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a review of the professional
literature and research needs
for LGBT youth of color
by caitlin ryan



**A Review of the Professional
Literature & Research Needs
for LGBT Youth of Color**

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Several years ago, the National Youth Advocacy Coalition (NYAC) embarked upon an unprecedented venture with its organizational members and with the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth they serve. NYAC began the arduous task of working to become a social justice organization focused on addressing multiple oppressions. We began this work humbly, gradually expanding the organization's efforts to include a broad range of social justice issues.

preface

This path has been marked by a thoughtful, sustained effort to embody the values that launched NYAC as a unique, youth-centered enterprise. From the beginning, NYAC has envisioned a society in which LGBTQ youth are healthy, fully empowered, and engaged in the building of their diverse communities. Accordingly, charting the course for change has meant struggling with a multiplicity of threats to the health and well being of young people including economic injustice, racism, sexism, ageism, and ableism. Over time, the clear voices of LGBTQ youth expanded NYAC's vision from a youth-serving perspective to one anchored within a strong youth justice orientation.

Over these many years, NYAC has committed itself to challenging the status quo by demanding that the voices of LGBTQ young people, particularly youth of color, be heard in important policy and service provision discussions.

As one strategy for raising the profile of these young people, NYAC requested a comprehensive review of the published literature on LGBTQ youth of color and asked for research recommendations based on findings and gaps in the existing literature. This review is based on three comprehensive searches of publications on LGBT youth in the professional literature conducted between 1995-2001, with a final search in the fall of 2002.

NYAC has consistently stressed the critical importance of collecting and disseminating accurate information about the physical and mental health needs and developmental issues of LGBTQ young people. Though it should not be surprising, in this study, we found less than 1% of all adolescent research focused on this population; and only 18 studies in the past 30 years concerned LGB youth of color (3.6% of the 1%); with not a single study addressing transgender youth of color. Research must be made a priority as it drives policy development, funding priorities, and access to resources.

We have known that substantial gaps exist in the literature on adult lesbians, gay men and bisexuals of color in basic areas, such as sexual and gender identity development, sexuality and sexual behaviors, culture, and experiences related to families, parenting, coping and resilience. This new report makes clear that the gaps are even more extreme in reflecting the experiences of LGBT youth of color.

From the report, we find that “Virtually all of the literature on LGBTQ youth and adults underscores the need to balance and prioritize the demands and allegiances of various community affiliations, few of which accept all aspects of an individual’s multiple identities. This is especially difficult for adolescents who are trying to consolidate and integrate multiple stigmatized identities, meet the cultural needs and demands of their families and ethnic communities, negotiate developmental tasks, and find support for dealing with same-sex desires.”

“Increasingly, youth are coming out during adolescence rather than adulthood, and in the context of the AIDS pandemic which affects risk, life course and development. Greater opportunities for social support are coupled with increased exposure to victimization and harassment. LGBT youth

of color are experiencing increased visibility in mainstream gay communities. However, they still struggle with racism and a lack of validation from mainstream, ethnic and LGBT communities. And although culture is a critical aspect of understanding sexual orientation, it is frequently left out of the study of sexuality and sexual health.”

Though the gaps that become evident in reading this report are nothing short of disgraceful, we are hopeful that it will provide the evidence necessary to require that attention be paid to the needs of LGBTQ youth of color.

We are confident that it will encourage researchers to prioritize study of the developmental needs of this population, recognizing of course, that their work will not be possible without a parallel commitment in new resources by our partners in the funding community.

NYAC works behind the scenes and on the front lines to ensure that LGBTQ youth have both the resources and the platform to advocate for their unique needs and perspectives. And, while LGBTQ youth have gained significant ground over the past decade, the grave threats to their well-being remain. They suffer, not because they are LGBTQ, but because as adults we are not fulfilling our responsibilities—ensuring that every youth, of every race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation, grows up in a safe environment, a tolerant environment, an environment that nurtures and supports their hopes and dreams.

This report is but one step in beginning to redefine how the needs of LGBTQ youth of color are understood and prioritized. You will see a great deal more from NYAC in the coming months and years. We hope that we can count on you to help us.

NYAC is indebted to the report’s author, Caitlin Ryan, whose commitment to meeting the needs of LGBTQ youth is unwavering. The publication of this report would not have been possible without her passion, experience, and wisdom. We also owe thanks to our 130+ member organizations whose direct service work helps keep LGBTQ youth safer and healthier; even as their needs fail to receive the attention they deserve from society at large. It is also important to thank NYAC’s Board and staff whose values drive NYAC’s commitment to social justice, even when it seems unpopular. Finally, countless young people have contributed to making the National Youth Advocacy Coalition the kind of organization that is willing to stand alone when necessary, work together when possible, and always operate strategically to provide essential leadership on cutting-edge issues. For their strength and courage, we remain in constant awe.

In Community,



Craig A. Bowman
Executive Director

the executive summary

A prior analysis of publications from 1972-1999 on health and mental health concerns of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) youth identified 166 publications on LGB youth (Ryan, 2000). Nine focused on LGB youth of color, including three book chapters and four empirical studies, with an additional nine published in 1999 on the social service and provider training needs of transgender youth. This represents about 1% of journal articles published during this period in professional journals serving school practitioners (Ryan, 2000). Of these, only 3.6% focused on LGB youth of color, and none addressed transgender youth of color.

Findings

In the current review, the author identified 16 articles and two book chapters published during the past 30 years on lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) youth of color. None focused specifically on lesbian or transgender youth of color. The first articles were published in 1989 in a special issue of the *Journal of Homosexuality* on gay youth (Herdt, 1989). Eighty-three percent were published since 1993, and half were published between 1996 and 2001. In addition, at least 11

This report was requested by the National Youth Advocacy Coalition on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth of color and based on findings and gaps in the existing literature. The review is based on searches of publications on LGBT youth in the professional literature and a search in 2002.

papers were published on sexual and substance-using risk behaviors of New York City youth, a majority of whom were African American or Latino (e.g., Rosario, et al., 1996; Rotheram-Borus, Reid & Rosario, 1994). However, since they did not assess these behaviors and experiences from an ethnic or cultural perspective, they are not included in this review. Other articles published in the professional literature include small proportions of youth of color, and one comprehensive study of LGB youth, of whom 60% were youth of color (Herdt & Boxer, 1993).

Unlike the literature on LGB youth, in general (see Ryan, 2000), the professional literature on LGB youth of color includes a much higher proportion of empirical studies. In fact, all but four publications (78%) are based on some form of data collection or case material. However, most samples are very small samples of convenience or snowball samples that lack diversity in terms of class, geographic area, level of acculturation, etc. Similar to the literature on LGB youth, in general, most focus on males.

