"Coming out" stories of gay and lesbian young adults: Relation between memory characteristics and psychological well-being

Nicole E. Rossi

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"COMING OUT" STORIES OF GAY AND LESBIAN YOUNG ADULTS:
RELATION BETWEEN MEMORY CHARACTERISTICS
AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in
Psychology

September, 2007
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ABSTRACT

"COMING OUT" STORIES OF GAY AND LESBIAN YOUNG ADULTS:
RELATION BETWEEN MEMORY CHARACTERISTICS
AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

by

Nicole E. Rossi

University of New Hampshire, September, 2007

Gay and lesbian young adults (N = 53) were interviewed in detail about coming out for the first time to each of their parents. Participants also completed an extensive battery of psychological measures, including event centrality related to disclosure to their mother and father, parental attachment, attitudes toward homosexuality, relationship satisfaction, anxiety, and depression. Analyses of memory content and structure (complexity, coherence, descriptiveness) were conducted, and the relation between memory qualities and well-being were analyzed. Hypotheses related to disclosure to parents and peers were largely supported. The majority of participants first disclosed their sexual orientation to a friend. More participants came out to their mother than to their father, and when disclosure was made to both parents, mothers were more likely to be told prior to fathers. Mothers were most often told using direct methods, such as a face-to-face conversation, whereas fathers were more likely to be informed using indirect methods, such as in a letter or via another person. Mothers also tended to first inquire about their sons' sexuality, which ultimately led to their disclosure;
mothers inquired about sexual orientation less with their daughters. Related to psychosocial well-being, individuals with more positive attitudes toward homosexuality were more satisfied with romantic relationships and less anxious. More positive relationships with parents were associated with a secure homosexual identity and less anxiety. In contrast, highly central and negative or mixed feelings about coming out to mothers were associated with a less secure homosexual identity. There were only scattered and unexpected findings related to narrative complexity, descriptiveness, and coherence. Grade level and reading ease were related to attachment; positive relationships with parents were associated with more simplistic coming out narratives. Individuals with more descriptive narratives, as measured by the proportion of adjective, adverbs, and modifiers, were more depressed. Lastly, participants with highly central and negative coming out experiences with fathers produced more coherent narratives. Findings are discussed in relation to the autobiographical memory, sexuality, attachment, and clinical literatures. Future directions and conclusions are also presented.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

It just happened this past Sunday. Um, I was nervous obviously and I was just like alright I have to tell you guys something. So they stopped the car and I was just like I'm gay. Any my mom was like ok, do you have a girlfriend? And I said no. And my dad said how do you know? And then my mother started to cry a little bit. And um, and my dad was just smiling, and he's just like I kind of figured. My mom was like yeah, you dropped a lot of hints. And then I just said I don't want you guys to ignore this. And um, then they said what do you want us to do? And then my mom asked if I had any gay friends and um, if there was any clubs here or anything? And I told her about Alliance and um I told her that I have gay friends. And um, my dad's like I'll still love you kid. And then I just asked my mom how she would feel about telling the rest of the family and she said I think yeah. She said if this is what's gonna make you happy. So that's it yeah. (participant #1051)

Although the "coming out" theme of the previous participant's account--the process by which one declares his or her identity to be "homosexual," "gay" or "lesbian" to family, friends, or significant others--may not be familiar to most
readers, we all have personal stories of emotional high and low points (Boxer, Cook, & Herdt, 1991). In everyday life there are rare moments, marked by “distinctive, circumscribed, highly emotional and influential episodes” (Pillemer 2001, p. 123). Such moments can be categorized as personal event memories if they represent an event that took place at a particular time and place, contain a detailed account of the person’s personal circumstances, and include sensory imagery (Pillemer, 1998). This fits the description of “flashbulb memories;” vivid memories for circumstances surrounding a very surprising or consequential event (Brown & Kulik, 1977). Most flashbulb memory studies have examined recollections of learning about public events, such as assassinations of prominent political figures (Brown & Kulik, 1977), or national disasters like the Challenger explosion and September 11th (Bohannon, 1988; Talarico & Rubin, 2003). In contrast, fewer studies of flashbulb memories have examined personal milestones, such as gaining acceptance into college (Tekcan, 2001). The current study focuses on a momentous event in the lives of gay and lesbian young adults: coming out to parents.

