

The Development of Same-Sex Intimate Relationships During Adolescence

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Same-sex intimate relationships are more visible and part of public discourse than perhaps at any other period in history. Only a generation ago, same-sex intimacy was stigmatized to the point of invisibility; today, same-sex marriage is possible in several countries and is the topic of prominent social and political debate. The discourse of these debates largely assumes a focus on adults, even though access to marriage is perhaps most relevant for adolescents and young adults who are at the threshold of the years at which most people develop long-term couple relationships and marriage. For young people, these debates play

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out in community anxieties regarding the high school prom or same-sex couples on the homecoming court. The implication is that same-sex intimate relationships are more visible than ever, and contemporary (Western) youth are among the first cohorts to have the opportunities to come out as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) during adolescence and to engage in same-sex relationships; however, these identities and relationships remain stigmatized.

The study of intimate relationships during adolescence has typically been framed from a normative perspective. Although there has been attention to the ways that adolescent romance and relationships may be associated with, for example, emotional vulnerability (see Joyner & Udry, 2000), scholars typically conceptualize intimate relationships as a dimension of the typical and normative progression of interpersonal relationship development and the shift from the primacy of parental and family relationships in childhood to the development of social relationships during the transitions into adolescence. Romantic relationships are understood as essential to the exploration of adolescents' identities; they serve as tools to help navigate environments that may seem lonely and confusing. These relationships help adolescents discover more about themselves and inform self-perceptions (Furman & Schaffer, 2003). Healthy relationships in adolescence build essential skills that are needed for a lifetime of successful development (Diamond, 2003). Thus, romantic relationships are understood as key rites of passage for (heterosexual) adolescents.

In contrast to the study of adolescent relationships, the study of sexual minority or LGB adolescents¹ has typically been framed from a risk perspective (Russell, 2005). LGB youth report disproportionate health and behavior risk (in many studies the risks are dramatically higher than for heterosexual counterparts); contemporary explanations for these risks focus on stigma, victimization, and minority stress (Meyer, 2003). Although there are recent exceptions, by and large the research on LGB adolescents has paid much less attention to dimensions of normative or typical development. Consistent with the focus on risk for LGB youth, there is a modest body of research on same-sex sexual behavior among adolescence; however, there has been little research on same-sex adolescent intimate relationships in the past three decades (although there is a body of literature on adult same-sex relationships) (Allen & Demo, 1995).

¹We use *LGB* when referring specifically to same-sex sexual identities and in reference to prior studies of LGB adolescents. *Sexual minority* is an umbrella term that we use to be inclusive of same-sex attractions and behaviors, as well as identities.

Aside from the emphasis on risk, challenges for research on adolescent same-sex intimate relationships are compounded by multiple factors. Because of social stigma and resulting internalized homophobia (i.e., negative feelings toward oneself because of same-sex attractions), many sexual minority youth do not "come out" (i.e., identify their same-sex attractions to others) as adolescents or choose to conceal their same-sex sexualities. Further, being in a same-sex relationship actually does place young people "at risk" to some degree because being a member of a same-sex couple makes one visible and potentially vulnerable to discrimination and harassment. For this reason, many sexual minority youth do not date or—more to the point—do not date members of the same sex.

In light of the tension between normative and "risky" development, there are a number of conceptual frameworks or perspectives that we suggest can provide a foundation for understanding same-sex intimate relationships among youth: heteronormativity, models of sexual identity development, and minority stress. We begin the chapter with a discussion of these frameworks. We then review the existing empirical research on adolescent same-sex intimate relationships. This work includes studies that provide basic descriptive information as well as patterns of relationship development and progression for same-sex couples. A number of studies have considered the role of gender in same-sex relationships. Finally, we discuss the research on "outcomes" or correlates of same-sex intimacy: relationship violence, emotional and behavior health risks, and positive development. The chapter ends with future directions for the study of same-sex adolescent romantic relationships.

THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Heteronormativity, Coming Out, and Minority Stress

Heteronormativity refers to the taken-for-granted system of privilege based on binary attitudes or beliefs about gender and sexuality that define what is considered "normal" or the moral standard (Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005). These normative values and moral standards are central to the development of gender and sexuality for children who are reared in a world that presumes there are only two sexes, that heterosexual coupling is "normal" or "natural," that "normal" relationships should be publicly displayed and celebrated, and that any deviation from what is "normal" is

considered deviant or "unnatural" (Kirzinger, 2005). Understanding heteronormativity provides a basis for thinking about the ways that LGB youth must navigate institutions and interpersonal interactions that presume heterosexuality.