Most publications discuss the impact of ethnicity on same-sex identity. Only one, (Choi, Kumekawa, Dang, Kegeles, Hays & Stall, 1999) specifically discusses HIV-related risk in the context of family and cultural values. Only two publications specifically focus on HIV (Choi, et al., 1999; Peterson, Bakeman & Stokes, 2001), and only two others mention HIV as a health concern for LGB youth of color (Chung & Katayama, 1998; Parks, 2001), a disturbing finding given the high rates of HIV infection among gay and bisexual youth of color.

Three publications provide a secondary analyses of large datasets including a 1988-90 national survey of reservation-based American Indian youth related to teen pregnancy (Saewyc et al., 1998a) and sexual orientation (Saewyc et al., 1998b), and an analysis of school performance and self-esteem related to ethnicity and romantic attraction (Russell & Truong, 2001). Six publications include discussions and

n (NYAC) to review the published literature and to provide research recommendations, based on three comprehensive literature reviews conducted from 1995-2001, with a final

case examples. One presents cultural values for school counselors (Chung & Katayama, 1998); while two discuss African-American youth, using experiences and case examples (Monteiro, 1994; Sears, 1994); another reviews developmental challenges for urban African-American youth (Parks, 2001); and two chapters in an edited book discuss identity development, culture, family expectations and gender nonconformity among youth of color and Native American and Native Hawaiian cultures (Savin-Williams, 1996; Williams, 1996).

Discussion

Substantial gaps exist in the literature on adult lesbians, gay men and bisexuals of color in basic areas, such as sexual and transgender identity development, sexuality and sexual behaviors, culture, and experiences related to families, parenting, coping and resilience. These gaps are even more extreme in reflecting the experiences of LGBT youth.

A common fallacy within communities of color is that gay men or lesbians are perceived as “defective” men or women who want to be a member of the opposite gender (e.g., Greene). Thus, understanding the meaning of same-sex behavior in ethnic minority cultures requires an appreciation of the importance of gender roles and traditional gender stereotypes. Indirectness and not discussing sexuality is seen as the cost for family and ethnic community acceptance, while being openly lesbian or gay is seen as rejecting appropriate social roles or traditional culture. Virtually all the literature on LGB youth and adults underscores the need to balance and prioritize the demands and allegiances of ethnic and mainstream LGBT communities, neither of which accept all aspects of an individual's multiple identities. This is especially difficult for adolescents who are trying to consolidate and integrate multiple stigmatized identities, meet the cultural needs and demands of their family and ethnic community, negotiate developmental tasks, and find support for dealing with same-sex desires.

Non-heterosexual youth and adults construct a variety of identities to provide social roles and a cultural framework for same-sex desires and behaviors. An understanding of these meanings is essential in studying risk and health outcomes. LGBT youth are a separate, evolving culture that is vastly different than previous generations of LGB adults. Increasingly, youth are coming out during adolescence rather than adulthood, and in the context of the AIDS epidemic which affects risk, life course and development. Greater opportunities for social support are coupled with increased exposure to victimization and harassment. LGBT youth of

color are experiencing increased visibility in mainstream gay communities. However, they still struggle with racism and lack of validation from mainstream, ethnic and LGBT communities. And although culture is a critical aspect of understanding sexual orientation, it is frequently left out of the study of sexuality and sexual health.

Díaz (1998) developed an important model to frame and understand risk behavior, ethnicity and culture among Latino gay men that has important implications for studying LGBT youth of color. One of his most important premises is that risky behavior is both natural and meaningful in the social and cultural context of men who have been socialized to hide and compartmentalize their sexuality to avoid shaming their families, and to support cultural values and norms that privilege masculinity and enforce sexual silence. These cultural norms directly impact and shape risk behaviors. Because homosexuality is perceived as a gender problem and gay men are perceived as not being “real men,” they are more vulnerable to cultural messages of machismo. Since HIV prevention approaches and strategies rarely reflect the cultural realities of the lives of gay men of color, they will not be successful in promoting behavior change.

Research and Support Needs

In-depth qualitative studies of diverse ethnic groups are needed to understand sexual culture and behaviors that are culturally determined and socially regulated. Research teams must combine community knowledge of ethnic groups with experts in emerging LGBT youth culture and adolescent development. Studies are needed on sexual and ethnic identity development in LGB people of color, based on their lived experiences. This includes in-depth studies of coming out among a broad range of youth of color to understand how they construct their identities, how health, sexuality, culture and gender interact, sources of strength and support, and predictors of a healthy coming out process. Because many minority communities have a gender-based definition of homosexuality, we need to explore how youth of color perceive gender in relation to sexual identity and how this affects health outcomes. We also need to understand the identity development process for transgender and bisexual youth, stressors, coping behaviors and promoting family support.

We need to strengthen support networks for non-heterosexual youth of color to provide access to peer and adult support and accurate information about sexuality and risk reduction. We need to support training to sensitize mainstream, LGBT and family-based programs to more effectively serve youth of color and to promote outreach strategies to increase their awareness and participation in these programs.

purpose

This report was requested by the National Youth Advocacy Coalition (NYAC) to review the existing published literature on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth of color and to provide research recommendations, based on findings and gaps in the literature. The review is based on three successive comprehensive literature searches of publications on LGBT youth in the professional literature. The first was conducted from 1995-1997 (Ryan & Futterman, 1997/1998); the second from September through December 1999 (Ryan, 2000); and the third from January through April 2001. A final review was conducted in July 2002. Given the intensive nature of these efforts to identify publications on sexual minority youth of color from a variety of sources, the author believes that this list is extremely inclusive, to date.

A prior analysis of publications in the professional literature from 1972-1999 on health and mental health concerns of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) youth identified 166 publications on LGB youth (Ryan, 2000). Nine focused on LGB youth of color, including three book chapters and four empirical studies, and an additional nine were published in 1999 on the social service and provider training needs of transgender youth. This represents about 1% of journal articles published during this period in professional journals serving school practitioners (Ryan, 2000). Of these, only 3.6% focused on LGB youth of color, and none addressed transgender youth of color.

LGBT youth publications in the professional literature by ethnic group

african american	5
american indian	3
asian/pacific islander	2
latino	2
range of groups (including white)	6

findings

In the current review, the author identified 16 articles and two book chapters published during the past 30 years on lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) youth of color (Table 1).¹ The first articles were published in 1989 in a special issue of the *Journal of Homosexuality* on gay youth (Herdt, 1989). Most (83%) were published since 1993, with half published between 1996 and 2001. The author also found at least 11 papers published by Rotheram-Borus, and colleagues (e.g., Rotheram-Borus, Reid & Rosario, 1994) and

Rosario, et al. (e.g., 1996) on a sample of New York City youth, a majority of whom were African American or Latino. Although these articles provide empirical data on sexual and substance using risk behaviors, they do not assess these behaviors and experiences from an ethnic or cultural perspective, and so are not included in this review. Other articles published in the professional literature include small proportions of youth of color, and one comprehensive study of LGB youth in Chicago (Herdt & Boxer, 1993) with a sample of 202 LGB youth, 60% of whom were youth of color.