As psychologists, we can learn quite a bit about people based on the content of remembered autobiographical episodes. These “highly accessible and vivid personal memories help to give meaning and structure to our life narratives and help to anchor and stabilize our conceptions of ourselves” as social creatures in the world and across our life span (Berntsen & Rubin, 2006, p. 219). Furthermore, the manner in which people organize these memories into a spoken narrative can be predictive of current levels of psychological functioning.
The main goal of this research is to examine the content, organization, and impact of young adults' "coming out" personal event narratives and their relation to psychological and social well-being.

In the present study, gay and lesbian young adults were interviewed in detail about coming out for the first time to each of their parents. Participants also completed an extensive battery of psychological measures, including event centrality related to disclosure to their mother and father, parental attachment, attitudes toward homosexuality, relationship satisfaction, anxiety, and depression. Analyses of memory content and structure were conducted, and the relation between memory qualities and well-being were analyzed.

First, I will review literature relevant to themes in the current study, including coming out to parents and peers, attitudes toward homosexuality, attachment to parents, the directive function of memory, event centrality, and the relation between memory characteristics and psychological well-being. Then, I will offer a series of hypotheses based on findings discussed in the literature, as well as outline in detail my methodological approach to collecting, coding, and analyzing the data. After presenting the results, I will discuss potential applications and implications of the current study for both researchers and practitioners in the fields of autobiographical memory, human sexuality, and attachment.

**Coming Out to Parents**

In the United States, approximately five to six percent of adolescents in grades 7-12 identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (Udry, 2001).
Thus, a conservative estimate places the number of school-aged GLBT youth somewhere between 2.25 and 2.7 million (Udry, 2001). For these youth, disclosing a same-sex sexual identity to parents has long been portrayed by mental health professionals as a profound developmental milestone (see review in Radkowsky & Siegel, 1997). Despite its importance, in rare cases are parents the first people to whom adolescents and young adults disclose their sexual orientation. For most youth, coming out to parents is typically a later developmental milestone, which occurs long after the first awareness of same-sex attractions (Savin-Williams, 2001). The age at which youths disclose their sexual orientation to their parents is approximately 17 years; however, there is quite a wide range, varying from age 13 to never (D'Augelli, 2006; Savin-Williams, 2001). Still, the current age of revealing to parents one's sexual orientation as gay or lesbian has been reduced in comparison to the average ten years ago; some adolescents are coming out in high school, yet others are doing so in junior high school or even middle school (Ryan & Futterman, 1997; Savin-Williams, 2001).

Given that parental relationships maintain their importance during adolescence (Moretti & Holland, 2003), it is understandable that “for many gay and lesbian youths, the most difficult decision to make after recognizing, and then accepting to some degree, their nontraditional sexual orientation is to reveal to their parents that they will not be fulfilling the heterosexual dreams of their parents” (Savin-Williams, 1989, p. 1). Thus, most individuals acknowledge in their coming out narratives the expectation that their parents will not react in a
positive and supportive manner (Savin-Williams, 2003). For example, the coming out story of participant #1226 to her mother illustrates the underlying psychological issues surrounding coming out.

We were going over, my mom hates bridges and we’re actually going over a really large bridge and um she was driving and I was in the passenger seat and I told her um that I was bisexual. I came out as bisexual first because I felt that I couldn’t come out as a lesbian because that would be the pinnacle of disappointment somehow. That maybe if I came out as bisexual um that that would be somehow reconcilable because that there would be like myths that I still like men and that’s actually, she was really shocked, and that’s actually one of the first things that she said afterwards was like, so you still like men right? And um, so that for the next couple of weeks that kept me really in the closet as a lesbian with her saying that. Um, but after a couple of weeks I told her, I’m like, I’m not bisexual, I was I’m a lesbian and I meant to come out as a lesbian but I’d feel safe to do, I didn’t feel comfortable to do that and your comment put me like deeper in that closet. Um, so she felt guilty. So, like there were things how she was feeling about it that she wasn’t telling me and I’ve always been aware of this and so I’ve never really, I never really talk about like hey remember when I came out, or I never really bring up the initial coming out story because I don’t want to hear about how it made her
uncomfortable because um through high school I couldn’t handle that kind of disappointment, um that I disappointed her or something. You can never um be entirely approved of accepted from that point, even though my parents love me and they accept me, and like but like there is this notion for me that there’s never from that point on there’s no real pleasing them because of not being heterosexual. (participant #1226)

As evidenced in the previous narrative, common fears include feeling rejected, “provoking parental guilt, worsening the relationship with parents, being blamed, and hurting or disappointing parents” (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003, p. 430). If the family is functioning and coexisting peacefully these fears may be accentuated, because the child has more to lose by coming out (Waldner & Magruder, 1999).

