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THE IMPACT OF PARENTING STYLE AND SELF-ACCEPTANCE  
ON GAYS AND LESBIANS

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

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by  
Diana Bristow

June 2000

THE IMPACT OF PARENTING STYLE AND SELF-ACCEPTANCE  
ON GAYS AND LESBIANS

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A Project  
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by  
Diana Bristow

June 2000

Approved by:

  
Zeila Gordon, Project Advisor,  
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6/5/00  
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## ABSTRACT

This study sought to explore the effect of parenting styles and the impact that it might have upon a gay teen with regard to their ultimate self-acceptance. The study addressed such factors as a positive sense of self and external factors that might impact their self-esteem, but specifically focused upon their eventual self-acceptance. This was determined by focusing on the type of parenting style that the participants perceived during their formative years. The specific population targeted was found through members of PFLAG (Parents, Friends of Lesbians and Gays), specifically the Claremont, California chapter and also members of a gay and lesbian group, GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender) and Ally Services at California State Polytechnical University (CalPoly), Pomona. Instruments were utilized that measured specific parenting styles and the concept of self-acceptance, and these were administered to individuals between the ages of 18 and 35 years. Frequencies and chi-square analyses were run in order to determine whether there was any association between the variables. While the results of these tests did not indicate any significant relationship for this particular sample, possible explanations and other findings

were discussed. Possible limitations of the study were also considered, together with future implications for the social work profession.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My heartfelt thanks and love goes to my husband, who has always believed in and been proud of me. May my achievement be an example to my children, that nothing is impossible - where there's a will, there's a way.

To my friends, who have been so supportive and encouraging, even when the going got tough - I really have neglected them terribly! I can assure them that I will now make up for lost time!

To those in my cohort who have been part of my family during this past two years - we've laughed together and cried together, but in spite of it all we have made it through!

This project marks the end of one journey, but leads to the beginning of another. May it be a fulfilling and enriching experience, during which the learning will never end.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Problem Statement

The stage of adolescence has been described in many terms - storm and stress, turbulence and turmoil. Whatever the descriptor, this life stage involves much change and it is unlikely that any one individual can move through this period without at least some stress along the way. Erik Erikson (1968) in his life stage theory describes this particular stage as *Identity versus Role Confusion*, whereby a young person seeks to explore who they are and establish their identity. When that identity is unclear or uncertain, then an individual might be perceived to suffer from role confusion.

Originally, this theory was aimed at individuals in the larger and general society. However, for a smaller population of teens or adolescents, there is an added factor to deal with, which can add an enormous added extra stress to this life stage - the fact that they are homosexual. This study seeks to explore whether there is a relationship between how a gay teen was parented during his or her formative years and the impact that this might have upon the factors that can play a large part in the identity formation of that individual. Factors such as the personal

struggle with sexual orientation, peer relationships, depression and self-acceptance will be addressed and discussed.

During the turbulent years of adolescence, while an individual is seeking to come to terms with his or her identity, a major factor in terms of being accepted is the pressure to conform to traditional roles (Berlin, 1980). However, for gay youth, this failure to conform is met with harassment, possible violence and rejection not only by peer groups, but often from family also, as well as religious institutions (D'Augelli, 1989). During adolescence, sexual relationships and the need to be close are of great importance. This often results in gay males and lesbians feeling lonely and isolated, due to the fear of ridicule and exploitation in engaging in anonymous sexual activities (Kellog, 1978). This might even lead to severe depression, following the inevitable break-ups (Harding, 1986).

Once a gay adolescent has come to terms with his or her homosexuality, there are unique stress sources with which he or she has to deal. These include issues such as whether to disclose their sexuality, fear of discovery by others, reactions of others, and the chronic stress associated with homosexuality (Remafedi, 1987b). According to Hunter (1990), many youths choose to hide

their gay sexual orientation until late in adolescence or adulthood, simply due to fear of the consequences.

With regard to the aspect of how an individual is parented during their formative years, this obviously plays an important part in the well-being or self-esteem of each and every one of us. Diana Baumrind (1991) suggested that there are three types of parenting that tend to be utilized. The first is that of the authoritarian, which is identified by the parents having extremely definite ideas about how their children should behave. They do not hesitate to set down the rules and tell their children what to do. The emphasis is upon control and conformity. The children do not have a voice in the matter. The second style, that of permissive, is less controlling, wherein the children are encouraged to be independent and to make their own decisions. These parents are very non-directive and tend to avoid trying to control their children. The third style, the authoritative, is somewhere in the middle of the other two, whereby the parents provide consistent support and control. They also very much involve their children in family decision making and encourage the development of independence (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 1997).

During the adolescent transition, it is more than likely that the parent-child relationship will be affected. This is a period during which the adolescent is

seeking to self-identify. It is natural, therefore, that there will be a shift in the relationship with the parents. Issues that play a part in this include less time spent with parents, emotional distance, and conflict in decision making. It is automatically assumed that there is intense conflict during this time. However, this is not necessarily the case, although adolescents perceive this conflict as being more frequent than do their parents (Montemayor & Hanson, 1985).

In gaining more insight into the highly sensitive and difficult issue of teenagers coming to terms with their homosexual identity, it is hoped that the findings of this study will be useful in educating the professional world, and social workers in particular. It is vital that these teens can feel comfortable in seeking guidance and assistance from those adults who have an in-depth understanding and empathy as to all the factors that can play a part in the development of a psychologically healthy young person.

#### Problem Focus

The present study was exploratory in nature, and utilized a post-positivist paradigm. This approach suggests that while it is possible to focus on a particular issue in depth, it is not possible to control the many outside variables that can also play a role. Post-positivist research can indicate certain trends or

relationships and point to weak associations between variables once the information has been collected and analyzed. The instruments utilized in this study reflected Diana Baumrind's parenting styles, in the form of John Buri's Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) and self-acceptance was measured through the Self-Actualization scale developed by Jamal Mazrui. The issue of validity and reliability of these measures is addressed at a later point. Frequencies and chi-square tests were run in order to determine whether there was any relationship between variables.

By addressing the various parenting styles - authoritarian, authoritative or permissive, it was hypothesized that those gay teens who experienced a parenting style of the more authoritarian type would fare less well than those teens who were parented in either the authoritative or permissive styles. The study was conducted through the use of a survey questionnaire, administered through distribution at social events which took place at PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), Claremont chapter, and also at GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender) and Ally Services at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. Snowball sampling was also utilized within these populations, should this become necessary.