Two other publications provide content on sexual and ethnic identity in LGB youth of color in publications that discuss these issues in the context of LGB youth, in general. These include a review of available data on health and mental health concerns of LGB adolescents, including youth of color (Ryan & Futterman, 1997/1998), and the development of intimacy and ethnic identity among LGB youth (Dube, Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2001).

In the interest of providing a comprehensive list of publications related to sexual orientation and LGB people of color, the author includes dissertations published on LGB youth and adults, and a bibliography on sexual

¹ The first article on homosexual male youth was published in the professional literature in 1972 by Roesler and Deisher.

table 1

publications on LGB youth of color in the professional literature

Author	Year	Sample Size	Age/Gender
Empirical Studies			
Choi, et al.	1999	40	males—mean age 22
Dube & Savin-Williams	1999	83 (136)	males—mean age 22.4
Edwards	1996a	37	males—mean age 18
Edwards	1996b	37	males—mean age 18
Newman & Muzzonigro	1993	27	males—ages 17-20
Peterson, et al.	2001	2,612	males—mean age 21.3
Tremble, Schneider, Appathurai	1989	10	7m, 3f ages 16-21
Ethnographic Studies Outside the US			
Carrier	1989	—	males
Parker	1989	—	mostly males
Secondary Analysis—Large Scale Studies			
Russell & Truong	(1995) 2001	251 (522)	males & females 13-18
Saewyc, et. al.	(1998-90) 1998a	12,978	males & females
Saewyc, et. al.	(1998-90) 1998b	3,749	males & females
Case Examples			
Sears	1994	1	young adult male
Discussion/Review			
Chung & Katayama	1998	—	males & females
Monteiro	1994	2	males—ages 20 & 23
Parks	2001	—	males & females
Savin-Williams	1996	—	males
Williams	1996	—	—

content

orientation, same-sex behavior and LGB adults (page 22-24). The report includes a review of the 18 identified publications on LGB youth of color and a discussion of the primary research needs related to LGBT youth. It is not intended to provide a comprehensive review of issues related to various ethnic groups, sexual identity and culture; nor does it include a bibliography of the extensive historical cross-cultural literature published during the past century. The focus is on contemporary youth of color in the United States who have same-sex desires and who may identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Literature in the bibliography on adults includes publications on same-sex behavior, desire and identity in various ethnic groups and countries, and should provide a useful resource for further reading.

Unlike the literature on LGB youth in general, reviewed elsewhere (Ryan, 2000), the professional literature on LGB youth of color includes a much higher proportion of empirical studies (Table 1). In fact, all but four of the publications (78%) are based on some form of data collection or case material. However, most samples are very small samples of convenience or snowball samples that lack diversity in terms of class, geographic area, level of acculturation, etc. Similar to the literature on LGB youth, in general, most focus on males. None report specifically on the experiences of transgender youth as that group is evolving a separate cultural identity in the U.S. today. The ethnographic work by Carrier (1989) and Parker (1989) in Mexico and Brazil, however, describes traditional and emerging categories of cross gender behavior and identity outside the U.S., and Williams (1996) describes gender nonconforming experiences in Native American and Native Hawaiian cultures.

A brief description of each publication can be found on the following pages.

Ethnic Groups	Type of Study	Topic
Asian/Pacific Islander	interview	HIV risk & protective factors
African-American/Asian/Latino/White	interview	sexual identity development
African-American	questionnaire	identity, disclosure
African-American	questionnaire	identity, disclosure
African-American/Asian/Latino/White	questionnaire	identity & family values
African-American/Asian/Latino/White	interview	HIV sexual risk behaviors
Asian, Greek, Italian, Indo-Pakistani, Portugese	interview	impact of ethnicity on family and relationships
Mexican	ethnography	sexual culture & gay liberation
Brazilian	ethnography	sexual culture & identities
African-American/Asian/Latino/White	secondary analysis	school-based experiences
American Indian	secondary analysis	sexual identity & behavior
American Indian	secondary analysis	pregnancy risk
African-American	case discussion	experiences growing up
African-American	literature review	culture & counseling
African-American	discussion	culture & sexuality
African-American	discussion	culture sexuality & schools
Ethnic minority youth	literature review	family, sex roles & culture
Native American/Hawaiian	interviews/history	historical review

empirical studies

Most publications discuss the impact of ethnicity on same-sex identity. Only one, **(Choi, Kumekawa, Dang, Kegeles, Hays & Stall, 1999)** specifically discusses HIV-related risk by focusing on risks and protective factors for HIV infection, in the context of family and cultural values among 40 Asian and Pacific Islander (API) gay and bisexual men in San Diego and Seattle. This is an important study that focuses on older youth and young adults (ages 18-25) and uses in-depth interviews to elicit information on how culture mediates risk. Other studies have shown that young API men who have sex with men engage in very high rates of unprotected anal intercourse, so this study explores these experiences among gay/bi-identified men, more than two-thirds of whom were born outside the U.S.

Choi and his colleagues found that risky behaviors were related to lack of communication about sex, in general, which “is virtually nonexistent in Asian families;” marginalization and lack of acceptance for their ethnic and sexual identities within mainstream gay and Asian communities; and having to hide their sexual identity from parents, particularly when they live with them, which contributes to secret or anonymous sexual encounters. In terms of protective factors, some youth saw living with parents as decreasing opportunities for sex. They also felt that cultural and family-oriented values reduce risk, as did the desire to avoid hurting their parents. Choi’s study was the most comprehensive, qualitative study by far, and the only one focusing on HIV of those that specifically address ethnicity—a disturbing finding given recent data on the increasing risk for HIV among gay youth of color.

Dube & Savin-Williams (1999) analyzed data from two prior interview studies to explore the influence of ethnicity on sexual identity development in white, African American, Asian American and Latino gay males from college and community settings. Their sample was highly educated and middle class: Between 70% and 95% of the general sample had some college experience or were college graduates; and only 22% of the total sample grew up in urban settings. The mean age of both samples was 21.2. They found that most youth reported first same-sex romantic relationships during high school or college, with Asian American youth reporting their first same-sex experiences approximately three years later than others. White youth reported significantly higher levels of disclosure, while African Americans and Asian Americans reported disproportionately lower levels. Less than half of ethnic minority youth disclosed to family members, and those who disclosed to more individuals reported feeling less internalized homophobia. A number of youth reported feeling pressure to choose between their ethnic and sexual identities, a common finding in the literature on LGB youth and adults.