Adolescence is a time when conformity to social norms is particularly salient in general. In particular, it is a time when norms regarding gender and sexuality are intensified (Galambos, Almeida, & Petersen, 1990; Hill & Lynch, 1983); it is the time when heteronormativity is learned and practiced. Heterosexual youth begin to spend less time in same-sex friendships as they show increasing romantic and sexual interest in the opposite sex (Collins & Sroufe, 1999). These patterns are understood as "normal," and become salient to sexual minority youth as they come to realize that because of their same-sex attractions they may be "abnormal" (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2004). The pressure to maintain distance from same-sex peers and appear to harbor attractions and desires for opposite sex peers can and does result in increased stress for LGB youth; they may begin to monitor their interpersonal interactions and may even terminate friendships rather than risk that their true attraction may be discovered (Savin-Williams, 1994).

Despite this context of heteronormativity, more youth are coming out and doing so at younger ages (Grov, Blimb, Nann, & Parsons, 2006). These changes are interpreted in relation to the dramatic social changes in visibility of LGB people and issues; the younger age for same-sex identity development has clear implications for possibilities for intimate relationships for youth. Several decades ago, a body of research began to conceptualize same-sex identity development, a process that is a relevant precursor for understanding same-sex intimate relationships. Early models posulated linear stages of identity development (e.g., Cass, 1984; Troiden, 1989) and the coming out process (Rust, 2004) that unfolded over time. Notably, these models were initially conceptualized when coming out was primarily relevant for adults. Briefly, these models conceptualized progression from stages that included initial awareness and confusion about same-sex sexuality; recognition that same-sex identities might apply to oneself; self-acceptance and labeling; disclosure to others; and ultimate identity integration, "coming out," and pride. While the identity development models focus on psychological processes and self-awareness, the coming out models explicitly integrate LGB community participation and same-sex relationships as stages in the progression toward coming out. For the most part, these models have been rejected because they fail to capture complexities of these processes. For many people, these dimensions

do not progress in neat, linear patterns, and scholars have pointed out that the presumed end state or goal of identity integration and pride (or being "out") may hold different meaning for different people or in different cultural groups and thus is not universal. Others argue that the process of coming out is not simply a singular process but is ongoing across time and context (Rust, 2004) or as individual sexual preferences and behaviors change (Diamond, 2003; Udry & Chantala, 2002).

Although these models have been critiqued in light of their original purpose for theorizing same-sex identity development or coming out, the dimensions they identify continue to be relevant for understanding same-sex identity and intimacy for youth. For contemporary youth, the issues of confusion and recognition of same-sex attractions, self-acceptance and labeling, and disclosure to others are all relevant aspects of emerging same-sex sexuality (D'Augelli, 2005). Yet given younger ages at coming out, the timing and sequencing of these dimensions for individual youth is compressed, or they may co-occur. For young couples in intimate relationships, it is likely that partners have different perspectives or experiences regarding each dimension (Diamond, Savin-Williams, & Dubé, 1999). For same-sex daters, one partner may be only just beginning to explore a same-sex identity while the other may have been "out" for several years. For two youth who are beginning to understand their personal identity at the same time as they begin a relationship, the relationship may become a primary venue for exploring personal identity. This could be a comfort. On the other hand, it is well-known that endings to adolescent romantic relationships are often experienced as particularly difficult or traumatic (Joyner & Udry, 2000); if the typical angst associated with a teenage breakup is intertwined with vulnerabilities related to an emerging sexual identity, the experience could be particularly difficult. Yet in other cases, a partner who has experience in prior same-sex relationships or has a more consolidated or integrated same-sex sexual identity may become a guide as well as companion. The point is that dynamics in adolescent romantic relationships typically due to age and experience may be expressed in same-sex couples through differences in sexual identity expression and integration. Although others have discussed similar questions (Diamond et al., 1999), we are not aware of studies that directly examine these questions within same-sex relationships.