Therefore, to recap, the issues that were focused upon were the parenting style experienced by a gay teen during his or her formative years and the healthy development of self-acceptance once adulthood was attained. The stressors that play a large part in the homosexual teen's life are acceptance or rejection by peers and family, difficulty in being open and honest about intimate or sexual relationships, and general anxiety with regard to society's view of homosexuality. Homophobia is defined as 'the irrational fear or hatred of people oriented toward homosexuality. The term is often applied to people who have strong negative feelings about homosexuals and to people who support antihomosexual activities', according to the Social Work Dictionary (1995). Homophobia can lead to much discrimination and even to hate crimes by those individuals within society who choose to remain uneducated and bigoted toward this particular population. For a teenager in this situation, who has not yet attained self-acceptance and feeling comfortable with himself, this attitude can result in anxiety, depression or even suicidal ideation.

It is hoped, therefore, that a study such as this can play a part in the future, in order to gain more insight into how a deeper understanding can play a part in making life a little easier for these young people by educating others. Social workers can play a large part in imparting

such valuable information not only to the teens themselves, but to their families also.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

As stated earlier, it is suggested that the parenting style which is experienced by a gay teen, has a significant impact upon the development of the identity of that individual in young adulthood. This can either be perceived as positive, with a strong and healthy sense of self, or conversely, as negative, where the individual is unable to come to terms with his or her homosexuality, living in fear of rejection or being unaccepted.

High school years are highlighted by much social interaction, taking many forms. This can involve sporting activities, dating, high school dances, not to mention the day to day interaction between peers. For a heterosexual teen, this can be a difficult enough period in trying to fit in, wanting to be accepted and simply trying to find their way to their self-identity. However, the pressures are far greater for the gay teen. Added to the aforementioned pressures is the fear of rejection due to sexual orientation. During these years, it would appear that there is a great need to conform, and when a gay teen senses that he is not able to be like his heterosexual counterparts, the alternative might be to alienate himself from his peers and become a loner. Especially important at this time, and particularly for boys, is the participation in sports. Studies have found that there is a definite distinction between the athlete and the non-



athlete, to the point where reputations and social relationships might be at stake (Stein and Hoffman, 1978). It was found that the athletes tended to categorize the non-athletes as somewhat inferior. Accordingly, for those gay teens who had no desire to become involved in sporting activities, this became an added stressor, along with possibly being labeled as being somewhat effeminate. There is much evidence to support the fact that effeminate boys and adult gay men have absolutely no interest in sports, or are even averse to them (Stein and Hoffman, 1978).

It is also during these high school years that the adolescent gay male finally comes to terms with the fact that his attraction is not for the females around him, but for the males. This can be accompanied by much stress in that realization, together with the very real fear of being found out and labeled (Dank, 1971). For many of these adolescents, in spite of this sexual attraction towards those of the same sex, many still choose to date the opposite sex, simply because it is 'the thing to do', and assists them in their peer acceptance (Saghir and Robins, 1973). However, for those individuals who feel uncomfortable in taking this course of action, this tends to leave them alienated to some degree and in a state of social isolation (Matza, 1964). It is likely that this

isolation could continue throughout the high school years, resulting in some damage to that teen's self-esteem.

With regard to the added stressors experienced by homosexual adolescents, and compounding the identity struggles that are a major focus of this developmental period, an important decision that these youth must make is whether or not to be open about their sexuality and 'come out'. This individual must weigh the pros and cons of how he or she will be judged, whether it will come with acceptance or rejection, and the future impact that this will have upon them. According to a study conducted in Minneapolis/St. Paul with middle class gay adolescents, one to two-thirds of youths reported experiencing stressors in their domain (Remafedi, 1987b). The author also reported that while 64% of the adolescents in the study had disclosed their sexual identity to friends within the past three months, only 31% had disclosed to parents. The accompanying stress and anxiety that is experienced by a gay adolescent, when making the decision whether or not to disclose, is made more stressful in the knowledge that others' reactions simply cannot be predicted (Remafedi, 1987b).

According to Remafedi (1987b), there are huge repercussions for the gay teen who has experienced rejection after disclosing their sexual orientation. This study found that 41% of gay males had lost a friend once

the disclosure was made, and a further 27% were abandoned by a friend who was extremely close to them. A further study demonstrated that for those gay male teens who had resorted to attempt suicide following rejection, they were actually more dependent upon those who had rejected them (Schneider, Farberow, and Kruks, 1989). This must demonstrate how very fragile their sense of self had become. Once a gay teen has disclosed to family and others, they are then at risk for abuse by family and others, verbally, emotionally and even physically (Martin & Hetrick, 1988). It is necessary, therefore, to become extremely aware of this and be vigilant to the possibility. In the study conducted by Remafedi (1987b), it was documented that over half the gay youths in the study had been subjected to verbal abuse by classmates over their sexual orientation, and a further one third were actually physically assaulted (a term we now recognize as "gay bashing"). It is unclear from the study as to the actual extent of the physical abuse and how related it was to their sexual orientation. Victimization based on known or suspected homosexual orientation is well known as a bias-related type of violence in the United States (Berrill, 1990; Comstock, 1991; Herek, 1989). Two-fifths of respondents in one study reported that verbal abuse was experienced from their own family members. A further 10% of respondents experienced actual physical

abuse from these same family members (Pilkington and D'Augelli, 1995).

With regard to gay-related stress, it is assumed that this stress is actually greater for those teens who have chosen to disclose their sexual orientation and now must suffer the repercussions. However, the above studies demonstrate that it is actually more stressful to the individual to choose to withhold the information and hide their sexual orientation. For many of these gay youths, living a lie and hiding the truth from family and friends can produce far more stress, resulting in anxiety, depression and even suicidal ideation.

For some homosexual teens, the stress becomes so overwhelming that there appears to be no other choice than to escape the pain and end the suffering by attempting suicide. While somewhat limited, existing information would appear to suggest that for this particular population, gay and lesbian youth are two to three times more likely to commit suicides than their heterosexual counterparts. These figures are reported to be some 30% of all adolescent suicides (Gibson, 1989). A further study, conducted by Remafedi, Farrow and Deisher (1991), found that of the gay and bisexual young men aged 14 to 21, who participated in the study, one-third had attempted suicide, and of these, half reported multiple attempts.

One study, conducted by Pilkington and D'Augelli (1995), reported that an extremely significant stressor for these homosexual teens is the disclosure of sexual orientation to those closest to them in their lives - their family and friends. Of the teens in their sample, only one third reported that the family reacted favorably to their disclosure. Less than one half reported their mothers as being accepting and only 28% reported their fathers feeling the same way. Those parents who were perceived as rejecting were 17% of the mothers and 25% of the fathers.