Edwards (1996a; 1996b) reports on a small sample of 37 urban African American gay males (ages 16-21) related to identity and disclosure. Edwards approaches his respondents from a sociological framework and developed a 40-item true/false questionnaire that each youth completed in 1994. He included five statements such as “I regret being homosexual” or “I have sought professional counseling for my sexual orientation” to assess anxiety and to measure levels of personal adjustment, however, these are rough assessments of personal adjustment and not clinical measures of anxiety. Among his findings: all youth lived with their family or other relatives; 54% were in high school, and 40% were in college. More than half (52%) identified as bisexual, while 48% identified as homosexual. Forty percent had sex with females, and all said that they were attracted to both males and females. The average age of first same-sex experience was 16, and only 38% said their first same-sex experience was with a friend or peer. Two-thirds (66%) said they were harassed if others thought they were gay, and 80% were harassed if they socialized in settings with other gay people (e.g., bars, parties, parks). None sought counseling, and all said they would prefer that their son not be gay. Only 24% had come out to their immediate family, and 89% said that their parents would most likely not accept their homosexuality.

Newman and Muzzonigro (1993) used a Likert-scale questionnaire with one open-ended item to define the coming out process and to assess the impact of traditional family values on the coming out experiences of 27 middle and upper middle-class gay male youth, ages 17-20, in 1991. Most (89%) were college students or high school graduates, and 3 were high school students at the time of the study; 44% were white, while others were African American (25%), Latino (22%) and Asian/Eurasian (7%). Families were categorized as having high or low traditional values based on: 1) the importance of religion; 2) emphasis on marriage; 3) emphasis on having children; and 4) whether

English was spoken in the home. A majority of youth in families rated as having both high and low traditional values had disclosed their sexual identity to at least one family member. Youth from families ranked as highly traditional reported strong family disapproval, while those from families identified as low-traditional reported less disapproval. Race alone was not found to have a systematic effect on how youth experienced coming out.

The authors defined the coming out process based on the available literature at the time of their study. However, coming out models, including those used to frame their approach, were developed during an earlier historical and cultural period based on the experiences of white, middle and upper middle class, mostly gay male adults, and did not reflect the experiences of adolescents or people of color. Other researchers (e.g., McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Szalacha, 1998) have questioned the utility of linear, staged models of coming out, and their ability to represent diversity (e.g., gender, ethnicity, class, religion, geographic area, etc). Moreover, in-depth interview-based studies, rather than questionnaires, are needed initially to collect information from diverse groups of ethnic minority LGB adolescents to document and define their coming out experiences and to frame them for further study.

Peterson, Bakeman and Stokes (2001) conducted face-to-face interviews with 2,612 young men who have sex with men (MSM), ages 15-25, from 13 geographically diverse U.S. cities. Designed to examine racial and ethnic differences in HIV sexual risk behaviors, the study used a "venue-based" recruitment strategy to randomly select participants from areas where young MSMs gathered. Peterson and colleagues targeted specific cities to recruit African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic and young men of mixed ethnicity from each city (or ethnic site) They found that 22% overall had engaged in unprotected anal intercourse with their primary or another sexual partner during their last sexual contact. Compared to participants in other ethnic

sites, fewer young men at African American sites reported unprotected anal sex, which suggests that young African American men may have begun receiving and acting on HIV prevention messages. Among other groups, however, participants at Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic and mixed sites were more likely to report unprotected anal sex, which underscores the need for targeted interventions to specific ethnic groups.

Tremble, Schneider and Appathurai (1989) interviewed ten Toronto lesbian and gay youth who had come out to their parents to ask about the impact of culture, religion, gender, parental relationships and parental perceptions of homosexuality. The study included lesbian and gay youth, ages 16-21, from Asian, Portugese, Greek, Italian, and Indo-Pakistani backgrounds; some were recent immigrants. Youth reported that they were accepted within their families but felt distanced from their culture to some extent, and usually excluded themselves from cultural activities to avoid shaming their families. Their parents often saw homosexuality as a western influence, a result of acculturation or a form of rebellion, which potentially may enable them to blame an external source and more readily accept their child. Youth were often victimized by gay stereotypes within their culture and had few opportunities to meet lesbian and gay role models from their cultures. Perceiving that being gay or lesbian meant adopting a role reversal, or extreme cross-gender behavior, youth may go through a period of extreme cross dressing which alienates their parents or may increase their risk for victimization or harassment. Youth felt like they had a "foot in each culture" without a sense of belonging to either. Parents used various mechanisms to reduce the conflict between homosexuality and their culture, including prioritizing their child and reinterpreting cultural values; drawing from past experience (e.g., knowing other gay people from their culture); and externalizing blame (e.g., to western culture).

secondary analysis

More recent inclusion of questions related to same-sex identity and/or behavior in population-based studies has provided important information on risks for LGB-identified youth and those who engage in same-sex behavior. However, many of these questions are not consistent which making it difficult to compare them, and such questions have generally been included in small State-level studies that lack a sufficient proportion of LGB-identified youth to make comparisons among various ethnic groups. Three publications that report on analyses of national-level data focus on sexual orientation and youth of color are included in this report.

Russell and Truong (2001) analyzed data on school performance and self esteem related to ethnicity from the 1995 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. Although the study is the largest and most comprehensive source of national data on adolescents, and has a large enough sample (20,000) to provide between group comparisons, the questions included only measure the broadest category of same-sex interest since they ask both boys and girls if they have ever had a romantic attraction to a same-sex person, rather than asking about identity and/or behavior. As a result, the subsample combines youth with same-sex desires, behaviors and identities, without distinguishing between these groups. Since the literature has generally focused on gay male youth, only a handful of studies have specifically targeted lesbian youth and, to date, no studies have explored bisexual identity in adolescents, these differences are minimally understood. At the same time, however, several studies have shown more negative experiences among bisexual youth than among lesbian or gay-identified teens (e.g., Goodenow, Netherland and Szalacha, 2002; Hershberger, Pilkington and D'Augelli, 1997; Hunter, 1996).

In their analysis, Russell and Truong found that youth who reported same-sex attractions had: 1) more negative attitudes towards school, 2) less social acceptance; 3) more likelihood of perceiving that students at school were prejudiced; 4) felt unsafe at school; and 5) felt that their expectations for future education were blocked. The authors found that differences were more significant for white youth (who may be experiencing minority status for the first time). Regardless of ethnicity, however, all youth who reported same-sex romantic attraction scored lower on self-esteem.