Like participant #1226, when gay and lesbian youths disclose their minority sexual identity, it is typically to their mother before their father (D’Augelli, 2003; Savin-Williams, 1998a). Specifically, among adolescents involved in a community support group, over 60% of gay and lesbian individuals first told their mother (D’Augelli & Hershberger, 1993). Youths usually feel more comfortable telling their mother prior to their father; they believe mothers are better able to understand their life circumstances and will be less likely than fathers to respond with anger, verbal, and/or physical abuse (see Savin-Williams & Dubé, 1998). Yet, the reality is somewhat different from the belief; mothers are more likely than fathers to verbally abuse a sexual-minority youth following disclosure, particularly
a lesbian daughter (Savin-Williams & Dubé, 1998). Even so, more mothers (88%) than fathers (59%) were rated as being accepting by their lesbian daughters (D'Augelli, 2003). Regardless of gender, more mothers (46%) than fathers (28%) initially accepted their child following disclosure (Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1995).

In addition to differences in the rate of disclosure to mothers and fathers, the manner in which children tell their parents also varies. In a sample of Israeli lesbian and gay men, mothers were usually told in a face to face meeting with their children (Ben-Ari, 1995). Similarly, in a sample of Chicago youth, three-quarters told their mother about their same sex attractions directly (Herdt & Boxer, 1993). Mothers are also more likely to directly ask a child about his or her sexual orientation. According to Savin-Williams (2001), one out of 3 youths has a mother who specifically asked; this is especially true for sons. Fathers were just as likely to be told directly as through indirect methods, such as a letter or being told by their wives (Ben-Ari, 1995). On the whole, both females and males are less 'out' with their fathers than their mothers (D'Augelli, 2003; Savin-Williams, 1990).

In the current study, content themes present in narratives are examined to determine if emerging themes replicate findings from previous studies related to adolescents and young adults coming out as homosexual to their parents. A thematic content analysis will also help to illuminate any prominent qualities or patterns not previously identified in the literature.
Coming Out to Peers

Usually same-sex sexual identity disclosure is first made directly to same-age peers (Savin-Williams, 1998a). According to a study by D'Augelli & Hershberger (1993), with a sample of 194 lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth (aged 15-21 years) who attended programs in 14 community centers, 73% first disclosed to a friend. Similarly, 78% of college-aged gay and bisexual men interviewed by Savin-Williams (1998b) reported coming out to a friend first, typically a female who was either a best friend, someone the individual was dating, or had dated in the past. Additionally, in an internet study with nearly 2,000 sexual-minority youth between the ages of 10 and 25, 46% first disclosed to “my best friend,” 22% “friends at school,” and 15% “friends outside of school or work” (OutProud, 1998). In the same internet survey at far lower percentages were mother (6%), brother or sister (4%), and father (3%).

Even though gay and lesbian individuals typically reveal their same-sex attractions to peers, it is not done so without worry or fear. For example, Pilkington and D'Augelli (1995) reported that 36% of young men and 27% of young women limited disclosure of their sexual orientation due to the fear of losing friends. Fear of rejection from friends and loss of friendships may be particularly stressful because peer relations and time spent with peers is increasingly important during the adolescent and young adult years (Moretti & Holland, 2003). Specifically during these years, friends are frequent popular providers of companionship, intimate disclosure, “reassurance of worth,
Attitudes Toward Homosexuality

Gay and lesbian youths have been shown to be at higher risk for emotional distress, including depression, anxiety, and suicidality, than are heterosexual youths (Faulkner & Cranston, 1998; Fergusson, Horwood, & Beautrais, 1999; Lock & Steiner, 1998; Remafedi, French, Story, Resnick, & Blum, 1998; Safren & Heimberg, 1999). One explanation for elevated levels of emotional distress among gay and lesbian youth could be due to experiencing a unique set of stressors related to being a sexual minority (e.g., Coyle, 1998; Rosario, Rotheram-Borus, & Reid, 1996). For example, gay-related stress could be internal in nature, involving an internalization of society's stigmatization of homosexuality. Just because disclosure of a same-sex sexual orientation is made to others, it cannot be assumed that a gay or lesbian individual will be completely comfortable with his/her homosexuality. Many gay and lesbian individuals share society's negative attitudes towards homosexuality, in part because they were raised by their parents and in a society that expects them to be heterosexual (Igartua, Gill, & Montoro, 2003; Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter, & Gwadz, 2002). This phenomenon is known as internalized homophobia, or the internalization of discrimination, which can lead to dissonance and conflict on the part of homosexual individuals (Meyer, 1995; Ross & Rosser, 1996).