The above reactions lead to the issue of discussing parental reactions to a child revealing his or her homosexual orientation. According to a study conducted by MacDonald (1983), it is inevitable that this information automatically brings with it a certain amount of trauma, and, in some cases, the child-parent relationship can suffer irrevocable damage. It is immediately necessary for these parents to have to completely restructure the original goals and expectations that had always been in place for their child and realize that many of these dreams will now not come to pass (Boxer, Cook & Herdt, 1991). The reactions of many of these parents, when seeking professional mental health advice, have been described as similar to the grieving and mourning process, as described by Kubler-Ross (1969). There appears to be a

progression through similar stages; denial, anger, bargaining, depression and finally acceptance. This news to a family can be followed by a period of probably uncertainty, possible disruption, and in some cases, major chaos can be created.

According to one study, parents mourn "the loss of the heterosexual identity of the child and their hopes, dreams and expectations for a traditional life for their lesbian or gay child; the lack of grandchildren and the special relationship of being in a grandparent role; their perceived lack of success as parents and as individuals; and the improbability of changing their child's orientation" (Mahoney, 1994). He believes that parents go through the following stages: shock at the initial disclosure, at which time words might be spoken to the child which can never be taken back and which might impair the parent-child relationship irreparably. This is followed by denial and isolation, whereby the parents' anxiety brings about this denial, and perhaps refusal to acknowledge or discuss the information, in the hopes that it might "just be a phase". Anger is the next stage, once the denial can no longer continue, with emotions ranging from agitation, disappointment to total rage at their child. It is at this stage where a parent might seek to find an external cause for their child's homosexuality. This stage is followed by one of bargaining - for

religious parents, they might seek to make a "deal" with God, if He would only change this aberration. Others might threaten or bargain with the child, that they never reveal this secret to anyone, and they might even look to the possibility of seeking professional help with a view to some sort of conversion. Once these avenues have been pursued, depression is the next stage of emotion. Parents come to an awareness that the situation is out of their control and they simply have to resign themselves to the fact. Feelings of shame and humiliation are extremely prevalent at this time, together with fear for their child's future well being. Finally, acceptance is the only option left, whereby the parents simply have to acknowledge that they have a gay child. Through support groups and education, an equilibrium can be reached within the family and over time parents are able to come to terms with their child's need to express his or her sexual self.

In order for an individual to overcome the inevitable difficulties in life and reach a point where they might feel that they reached the ultimate, they might be described as being self-actualized. According to Abraham Maslow (1954), there are a hierarchical variety of needs that range from the basic physiological needs, such as food, water and shelter and ascending to safety, love and belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization. If one is fortunate enough to attain self-actualization, this

represents an individual having reached his or her full potential. Maslow (1970) and Sumerlin, (1995) have suggested that self-actualizers are individuals who often share certain characteristics, such as demonstrating autonomy, courage, creativity, democracy, are goal-oriented and are ultimately self-accepting. Conversely, this study also found that the authoritarian parenting style tended to inhibit self-actualization.

Nystul (1984) suggested that self-actualization might be associated with parenting style. He further stated that enhanced self-actualization in children was influenced by parental respect, encouragement and consistent discipline. A 1997 study looking at the relationship between parenting style and self-actualization in college-aged children did indeed find that there was a relation between the authoritative parenting style and the highest levels of self-actualization.

For the purposes of this paper, having reviewed only a small part of the literature available on this topic, a logical hypothesis might be that for those gay teens raised in a healthier, more involved atmosphere, acceptance of their sexual identity might be somewhat easier or more likely. Conversely, for these gay teens raised in a more rigid, controlled environment, acceptance might be less likely. With this in mind, therefore, it is



possible that there could be some connection between how these gay teens are raised and the eventual outcome of the parent-child relationship upon disclosure of sexual orientation. Up to this point in time, limited research has taken place with regard to the attributes and beliefs of these parents. Some aspects that have been investigated are religion, ethnicity, gender role orientation, age and gender, all of which have been linked to positive and negative reactions towards family members who are gay or lesbian (Bozett & Sussman, 1989; Morales, 1989; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Savin-Williams, 1989; Strommen, 1989; Tremble et al., 1989).

## METHODS

### Purpose and Design of the Study

The purpose of the proposed study was to explore and evaluate whether there is a link between the parenting style received by a gay teen and a later healthy identity formation for that individual. This was demonstrated through the self-reports of the participants with regard to the stressors that they were currently experiencing, their satisfaction with life and their general self-esteem. In order to obtain the necessary data, a post-positivist paradigm was utilized, which incorporated a qualitative method of gathering information. Through the use of this particular paradigm, it was hoped that the study would be able to demonstrate some trends or associations between the variables already discussed. In particular, the study focused upon such issues as self-acceptance or acceptance by others, positive sense of self, satisfaction with various aspects of their life, together with less positive aspects, such as possible anxiety, depression, or suicidal ideations.

The hypothesis for this study was as follows: it was hypothesized that gay teens who were parented in a more authoritative style would demonstrate evidence of a more positive self-identity. Conversely, it was hypothesized that gay teens who were parented in a more authoritarian style would demonstrate a poor self-identity. It was

further hypothesized that for those gay teens who were parented in a permissive style might demonstrate an equal sampling of both positive and negative self identity.

#### Sampling

For the purposes of this study a questionnaire was distributed to various established organizations, at social activities and gay and lesbian events, attended by the gay population. Specifically, two of the targeted establishments were the Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), Claremont chapter, and the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender (GLBT) and Ally Services at California State Polytechnical University, Pomona. It was initially anticipated that 50 - 75 gay and lesbian individuals might participate, with an age range between 18 and 35 years. It was believed that this age range would be able to allow for good recollection of adolescent events, together with a sufficient maturity that would allow for objectivity and reflective insight. Thereafter, the sample will be expanded through the use of snowball sampling should the necessary sample number not be obtained at the above venues. Due to the nature of this particular study, snowball sampling would appear to be the most obvious choice. Due to the fact that homosexuality carries with it some social stigma, this is not an easy population with which to work. In fact, the final sample

number of completed questionnaires numbered 41. This, however, was sufficient for the necessary analysis.