Saewyc and colleagues conducted an analysis of sexual orientation and behavior (1998a) and prevalence of teen pregnancy related to sexual orientation (1998b) using a data from a 1988-1990 national school-based survey of reservation-based American Indian youth. Although this was not a population-based study, it included youth from 55 tribes in 8 of the 12 Indian Health Service areas. In the first analysis, researchers compared American Indian youth from the national sample with rural Anglo youth from another school-based sample of Minnesota students, and found that American Indian youth were far less likely to identify as exclusively heterosexual, which may reflect cultural norms related to sexual orientation and behavior (1998a). Instead, American Indian adolescents were significantly more likely to identify as bisexual or exclusively homosexual, and to be unsure of their sexual orientation. In the second analysis of teen pregnancy based on sexual orientation, Saewyc, et al. (1998b) found similar pregnancy rates between heterosexual and non-heterosexual youth, with differences in risk factors based on sexual orientation. For example, LGB youth were more likely to report early heterosexual intercourse, while lesbian and bisexual girls reported more frequent intercourse, and one in four had been pregnant at least once.

discussion, case examples, and literature reviews

Monteiro (1994) and Sears (1994) provide commentary on the experiences of African American gay male youth using experiences and case examples from youth they interviewed, published in a special issue on LGB youth and the schools in the *High School Journal*.

Monteiro points to the importance of spirituality in African American culture, and criticizes cultural myths that belie the existence of homosexuality in African or African American history (and those who dismiss it as an example of western behavior), noting examples of same-sex behavior from African tribes and countries. He observes that much of gay social life is often constructed to overlap or blend into heterosexual social life. The young gay males he interviewed reported early attraction to other boys but did not label this as homosexuality, and had sex with both boys and girls, identifying as heterosexual into their late teens. Both Monteiro and Sears discuss differences in perceptions for African Americans who identify first as either black or gay.

Chung & Katayama (1998) discuss cultural concerns that affect Asian American gay and lesbian youth, and provide some suggestions for school counselors. They maintain that the intensity of heterosexism and homophobia is much stronger in Asian cultures than in mainstream U.S. cultures since homosexuality is in conflict with traditional gender roles, such as getting married and having children. The need to choose between one's ethnic or gay identity is an ongoing concern for lesbian and gay Asians. The authors underscore the need for education about STDs and HIV with Asian American teens since sex is a taboo subject in many Asian cultures so Asian American adolescents may be less knowledgeable about STDs and HIV.

Parks (2001) reviews developmental and social challenges for urban African American youth with same-sex desires, and underscores that developmental pathways are very different than for white gay youth. Because coming out can represent a threat to the family unit, a distraction from more pressing problems, an act of genocide, and possible exposure to HIV/AIDS, he notes that African American youth

will be very cautious in disclosing their sexual identity to others. As a cultural cornerstone, the African American church represents a source of strength and conflict for same-gender-loving youth. In promoting basic identities and role expectations that support family life, the church also reinforces heterosexist norms that affect the self esteem and self concept of these youth. Experiences with racism, sexism, and homophobia expose youth to multiple levels of victimization and minority stress.

Savin-Williams (1996) and Williams (1996) provide two chapters for an edited book on LGB issues, focusing on identity development, family and cultural expectations, and gender nonconformity among youth of color and Native American and Native Hawaiian cultures. Savin-Williams discusses common developmental challenges for LGB youth: developing a sexual and ethnic identity; resolving potential conflicts in allegiance with both reference groups or communities; and negotiating homophobia and racism. He notes that formative experiences with ethnicity (and racism) may help youth develop coping skills to assist in managing the stigma associated with being gay—a finding reported in one of only two publications on coping and resilience of gay youth, in general (e.g., Anderson, 1998). Savin-Williams also discusses the emergence of a reference group network for LGB persons in communities of color, and notes that the growing visibility and diversity of LGB lives may be changing the rigid stereotypes of lesbians and gay men embedded in some ethnic communities. Williams reviews the literature on historical and more recent attitudes towards non-heterosexual or two-spirit people among Alaskan, Native Hawaiians and American Indians, and discusses traditional positive perceptions and depictions of these individuals in community life. He also includes content from interviews with Native populations in the U.S.

ethnographic studies

Finally, **Carrier (1989) and Parker (1989)** discuss observations from their anthropological work in Mexico and Brazil documenting non-heterosexual behavior and identities and the impact on youth in those cultures. Both comment on the centrality of gender roles in defining sexuality and behavior. As Carrier points out, in Guadalajara, all people exhibiting cross gender behavior are considered homosexual, since gender is dualized into active and passive roles and behaviors. Carrier quotes Mexican writer, Octavio Paz, who observed that "Masculine homosexuality is regarded with a certain indulgence insofar as the active agent is concerned. The passive agent is an abject, degraded being." Carrier describes anal intercourse as the generally preferred sexual practice between males with "feminine" or gender atypical males pressed into a receptive role, often from an early age. As long as masculine (*activo*) males play an active role and show distaste toward "feminine" (*pasivo*) males, their masculinity is not challenged. Because active same-sex partners are not stigmatized, most Mexican males are not concerned about bisexuality, and acceptance of bisexual behavior is widespread.

Carrier reports that feminine male youth who adopt a passive sex role at an early age appear not to think of themselves as heterosexual, and accept homosexual identities in their early teens, experiencing less cognitive dissonance. Masculine youth who take an active role appear to think of themselves as heterosexual and are more likely to experience some cognitive dissonance, which they mediate through heterosexual intercourse or by maintaining an active role with male partners. Males who experience the greatest cognitive dissonance are masculine males who take both active and passive sexual roles; these behaviors are considered foreign and men who switch roles are called *internacionales*. (Among

Latino males in the U.S., Díaz [1998] described a variety of identities and behaviors. Men most likely to engage in traditional active/passive behaviors corresponding with insertive/receptive anal intercourse, were non-aculturated in terms of gay identity in the U.S.) Carrier also describes the development of a gay rights movement which emerged in Guadalajara in the spring of 1981. As he points out, gay life in the U.S. has affected some aspects of Mexican homosexual social organization. A major result of the movement has been the creation of places for gay people (including youth) to gather which has fostered development of a gay identity. This is especially important in a society where single people continue to live with their families into adulthood.

In his study of same-sex behavior in Brazil, Richard Parker describes the emphasis not only on behaviors, but also on gender roles: *atividade* (activity) and *passividade* (passivity) as the central organization of people's sexual lives. Similar to Carrier's work in Mexico and Díaz' in the U.S., Parker notes that a man who has sex with other men remains masculine as long as he performs the culturally active masculine role during

intercourse. Moreover, a woman who is properly feminine and passive sexually and socially does not jeopardize her femininity by having sex with other women. However, males who are passive and women who are aggressive upset the gender balance and take on new social constructions that are subject to severe social stigma. An important core belief underlying sexuality and ethnicity is that an individual's same-sex object choice is less significant than their sexual role.