Finally, once youth come out, they are more likely to directly confront heteronormative expectations and to experience the stigma of same-sex sexuality; for example, coming out is a period when youth are more likely

to be harassed or victimized (D'Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002; Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1995). The minority stress model proposes that sexual minorities are subjected to chronic stress related to the stigmatization associated with being a sexual minority in a heteronormative society (Meyer, 2003). This model is important because it integrates the role of stigma into an understanding of the stress process for sexual minorities. The model was developed to explain elevated mental and behavioral health risks for sexual minorities. Specifically, Meyer (2003) argued that the link between sexual minority status and negative outcomes is largely explained by minority stress—both experiences of discrimination and possible violence but also internalized processes that include expectations of rejection, concealment, and internalized homophobia. A key aspect of this model that is relevant for understanding intimate relationships is that the link between minority stress and negative adjustment is dependent to some extent upon coping and available social support. Supportive relationships, including and especially intimate relationships, may be a key for buffering the negative impact of minority stressors.

Thus, heteronormativity provides a vantage point for understanding the broader contexts of adolescence for sexual minority youth: the stigma and potential discrimination that they may face at home, in schools, and in the community. The dimensions of coming out or identity development, which are shaped by heteronormativity, are relevant for youth as they begin intimate relationships; indeed, for many young people, intimacy is a key dimension in their coming out process. Finally, the minority stress model suggests a potentially distinctive role of same-sex intimate relationships for sexual minorities. On one hand, being in a same-sex relationship in adolescence may increase stress due to harassment or victimization that may accompany the visibility of being out; on the other hand, intimate relationships may be particularly important sources of personal and social support that may buffer against the well-known negative outcomes among sexual minority young people. Altogether, these three perspectives provide a backdrop for interpreting the research on same-sex intimate relationships in adolescence.

RECENT EMPIRICAL ADVANCES

We have argued that there is little existing empirical research on same-sex intimate relationships in adolescence and young adulthood. Indeed, it is possible to review nearly all that has been done within this chapter. We begin

by reviewing the most basic information: What are the patterns and progressions of same-sex intimate relationships? Much of the literature on intimate relationships has focused on gender—specifically, the differences between males and females in heterosexual relationships. Given the rich literature on gender differences in relationships, some scholars have considered the implications for relationships when they are made up of two young men or two young women; we review the research pertaining to adolescence. Finally, given the role of heterosexual relationships in adolescents' well-being, a body of research considers relationship violence, risk outcomes, and positive development associated with same-sex intimate relationships.

Before we begin the review, we acknowledge methodological challenges in the study of same-sex sexuality and relationships in adolescence. A complete review is beyond the scope of this chapter (see Russell, 2003; Savin-Williams, 2001), but two issues are particularly relevant. First, for years, scholars struggled with naming and measuring the population of interest: Should we study self-labeled LGB youth, those who engage in sexual behavior with the same sex, or those who are in same-sex relationships? As a result, questionnaire studies have used different measures with different populations, making comparisons across studies difficult if not impossible. In the past decade, general consensus has emerged, as reflected in work by Saewyc and colleagues (2004), who recommend the inclusion of three related but distinct indicators: (1) same-sex attractions, (2) behaviors, and (3) self-labels (the authors review the advantages and drawbacks of each, particularly in regard to the study of adolescent health). However, few of the studies we will review include more than one measure, and none include each of these recommended three. Other scholars argue that fullest understanding of the lives of sexual minority youth can come through using narrative methods that give voice to the complex stories and pathways through which young people come to understand their same-sex sexualities (Hammack, Thompson, & Pilecki, 2009).

Second, sexual minorities are a (potentially) hidden population, one that is difficult to identify through traditional research sampling strategies due in part to the issues previously described (who should be included as a sexual minority and how should that be measured?). These matters are compounded by the fact that, due to the pressures of heteronormativity, even if they are self-labeled as LGB they may not choose to disclose their sexual minority status to researchers. Thus, historically, studies of LGB youth have been based on small samples of self-labeled youth, typically from community-based organizations or programs; more recent scholars have made use of the Internet to reach LGB youth through

e-mail lists, websites, or through targeted social networking sites (e.g., Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010). These methods are useful for within-group studies of LGB-identified youth, but the degree to which they are representative of the true population of sexual minority youth remains unclear. Large-scale, population-based studies have begun to include measures suggested by Saewyc and colleagues (2004) but are costly and must have very large samples in order to include enough youth who represent this small subgroup of the larger adolescent population.

