

Ethnic/Racial Differences in the Coming-Out Process of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youths: A Comparison of Sexual Identity Development Over Time

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This longitudinal report of 145 lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) youths examined ethnic/racial differences in the coming-out process. No significant differences emerged in sexual developmental milestones, sexual orientation, sexual behavior, or sexual identity. However, Black youths reported involvement in fewer gay-related social activities, reported less comfort with others knowing their sexual identity, and disclosed that identity to fewer people than did White youths. Latino youths disclosed to fewer people than did White youths. Analyses of change indicated Black youths had greater increases in positive attitudes toward homosexuality and in certainty in their sexual identity over time than did White youths. These findings support the authors' hypothesis that cultural factors do not impede the formation of identity but may delay identity integration.

• ethnic/racial differences • sexual identity development • internalized homophobia
• disclosure • community involvement • gay • lesbian • bisexual • adolescents

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The development of a lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) sexual identity—also known as the coming-out process—is often a difficult process of identity formation and integration because of the stigmatized nature of this identity. Considerable theoretical attention has been devoted to models of the coming-out process (e.g., Cass, 1979; Morris, 1997; Rosario, Hunter, Maguen, Gwadz, & Smith, 2001; Troiden, 1989; for a review, see Eliason, 1996). Although differing in their emphasis, these models describe a process of increasing acceptance of sexual identity through a process of LGB identity formation and integration. Identity formation is that part of the coming-out process in which individuals become aware of their developing sexual orientation, begin to question whether they may be LGB, and explore their emerging LGB identity by engaging in sexual activities. The coming-out process continues by means of identity integration in which an LGB identity is incorporated and consolidated. Identity integration is the part of the coming-out process by which individuals become more accepting of their LGB identity, resolve internalized homophobia by adopting more positive attitudes toward homosexuality, feel more comfortable with others knowing about their sexual identity, disclose that identity to others, and become involved in LGB social activities (Rosario et al., 2001).

For ethnic/racial minority LGB individuals, the coming-out process may be complicated by cultural factors that operate to retard or arrest the process. Extensive writings about Latino and Black LGB individuals have suggested that cultural factors including the importance of family, traditional gender roles, conservative religious values, and widespread homophobia may lead many ethnic/racial minority individuals to experience difficulties in the formation and integration of an LGB sexual identity (e.g., Diaz, 1998; Espín, 1993; Greene, 1998; Loiacano, 1989; Martínez & Sullivan, 1998; Rodriguez, 1996; Savin-Williams, 1996; Smith, 1997; Stokes & Peterson, 1998). Additionally, racism within the predominantly White

LGB community may further complicate the coming-out process for ethnic/racial minority LGB individuals (e.g., Icard, 1986; Loiacano, 1989; Martínez & Sullivan, 1998; Savin-Williams, 1996). In essence, the literature suggests the hypothesis that ethnic/racial minority individuals are not as far along in the coming-out process as their White peers because they are caught between two major forces: (a) stronger cultural pressures in their ethnic/racial communities favoring heterosexuality and discouraging or punishing homosexuality, and (b) ethnic/racial prejudice and discrimination in the predominantly White LGB community that alienates ethnic/racial minority individuals from the one community that consistently validates an LGB identity and provides resources and supportive settings to LGB individuals.

Despite widespread discussion of the potential difficulties in the coming-out process of ethnic/racial minority LGB individuals, little empirical research has examined ethnic/racial differences in the coming-out process. Furthermore, what research has examined the coming-out process among ethnic/racial minority LGB individuals has usually been conducted with a single ethnic/racial group (e.g., Alquijay, 1997; Crawford, Allison, Zamboni, & Soto, 2002; Espín, 1993; Loiacano, 1989; Rodriguez, 1996; Stokes & Peterson, 1998), which necessarily cannot address potential differences among ethnic/racial groups. Therefore, the present study examined potential differences in sexual identity formation and integration among Black, Latino, and White LGB youths. In addition, it longitudinally examined changes in the coming-out process.

Ethnic/Racial Differences in Sexual Identity Formation and Integration

Empirical examination of LGB sexual identity formation has focused primarily on the timing of various developmental milestones, yet, of these studies, few contain enough

ethnic/racial minority LGB individuals for comparisons with their White peers. In contrast to the widespread hypothesis that cultural factors delay the identity formation process of ethnic/racial minority LGB individuals relative to White peers, empirical studies either have found no significant differences (Newman, & Muzzonigro, 1993; Rosario et al., 1996) or have found antithetical findings indicating that Latino or Black LGB individuals achieve identity development milestones earlier than do White LGB individuals (Dubé & Savin-Williams, 1999; Morris & Rothblum, 1999; Savin-Williams, 1998). Cross-cultural research comparing adult lesbians from Latin America, Asia, and the United States also have found no differences in the ages of awareness or identification as lesbian (Whitam, Daskalos, Sobolewski, & Padilla, 1998).