Parker also writes about the emergence of an urban gay culture and gay liberation movement in Brazil which now has the largest and most visible gay subculture anywhere outside of the industrialized West. Sexual culture in Brazil has incorporated a gay subculture into its own mainstream culture which has allowed for new concepts and new types of gender presentation and behavior, including adoption of a middle-class western gay identity. This rather complex sexual culture also has a significant influence on shaping sexual identity for new generations of homosexual youth, much as it does on the experiences of queer youth in the United States, by providing opportunities for youth to find one another, obtain support and live more openly.

lesbians and gay men

discussion

Herd and Boxer (1992) point out that culture and same-sex identities are constantly evolving. During their study of LGB youth in Chicago in the late 1980s, Herdt identified four different cohorts of non-heterosexual men who came of age during the last century in the context of sentinel events, including World War I and II, Stonewall, and the AIDS epidemic. All four groups ranging from invert, to homosexual, to gay men, to queers had profoundly different experiences related to same-sex desires and self concept. Self concepts and identities are also changing related to homosexuality within communities of color (and around the world), but much less is known about these concepts and experiences. Most of the research on lesbians and gay men has been conducted on white, middle-class adults, which excludes a large proportion of communities that have been ravaged by HIV. Although the body of literature on adult lesbians, gay men and bisexuals of color has been steadily growing, especially during the past decade, there are substantial gaps in basic areas, particularly sexual and transgender identity development, sexuality and sexual behaviors, culture, and experiences related to families, parenting, coping and resilience. These gaps are profound when it comes to documenting the experience of LGBT youth.

The dearth of publications in the professional and scientific literature on LGBT youth of color is especially disturbing given data on the increase in HIV infection among African American gay youth and other youth of color. Of even more concern, however, is that only two references in 18 published on gay youth of color specifically focus on ethnicity and HIV (Choi, et al, 1999; Peterson, Bakeman & Stokes, 2001), and only two other publications mention HIV as a concern for LGB youth of color (Chung & Katayama, 1998; Parks, 2001). Although several publications published during the past decade (e.g., Rotheram-Borus et al, 1994; Rosario et al., 1996) have been conducted using a sample of whom of a majority are African American and Hispanic gay and bisexual male youth, they have not specifically addressed issues related to ethnicity so they are not included in this analysis. These publications are, however, included in the bibliography.

Although there is wide diversity regarding perceptions and interpretation of same-sex behavior among ethnic minority communities, Greene (1997) describes a common fallacy that gay men or lesbians are generally perceived as wanting to be a member of the other gender, as “defective” men or “defective” women. So understanding the meaning of same-sex behavior in ethnic minority cultures requires knowledge of the importance of gender roles and traditional gender stereotypes. Family and ethnic minority communities provide a primary source of support and a buffer against racism experienced in mainstream society. Greene (1997) points to several other important cultural factors to consider in understanding the experiences of LGBT people of color. These include: attitudes, values and beliefs related to sexuality; the importance of procreation; the role of religious values; the importance of one’s ethnic community; the degree of acculturation of the individual or family into the dominant culture; and historical experiences with discrimination or oppression from the dominant culture.

table 2

common attitudes and experiences towards homosexuality among ethnic minorities

Cultural and Family Values	Cultural Perceptions of Homosexuality	Experience of LGBT Identity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Strongly interdependent family and extended family (that includes non-relatives and friends) – Structured interpretation of sex roles (ranging from greater flexibility in Native American and African American cultures to more sharply defined in Asian American culture) – Importance of marriage and childbearing – Importance of religion and spirituality – Indirect response to conflict – Lack of open discussion about sex (in Hispanic and Asian American cultures) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Homosexuality is viewed as a “Western” or white phenomenon, that “does not exist” in ethnic minority cultures – Seen as rebellion or rejection of one’s cultural heritage, or may be the result of too much assimilation by the mainstream culture – Acceptance of third gender role among Native Americans, which included homosexuality and bisexuality, was obscured during destruction of tribal culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Feel pressure to choose between two communities (LGBT or ethnic minority) – Feel they cannot truly be themselves in either world since both communities reject or devalue a core part of their identity – Feel most comfortable when they are able to express both ethnic and LGBT identities

males of color

The rigidity related to gender expectations and sex roles differs (for example, Asian and Latino cultures are more proscriptive than African Americans and American Indians), but indirectness and not discussing their sexuality is seen as the cost for family and ethnic community acceptance of homosexuality. Although much more is written about homosexual men of color, Espin (1987) points out that openly lesbian Latinas force a culture that denies women's sexuality to confront it. Because being openly lesbian or gay is seen as rejecting appropriate social roles and expectations, it is also seen as a rejection of traditional culture (Chan, 1989) or an act of treason against the culture and one's family (Espin, 1987). Virtually all of the literature on LGB youth and adults speaks to feelings of being required to balance and often prioritize the demands and allegiances of ethnic and mainstream lesbian/gay communities, neither of which accept all aspects of an individual's multiple identities. This is especially difficult for adolescents who are trying to consolidate and integrate multiple stigmatized identities, meet the cultural needs and demands of their family and ethnic community, negotiate developmental tasks of adolescence related to intimacy, sexuality, and relationships, and find support for dealing with same-sex desires.

challenges in studying LGBT youth

One of the major challenges in studying LGBT youth is that they are a separate, evolving culture that is vastly different than previous generations of LGB adults. They have, for example, come out during adolescence rather than adulthood and can experience their adolescence in real time, as opposed to delayed time decades later which affects risk, life course and development (see Boxer & Cohler, 1989). They are also coming of age in the shadow of the AIDS epidemic and encounter greater opportunities for social support in their communities and online, coupled with increased exposure to victimization and harassment. LGBT youth of color are experiencing increased visibility in mainstream gay communities. However, as Morales (1990) has pointed out, they still struggle with racism and lack of validation from the two communities they need for acceptance and support, and must manage homophobia and racism inherent in each (some of those challenges are reflected in Table 3, following pages).

