make fun of a friend who's not there.

a) You would think: "It was all in fun; it's harmless."

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

b) You would feel small...like a rat.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

c) You would think that perhaps that friend should have been there to defend himself/herself.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

d) You would apologize and talk about that person's good points.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

9. You make a big mistake on an important project at work. People were depending on you, and your boss criticizes you.

a) You would think your boss should have been more clear about what was expected of you.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

b) You would feel like you wanted to hide.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

c) You would think: "I should have recognized the problem and done a better job."

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

d) You would think: "Well, nobody's perfect."

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

10. You are taking care of your friend's dog while they are on vacation and the dog runs away.

a) You would think, "I am irresponsible and incompetent."

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

b) You would think your friend must not take very good care of their dog or it wouldn't have run away.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

c) You would vow to be more careful next time.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

d) You would think your friend could just get a new dog.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

11. You attend your co-worker's housewarming party and you spill red wine on their new cream-colored carpet, but you think no one notices.

a) You think your co-worker should have expected some accidents at such a big party.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

b) You would stay late to help clean up the stain after the party.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

c) You would wish you were anywhere but at the party.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely

d) You would wonder why your co-worker chose to serve red wine with the new light carpet.

1	2	3	4	5
Not Likely				Very Likely



## Appendix D:

## Acceptance of Lesbian Mothers Scale (ALMS)

Instructions: Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

I would be accepting of my mother if she were to disclose a lesbian identity.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

I would be accepting of my mother if she told me directly that she were a lesbian.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

I would be accepting of my mother if I found out from another person that she were a lesbian.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

I would not be upset if my mother wanted me to keep her lesbian identity a secret from others.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

If my father accepted my mother as a lesbian, I would also feel accepting of her.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

I would be accepting of my mother's lesbian identity if she wanted me to keep it a secret from others.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

I would accept my mother if she were a lesbian.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

I would be accepting of my mother if she disclosed her lesbian identity to me in the company of others.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

My friends do not make derogatory comments about gay, lesbian, or bisexual individuals.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

I would not feel ashamed of my mother if she were a lesbian.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

I would be accepting of my lesbian mother's identity if she had a girlfriend.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

I would be proud of my mother if she disclosed a lesbian identity.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

I would keep open communication with my mother if she disclosed a lesbian identity.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

## Appendix E:

## Acceptance of Gay Fathers Scale (AGFS)

Instructions: Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

I would be accepting of my father if he were to disclose a gay identity.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

I would be accepting of my father if he told me directly that he were gay.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

I would be accepting of my father if I found out from another person that he were gay.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

I would not be upset if my father wanted me to keep his gay identity a secret from others.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

If my mother accepted my father as being gay, I would also feel accepting of him.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

I would be accepting of my father's gay identity if he wanted me to keep it a secret from others.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

I would accept my father if he were gay.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

I would be accepting of my father if he disclosed his gay identity to me in the company of others.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

My friends do not make derogatory comments about gay, lesbian, or bisexual individuals.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

I would not feel ashamed of my father if he were gay.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

I would be accepting of my gay father's identity if he had a boyfriend.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

I would be proud of my father if he disclosed a gay identity.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

I would keep open communication with my father if he disclosed a gay identity.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Disagree						Agree

## Appendix F:

## Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men (ATLG) Scale (Herek &amp; Capitanio, 1995)

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

Sex between two men is just plain wrong.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Strongly Disagree								Strongly Agree

I think male homosexuals are disgusting.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Strongly Disagree								Strongly Agree

Male homosexuality is a natural expression of sexuality in men.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Strongly Disagree								Strongly Agree

Sex between two women is just plain wrong.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Strongly Disagree								Strongly Agree

I think female homosexuals are disgusting.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Strongly Disagree								Strongly Agree

Female homosexuality is a natural expression of sexuality in women.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Strongly Disagree								Strongly Agree

## Appendix G:

Quality of Relationships Inventory (QRI; Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1991)

QRI-Mother (QRI-M)

**Please use the scale provided beneath each question to describe your relationship with your mother.**

To what extent could you turn to this person for advice about problems?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How often do you need to work hard to avoid conflict with this person?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

To what extent could you count on this person for help with a problem?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How upset does this person sometimes make you feel?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

To what extent can you count on this person to give you honest feedback, even if you might not want to hear it?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How much does this person make you feel guilty?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How much do you have to “give in” in this relationship?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

To what extent can you count on this person to help you if a family member very close to you died?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How much does this person want you to change?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How positive a role does this person play in your life?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How significant is this relationship in your life?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How close will your relationship with this person be in 10 years?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How much would you miss this person if the two of you could not see or talk with each other for a month?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How critical of you is this person?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

If you wanted to go out and do something this evening, how confident are you that this person would be willing to do something with you?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How responsible do you feel for this person's well-being?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How much do you depend on this person?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

To what extent can you count on this person to listen to you when you are very angry at someone else?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How much would you like this person to change?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How angry does this person make you feel?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How much do you argue with this person?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

To what extent can you really count on this person to distract you from your worries when you feel under stress?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How often does this person make you feel angry?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much



How often does this person try to control or influence your life?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How much more do you give than you get from this relationship?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

QRI-Father (QRI-F)

**Please use the scale provided beneath each question to describe your relationship with your father.**

To what extent could you turn to this person for advice about problems?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How often do you need to work hard to avoid conflict with this person?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

To what extent could you count on this person for help with a problem?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How upset does this person sometimes make you feel?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

To what extent can you count on this person to give you honest feedback, even if you might not want to hear it?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How much does this person make you feel guilty?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How much do you have to “give in” in this relationship?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

To what extent can you count on this person to help you if a family member very close to you died?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How much does this person want you to change?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How positive a role does this person play in your life?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How significant is this relationship in your life?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How close will your relationship with this person be in 10 years?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How much would you miss this person if the two of you could not see or talk with each other for a month?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How critical of you is this person?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

If you wanted to go out and do something this evening, how confident are you that this person would be willing to do something with you?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How responsible do you feel for this person's well-being?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How much do you depend on this person?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

To what extent can you count on this person to listen to you when you are very angry at someone else?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How much would you like this person to change?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How angry does this person make you feel?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How much do you argue with this person?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

To what extent can you really count on this person to distract you from your worries when you feel under stress?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How often does this person make you feel angry?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How often does this person try to control or influence your life?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much

How much more do you give than you get from this relationship?

1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much