Several writers have suggested that cultural pressures favoring heterosexuality may lead many ethnic/racial minority individuals to be bisexual in their sexual orientation and sexual behaviors and to identify as bisexual rather than as gay or lesbian (Peterson & Marin, 1988; Rust, 1996; Smith, 1997). However, the available research only partly supports this hypothesis. Two studies, one of women (Morris & Rothblum, 1999) and another of male youths (Dubé & Savin-Williams, 1999), failed to find any ethnic/racial differences in sexual orientation (e.g., erotic attractions for or fantasies about the same or other sex) or in sex of sexual partners. However, studies of sexual identity have found significant ethnic/racial differences, indicating that Black individuals are more likely to identify as bisexual than are Whites or Latinos (e.g. Doll, Petersen, White, Johnson, & Ward, 1992; Rust, 2001). These findings suggest that cultural pressures may have little influence over sexual orientation or sexual behavior (i.e., identity formation), although such pressures may affect sexual identification (i.e., identity integration). Additionally, the findings that Blacks and Latinos may differ indicate a need to examine differences between ethnic/racial minority groups as well as be-

tween these individuals and their White peers.

As indicated earlier, extensive writings have suggested that cultural pressures (e.g., importance of family, traditional gender roles, religious values, widespread homophobia) ensure that many ethnic/racial minority LGB individuals are not as far along on identity integration as are White LGB persons (e.g., Loiacano, 1989; Martinez & Sullivan, 1998; Savin-Williams, 1996; Smith, 1997). Some available research has supported the hypothesis in that Black LGB individuals reported significantly more negative attitudes toward homosexuality (Stokes, Venable, & McKirnan, 1996) and were less likely to disclose their sexual identity to others (Dubé & Savin-Williams, 1999; Kennamer, Honnold, Bradford, & Hendricks, 2000; Morris & Rothblum, 1999; Stokes et al., 1996) than were White or Latino LGB individuals. Moreover, Black and Latino gay men reported more stress surrounding disclosure than did White men (Siegel & Epstein, 1996). However, other findings indicated no significant ethnic/racial differences in attitudes toward homosexuality (Dubé & Savin-Williams, 1999) or in fear of disclosing to others (Morris & Rothblum, 1999). In addition, although Black LGB individuals may disclose their sexual identity to fewer numbers of individuals (see above), they may be more likely than their White peers to disclose to someone at an earlier rather than a later age (Morris & Rothblum, 1999; Savin-Williams, 1998).

Several authors have suggested that racism in the White LGB community may lead many ethnic/racial minority individuals to distance themselves from participating in gay-related social activities (Icard, 1986; Loiacano, 1989; Martinez & Sullivan, 1998; Savin-Williams, 1996). The few studies of ethnic/racial differences in gay and bisexual men have found that Black men were less involved in the gay community or less likely to belong to gay-oriented organizations than were White men (Kennamer et al., 2000; Stokes et al., 1996). Moreover, Black men experienced stress from the gay social scene

more frequently than did White men (Siegel & Epstein, 1996). However, a study of lesbian adults failed to find ethnic/racial differences on involvement in lesbian social activities (Morris & Rothblum, 1999). It is unknown whether the mixed findings suggest possible gender differences.

In conclusion, despite extensive suggestions that cultural pressures against homosexuality and ethnic/racial prejudice in the LGB community operate to delay the coming-out process among ethnic/racial minority LGB individuals, the extant research has a number of limitations. First, the available research provides mixed and even contradictory results. The inconsistencies suggest to us a more nuanced hypothesis: Ethnic/racial differences are expected only in those aspects of the coming-out process that are vulnerable to external influences (i.e., identity integration) but not in aspects that are driven by the self (i.e., identity formation). A second limitation of the empirical literature is that only a single study has examined ethnic/racial differences among females (Morris & Rothblum, 1999), and none have been conducted among female youths. Third, the examination of ethnic/racial differences has focused on Black and White differences, with far less attention to Latinos. Finally, past research has been exclusively cross-sectional, yet the study of the coming-out process necessitates longitudinal designs to reveal transformations over time. Our report, which builds on our earlier cross-sectional work with both male and female LGB youths (Rosario et al., 1996, 2001), attempts to address the limitations of past research by longitudinally examining the differences among Black, White, and Latino LGB youths in the coming-out process over time.