Adolescence and the study of sexuality are both interdisciplinary fields, but much of the research is not conceptualized from an interdisciplinary perspective and many investigators have not read, nor referenced beyond their discipline. This criticism goes beyond the 18 publications cited in this report to the broader literature on LGB youth and to publications on LGB adults. Not only are LGBT youth creating a new culture apart from adults, but each youth of color is rooted in his or her own ethnic culture which is further informed by degree of acculturation to mainstream culture, role of religion, attitudes and beliefs about gender, childbearing, family, and sexuality. Many youth are reared in immigrant families and are themselves immigrants who are adjusting to

Family Response to Homosexuality	Experience with Mainstream LGBT Communities	Experience with Ethnic Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none">— May cause major conflict in family if openly expressed— May silently tolerate, rather than openly accept, as long as family member does not disclose	<ul style="list-style-type: none">— Access to LGBT community resources and activities provides essential support and decreases stress of hiding same-sex identity— Racism, discrimination, stereotyping, and invisibility are common experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">— Fear of rejection and stigma cause many to hide— More are open with friends than family members; few are open with parents— Coming out to family or other community members may jeopardize essential support for their ethnic identity or prevent them from serving their community in leadership roles

table 3

a new mainstream culture with different social and gender roles, and media representations of sexuality. Values and beliefs from their countries of origin also inform behavior, collectively through the influence of their family and ethnic community, and individually, through internalized representations that shape attraction and desire.

Boxer (1991) and colleagues have observed that children influence their parents as much as they are influenced by them, so even though it is not well documented in the professional literature, changes are anticipated in how ethnic minority parents respond to their non-heterosexual children, which will affect extended families and others within their ethnic community. As LGBT people of color increasingly assume contemporary identities that include openly disclosing their sexual and gender identities (e.g., Leong, 1996), families and ethnic communities will respond in new and different ways. Hom (1996) discusses some of these changes in her interviews with Asian parents of openly lesbian and gay adult children. Rather than claiming homosexuality as a western phenomenon or a result of assimilation in mainstream culture (common in earlier literature on ethnicity and homosexuality), these parents acknowledged the presence of non-heterosexual and homosexual identities in their culture, although many still associate gender role reversal

with homosexuality. Parents reported feeling many of the same feelings experienced by white parents who learn that their child is lesbian or gay: grief, disbelief, anger, shame, concern that they may be to blame or have done something wrong, perceptions that it may be a stage their child is going through, concern about what others will think, and loss of a dream for their child's future.

Many parents—particularly mothers—also found reading about sexuality and talking with other lesbian and gay people to be extremely helpful, though not all were willing to discuss these concerns with others. Some parents discussed these issues with relatives and friends, while others did not. All parents interviewed had come to some level of accommodation with their lesbian or gay children, and some were very open about their acceptance. Although many recent community initiatives have not been published in the professional literature, efforts are underway to expand PFLAG's local projects related to ethnic families and LGBT children to a more national level. And a few of these activities have been published for community distribution, such as *Beloved Daughter*, the family letter project from parents and siblings to a lesbian daughter (Mandarin Asian Pacific Lesbian/Bisexual Network, 2000).

As the professional and cross-cultural literature has consistently pointed out, men and women from all ethnic groups in many cultures in the U.S. and other countries engage in same-sex behavior but many do not identify as homosexual or LGB. A variety of identities have been constructed to provide social roles and a cultural framework for these desires and behaviors, and an understanding of these meanings is essential in studying risk and health outcomes. Gilbert Herdt (1997), the cultural anthropologist, has also observed that sexuality is often left out of the study of culture, but to a large degree, culture has been left out of the study of sexual orientation, particularly in understanding the connection between culture, gender and same-sex desire.

ethnic minority lesbians and gay males—challenges to integrating identity

Ethnic Community	LGBT Community	Mainstream Society
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Acceptance/validation of ethnic identity– Family and community support– Buffer for racism and discrimination experienced in mainstream society and LGBT community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Acceptance/validation of LGBT identity– Access to community support– Access to information and LGBT resources (e.g., organizations, health services, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– National identity– Access to multiple social and cultural groups– Access to resources (e.g., education, employment, health)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Denial of homosexuality– Homophobia– Rejection based on sexual orientation & cultural gender norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Racism and discrimination– Rejection based on ethnic identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Racism and discrimination– Homophobia– Rejection based on ethnic identity, sexual orientation & gender identity

From: Ryan & Futterman. (1998). *Lesbian & Gay Youth: Care & Counseling*, Columbia University Press. Reprinted with permission.

psycho-cultural model of risk & self regulation

An important model for addressing and framing these issues was developed by Rafael Díaz (1998) in his ongoing study of culture, sexuality and risk behavior among Latino gay men. He began by studying the way that gay men give meaning to their sexual lives, with a series of in-depth interviews, followed by a two-city survey and additional in-depth interviews. This led to the development of a model for empowering Latino gay men to develop social support, self-awareness and risk reduction strategies and skills. One of his most important premises is that risky behavior is both natural and meaningful in the social and cultural context of men who have been socialized to hide and compartmentalize their sexuality to avoid shaming their families, and to support cultural values and norms that privilege masculinity (*machismo*), while enforcing sexual silence about homosexuality.

Observing that sexuality is both culturally regulated and self-regulated, Díaz (1998) began his work from an understanding that Latino homosexuals are very different than white gay men on a wide range of variables related to HIV prevention. These include the meaning of same-sex behavior and what constitutes homosexuality, the degree of identification with the gay community, sources of social support, and the processes involved in forming dual minority identities of ethnicity and sexuality. His primary critique of earlier prevention efforts and models was that they did not reflect the cultural realities of the lives of gay men of color, so they would not be successful in promoting behavior change. Latino gay men are raised with strong family values in a culture with highly defined gender roles, where masculinity is expressed through behaviors such as risk taking, sexual prowess (especially penetration) and multiple partners, and where sexual intercourse is defined as active (masculine) and passive (feminine). Homosexuality is perceived as a gender problem and gay men are perceived as not being “real men,” so they are more vulnerable to cultural messages of machismo. Homosexuality is also shameful, so it is not openly discussed, and Latino gay men generally separate their sexual, social and family lives to avoid hurting or embarrassing their families.

These early social and cultural messages are internalized and eroticized, affecting attraction, sexual behavior and risk in adolescents and adults. Díaz found that many Latino gay men constructed their sexuality to create and restore a sense of masculinity, using sexual encounters to show their masculinity or to experience the masculinity of their partners

through strong penetrative practices. Fear of losing erections (and being perceived as unmanly or not satisfying their partners) was a cultural barrier to using condoms, especially since this was perceived as a great source of embarrassment for the insertive partner and another failure at masculinity. Many men feared that unless penetration occurred, their partners would be disappointed. In fact, men in his study said that sexual activity without penetration was often described as “nothing really happened.” Díaz points out that “the concern with maintaining erections at all costs does not allow the time needed for the gradual familiarization with and eroticization of condoms,” and does not allow Latino gay men to “explore and develop a repertoire of non-penetrative safer sex practices that can be enjoyed as true expressions of sexual desire.”