With respect to functional outcomes specifically, Dupras (1994) examined links between internalized homophobia and psychosexual tendencies with a
sample of 261 HIV seronegative and seropositive homosexual men. Using the Nungesser Homosexual Attitudes Survey (NHIA; Nungesser, 1983), it was found that internalized homophobia was negatively related to satisfaction with sexual relationships. Similar results were found in a sample of 202 men who had sex with men and attended “Man to Man” sexual health seminars in the Midwest (Ross & Rosser, 1996). Specifically, higher levels of internalized homophobia were significantly associated with shorter romantic relationships and less satisfaction with those relationships. In order to assess the relation between internalized homophobia and well-being variables, Szymanski, Chung, & Balsam (2001), studied a sample of lesbian women from two community centers in Southern and Midwestern America. Internalized homophobia correlated significantly and positively with scores of depression. Lastly, in a study of 220 gay and lesbian college students, negative feelings about one’s own homosexuality were significantly related to anxiety and depression (Igartua et al., 2003). Given the robustness of findings with regard to attitudes toward homosexuality in previous research, it is expected that results concerning the relation between attitudes toward homosexuality and relationship satisfaction, anxiety, and depression will be replicated in the current study.

**Parental Attachment**

Because parents play an important role in coming out for gay and lesbian adolescents and young adults, it is important to examine the quality of the parent/child relationship, and how this may be revealed in analyses involving autobiographical memory. Main, Kaplan, and Cassidy (1985), devised the Adult
Attachment Interview (AAI), in which people describe memories of their early relationships with parents. Results of the AAI identified a strong relation between the memory styles of U.S. mothers’ and the quality of their children’s emotional attachment status. Specifically, when parents of securely attached children were asked to recount their own early memories, several common characteristics were found. For example, these adults valued attachment relationships, easily accessed attachment-related memories, and had narratives which were coherent and realistic. In contrast, parents of insecure children were “relatively incoherent in their interview transcripts, exhibiting logical and factual contradictions between the general descriptions of their relationships with their parents and actual autobiographical episodes offered” (Main, 1991, p. 143). It is thought that people with a secure adult attachment style are able to report negative life experiences in a manner illustrating that the negative events have been both understood and incorporated into the life story; they are “believed to have worked through their past negative attachment experiences or to have had secure experiences” to begin with (Bakermans-Kranenburg & van Ijzendoorn, 1993, p. 870).

Early attachment styles, like the ones identified by Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall (1978) during infancy, persist into adulthood and can play a role in later outcomes. Internal working models of these attachment relationships “may mediate the connection between previous attachment experiences and subsequent personality and associated behaviors” (Rothbard & Shaver, 1994, p. 61). Supporting the previous statement is a study of 113 gay and lesbian young adults, where a secure attachment status to one’s mother and father was

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positively associated with disclosure of a homosexual identity and length of time since disclosure (Holtzen, Kenny, & Mahalik, 1995). In the same study, secure attachment relationships with parents were negatively associated with self-reports of vulnerability to depressive symptoms. In another study with almost 500 gay, lesbian, and bisexual adults, general attachment patterns, assessed in terms of attachment anxiety and avoidance, were associated with the degree to which sexual orientation was known by and openly discussed with others (Mohr & Fassinger, 2003). Results indicated that individuals who had difficulties accepting their own sexual orientation were more likely to exhibit patterns of high avoidance and high anxiety attachment characteristics.

Current romantic relationship satisfaction among gay and lesbian adults can also be related to attachment style. Specifically, in a cross-sectional study with 177 participants, romantic relationship satisfaction was linked to ratings of attachment style, such that secure attachment was associated with experiencing more satisfaction in current romantic relationships (Ridge & Feeney, 1998). Lastly, with heterosexual samples, attachment insecurity has been associated with levels of anxiety. For example, among 153 university students in Greece, compared with the insecurely attached participants, those that were securely attached to parents scored higher on measures of self-esteem and lower on measures of anxiety and loneliness (Leondari & Kiosooglou, 2000).

Using the case of participant #1226 (second narrative presented) as an illustrative example of the findings mentioned above, she may view others as untrustworthy and undependable (Rothbard & Shaver, 1994). She may also be
insecure in her own homosexuality because of the belief she disappointed her family by not living up to their heterosexual expectations (Rothbard & Shaver, 1994). Subsequently, these feelings could lead to failures in romantic relationships and a negative self-image, marked by feelings of sadness and anxious preoccupation.