#### Data Collection and Instruments

For the purposes of this study, the data was collected through the distribution of a questionnaire that incorporated measurement of parenting style, life satisfaction, and self-esteem. In order to measure the type of parenting style an individual perceived during their formative years, Buri's Parental Authority Questionnaire (1989) was utilized. In terms of life satisfaction and self-esteem or self-acceptance, Mazrui's Self-Actualization instrument was utilized to determine these concepts. Likert-scale questions were utilized on the questionnaire. Permission to distribute the questionnaire was verbally obtained from both organizations (PFLAG and GLBT), with written permission secured thereafter.

## MEASURES

### Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ)

This study was specifically developed in order to measure Diana Baumrind's (1971) permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative parental authority prototypes. Several studies have determined that their results supported the PAQ as being 'a psychometrically sound and valid measure of Baumrind's parental authority prototypes.' Test-retest reliability of the measure reflected .81 for mother's permissiveness, .86 for mother's authoritarianism and .78 for mother's authoritative-ness. These results reflect sound reliability. When tested for discriminant-related validity, results of this measure demonstrated a divergence in the PAQ scores. Specifically, mother's authoritarianism was inversely related to mother's permissiveness ( $r = - .38, p < .0005$ ) and to mother's authoritative-ness ( $r = - .48, p < .0005$ ). Again, a sound validity is reflected.

### Self-Actualization Questionnaire

This particular instrument was selected due to the fact that the specific items so accurately defined the purpose of this study. The author, Jamal Mazrui, has devoted much of his research to the concept of self-actualization, and it is for this reason that this instrument was selected. However, it has not been possible to determine whether there have been prior studies conducted on this

questionnaire. It is, therefore, not possible to be able to address the validity or reliability of this measure at this time.

#### Demographic Questionnaire

Participants were asked to respond to a short list of demographic questions. These questions will address participants' age, ethnicity, education level, religion, demographic area of upbringing, family of origin situation, siblings, and described sexual identity.

#### Procedure

The final instrument in the form of a questionnaire was distributed to participating individuals attending social functions or meetings at PFLAG, Claremont chapter and at GLBT, CalPoly, Pomona. Participants were advised that the goal of the study was to determine whether parenting style had an impact on the ultimate self-acceptance of a gay or lesbian individual. They were then asked to complete the questionnaire. They also received a copy of the consent form and were debriefed upon completion of the questionnaire. The questionnaire took approximately 20 minutes to complete and was collected at the function premises. Information pertaining to the results of this study is available to participants, together with a contact person, should further information be necessary.

### Protection of Human Subjects

The participants in this study were asked to complete a questionnaire, consisting of two scales and a demographic questionnaire. In order to ensure confidentiality and the anonymity of these participants, there was no necessity to give any identifying information at any time on the questionnaire. All responses were coded, ensuring that there be no possibility of identification. All information obtained in this study was completely anonymous and all data was reported in group form only. Once all data was obtained and recorded, all surveys were destroyed, in order to protect confidentiality.

### Data Analysis

As previously noted, this study was exploratory in nature, with the utilization of a post-positivist paradigm. This approach suggests that while it is possible to focus on this particular issue, it is not possible to control the many outside variables that can also play a role. Post-positivist research can indicate certain trends or relationships and point to weak associations between variables once the information is collected and analyzed.

The instruments that were utilized in this study reflected Diana Baumrind's parenting styles, in the form of Buri's Parental Authority Questionnaire (see attached).

Level of self-acceptance was measured through Mazrui's Self-Actualization Survey (see attached). A third instrument was in the form of a demographic questionnaire. In identifying the three parenting styles, that is, authoritarian, authoritative and permissive, it was hypothesized that for those gay and lesbian teens who experienced a more rigid, authoritarian style of parenting, self-acceptance would be lower than for those teens who were parented in either the authoritative or permissive styles. Conversely, for those individuals who perceived having received a more authoritative or even permissive parenting style, their self-acceptance levels would be higher. This study was conducted through the use of a survey questionnaire, which was distributed at organization functions, with snowball sampling also utilized in order to access more data.

The collected data was analyzed through running frequencies, cross-tabs and simple chi-square analyses amongst variables, in order to determine whether there was any significance which might support the hypotheses.



## RESULTS

This study was conducted in order to explore the differing parenting styles received by participating individuals and their perceived self-acceptance. In order to answer the research questions the following current information was ascertained from participants. The results are presented in the following order: demographics, parenting styles, and self-esteem.

### Demographics

Appendix 1 presents the frequency distribution of responses from males and females on the demographic variables. To summarize, 21 males and 20 females filled out the questionnaire with ages ranging from 18 to 35 years. The mean age of the respondents was 23.73 years. Caucasians represented 48.8% of the sample population, Hispanic/Spanish/Latino represented 24.4%, with African American, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Native American/Native Alaskans and Other representing the remaining 26.8%. Religion was demonstrated with Catholic at 24.4%, Protestant at 14.6%, Agnostic, Atheist, Jewish, and Muslim at 14.5%, No Religious Affiliation at 12.2% and for Other, an overwhelming 34.1%. Education demonstrated that 36.6% completed high school, 22.0% attending community college, 12.2% a four-year college graduate and 14.6% post graduate, with 14.6% not having completed high school. For location of upbringing, 75.6% were from the West of

the USA, 19.5% from the East of USA, with 4.9% from other parts of the world. For family of origin, 73.2% reported living in a two parent family, 17.1% in a single parent family, headed by the mother, 4.9% in a single parent family headed by the father, and for other family, or blended family; both categories indicated 2.4%. For siblings in the family, 41.5% reported having sisters, 29.3% reported having both brothers and sisters, 19.5% reported brothers only, with 9.8% reporting having no siblings. In reporting having other gay relatives in the family, 61% of respondents indicated that they did not, with 39.0% indicating that they did. In labeling their identity, 70.7% indicated themselves to be gay or lesbian, and 29.3% indicated being bisexual.

#### Parenting Style

Using the five-point Likert scale to measure the three parenting styles, authoritarian, authoritative and permissive, participants were asked to rate their perception of how they were parented during their formative years. As shown in Appendix G, the respondents indicated a higher percentage of authoritative parenting, with authoritarian at the next level and permissive reflected at the lowest level. The authoritative parenting style was measured by questions such as, "As I was growing up, once family policy had been established, my mother discussed the reasoning behind the policy with

the children in the family," or "As I was growing up my mother directed the activities and decisions of the children in the family through reasoning and discipline." Authoritarian parenting was measured through questions, such as, "As I was growing up my mother did not allow me to question any decision she had made," or "My mother felt that wise parents should teach their children early just who is boss in the family." Finally, permissive parenting was measured with statements such as, "While I was growing up my mother felt that in a well-run home the children should have their way in the family as often as the parents do," or "My mother did not view herself as responsible for directing and guiding my behavior as I was growing up."