Patterns and Progressions of Intimate Relationships

Data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (the Add Health study) has been used to examine same-sex romantic attractions as well as reports of same-sex relationships in a national cohort; the study began in the United States in the mid-1990s when participants were 7th to 12th graders and is one of the largest and most comprehensive prospective study of U.S. adolescents. Using Add Health, Russell & Consolacion (2003) found that just less than 10% of same-sex attracted adolescents reported having ever had a same-sex romantic relationship (same-sex attracted boys and girls were equally likely to report same-sex relationships at 8.2% and 9.2%, respectively). Yet dramatically, more same-sex attracted youth reported heterosexual relationships, although less in comparison to heterosexual youth. Same-sex attracted youth girls reported more heterosexual relationships than boys (60.6% of same-sex attracted boys and 67.9% of same-sex attracted girls reported other-sex relationships; for heterosexual youth, by comparison, 70.9% of boys and 73.8% of girls reported heterosexual relationships). According to these results, it is not as though sexual minority youth do not or cannot date: Rather, their primary dating experiences are heterosexual (Savin-Williams, 1994). Sexual minority youth must weigh the consequences to decide whether the risk of pursuing a romantic relationship is worth the negative peer and social reactions they may receive (Diamond et al., 1999).

Another large national study was conducted in Norway during the same period (Pedersen & Kristiansen, 2008); it asked an older age group (young adults ages 19 to 26) about steady relationships and cohabitation or marriage. That study found that gay and bisexual men were far more likely to be living alone (85.7% compared to 56.7% for heterosexual men) and less likely to report steady relationships (3.6% compared to 26.4%). Although lesbian and bisexual women were somewhat more likely to be

single (47.9%) than heterosexual women (34.9%), the sexual orientation differences were much less pronounced for young women. Together these results pose the possibility that in the 1990s, school-aged LGB youth had many fewer opportunities for same-sex relationships than heterosexual ones and that the patterns were similar for boys and girls; by young adulthood, when intimate relationships begin to become more serious and lasting, lesbian and bisexual females begin to move into these young adult relationships—but such relationships remain remarkably unlikely for gay and bisexual men.

More recent studies suggest that relationship pathways for LGB youth may have changed in the past decades. Contrary to the assumption that LGB adolescents have few opportunities for dating and relationships, one study conducted 10 years after the Add Health and Norwegian studies (in 2005) showed that the majority of LGB youth from a primarily community-based sample (ages 14 to 21) were currently or had been recently involved in romantic or sexual relationships (Glover, Gallher, & Lamere, 2009). It is worth noting that this was not a sample from a major metropolitan area known to be LGB-friendly; the sample was collected in communities in Utah, and nearly half of the participants (48%) reported that they were Mormon—a religious group that historically has not been affirming of LGB relationships. It is likely that youth contacted through LGB community organizations would be much more likely than LGB youth from a nationwide sample to have access to same-sex relationships; in a very early study, for example, three fourths of the young gay men in the study reported current or recent same-sex relationships (Rematedi, 1987). Similarly, a recent longitudinal study of over 500 New York City area LGB youth (ages 15–19) found that over a third of the study participants reported current same-sex relationships. This study, however, also found important gender differences: Lesbian and bisexual girls were more likely to have been in a relationship for longer periods of time and reported having had more serious relationships (lasting 3 months or more) compared to gay and bisexual boys (Bauermeister et al., 2010). The recent studies point out that dating may be increasingly possible for LGB adolescents but that the differences found for young adult gay and bisexual men (Pedersen & Kristiansen, 2008) may begin during the adolescent years through the experience of shorter-term, less serious intimate relationships.

Beyond whether, who, and how long LGB youth and young adults date, other questions pertain to the patterns and character of intimacy in adolescence. Studies of heterosexual adolescent relationships have identified patterns in the typical progression of intimate relationships.

Data from the Add Health study points out a progression of relationships that is similar for girls and boys in the general population: Spending time with a partner as part of a group typically precedes holding hands, which is followed by thinking of themselves as a couple and ultimately telling others that they were a couple (O'Sullivan, Cheng, Harris, & Brooks-Gunn, 2007). What is notable here is that each of these typical and public aspects of heterosexual relationship initiation may be less likely for same-sex relationships. It is also the case that adolescents (and adults) are more likely to date those who are similar to them in terms of personal characteristics and interests (Furman & Simon, 2008), but because the pool of available partners is smaller, it may be harder for LGB adolescents to find partners who share their similarities. In fact, studies of adults indicate that heterosexual couples report more similarities in age, education, and interests than do lesbian and gay male couples (Peplau & Spalding, 2003).