Method

Participants

Male and female youths, ages 14 to 21 years, were recruited in New York City from October 1993 through June 1994. They were recruited from three LGB-focused commu-

nity-based organizations (CBOs) that provide social and recreational services for LGB youths (85%) and two LGB student organizations at public colleges (15%). We attempted to recruit every potentially eligible youth at each recruitment site. Meetings were held with the youths at each site to introduce the study and invite them to participate, regardless of their sexual identity. In addition, at two sites, youths were approached individually and introduced to the study, and youths who expressed interest were offered on-the-spot interviews. We have estimated that 80% of youths who attended a recruitment meeting or who were individually approached did participate in the study.

Eight of the 164 participants interviewed at baseline were excluded because they did not meet eligibility criteria, resulting in a final sample of 156 youths (49% female) with a mean age of 18.3 years ($SD = 1.65$). The youths self-identified at baseline as gay or lesbian (66%), bisexual (31%), or other (3%). The youths self-identified their ethnicity/race as Latino (37%), Black (35%), White (22%), or Asian and other ethnic backgrounds (7%).¹ Because of the small number of youths of Asian and other backgrounds ($n = 11$), they were excluded from the present report. Of the youths, 34% reported having a parent of lower socioeconomic status (SES) in that the parent had received welfare, food stamps, or Medicaid. Although 15% of the youths were recruited from college LGB organizations, 31% of the sample reported they were currently in college.

Procedure

The youths provided signed informed consent. Parental consent was waived by the Commissioner of Mental Health for New York State for youths less than age 18 years.

¹This ethnic/racial assessment does not make within-group distinctions (e.g., African Americans vs. Jamaicans, Puerto Ricans vs. Cubans, Italian Americans vs. Jews).

Instead, an adult at each CBO served *in loco parentis* to safeguard the rights of each minor in the study. The study was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board and the recruitment sites, and it received a Federal Certificate of Confidentiality.

A 2–3-hr structured interview was conducted at baseline and subsequently at 6 and 12 months. Youths received \$30 at each interview. Interviews were conducted in a private room at the recruitment sites at baseline and in a private location convenient for the youths at subsequent assessments. Interviews were conducted by college-educated individuals of the same sex as the youth and who were comfortable with LGB individuals. No attempt was made to match the interviewer and the youth on ethnicity/race. Each interviewer received 20 hr of training on conducting interviews on sexually sensitive topics and conducted four practice interviews. Audiotaped interviews of actual participants were monitored to ensure quality and consistency, and interviewers received feedback in both individual and group supervision.

Youths were contacted by telephone either directly or through members of their social network to schedule follow-up interviews. The retention rates were 92% ($n = 143$) for the 6-month assessment and 90% ($n = 140$) for the 12-month assessment; 85% ($n = 133$) of youths were interviewed at all three times. Only 5 youths were lost to both follow-up assessments. Further details of the recruitment, interview, and retention procedures have been reported elsewhere (Rosario et al., 1996; Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter, & Gwadz, 2002).

Measures of Sexual Identity Formation

Sexual developmental milestones, sexual behavior, sexual orientation, and sexual identity were assessed with the Sexual Risk Behavior Assessment—Youth (SERBAS–Y) for LGB youths (Meyer-Bahlburg, Ehrhardt, Exner, & Gruen, 1994). This interviewer-administered assessment has demonstrated moderately high test–retest reliability over a 2-week period (mean $r = .84$) among this

sample (Rosario et al., 1996). Below, we discuss each component of the SERBAS–Y used in this report. However, for further details of this measure, extensive descriptive and psychometric information regarding the SERBAS–Y is available elsewhere (Rosario et al., 1996).

PSYCHOSEXUAL DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES.

The SERBAS–Y assessed at baseline the youths' ages for 10 different psychosexual developmental milestones. Youths were asked the ages when they were first erotically attracted to, fantasized about, and were aroused by erotica focusing on the same sex. The mean age for the three milestones was computed to obtain a mean age of awareness of same-sex sexual orientation, given that a factor analysis generated a single factor (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$). Similar items assessing other-sex attractions, fantasies, and erotic arousal were combined in the same manner (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$). In addition, youths were asked about the age when they first thought they "might be" LGB and when they first thought they "really were" LGB. They were asked about the age when they first had sex with the same sex and with the other sex. For all developmental milestones, we computed the number of years since the youth first experienced each milestone as the difference between the youth's age at each milestone and his or her age at baseline.