**Directive Function of Memory**

Personal event memories can serve as a guiding force across the life span, particularly during times of transition, such as coming out. Yet, not all life transitions, even the personally chosen ones, leave individuals with a “strengthened sense of meaning or happiness in life” (Bauer & McAdams, 2004, p. 574). Research has shown that interpretations of transitions have strong implications for the course of the transition as well as the broader life course (i.e. Brandtstadter, Wentura, & Rothermund, 1999; McAdams, Josselson, & Leinblich, 2001).

Experiencing and appraising past events can help individuals comprehend and interpret how to best act and react to present and future situations. Researchers have proposed that memory serves a directive function, in which both positive and negative “remembered events...have an active and enduring influence that extends beyond the immediate local context” (Pillemer, 1998, p. 65). According to Schank (1990), “intelligence is really about understanding what has happened well enough to be able to predict when it might happen again.... Comprehending events around you depends upon having a memory of prior events available for helping the interpretation of new events” (p. 1).
Within the context of autobiographical accounts, the meaning personal event memories hold and the lessons learned from them are useful as a guide or causal agent for subsequent behavior (McCabe, Capron, & Peterson, 1991; Pillemer, 1992; Pillemer, Picariello, Law, & Reichman, 1996; Pratt, Arnold, Norris, & Filyer, 1999; Thorne, McLean, & Lawrence, 2004).

We can employ the directive function in regards to the previously presented coming out narrative by participant #1051 (first narrative presented). In particular, this participant may use her memory of coming out—the success of her honest and straightforward approach—as a frame of reference for confronting and negotiating future life tasks. The experience of coming out may strengthen ties between the individual and the family; it may also aid in fostering a secure and positive homosexual self-identity. However, coming out stories with disappointing or disastrous personal consequences will set a much different tone for future encounters. For example, the parent/child relationship may be strained for a period of time. In order to shield ones’ self from feelings of awkwardness or guilt at disappointing their family, children might distance themselves from parents. Or, in another social venue, one might hide his/her homosexuality from others, for fear that revealing it would lead to additional negative reactions and loss of relationships. This may also generate feelings of hatred regarding ones’ own homosexuality and the inability to establish quality same-sex romantic relationships. The potential directive impact of memories of coming out are evaluated in the present study by relating memory content and organization to current psychological and social functioning.
Event Centrality

The literature on autobiographical memory proposes several functions for vivid and highly accessible personal memories, including directive, self, and social (e.g. Bluck, Alea, Habermas, & Rubin, 2005). In most cases, examples and analyses target functions of memories for positive and culturally appropriate life events, such as the birth of a child or leaving home (e.g. Shum, 1998; Robinson, 1992). Berntsen & Rubin (2006) extend the previous applications by arguing that similar functions may also be elicited by memories of negative events. However, an important component is the degree to which individuals perceived the referenced event as influential in their lives. Event centrality is the degree to which an event is a meaningful component of a person's identity and life story (Berntsen & Rubin, 2006).

Event centrality has been connected to functional and psychological outcomes, particularly symptoms associated with trauma. In Berntsen and Rubin’s (2006) introduction of the concept, 707 undergraduates were surveyed to assess the psychometric properties of the Centrality of Event Scale (CES), as well as its relation to emotional outcomes. Findings indicated that both posttraumatic stress disorder and depression symptom severity were positively correlated with a traumatic event being central to one's identity and life story. Because sexual preference is a powerful component of self-identity, one could hypothesize that coming out would be evaluated as an especially "central" life event. Furthermore, whether its disclosure spawns positive or negative reactions from parents could be influential in shaping how gay and lesbian individuals feel
about themselves and how comfortable they are in society. Additionally, because several previous clinical case studies have indicated that traumatic memories are fragmented and lack coherence compared to other memories (see Reviere & Bakeman, 2001 for a review), it is possible that highly central negative coming out stories will also be associated with poor narrative construction and organization.

**Using Memory to Predict Functional Outcomes**

The manner in which people organize their memories into a spoken or written narrative can be predictive of current levels of psychosocial functioning. For example, in findings from the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) by Main et al., (1985), parents' organization of their thoughts and feelings about their own parents was related to the behaviors they exhibited. Also, in a study by Kobak & Sceery (1988), college students' Adult Attachment Interview classifications were related to measures of personality and ego resiliency. In the current study, the developmental transition of coming out can be thought of as a unique, highly emotional, and important event in the parent/child relationship. It is possible that qualities of the memory of this singular experience can be used as an assessment tool for the attachment status and associated outcomes of gay and lesbian young adults, thus providing a new application for and extension of Main et al.'s. (1985) methods.