These studies point out the potential barriers to same-sex intimacy for adolescents. Simply finding a compatible partner may be more difficult for sexual minority youth, particularly those in small or rural communities. Despite the fact that most LGB adolescents report wanting to feel close and connected to a partner (Diamond & Dubé, 2002), many may feel too personally or socially vulnerable to date someone of the same sex. Others may choose heterosexual dating because of legitimate interest in their partner and other-sex intimacy, to assuage concerns that they may be lesbian or gay, or simply due to pressures by family and friends (Diamond et al., 1999; Russell & Consolacion, 2003; Savin-Williams, 1994). And yet at least some youth engage in same-sex intimate relationships; we consider characteristics of their relationships in the following sections.

Gender and Same-Sex Relationships

Gender is a fundamental dimension of relationship dynamics. Research on heterosexual adolescent relationships reveals complex patterns that are both consistent with the long-standing stereotype that "girls want love and boys want sex" yet challenge a simplistic interpretation of the implications for youth (Ott, 2010). Adolescent girls may be more attuned to emotional intimacy and closeness in romantic relationships, and adolescent boys may need to maintain emotional distance consistent with codes of masculinity (Tolman, Spencer, Harmon, Rosen-Reynoso, & Striepe, 2004). Yet one study points out that the implications for relationships is that girls have

more power in relationships (Giordano, Longmore, & Manning, 2006); in a study of over 900 7th to 11th graders, boys were perceived to have less power and be less confident in relationships, even though levels of love and attachment were similar. In essence, boys may desire more intimacy than they can accommodate in maintaining masculinity (Tolman et al., 2004). Given that gender norms and roles are defining for all young people, how do these dynamics play out when a relationship is made up of two girls or two boys? In a rare study of relationships of both same- and opposite-sex college-aged couples, Darling and Clarke (2009) found that male-male partners reported lower connections to their partners than their heterosexual counterparts, including more negative behaviors (e.g., conflict, frustration, sarcasm, discomfort). One can see that the navigation of codes of masculinity while exploring same-sex intimacy may seem impossible for some gay and bisexual boys. In the national study from Norway, which was previously cited, the authors conclude that norms of masculinity may lead to loneliness for men, particularly those who are gay or bisexual (Pedersen & Kristiansen, 2008).

In one study (Diamond & Dubé, 2002), gay male youth described intimate relationships as typically beginning with a sexual experience and progressing to intimacy, romance, or dating. Lesbian youth, however, described relationships that began as close friendships and that progressed to sexual behavior only after becoming romantic. Lesbian youths' relationships were characterized as emotionally closer and more supportive than young gay males' (Diamond, 2003). In another study (73 LGB youth recruited through community organizations or LGB youth conferences and 95 heterosexual youth recruited from a northeastern university), gay and bisexual males reported less attachment to romantic partners compared to heterosexual males (Diamond & Dubé, 2002). These studies indicate that gender may play a key role in the character of the beginning and progression of the intimate relationships of LGB youth.

Harmful and Healthy Outcomes

Relationship Violence

Sexual minority adolescents may experience abuse like any other youth in dating relationships; however, there may be distinct forms of abuse, for example, threats of disclosure of same-sex identity or relationship to others. In one study (a community sample of over 500 LGB adolescents),

LGB adolescents experienced abuse in dating relationships at levels equivalent to heterosexual peers, and the prevalence was similar for male and female LGB adolescents (Freedner, Freed, Yang, & Austin, 2002). Data from the Add Health study has shown that almost a quarter of adolescents in same-sex romantic relationships are victims of partner violence (Halpern, Young, Waller, Martin, & Kupper, 2004). That study examined multiple forms of relationship victimization and violence and showed that girls in same-sex relationships were more likely to report relationship violence overall and were more likely specifically to report insults or being sworn at, while males were more likely to report having received threats (Halpern et al., 2004). Thus there appear to be some differences in the forms of relationship violence for female and male sexual minorities.