Other experiences that promote risk include poverty and racism, which undermines their ability to self-regulate risk for HIV infection. In one of his studies, Díaz (1998) found that only 10% of Latino gay and bisexual men studied felt they had no chance of becoming HIV infected. He interprets this fatalism as a meaningful response to significant experiences with racism, poverty, and homophobia which erodes the ability to exercise control. Racism in the gay community affects the ability of Latino gay men to find support and to more fully integrate their multiple identities; and belonging often has a cost—being objectified by white gay men who are seeking “exotic, dark and passionate” fantasies. Díaz criticizes educational approaches that fail to take these complex, inter-related phenomena into account when promoting weekend safer sex workshops and brief interventions. But he is especially concerned with the lack of culturally sensitive research that reflects the lived experiences and social realities of gay and bisexual men of color. Although these same issues affect gay youth of color (personal communication, R. Díaz, November 16, 2000), to date, very little research has been conducted to elicit these deep cultural meanings, to interpret them in the context of cognitive and behavioral models and to develop culturally appropriate models for prevention and risk reduction.

research needs

The experience of LGBT youth of color is complex and multicultural. Research teams are needed that combine community knowledge of ethnic groups with experts in emerging LGBT youth culture and adolescent development and skilled investigators who know how to establish rapport, conduct in-depth interviews, and analyze data to elicit deeper and more complex meanings. While quantitative research is very useful to establish the prevalence and frequency of specific conditions and behaviors, the only way to understand behaviors that are culturally determined and socially regulated is by in-depth qualitative studies of each ethnic group. Rafael Díaz' research provides an important framework for conceptualizing and conducting such work.

To date, no studies have been published on identity development in LGB people of color, based on their lived experiences. Some psychologists have compared coming out models drawn from the experiences of largely white gay men with models of ethnic identity development (e.g., Espin, 1993; Morales, 1990), however, these are abstract rather than reflecting the actual experiences of LGB-identified persons of color. Early models of LGB identity development were based on earlier generations of mostly white middle and upper-middle class gay men and some lesbians. Herdt (1992) has shown substantial differences between the social and cultural experiences of different generations of homosexual and gay men, and more recently, queer youth. Different life experiences and patterns of behavior contribute to different health outcomes, and the greatest differences

are seen in today's generations of LGB youth who have the opportunity of living out across the lifespan. Coming out is reported to have positive implications for mental health and self-esteem, but disclosure can also have negative consequences for LGB youth, increasing their risk for victimization and abuse (D'Augelli, Hershberger and Pilkington, 1998).

Although some investigators have been attempting to expand theoretical models of sexual identity development to incorporate gender and ethnicity (e.g., McCarn & Fassinger, 1996), these remain at a theoretical level. To understand subjective meaning and culturally mediated behavior, we urgently need models of sexual and ethnic identity development in LGBT youth of color that reflect the lived experiences of a broad range of LGBT-identified adolescents. These are essential to explain why a disturbing proportion of HIV-infected youth are gay and bisexual youth of color.

Research is needed to examine the life trajectories and health outcomes of LGB youth of color in the context of coming out. We need to collect substantive in-depth qualitative data on the coming out process from the perspective of various ethnic groups. This includes studying the coming out histories of a broad range of youth of color from diverse cultures to understand how they construct their identities, how health, sexuality, culture, and gender interact, and how ethnicity affects willingness to disclose.

Rather than imposing models from the top down, we need to study the lived experiences of LGB youth to define coming out and healthy coming out. This includes identifying sources of difficulty (e.g., negative religious beliefs, lack of validation or rejection from their ethnic communities, etc.) as well as resiliency. We need to understand sources of strength and support, how adolescents integrate their ethnic and sexual identities, and the predictors of a healthy coming out process. How does the coming out process impact mental health and emotional health, patterns of substance use and abuse, HIV/STD risk, school performance, and career development? Many minority communities have a gender-based definition of homosexuality, and we need to explore how youth of color perceive gender in relation to sexual identity and how this affects health outcomes. We also need to understand the identity development process for transgender youth, stressors, coping behaviors and promoting family support. Although the term "bisexual" youth is used repeatedly, to

date, no studies of bisexual identity have been conducted in adolescents. Some studies have shown differences in risk and negative experiences of youth who identify as bisexual when compared with lesbian and gay youth, but this identity construct is poorly understood both for white youth and youth of color. Moreover, we urgently need studies of identity development and the impact of multiple identities in transgender youth. Very little information is available on their needs and experiences, regardless of race. Many youth are concerned about transitioning from male to female or female to male or with presenting as more androgenous through use of hormones, but little guidance is available to providers in assisting youth with decisions that affect psychological status, self-esteem and physical growth and development.

Repeatedly, the literature on youth and adults speaks to the challenge of trying to interact and find support in separate worlds of ethnic and gay cultures, while being fully accepted in neither. We need to understand the impact of this duality in adolescents of color: how are they burdened by the demands of the coming out process? How do mainstream gay standards of disclosure, attractiveness, and cultural approval interfere with adopting an integrated ethnic gay identity? We need well-funded, well-designed studies to understand these issues based on the voices and lived experiences of diverse populations of LGBT youth. Most of the available information on youth of color is based on the experiences of older, mostly male youth. The experiences of lesbian adolescents, regardless of ethnicity, have rarely been studied. In fact, no publications were found specifically addressing lesbian youth of color for this review.

support & resource needs

We need to strengthen support networks for non-heterosexual youth of color to provide access to peer and adult support and accurate information about sexuality and risk reduction. We need to understand differences in risk experiences of youth of color who participate in LGBT support programs (including predominantly white gay straight alliances) and those who do not. We need to support training to sensitize mainstream and LGBT support programs to more effectively serve youth of color and to promote outreach strategies to increase their awareness and participation in these programs. We need to provide similar support for family-based programs (e.g., PFLAG's outreach to communities of color), which includes developing videos, training and print materials for families and youth to increase awareness of services, and the availability of support. Some resources exist, such as "All God's Children," a film on homosexuality and the Black Church, and ethnic minority PFLAG chapters, such as the Asian/Pacific Islander PFLAG Family Project and the African American family project. LGBT youth of color need support from their families and ethnic communities. Having to separate their sexual and social/family lives increases risk for anonymous sex, high risk behaviors and substance use and abuse.

The lack of adequate funding for research on LGBT youth of color has led to glaring gaps in the literature, and to a lack of substantive studies. Much of the literature reviewed for this report is dated and limited, and it is unclear to what extent it reflects the experiences of today's generation of LGBT youth. Well-funded studies of diverse groups of LGBT youth of color are urgently needed to begin to understand their experiences, stressors, coping behaviors and strengths.

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