SOCIOSEXUAL DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES.

As part of a questionnaire assessing involvement in gay-related social activities (see below for details), we asked the youths at baseline the ages when they first spoke or wrote to various people (e.g., peer, counselor, teacher, switchboard) about homosexuality or bisexuality. Similarly, we asked about the ages when they first engaged in various gay-related social or recreational activities (e.g., attending a gay bar, bookstore, organization). The minimum age reported for each milestone was used as the age when the youths first talked to someone about homosexuality and the age at which they were first involved in a gay-related activity. As we did with the psychosexual milestones discussed

above, we computed the number of years since each milestone as the differences between these ages and the youths' age at baseline.

RECENT SEXUAL BEHAVIORS. The SERBAS-Y assessed whether youths had engaged in various sexual activities with the same sex and the other sex during the past 3 months at the baseline assessment and within the past 6 months (i.e., since their last interview) at the follow-up interviews. For our analyses, we computed whether the youths reported any sexual activity with the same sex or the other sex.

CURRENT SEXUAL ORIENTATION. The SERBAS-Y assessed sexual orientation at every assessment. Youths were asked to indicate the extent to which their recent sexual attractions, thoughts, and fantasies focused on the same or other sex (a) when in the presence of other individuals in a public setting; (b) when masturbating, dreaming, or day dreaming; and (c) when viewing erotic material in films, magazines, or books. A 7-point, Kinsey-type Likert response scale was used ranging from *always focused on the other sex* (0) to *always focused on the same sex* (6), with a midpoint indicating *equally focused on both sexes* (3). Youths were allowed to indicate not experiencing the assessed event. We computed current sexual orientation as the mean of the three items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$ to $.92$ across the three assessment periods).

SEXUAL IDENTITY. An item from the SERBAS-Y inquired about sexual identity at every assessment: "When you think about sex, do you think of yourself as lesbian/gay, bisexual, or straight?" Youths who rejected these identities were coded as "other."

Measures of Sexual Identity Integration

INVOLVEMENT IN GAY-RELATED ACTIVITIES. We developed a 28-item checklist to assess lifetime involvement in gay-related social and recreational activities at baseline (Rosario et

al., 2001). At follow-up assessments, youths were asked about their activity involvement during the past 6 months (i.e., since their last assessment). Factor analysis of the baseline data generated 11 items that loaded on one factor (e.g., going to a gay bookstore, coffee house). Of these 11 items, we computed the number of items endorsed by the youths as the indicator of involvement in gay-related activities (Cronbach's $\alpha = .64$ to $.77$ across the three assessments).

POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARD HOMOSEXUALITY. We administered a modified version of the Nungesser Homosexual Attitudes Inventory (Nungesser, 1983) at all three assessments, using a 4-point response scale ranging from *disagree strongly* (1) through *agree strongly* (4). A principal-axis factor analysis using varimax rotation of the baseline data resulted in two factors. The first factor was composed of 11 items that assessed attitudes toward homosexuality, for example, "My (homosexuality/bisexuality) does not make me unhappy." We computed the mean of these items at each assessment, with high scores indicating more positive attitudes toward homosexuality (Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$ to $.85$ across the three assessments). Because these data were negatively skewed at all assessments, we transformed the data using the exponential e to stretch the positive end of the distribution.

COMFORT WITH OTHERS KNOWING ABOUT YOUR HOMOSEXUALITY. As noted above, a factor analysis of the baseline data from the Nungesser Homosexual Attitudes Inventory (Nungesser, 1983) identified two factors. The second factor was composed of 12 items that assessed comfort with other individuals knowing about the youth's sexuality, for example, "If my straight friends knew of my (homosexuality/bisexuality), I would feel uncomfortable." We computed the mean of these items at each time period, with a high score indicating more comfort with homosexuality (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$ to $.91$ across the three assessments).

SELF-DISCLOSURE OF SEXUALITY TO OTHERS. We asked youths at baseline to enumerate “all the people in your life who are important or were important to you and whom you told that you are (lesbian/gay/bisexual)” (Rosario et al., 2001). Subsequently, youths were asked about the number of individuals to whom the youths had disclosed during the past 6 months (i.e., since their last assessment). We computed the number of individuals reported as the indicator of self-disclosure to others. We imposed a logarithmic transformation on the follow-up data, given these data were positively skewed.