### Self-Esteem

In responding to this questionnaire, participants were measured in terms of high and low self-esteem. As demonstrated in Appendix G, high self-esteem was demonstrated at a far higher rate than low self-esteem. In order to determine the presence of healthy self-esteem, a sample of this was "I do not feel ashamed of any of my emotions" or "I can express my feelings even when they result in undesirable consequences". Low self-esteem was measured by questions such as, "I fear failure" or "I am bothered by fears of being inadequate."

### Parenting Style and Self-Esteem

Cross tabs and simple chi-squares were run in order to determine whether there was any association between the three variables of authoritative, authoritarian and permissive parenting style, and the two variables of high and low self-esteem. As indicated in Appendix H, no significance was demonstrated with regard to the measurement of these variables.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine whether any or all of the three parenting styles that this study focused upon had any influence upon the self-esteem of gay, lesbian or bisexual individuals, either positively or negatively. However, as demonstrated by the results of this particular study (see Appendix H), this was not found to be the case. There could be several explanations behind these findings. Firstly, the sample size of this particular population only numbered 41 individuals, perhaps not a large enough sample to be generalized. Secondly, the majority of the participants were college students, who perhaps had come to a place in their lives where they felt good about themselves, and were actively seeking further education in order to pursue their future career. This sample population did not appear to contain individuals who present themselves as struggling with their identity at all; in fact, as is demonstrated in Appendix G, their self-esteem appeared to be fairly high. Furthermore, with regard to the parenting styles perceived by this particular sample population, the graph in Appendix G indicates a higher percentage of authoritative parenting. As the literature demonstrates, this type of parenting would appear to be the most positive, with equal interaction between parents and children, together with guidance and nurturing on the part of the parents. Hardin

(1999) addresses the fact that family of origin plays a significant role in an individual's self-esteem, not only in terms of parenting styles, but also in expectations, the role of the individual within the family and methods of communication. While this is the case for every individual growing up in his or her family of origin, Hardin particularly speaks to the gay and lesbian population. He particularly stresses that the parenting style with which one is brought up can have a major impact upon the development of one's core beliefs, and consequently their ultimate self-esteem.

With regard to the authoritarian parenting style, there tends to be a dictatorship at the head of the household. The dictator tends to be subtly judgmental which can lead to belittling, devaluing and discriminatory, possibly even resulting in aggression towards others who are different and threaten their authority. This type of parenting can result in threats of rejection, either literally or emotionally. It is plain that for a gay or lesbian individual growing up in such an environment, it could definitely lead to much negative thinking, not to mention extremely poor self-esteem. However, as indicated in Appendix G, this parenting style was not demonstrated to a great degree in this particular study.

Permissive parenting is seen as the opposite end of the spectrum from authoritarian. However, in spite of the fact that these parents tend to be more emotionally supportive or caring, problems with self-esteem are still a problem for individuals who have been parented in this manner. The parents' lack of setting limits or boundaries can be perceived as emotional neglect, leading to feelings of being unimportant and unappreciated. It is clear, that this is not a healthy environment in which to develop, particularly for the gay or lesbian individual, who is already struggling with his or her own sense of identity.

This brings us to the third parenting style, that of authoritarian, which has already been demonstrated to be the most healthy, balanced manner in which to grow up. This environment maintains an atmosphere of open communication, trust and respect. Through guidance and clear consequences for the individual, a child's sense of personal power and positive self-image is the ultimate goal. These parents are able to provide a sense of consistent emotional support and love even during the most stressful of events. Positive messages are constantly given and received, which ultimately leads the individual to believe that they have value within the family and in the world.

One interesting finding with regard to the demographics of the sample population was the fact that

only 12.2% of participants reported having no religious affiliation, which might indicate that having some spiritual meaning in life could contribute to a more positive sense of self. According to Hardin (1999), when confronting life's many struggles, a great source of peace, strength and growth can be achieved through having a healthy, balanced and active spiritual life. Hardin states moreover that spirituality does not necessarily mean being involved with major religious institutions - some of whom may be intolerant or condemnatory of the gay lifestyle - but it can also mean having internal resources of the human spirit. This might therefore be a contributing factor to the figures demonstrating a higher rate of good self-esteem.

A further interesting finding was the number of gay relatives reported in the family by the participants. While 61% indicated having no gay relatives, a substantial 39% indicated affirmatively. While no research to date has been able to determine an absolute cause for an individual's homosexuality, Ruse (1981, Storms (1980) and Zuger (1976) have all recognized the importance of biological factors. Research completed in 1986 by Pillard and Weinrich gave additional support for the importance of biological factors and they also suggest that homosexuality "clumps" in families, as when 22% of gay men



reported having gay or bisexual brothers, compared to only 4% of heterosexual men who had gay siblings.

To summarize the issues which have been the focus of this study: the parenting style received by a gay, lesbian or bisexual individual and any possible impact that it might have upon their ultimate self-acceptance. While this study was not able to find a significant association between these variables, several of the findings indicated that for this particular sample population, there was an overall representation of positive self-esteem, together with a further indication of authoritative parenting having been perceived.

#### Limitations of Study

It must be noted that there were some limitations inherent in this study. One is that there is a general weakness with regard to survey research. This particular instrument could be subject to semantic connotations, and particularly, for this type of population, there might be a tendency for individuals to not give accurate or completely honest responses. Also, due to the sensitive and often-stigmatized view of homosexuality, the accuracy of any findings might not be subject to generalizability, simply due to many individuals in this population not being open and available for inclusion.

The study might have been limited by the small sample size obtained for this particular population. Future

research might incorporate a more varied sample representation, such as non-college educated individuals, and the collection of a larger sample number, in order to be able to give more generalizability to the study. A further limitation to the study might be that the questionnaire tended to focus solely upon the parenting of the mother in the home. Future studies should also take into account the parenting style of the father also, assuming that he played a role in the upbringing of the gay or lesbian individual.

#### Strengths of the Study

With regard to possible strengths of the study, the anonymity of the instrument might be of encouragement to those reluctant to participate in this population. Also, through the use of snowball sampling, this gave an opportunity to reach a greater number of respondents than would in-depth interviews allow. Furthermore, greater awareness and education in this particular area is always of benefit and can only assist in gaining a greater understanding of this stigmatized population.