There are also differences in relationship violence among sexual minorities: Bisexual youth may be particularly vulnerable. Bisexual males were much more likely than bisexual females and even gay males or lesbians to report being threatened with being "outed" by a partner (Freedner et al., 2002). The authors suggest that bisexuals may be less accepted among both lesbian/gay and heterosexual peers and may be more vulnerable or isolated. Further, the threat of same-sex disclosure may be particularly salient for males, for whom boundaries of gender and sexuality are most rigid. Bisexual females in that study, on the other hand, were more likely than heterosexual females to report sexual abuse. Further, bisexual youth (both male and female) were less likely than gay/lesbian youth to have disclosed the abuse to a friend or family member (Freedner et al., 2002). These findings point out differences based on gender as well as LG compared to bisexual identities and suggest that more careful attention is needed in order to understand the implications of dynamics of gender and sexual relational power in the intimate relationships of sexual minority adolescents and young adults.

Emotional and Behavioral Health

Several studies have examined health and behavioral risk for same-sex relationships using data from Add Health. In one study, same-sex daters were more likely than singles or youth in other-sex relationships to report suicidal thoughts (Russell & Consolacion, 2003). There were complex results for anxiety; independently, same-sex attraction and same-sex relationships were associated with higher anxiety, but the exception was for youth who reported same-sex attraction and also same-sex relationships: They were actually less anxious. It appears then that youth with same-sex

attractions who had found romantic partners fared better—at least in terms of anxiety (Russell & Consolacion, 2003). A closer look at boys in the Add Health study shows that those in same-sex only relationships appear at risk for emotional but not behavioral health problems. Adolescent boys with same-sex only partners were more likely than boys with other-sex partners to report suicidal thoughts and depression, but were no more likely to report delinquency (Udry & Chantala, 2002).

In terms of substance use and abuse and problem behavior, it appears that, like for relationship violence, bisexual youth are most vulnerable. Boys with both-sex partners were more likely to use illegal drugs or to sell sex for drugs or money (Udry & Chantala, 2002). That study also showed that girls with both-sex partners were at high risk for nearly all of the health and behavior risk indicators included in the study. Another study showed that youth who report having had relationships with both sexes report more cigarette use, more drinking alone and more times having been drunk, a higher number of problems related to alcohol use, and more marijuana and drug use (Russell, Driscoll, & Thuong, 2002). Taken altogether, these studies suggest that youth who report relationships with both males and females are most at risk across multiple domains. For sexual minority girls, same-sex relationships do not appear to be a marker for elevated (or lower) risk outcomes. And boys in same-sex relationships may be more emotionally vulnerable but appear to actually be at lower risk for anxiety and for some indicators of substance use.

Positive Outcomes

The minority stress model would suggest that intimate relationships might be an important buffer to minority stress for sexual minorities, yet few studies have considered positive outcomes of same-sex relationships for LGB youth. One report from the Add Health study showed no differences based on same-sex relationships in adolescents' self-esteem (Russell & Consolacion, 2003), leading the authors to conclude that same-sex relationships may have implications for negative but not positive adjustment. Another study showed that boys in same-sex relationships were less likely to smoke and reported fewer drinking-related problems (Russell et al., 2002). Further, in the New York City study of LGB youth, gay and bisexual males who reported same-sex relationships reported greater self-esteem over time, and lesbian and bisexual females in same-sex relationships reported less internalized homophobia (Bauermeister et al., 2010). One noteworthy finding from that study is that some of the LGB youth

reported heterosexual dating. Those who did subsequently reported higher internalized homophobia. Some LGB youth may use heterosexual dating as a hiding strategy, yet it appears to undermine their mental health (Martin, 1982). Finally, the study conducted in Utah included attention to the feelings that LGB adolescents have about their relationships. It showed that LGB adolescents who were not in relationships reported higher rates of relational depression (feeling disappointed about your relationship status) and lower rates of relational esteem (positive evaluation of your capacity for intimacy) compared to those who reported same-sex relationships (Glover et al., 2009).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The study of same-sex intimate relationships for adolescents and young adults must be understood within the context of dramatic, fast-paced social change. In many ways, the body of research is barely catching up with the experiences of contemporary young people. Published empirical studies are largely based on earlier cohorts (for example, the cohort of participants in the Add Health Study were teenagers in the mid-1990s) and thus included youth who were growing up at times when the stigma of same-sex relations may have been greater, but the visibility was not. Thus, contemporary young people have access to opportunities that were unimaginable just a decade ago. Not only is this social change affecting possibilities for youth but it is offering new areas of inquiry for our understanding of intimacy and romance in adolescence and young adulthood.