CERTAINTY ABOUT, COMFORT WITH, AND SELF-ACCEPTANCE OF ONE’S OWN SEXUALITY. At the 6- and 12-month assessments, we assessed the youths’ commitment either to their gay/lesbian identity or to that part of their bisexual identity that centered on the same sex (Rosario, Hunter, & Gwadz, 1994). Specifically, we asked youths who identified as gay/lesbian, “How certain are you about being lesbian/gay at this point?” and asked bisexually identified youths, “How certain are you about being bisexual at this point?” Our indicator was the prevalence of being *very certain* (1) about the current sexual identity as compared with being *less than very certain* (0). For comfort with sexual identity, we queried the gay/lesbian youths, “How comfortable are you with your lesbianism/gayness?” and asked the bisexual youths, “How comfortable are you with your lesbian/gay side?” The prevalence of being *very comfortable* (1) with the current sexual identity as compared with being *less than very comfortable* (0) was our indicator. For self-acceptance of sexual identity, we asked the gay/lesbian youths, “How accepting of your lesbianism/gayness are you?” and asked the bisexual youths, “How accepting are you of your lesbian/gay side?” The prevalence of being *very accepting* (1) as compared with being *less than very accepting* (0) of the current sexual identity was our indicator.

Other Measures

SOCIAL DESIRABILITY. We administered at baseline a 31-item version (2 items inappropriate for youths were removed) of the Marlowe–Crowne Social Desirability scale using the original true-false response format (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964). A factor analysis generated 12 items that loaded on a single factor. The number of these items endorsed composed our indicator of social desirability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .74$). A Marlowe–Crowne measure that was reduced in a similar fashion was used with LGB youths by another research team (Safren & Heimberg, 1999).

Results

Ethnic/Racial Differences in Sociodemographic Characteristics and Social Desirability

Potential differences among Black, Latino, and White youths on several sociodemographic characteristics were examined using analysis of variance (ANOVA) and chi-square analyses. No significant differences were found among Black, Latino, and White youths on sex, SES, or age. Significant differences were noted, however, in education (i.e., currently in college or not), $\chi^2(2, N = 144) = 6.02, p < .05$, and recruitment site, $\chi^2(6, N = 144) = 24.08, p < .01$. Follow-up chi-square comparisons revealed that White youths were more likely to be currently attending college (47%) than Black (22%) or Latino (30%) youths. Similarly, analysis of the recruitment sites revealed that youths recruited from the college organizations were more likely to be White (50%) than Black (18%) and Latino (32%). In addition, a marginally significant ethnic/racial difference emerged for social desirability, $F(2, 145) = 2.51, p < .10$. Post hoc comparisons, using Fisher’s protected *t* test, indicated that Black youths significantly ($p < .05$) reported more socially desirable responses than did White youths ($M = 6.48$ vs. 5.09) but that Latino youths did not significantly differ from either Black or White youths.

TABLE 1 Ethnic/Racial Differences in Time Since First Experiencing Developmental Milestones

Years since first	Ethnicity/race			F	η^2
	Black (n = 54)	Latino (n = 57)	White (n = 34)		
Same-sex sexual attractions, fantasies, and arousal	6.68	6.96	7.13	0.20	.00
Other-sex sexual attractions, fantasies, and arousal	6.88	6.19	7.54	1.81	.04
Thought might be lesbian/gay or bisexual	6.63	5.98	6.29	0.38	.01
Other-sex sexual activity	6.69	4.95	5.68	2.21	.04
Same-sex sexual activity	4.31	5.25	4.56	0.68	.01
Thought really was lesbian/gay or bisexual	3.96	3.55	3.47	0.48	.01
Talked to someone about homosexuality or bisexuality	3.39	2.91	3.85	1.30	.02
Participated in a gay-related social activity	2.69	2.14	1.94	1.50	.02

Note. Analyses were conducted using analysis of variance. The measure of effect size, eta-squared (η^2), is the proportion of explained variance.

Ethnic/Racial Differences in the Coming-Out Process: Univariate Relations

Univariate comparisons of the identity formation histories of the Black, Latino, and White youths with respect to time since experiencing various developmental milestones were examined using ANOVA (see Table 1). Even without controls for Type I error, we found no significant differences among the three groups of youths.

Univariate comparisons among the three ethnic/racial groups on the youths' sexual behavior, sexual orientation, sexual identity, and aspects of identity integration at each of the three assessment periods were conducted with ANOVA for the continuous outcomes and chi-square analyses for the categorical outcomes (see Table 2). No ethnic/racial differences emerged on the prevalence of sex with the same or other sex, current sexual orientation, or sexual identity (gay/lesbian vs. bisexual). Similarly, the youths did not differ significantly on their comfort with or acceptance of their own LGB identity.