#### Implications for Social Work

Much homophobia exists in the world today and it is vital that social workers are able to deal with their own feelings surrounding this difficult issue. It is important to be aware that this is a very real problem for many families today, and with that in mind, it is

extremely important for the professional to become better educated with regard to this population. According to a study conducted by Savin-Williams (1995), he found that parents of gay and lesbian young people who were able to accept their sexual orientation had high self-esteem and indicated a strong sense of wholeness and authenticity. Conversely, for those individuals whose parents were not able to come to acceptance, they felt extreme isolation and a sense of not belonging to the family. These feelings can lead to much stress and depression on the part of the gay individual. It is, therefore, vital that we as a profession find a way to be able to help not only that individual, but the family as a whole. Other areas of growth might be in the setting up of support groups, both for the gay individual, and also for the families and relatives. While this particular study might indicate a fairly positive situation, this might not be the case for many others who face discrimination and lack of acceptance. It is our job to be aware and informed of all aspects of this sensitive subject.

## APPENDIX A: Parental Authority Questionnaire

*Instructions:* For each of the following statements, circle the number on the 5-point scale(1= *strongly disagree*, 5= *strongly agree*) that best describes how that statement applies to you and your mother. Try to read and think about each statement as it applies to you and your mother during your years of growing up at home. There are no right or wrong answers, so don't spend a lot of time on any one item. We are looking for your overall impression regarding each statement. Be sure not to omit any items.

	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Unsure</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>
1. While I was growing up my mother felt that in a well-run home the children should have their way in the family as often as the parents do.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Even if her children didn't agree with her, my mother felt that it was for our own good if we were forced to conform to what she thought was right	1	2	3	4	5
3. Whenever my mother told me to do something as I was growing up, she expected me to do it immediately without asking any questions.	1	2	3	4	5
4. As I was growing up, once family policy had been established, my mother discussed the reasoning behind the policy with the children in the family.	1	2	3	4	5
5. My mother has always encouraged verbal give-and-take whenever I have felt that family rules and restrictions were unreasonable.	1	2	3	4	5

	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Unsure</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>
6.	My mother has always felt that what children need is to be free to make up their own minds and to do what they want to do, even if this does not agree with what their parents might want.				
	1	2	3	4	5
7.	As I was growing up my mother did not allow me to question any decision she had made.				
	1	2	3	4	5
8.	As I was growing up my mother directed the activities and decisions of the children in the family through reasoning and discipline.				
	1	2	3	4	5
9.	My mother has always felt that more force should be used by parents in order to get their children to behave the way they are supposed to.				
	1	2	3	4	5
10.	As I was growing up my mother did <i>not</i> feel that I needed to obey rules and regulations of behavior simply because someone in authority had established them.				
	1	2	3	4	5
11.	As I was growing up I knew what my mother expected of me in my family, but I also felt free to discuss those expectations with my mother when I felt that they were unreasonable.				
	1	2	3	4	5
12.	My mother felt that wise parents should teach their children early just who is boss in the family.				
	1	2	3	4	5

- |     | <u>Strongly<br/>Disagree</u>   | <u>Disagree</u> | <u>Unsure</u> | <u>Agree</u> | <u>Strongly<br/>Agree</u> |
|-----|--|-----------------|---------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| 13. | As I was growing up, my mother seldom gave me expectations and guidelines for my behavior.   |                 |               |              |                           |
|     | 1  | 2               | 3             | 4            | 5                         |
| 14. | Most of the time as I was growing up my mother consistently gave us direction and guidance in rational and objective ways.   |                 |               |              |                           |
|     | 1  | 2               | 3             | 4            | 5                         |
| 15. | As the children in my family were growing up, my mother consistently gave us direction and guidance in rational and objective ways.  |                 |               |              |                           |
|     | 1  | 2               | 3             | 4            | 5                         |
| 16. | As I was growing up my mother would get very upset if I tried to disagree with her.  |                 |               |              |                           |
|     | 1  | 2               | 3             | 4            | 5                         |
| 17. | My mother feels that most problems in society would be solved if parents would <i>not</i> restrict their children's activities, decisions, and desires as they are growing up. |                 |               |              |                           |
|     | 1  | 2               | 3             | 4            | 5                         |
| 18. | As I was growing up my mother let me know what behavior she expected of me, and if I didn't meet those expectations, she punished me.  |                 |               |              |                           |
|     | 1  | 2               | 3             | 4            | 5                         |
| 19. | As I was growing up my mother allowed me to decide most things for myself without a lot of direction from her.   |                 |               |              |                           |
|     | 1  | 2               | 3             | 4            | 5                         |

- |     | Strongly<br><u>Disagree</u>  | <u>Disagree</u> | <u>Unsure</u> | <u>Agree</u> | Strongly<br><u>Agree</u> |
|-----|--|-----------------|---------------|--------------|--------------------------|
| 20. | As I was growing up my mother took the children's opinions into consideration when making family decisions, but she would not decide for something simply because the children wanted it.                              |                 |               |              |                          |
|     | 1  | 2               | 3             | 4            | 5                        |
| 21. | My mother did not view herself as responsible for directing and guiding my behavior as I was growing up.   |                 |               |              |                          |
|     | 1  | 2               | 3             | 4            | 5                        |
| 22. | My mother had clear standards of behavior for the children in our home as I was growing up, but she was willing to adjust those standards to the needs of each of the individual children in the family.               |                 |               |              |                          |
|     | 1  | 2               | 3             | 4            | 5                        |
| 23. | My mother gave me direction for my behavior and activities as I was growing up and she expected me to follow her direction, but she was always willing to listen to my concerns and to discuss that direction with me. |                 |               |              |                          |
|     | 1  | 2               | 3             | 4            | 5                        |
| 24. | As I was growing up my mother allowed me to form my own point of view on family matters and she generally allowed me to decide for myself what I was going to do.  |                 |               |              |                          |
|     | 1  | 2               | 3             | 4            | 5                        |
| 25. | My mother has always felt that most problems in society would be solved if we could get parents to strictly and forcibly deal with their children when they don't do what they are supposed to as they are growing up. |                 |               |              |                          |
|     | 1  | 2               | 3             | 4            | 5                        |