Based in part on Main et al.'s. (1985) results, one would expect examples of personal narrative organization to be common in the autobiographical memory literature, however, it is not. Instead, most studies have been conducted with
clinically based samples. For example, in a study by Egeland & Susman-Stillman (1996), narratives from 24 mothers in the University of Minnesota Mother-Child Project, a prospective longitudinal study of families at risk for child maltreatment, were collected and analyzed for coherence. Participants who were abused and currently abusing their children, retold their own childhood abuse experiences in a fragmented and disconnected fashion, with high rates of idealization, inconsistency, and escapism present (Egeland & Susman-Stillman, 1996). In comparison, mothers who broke the cycle of abuse integrated their abusive experiences into a more coherent view of the self and displayed fewer dissociative tendencies, which can be quantified as “disturbances in identity, memory, awareness, and cognition and feelings of derealization or depersonalization or associated phenomena such as déjà vu and absorption” (Bernstein & Putnam, 1986, p. 729).

There is also a significant body of literature in which posttraumatic stress reactions are thought to reflect the inability to properly process and integrate traumatic events with knowledge of the self and world (Horowitz, 1986). In a qualitative study of 15 Australian individuals with acute stress disorder, trauma narratives both prior to cognitive behavior therapy and following treatment were coded for evidence of dissociation, disorganization and perception of threat (Moulds & Bryant, 2005). In this study, disorganization change scores were negatively correlated with post-treatment narrative dissociation. In other words, greater improvement in narrative coherence was associated with fewer reports of dissociative symptoms in post-treatment narratives. Similarly, dissociation
change scores were negatively correlated with post-treatment narrative disorganization; the larger the reduction in references to dissociative symptoms, the more organized the post-treatment narrative. Lastly, with respect to coherence and complexity, in a replication and extension study (of Foa, Molnar, & Cashman, 1995) conducted by Van Minnen, Wessel, Dijkstra, & Roelofs (2002), narrative changes following prolonged exposure therapy in a sample of patients suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder were evaluated. Specifically, improved patients, in comparison to those who did not improve, displayed a greater decrease in disorganized thoughts present in their narratives following treatment.

A connection can also be made between emotional outcomes and the retrieval of specific events versus reporting a general summary of events. Williams (1995; Williams & Broadbent, 1986) discovered what he termed “overgeneral” recall, whereby some people chronically produced general memories even when instructed to recount specific episodes. This finding has been examined thoroughly with clinical samples. For example, in their early work Williams & Broadbent (1986) established the connection between depression and overgeneral memory in a sample of suicide attempters. In another clinical sample, twenty in-patients with a diagnosis of major depression retrieved specific memories on average 40% of the time, in comparison to 70% for matched control participants (Williams & Scott, 1988). In a repeat of the previous study by Puffet, Jehin-Marchot, Timsit-Berthier, & Timsit (1991), similar results were found, overgenerality was present in depressed participants. Findings of the previously
presented studies lend support to overgeneral memory being a robust
phenomenon among suicidal and depressed individuals.

While the explanation for the overgenerality effect is speculative at the
time, Williams (1995) offered a developmental trajectory. According to Williams,
an early history of negative life events could have lasting effects on narrative
memory styles, such that "specific episodic information is too negative, so the
person passively avoids this punishing consequence of recollection" (p. 260).
Consequently, the person's encoding and retrieval process remains stuck at the
generic level; eventually this framework is carried over to other non-traumatic
events. Singer and Salovey (1993) suggested an alternative, but related
explanation; habitual activation of general memories may serve to dampen
negative affective responses associated with painful events. "Some people may
use highly abstract and summarized memories as a means to ward off unwanted
images and emotional reactions from their past...their organization of memory
narratives, representing one aspect of a cognitive style, may be employed for
defensive purposes" (p. 105). This theory is supported by personality literature;
whereby individuals with a repressive personality style are highly likely to
produce general rather than specific memories (i.e. Davis, 1987; Kihlstrom &
Harackiewicz, 1982; Singer & Salovey, 1993).