However, significant ethnic/racial differences were found on several aspects of identity integration (see Table 2). Black youths were more certain of their sexual identity at the 12-month assessment than were White youths. Black youths were involved in fewer gay-related social activities at both the base-

line and 6-month assessments, were less comfortable with others knowing about their homosexuality at all three assessments, and had self-disclosed to fewer individuals at the baseline and 6-month assessments than had White youths. Latino youths, like Black youths, had disclosed their LGB identity to fewer individuals at the baseline and 6-month assessments than had White youths. However, Latino youths were more comfortable with other individuals knowing about their homosexuality at the baseline and 12-month assessment than were Black youths.

Ethnic/Racial Differences in the Coming-Out Process: Multivariate Relations

To control for sex, age, SES, college attendance, and social desirability,² we used multivariate analyses to examine the relations between ethnicity/race and aspects of the coming-out process. Specifically, we compared the Black and Latino youths with White youths in a series of logistic regression

²College attendance was used as a control for both educational attainment and recruitment site (i.e., recruitment from college organizations vs. CBOs) because college attendance and recruitment site were redundant, $\chi^2(3, N = 155) = 60.20, p < .001$.

TABLE 2 Ethnic/Racial Differences in Prospective Assessments of Sexual Identity Formation and Identity Integration

Variable	Ethnicity/race			χ^2 or F	τ or η^2
	Black ($n = 54$)	Latino ($n = 57$)	White ($n = 34$)		
Sex with the same sex					
Time 1	65%	68%	71%	0.35	.00
Time 2	88%	82%	73%	2.50	.02
Time 3	78%	82%	83%	0.40	.00
Sex with the other sex					
Time 1	15%	14%	24%	1.58	.01
Time 2	19%	13%	23%	1.53	.01
Time 3	30%	18%	24%	2.12	.02
Current sexual orientation					
Time 1	5.04	5.15	5.02	0.15	.00
Time 2	5.02	5.03	4.83	0.25	.00
Time 3	4.91	5.11	4.70	0.83	.01
Lesbian/gay vs. bisexual identity					
Time 1	69%	67%	67%	0.06	.00
Time 2	73%	80%	72%	0.99	.01
Time 3	79%	81%	74%	0.53	.00
Certainty of sexual identity					
Time 2	75%	71%	76%	0.24	.00
Time 3	91% _a	80%	67% _b	6.47*	.06
Comfort with sexual identity					
Time 2	73%	86%	79%	2.40	.02
Time 3	86%	85%	82%	0.31	.00
Self-acceptance of sexual identity					
Time 2	84%	88%	86%	0.26	.00
Time 3	81%	87%	93%	1.79	.02
Involvement in gay social activities					
Time 1	5.87 _a	6.60	7.35 _b	3.46*	.05
Time 2	5.13 _a	5.98	6.63 _b	4.08*	.06
Time 3	5.32	4.90	5.69	0.73	.01
Attitudes toward homosexuality					
Time 1	37.56	41.23	41.95	1.40	.02
Time 2	38.61	40.24	40.92	0.32	.01
Time 3	40.88	40.95	38.74	0.29	.00
Comfort with others knowing about your homosexuality					
Time 1	2.59 _a	2.88 _b	3.09 _b	5.81**	.08
Time 2	2.71 _a	2.94	3.14 _b	4.15*	.06
Time 3	2.78 _a	3.07 _b	3.20 _b	4.17*	.06
Self-disclosure to others					
Time 1	5.85 _a	5.81 _a	9.21 _b	6.82***	.09
Time 2	0.69 _a	0.64 _a	1.76 _b	5.06**	.07
Time 3	0.65	0.89	1.01	0.56	.01

Note. Time 1 = baseline; Time 2 = 6-month assessment; Time 3 = 12-month assessment. Sexual identity was assessed such that gay/lesbian identity = 1 and bisexual identity = 0. Ethnic/racial groups with differing subscripts differed significantly at $p < .05$. Analyses were conducted using analysis of variance for the continuous outcomes and chi-square for categorical outcomes. Measures of effect size (i.e., proportion of variance explained) were computed with Goodman–Kruskal tau (τ , Goodman & Kruskal, 1979) for categorical variables and eta-square (η^2) for continuous variables.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

and multiple regression models on which we imposed demographic controls. We also compared the Black and Latino youths.