- |   | <u>Strongly<br/>Disagree</u> | <u>Disagree</u> | <u>Unsure</u> | <u>Agree</u> | <u>Strongly<br/>Agree</u> |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| 26. As I was growing up my mother often told me exactly what she wanted me to do and how she expected me to do it.  | 1                            | 2               | 3             | 4            | 5                         |
| 27. As I was growing up my mother gave me clear direction for my behaviors and activities, but she was also understanding when I disagreed with her.                          | 1                            | 2               | 3             | 4            | 5                         |
| 28. As I was growing up my mother did not direct the behaviors, activities and desires of the children in the family.   | 1                            | 2               | 3             | 4            | 5                         |
| 29. As I was growing up I knew what my mother expected of me in the family and she insisted that I conform to those expectations simply out of respect for her authority.     | 1                            | 2               | 3             | 4            | 5                         |
| 30. As I was growing up, if my mother made a decision in the family that hurt me, she was willing to discuss that decision with me and to admit it if she had made a mistake. | 1                            | 2               | 3             | 4            | 5                         |



## SELF-ACCEPTANCE QUESTIONNAIRE

*Instructions:* For each of the following statements, circle the number on the 5-point scale

(1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) that best describes how you feel. There are no

right or wrong answers, simply determine the answer that is the closest to your feeling. Be sure not to omit any items.

---

	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Unsure</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>
1. I do not feel ashamed of any of my emotions.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I feel I must do what others expect me to do.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I believe that people are essentially good and can be trusted.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I feel free to be angry at those I love.	1	2	3	4	5
5. It is always necessary that others approve of what I do.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I don't accept my own weaknesses.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I can like people without having to approve of them.	1	2	3	4	5

<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Unsure</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>
8. I fear failure.				
1	2	3	4	5
9. I avoid attempts to analyze and simplify areas that are difficult for me.				
1	2	3	4	5
10. It is better to be yourself than to be popular.				
1	2	3	4	5
11. I have no mission in life to which I feel especially dedicated.				
1	2	3	4	5
12. I can express my feelings even when they result in undesirable consequences.				
1	2	3	4	5
13. I do not feel responsible to help anybody.				
1	2	3	4	5
14. I am bothered by fears of being inadequate.				
1	2	3	4	5
15. I am loved because I give love.				
1	2	3	4	5

## APPENDIX B: Demographic Information

The following information is requested for statistical purposes. Please answer the questions accordingly, and do not put your name on any of the pages in order to ensure confidentiality.

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Gender: Male \_\_\_\_\_  
Female \_\_\_\_\_

3. Ethnicity:

- \_\_\_\_\_ African-American/Black
- \_\_\_\_\_ Asian/Pacific Island
- \_\_\_\_\_ Caucasian
- \_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic/Latino/Spanish
- \_\_\_\_\_ Native American/Native Alaskan
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Religion (circle one):

Agnostic  
Catholic

Atheist      Buddhist

Islam      Jewish

Muslim      Protestant

No religious affiliation

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Education:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Did not complete high school
- \_\_\_\_\_ Completed high school/GED
- \_\_\_\_\_ Community college
- \_\_\_\_\_ Four year college graduate
- \_\_\_\_\_ Post graduate

6. Where were you raised (spent most of your life)? City/State/Country

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Family:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Two parent family
- \_\_\_\_\_ Blended family

8. Siblings:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Brothers
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sisters

- \_\_\_\_\_ Single parent family (mother head of household)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Single parent family (father head of household)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other family (e.g. grandparents, aunts, etc.)

\_\_\_\_\_ Other

9. Are there any other gay relatives in your family? ☐ Yes  
☐ No
10. Self description/Identity: ☐ Lesbian or Gay  
☐ Bisexual

## APPENDIX C: Informed Consent

Department of Social Work  
California State University, San Bernardino

The study in which you are about to participate is designed to investigate the relationship between the effects of parenting style on gay and lesbian teens and self-acceptance. This study is being conducted by Diana Bristow, MSW student at CSUSB, under the supervision of Ms. Zoila Gordon, L.C.S.W., Social Work Department. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of California State University, San Bernardino.

For the purposes of this study, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire, comprised of approximately 55 questions. The study requires approximately 20-25 minutes to complete.

Please be assured that any information you provide will be held in strict confidence by the researchers. At no time will your name be reported along with your responses. All data will be reported in group form only. At the conclusion of this study, you may receive a report of the results.

Please understand that your participation in this research is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time during this study without penalty, and to remove any data at any time during this study.

If you have any questions about this study, or would like a report of its results, please contact Diana Bristow or Ms. Gordon at (909) 880-7222.

By placing a mark in the space provided below, I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and understand the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate. By this mark, I further acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age.

Give your consent to participate by making a check or 'X' here: \_\_\_\_\_

Today's date is \_\_\_\_\_

#### APPENDIX D: Debriefing Statement

This research study was conducted by Diana Bristow, second year student in the M.S.W. (Masters in Social Work) program under the supervision of Ms. Zoila Gordon, L.C.S.W., Field Faculty Liaison, Social Work Department at California State University, San Bernardino. The instrument used in the study was Buri's Parental Authority Questionnaire, an instrument which is frequently used to measure parenting style. The Self-Actualization scale was developed by Jamal Mazrui, which measures level of self-esteem.

If any of the questions asked on the above measurements or any aspect of the research caused you any emotional stress, you can contact your local family service agency. You can find the number of the agency in the yellow pages of your telephone book or by calling 1-800-564-8956.

A brief summary of the findings and conclusion of the study will be available after June 1, 2000 and can be obtained by calling Diana Bristow or Ms. Gordon at (909) 880-7222. Thank you for your participation in the study.

APPENDIX E: Letter of Consent

Dr. Morley Glicken  
Department of Social Work  
California State University, San Bernardino  
5500 University Parkway  
San Bernardino, CA 92407-2397

To Dr. Glicken:

This letter serves as notification to the Department of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino, that Diana Bristow has obtained consent from PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), Claremont chapter, to conduct the research project entitled "The Impact of Parenting Style and Self-Acceptance on Gays and Lesbians".

If you have questions regarding this letter of consent, you may contact

\_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (printed) Title/Position at PFLAG



Dr. Morley Glicken  
Department of Social Work  
California State University, San Bernardino  
5500 University Parkway  
San Bernardino, CA 92407-2397

To Dr. Glicken:

This letter serves as notification to the Department of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino, that Diana Bristow has obtained consent from the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Ally Services at California Polytechnical University, Pomona, to conduct the research project entitled "The Impact of Parenting Style and Self-Acceptance on Gays and Lesbians".