Prior studies indicate that despite the barriers sexual minority youth may face, they are like all adolescents in their desire for intimacy and in fact they are quite engaged in romantic and dating relationships. Gender norms and expectations play out in these relationships as we might expect at the personal level: Boys' and girls' expectations appear to be guided or shaped by the codes of masculinity and femininity (i.e., heteronormativity). Important differences appear at the level of the couple as couples navigate these gendered feelings, attitudes, and behaviors. There has been very little research that explicitly has studied same-sex couples (see Darling & Clarke, 2009); such studies could inform research on sexual minority adolescent development and well-being as well as the complexities of gender in intimate relationships. A unique factor for

understanding same-sex intimacy in adolescence is that for many young people who desire same-sex intimacy, relationships may not be congruent with same-sex desires. And just as dating has implications for heterosexual adolescents' well-being, both heterosexual dating and not dating at all appear to have real implications for sexual minority youth. In fact, heterosexual dating by sexual minority youth may be a symptom of minority stress; this is a topic worthy of future research attention.

Another area that has been notably understudied is the contexts for same-sex intimate relationships in adolescence. There are growing bodies of research on the settings that shape the lives of sexual minority youth (Horn, Kosciw, & Russell, 2009), but little of that work considers intimate relationships. Yet it is clear that there are unique issues related to how and where same-sex attracted youth find one another. Some same-sex attracted adolescents may have typical opportunities for intimate relationships at school, in their faith communities, or in their larger social or community networks. However, for most sexual minority youth, much may depend on circumstance (Diamond, 2003) because the typical contexts (e.g., school, faith group) remain circumscribed: For example, even if there are visible and "out" LGB students in school, same-sex dating may remain too transgressive. LGB-focused youth groups or online social network spaces continue to be more conducive to intimate relationship exploration and formation for LGB adolescents. Several scholars have written about the possibilities that the Internet affords for youth, not only in exploring identity but in finding same-sex relationships (Diamond, 2003; Russell, 2002). Of course, online spaces are used for intimacy by all youth; the point is that if typical spaces are unsafe for same-sex intimacy, these alternate spaces may be all the more important for LGB adolescents. As research on youth and media continues to grow, studies should compare the online relationships experiences of sexual minority and heterosexual adolescents.

LGB-focused, community-based youth programs are another important venue for youth to explore and develop same-sex intimate relationships. Many communities now host LGB youth groups. Originally envisioned as spaces for social or crisis support, such organizations have increasingly taken on the role that typical youth programs play in the lives of teens by offering recreational and social activities. For many young people, these are especially important spaces for developing friendships and finding romantic partners. Yet it is important to note that support for many of these programs or organizations comes through funding designed to prevent the host of

health and behavioral risks so prevalent among LGB youth and adults, including victimization, depression, substance use and abuse, and high-risk sexual behavior. Thus, while these programs exist to provide safe space for LGB youth to socialize with one another, many remain at least partly if not predominantly focused on prevention. Such a focus raises important questions about the context for intimacy development: What does it mean for youth to first explore intimacy in a setting where at least part of the explicit message is about risk? Although such spaces are lifelines for some LGB youth, might they unintentionally instill and perpetuate stereotypes that LGB relationships are "risky"?

Finally, research is beginning to catch up to the realities of sexuality in the lives of contemporary youth, including new relationship forms and the dramatic influence of new media. For example, studies of "hookups" and "friends with benefits" suggest that the world of youthful sexuality is changing (e.g., Bisson & Levine, 2009); the degree to which same-sex sexuality has been influenced—or influential—remains understudied. Also, while the Internet has provided youth with opportunities to explore or test out same-sex identities (Russell, 2002), recent research illustrates the ways that these opportunities create new possibilities for heterosexuals as well. "Dude sex," for example, is argued to be an authentic heterosexuality for young men who go online to seek sex with other men (Ward, 2007). These new possibilities for intimacy made possible by technology and media largely blur the boundaries of "relationships" and the borders of sexual identities. These are rich sites for further research on adolescent and young adult same-sex intimacy.

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Relationship Pathways

From Adolescence to Young Adulthood

This book is dedicated to Duane Buhrmester (1952–2010).

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