Despite the controls imposed in these multivariate analyses, the data generally replicated the differences found at the univariate level of analysis (described above). Once again, the ethnic/racial groups did not differ on the developmental milestones, sexual behavior, sexual orientation, and sexual identity, or on certainty, comfort, or self-acceptance of that identity. However, significant differences were identified on several aspects of identity integration. Black youths were involved in fewer gay-related social activities at baseline and 6 months ($\beta = -.27, -.32$, respectively), endorsed less positive attitudes toward homosexuality at the baseline assessment ($\beta = -.24$), were less comfortable with others knowing about their homosexuality at all three assessments ($\beta = -.42, -.38, -.38$), and had disclosed to fewer individuals at the baseline and 6-month assessments ($\beta = -.38, -.31$) than had White youths. Like Black youths, Latino youths had disclosed to fewer individuals at baseline and 6 months ($\beta = -.37, -.32$) than had White youths. However, Latino youths were more comfortable with others knowing about their homosexuality at all three assessments ($\beta = .25, .22, .25$) than were Black youths. Latinos also were involved in more gay-related activities at the 6-month assessment ($\beta = .20$) than were Black youths.

Ethnic/Racial Differences in Change in the Coming-Out Process

To examine potential ethnic/racial differences in the degree of change in the coming-out process between the baseline and 12-month assessments, we computed change scores for each youth by conducting a series of multiple or logistic regression models predicting each variable at the 12-month assessment from which the baseline values of that same coming-out variable were partialled (see Cohen & Cohen, 1983, for elaboration). This allowed us to examine differences in the degree of change regardless of

whether the group increased (positive change), decreased (negative change), or remained unchanged (zero change) over time. Race/ethnicity was then examined as a predictor of these changes in the regression analyses, while controlling for demographic confounds. This method examines group-level changes (e.g., did the degree of change for Black youths as a group differ from that of Latino youths as a group). The changes over time within each ethnic/racial group were not examined because our hypothesis focused on ethnic/racial differences between groups, not within-groups change.

Significant ethnic/racial differences were found in changes in identity certainty and in attitudes toward homosexuality. Black youths were nearly seven times more likely to become more certain about their sexual identity over time than were White youths (odds ratio = 6.91, $p < .05$). Black youths also had significantly greater increase in positive attitudes toward homosexuality over time than did White youths ($\beta = .18$, $p < .05$). Latino youths did not differ from Black or White youths in the degree of change on any study variable. No ethnic/racial differences were found in change in sexual behavior, sexual orientation, sexual identity, comfort/acceptance of their own identity, involvement in gay-related activities, comfort with others knowing their sexual identity, or disclosure of their sexual identity to others.

Discussion

The development of an LGB sexual identity has been hypothesized to differ by ethnic/racial background, given (a) stronger cultural forces discouraging or punishing homosexuality in ethnic/racial minority communities than in the White community and (b) ethnic/racial prejudice and discrimination in the White LGB community. Thus, we examined the hypothesis that the coming-out process of Black and Latino youths as LGB is delayed relative to that of

White youths. Further, we hypothesized that these delays would occur only in those aspects of the coming-out process that are vulnerable to external influences (i.e., identity integration) but not in aspects that are driven by the self (i.e., identity formation). In addition, we longitudinally examined ethnic/racial differences in the degree to which youths changed over time on the various dimensions of the coming-out process.

Ethnic/Racial Similarities and Differences

Although others have hypothesized that Black and Latino youths would be delayed in aspects of identity formation, consistent with our hypothesis, we found no differences. Youths of the three ethnic/racial backgrounds experienced the developmental milestones of identity formation around the same time in their lives. Black, Latino, and White youths also were found to reach out to the LGB community at similar ages. Furthermore, despite cultural pressures against homosexuality in ethnic/racial minority communities (which would suggest more bisexual identities, orientations, and behaviors among Black and Latino youths), we found that sexual identity, current sexual orientation, and recent sexual activity did not differ significantly among the ethnic/racial groups. These nonsignificant findings suggest that sexual identity formation is not significantly influenced by cultural factors. The lack of differences is consistent with both biological and psychoanalytic theories of sexual development.

However, as we hypothesized, several ethnic/racial differences were found on various aspects of identity integration. For example, consistent with past research (e.g., Kennamer et al., 2000; Stokes et al., 1996), we found that Black youths were involved in fewer gay-related social and recreational activities than were White youths. This finding, when coupled with our earlier finding that the youths did not differ on time since they first participated in a gay-related social activity, suggests that after initial involvement, Black youths may retreat from gay-related

social activities in the LGB community, perhaps because of racism in the LGB community. We also found that Black youths were more uncomfortable with others knowing about their homosexuality and had disclosed to fewer numbers of other individuals than had their White peers. This suggests that aspects of the coming-out process that touch on social relationships, either by means of involvement in gay-related activities or disclosure to others, prove problematic for Black youths.