Collectively, results from the previously presented studies based on
clinical samples can inform non-clinical populations regarding the predictive utility
of the cognitive organization of memory. It is conceivable that the previously
discussed pattern of findings could be replicated in young adults' coming out
narratives. For example, the following coming out narrative from a participant in the current study represents some features of a narrative lacking in specific detail, descriptiveness, clarity, coherence, and complexity:

I don't really remember. I was thirteen. I'm sitting with my mom and my sister and I think my sister said if you turn out to be a lesbian your mom my mom is going to kill her, because she always harassed me about it when I was younger. But it was really, that was it, and then I didn't have to tell anybody else because my family's a bunch of big mouths. (participant #8484)

According to the literature on narrative organization, the previous participant's fragmented recall could be indicative of a failure to fully integrate the event as part of her identity and life story. If this is the case, the lack of narrative structure could be associated with poorer social and psychological outcomes in the present study and based on Main et al.'s. (1985) findings, a poor parental attachment status.

The present study extends the work of Main and other researchers in new substantive and methodological directions. Main et al. (1985) elicited lengthy, semi-structured narratives about relationships with parents, and used these narratives as the basis for analyses of memory coherence. In contrast, this study examines memories of a circumscribed, emotionally salient parent/child encounter: coming out. One broad goal of the study is to test whether the coded coherence of a specific memory is predictive of parental attachment and general psychological well-being. A second broad goal is to apply memory analysis
techniques to a new substantive issue: the unique experience of coming out to parents in the lives of gay and lesbian young adults.

Hypotheses

In this research, I examine memory content and organization, and its relation to current social and psychological functioning (anxiety, depression, romantic relationship satisfaction), emotional attachments, and attitudes toward homosexuality. By linking the analysis of the specific personal event memory of coming out to indices of successful functioning, namely, attitudes toward homosexuality, anxiety, depression, and romantic relationship satisfaction, this study will enrich both the autobiographical memory and gay/lesbian psychological literatures. Additionally, results from the study may help to identify critical life issues regarding gay and lesbian young adults and additional methods of aiding them to become, in the words of the mission statement of Seacoast Outright, a community organization offering services to sexual minorities, “healthy, caring, and productive citizens.”

Based on the previously discussed literature, the following hypotheses will be tested:

Disclosure of Sexual Orientation

Hypothesis 1a. Participants will be more likely to disclose their sexual orientation to a peer before a parent(s).

Hypothesis 1b. Participants will be more likely to disclose their sexual orientation to their mother than to their father.
Hypothesis 1c. If disclosure is made to both parents, participants will be more likely to disclose to their mother before their father.

Hypothesis 1d. Direct face-to-face disclosure will more likely be made to mothers, while indirect methods will more likely be used with fathers.

Hypothesis 1e. Mothers will be more likely than fathers to ask participants about their sexual orientation, especially for males.

Attitudes Toward Homosexuality

Hypothesis 2. Attitudes toward homosexuality will be positively related to romantic relationship satisfaction, and negatively related to anxiety and depression.

Parental Attachment

Hypothesis 3. Securely attached individuals will be more comfortable with their homosexuality, more satisfied with romantic relationships, and less anxious and depressed than those who are insecurely attached. Also, securely attached individuals will have disclosed their sexual orientation earlier than insecurely attached individuals.

Autobiographical Memory Structure

Hypothesis 4. Individuals producing more complex, coherent, specific, and descriptive coming out narratives will be more comfortable with their own sexuality, more securely attached to their parents, and less anxious and depressed.
Event Centrality

**Hypothesis 5.** If the memory of coming out is seen as a central negative life event it will be associated with poorer social and emotional outcomes, specifically internalized homophobia, relationship satisfaction, anxiety, and depression. The clinical literature reviewed earlier also suggests that it will be associated with poor narrative coherence.
CHAPTER II

METHOD

Participants

Fifty-five participants, between the ages of 18 and 25, were recruited via announcements by staff and/or the primary investigator at several support group meetings in the Southern New Hampshire and Northern Massachusetts area—the University of New Hampshire Alliance (n = 28), Manchester Outright (n = 8), Seacoast Outright (n = 12), and Merrimack College Friends Coalition (n= 7). These are educational, social service, and advocacy organizations that offer services to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth and young adults. Two participants were excluded from the current sample: one student from the University of New Hampshire Alliance who never came out to his/her parent(s), and another participant who was 29 years-old and not affiliated with one of the previously mentioned groups. The total sample is comprised of 53 gay and lesbian young adults (\(M_{\text{age}} = 20.32, \ SD_{\text{age}} = 2.05\)) who have disclosed their homosexuality to a parent(s).