If you have questions regarding this letter of consent, you may contact

\_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_  
Name/Title Phone Number

Sincerely,

_____	_____
Signature	Date
_____	_____
Name (printed)	Title/Position at GLBT

## APPENDIX F: Data Demographics

### Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=41)

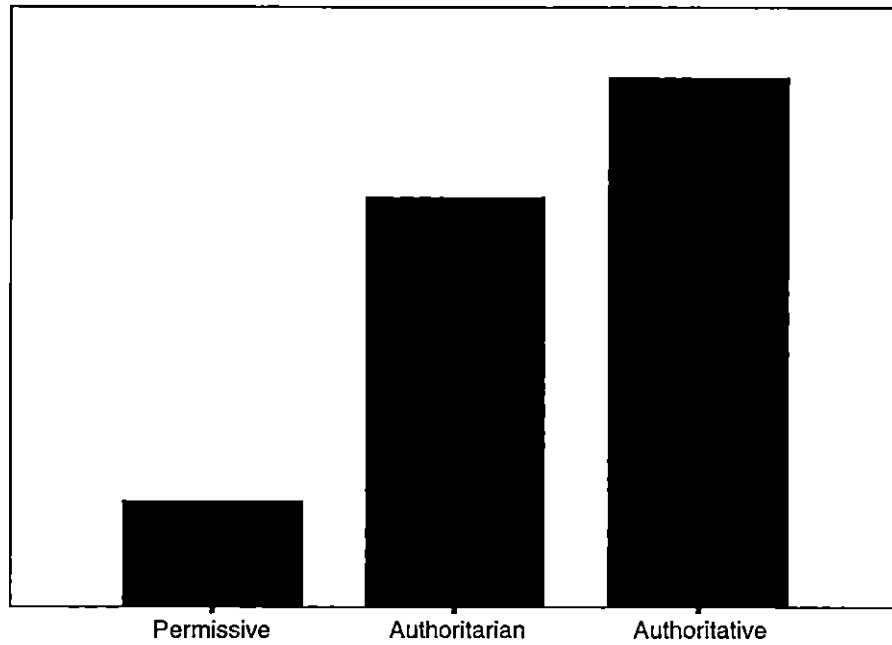
Age: Range 18 to 35 years

Mean age is 23.73

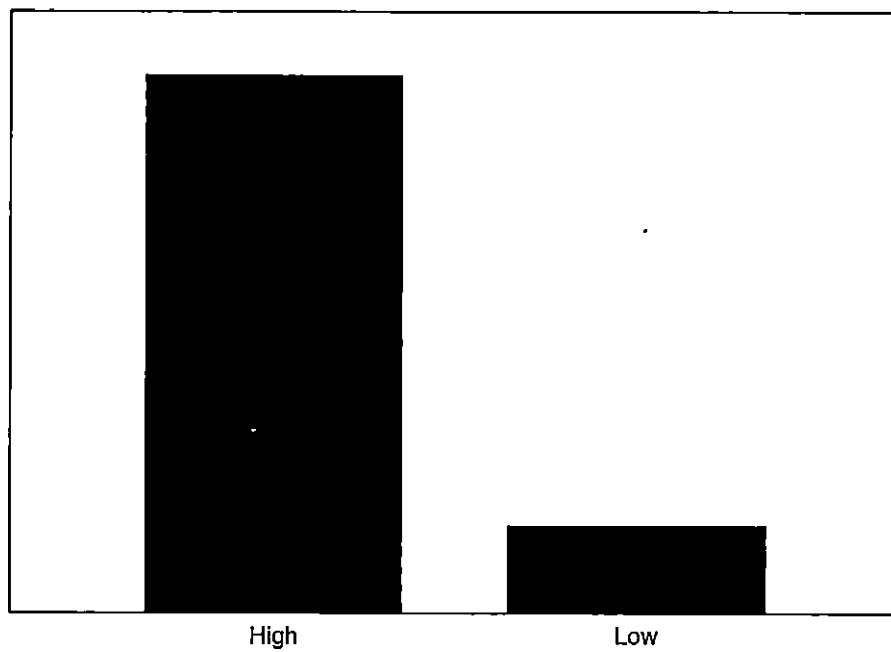
Characteristic and Category	f	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Gay man	21	51.2
Lesbian or Bisexual	20	48.8
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
African American	3	7.3
Asian/Pacific Islander	2	4.9
Caucasian	20	48.8
Hispanic/Spanish/Latino	10	24.4
Native American/Native Alaskan	1	2.4
Other	5	12.2
<b>Religion</b>		
Agnostic	3	7.3
Atheist	1	2.4
Catholic	10	24.4
Jewish	1	2.4
Muslim	1	2.4
Protestant	6	14.6
No religious affiliation	5	12.2
Other	14	34.1
<b>Education</b>		
Did not complete high school	6	14.6
Completed high school/GED	15	36.6
Community college	9	22.0
Four year college graduate	5	12.2
Post graduate	6	14.6
<b>Location of upbringing</b>		
West USA	31	75.6
East USA	8	19.5
Other	2	4.9
<b>Family</b>		
Two parent family	30	73.2
Single parent family (mother head household)	7	17.1
Single parent family (father head household)	2	4.9
Other family (e.g. grandparents, aunts, etc.)	1	2.4
Blended family	1	2.4
<b>Siblings</b>		
Brothers	8	19.5
Sisters	17	41.5
Both	12	29.3
None	4	9.8
<b>Gay relatives</b>		
Yes	16	39.0
No	25	61.0
<b>Self Description/Identity</b>		
Lesbian or Gay	29	70.7
Bisexual	12	29.3

## APPENDIX G: Parenting Styles and Self-Esteem Table

### PARENTING STYLES



### SELF-ESTEEM



# APPENDIX H: Data Results

		HIGH			LOW		
		Value	df	Asymp Sig (2- sided	Value	df	Asymp Sig (2- sided
AUTHORITATIVE	Pearson Chi-Square	273.276	264	.334	418.639	384	.108
	Likelihood Ratio	147.732	264	1.000	170.360	384	1.000
	Linear-by linear Association	.047	1	.829	.782	1	.377
	N of Valid Cases	41			41		
AUTHORITARIAN	Pearson Chi-Square	280.338	264	.234	383.008	384	.505
	Likelihood Ratio	150.505	264	1.000	166.541	384	1.000
	Linear-by linear Association	.187	1		.006	1	.940
	N of Valid Cases	41			41		
PERMISSIVE	Pearson Chi-Square	255.783	231	.126	360.878	336	.168
	Likelihood Ratio	142.223	231	1.000	163.124	336	1.000
	Linear-by linear Association	.735	1	.391	.228	1	.633
	N of Valid Cases	41			41		

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