For another aspect of identity integration, attitudes toward homosexuality, no significant ethnic/racial differences were found in the univariate analyses, yet differences were found after controlling for potential covariates. Black youths endorsed fewer positive attitudes than did Latino or White peers at baseline (but not at subsequent assessments). Consistent with this, when examining change in attitudes toward homosexuality over time, Black youths experienced a greater increase in positive attitudes compared with White youths. This increase suggests that while Black youths may have experienced some internalized homophobia at baseline, they were able to resolve these negative attitudes, resulting in no differences by the end of the study. Involvement of Black youths in the LGB organizations may explain their increase in positive attitudes. Further, the attitudes of the White youths may not have changed as much because White youths began with highly positive attitudes.

Contrary to our hypothesis that Black and Latino youths would be delayed relative to White youths on identity integration, we found that Black youths were more rather than less certain of their LGB identity at the 12-month assessment compared with White youths. Further, we found that Black youths were more likely than White youths to become more certain of their sexual identity over time. Although the direction of these findings was unexpected, the findings may suggest that, for Black youths, who generally experience cultural pressures against homosexuality, the confidence and strength re-

quired to accept an LGB identity will ensure a strong commitment to that identity. For White youths, who generally have fewer cultural pressures against homosexuality, commitment may be more variable. Future research should examine this possibility. However, the results may also be a statistical artifact of regression to the mean (Cohen & Cohen, 1983).

Our data indicated that Latino youths sometimes were similar to Black youths and sometimes were similar to White youths on the coming-out process. The Latino youths reported similar levels of comfort with others knowing about their homosexuality as did White youths. However, like the Black youths, Latino youths had disclosed to fewer individuals than had White youths. These seemingly contradictory findings may be explained by a close examination of Latino culture. One pillar of Latino culture is familism, in which *la familia* (the family) sticks together through all adversities, always supporting all members. However, another aspect of Latino culture, *respeto* (respect), demands that one obey one's elders and others in positions of authority. To raise the issue of homosexuality may be construed a *falta de respeto* (lack of respect), constituting a breach of normative prescriptions guiding social interactions. Thus, Latino youths may feel comfortable with their family members knowing about their sexuality because they know they will not be abandoned by their families, given cultural familism, but their values of *respeto* may prevent them from actually disclosing their sexuality. While a speculative explanation of our findings, future research should examine these cultural factors in the coming-out process of Latino LGB individuals.

Study Limitations

Our findings have limitations of which future research should be aware and, to the extent possible, address. First, our sample size was modest. Although we did have enough statistical power to detect a medium effect given the observed effect sizes (Co-

hen, 1987), we do encourage larger samples than were available to us. Second, we followed our sample for a 1-year period, but longer assessment periods are recommended of future studies. For example, we need to ascertain whether significant findings across our follow-up assessments (e.g., comfort with others knowing about one's homosexuality) might become nonsignificant in the future. To meet these objectives, we need to follow youths through adolescence, meaning through approximately age 25 in the United States. Our findings provide a rationale for such long-term assessments. Future research may also wish to examine the role of racial identity and acculturation on the coming-out process. Such individual differences within each ethnic/racial group may explain the relation (or lack thereof) between ethnic/racial group and the coming-out process.

Two issues involving external validity also are of concern. First, cohort effects may exist in which the experiences of earlier cohorts differ from those of more recent cohorts in all ethnic/racial communities. If true, newer generations may become increasingly more tolerant of homosexuality, including of their own personal LGB identity, than previous generations, regardless of ethnic/racial backgrounds. This may explain the similarity among Black, Latino, and White youths found here, which contrasts with previous studies on earlier cohorts. Second, our youths were recruited from gay-focused organizations and programs, yet there are many LGB youths who may not attend such settings. Because they were recruited from gay organizations, our youths also may be involved in more gay-related activities. The youths also self-identified as LGB. Thus, the youths in our sample may have been more certain, comfortable with, and accepting of their LGB identity than might be the case among more representative samples of youths. Because sampling issues raise generalizability concerns, we urge corroboration of the findings with other LGB youths recruited from other locations (i.e., suburban and rural areas, as

well as other urban areas), including non-gay-focused venues. We cannot sufficiently stress that such samples must contain adequate numbers of LGB individuals of ethnic/racial minority backgrounds (including Latinos and Asians) to permit empirical examination of hypotheses in the literature.

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