Roughly even numbers of males (n = 27, 51%) and females (n = 26, 49%) participated in the present study. The sample was predominantly Caucasian (94.3%), with 3.8% identifying as Hispanic. The majority of participants either had a high school diploma/GED or were current college students (73.6%); 13.2%
of participants were college graduates and 13.2% had not completed high school.

**Procedure**

For University of New Hampshire students, data collection took place in the primary investigator's laboratory space on the University of New Hampshire campus. For non-UNH students, the study was conducted in a private location near the sponsoring organization. Prior to their participation in the study, written consent was obtained from participants. Next, participants completed a packet of questionnaires assessing demographic information, attitudes toward homosexuality, parental attachment, romantic relationship satisfaction, anxiety, and depression (see Appendices D-K for demographics and complete scales). Coming out narratives were then obtained via a tape-recorded interview conducted by the primary investigator (see Appendix A for detailed interview questions). Similar to methods utilized in several of the previously mentioned studies related to memory structure and organization (i.e. Egeland & Susman-Stillman, 1996; Main et al., 1985; Moulds & Bryant, 2005; Van Minnen et al., 2002), spoken rather than written narratives were obtained in the current study. These interviews were then transcribed and coded prior to their destruction. Following the interview, participants completed questionnaires which assessed the impact of coming out and how central this event was to their identity and life story. Subjects received $10 in cash for their participation in the study. Upon completion of the entire study (July 2007), all participants were provided with written information regarding the results.
Materials

Interview Questions

Participants were first asked if they had come out to their parents and if they told their parents at the same time or on separate occasions. They then recounted their full coming out story (to mother and father, together or separately), sparing no details, even if the details did not seem especially important to them. Following the initial telling of their coming out story, participants were given additional memory probes, including: ‘Where were you?’ ‘What did you say?’ ‘Who else was present?’ ‘How did you feel?’ ‘How did your mother, father, parents feel?’ ‘What happened after you told your mother, father, parents?’ These questions are based on canonical informational categories identified by Brown and Kulik (1977) and used in studies of flashbulb memories. After a full narrative was elicited, participants were asked to complete a series of short answer questions, including: age at coming out to each parent, ratings on 5-point scales of how emotional participants felt when the experience originally occurred and when they looked back upon the experience today, the impact of the experience on how participants currently felt about themselves, if the experience affected the relationship with their mother/father at the time, and if it continues to affect the relationship. Please see Appendices A-C for a complete list of coming out story and follow-up questions.

Attitudes Toward Homosexuality

To assess attitudes toward one’s own homosexuality and comfort with others knowing about one’s homosexuality, participants completed a 23-item
scale adapted by Rosario et al. (Rosario, Hunter, Maguen, Gwadz, & Smith, 2001; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2004; Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter, & Braun, 2006) from the Nungesser Homosexual Attitudes Inventory (NHAI; Nungesser, 1983). The NHAI was originally developed for and tested on homosexual men by Nungesser. More recently, the scale has been modified for youths and young adults by simplifying the language, making it more informal, and generalizing the item content to include both males and females. Participants rate their responses on a 4-point response scale ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) through 4 (agree strongly), rather than the original binary (true/false) format. Examples of questions are as follows: “I am glad to be gay/lesbian,” and “I would not give up my homosexuality even if I could.” Lower scores on the scale indicate more internalized homophobia and higher scores indicate less internalized homophobia, or more positive attitudes toward homosexuality. In the current study, scores on the internalized homophobia scale ranged from 62.00 to 92.00, with $M = 79.32$, $SD = 7.81$. According to Rosario et al. (2001, 2004, 2006), because the mean for individual item ratings was negatively skewed ($M = 3.59$ of a maximum possible value of 4.00, $SD = .48$) the data were transformed using the exponential $e$ to stretch the positive end of the distribution. Thus, a comparison of means between the current study and Rosario et al. (2001, 2004, 2006) cannot be made. In the current study, Cronbach’s alpha for the measure was acceptable ($\alpha = .83$).
Relationship Satisfaction

In order to assess romantic relationship satisfaction, participants completed the seven item Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick, 1988). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale and a higher score indicates more satisfaction with the relationship. Items measure how well the partner meets one's needs, how well the relationship compares with others, regrets about the relationship, how well one's expectations have been met, love for the partner, and problems in the relationship (Hendrick, 1988). Participants were instructed to answer in regard to their most recent romantic relationship. If participants never had a romantic relationship, they were asked to answer in regard to their same-sex best friend and to place a check in a blank provided if they chose this alternative (this was changed from opposite-sex friend in the original scale instructions). In the current study, only three participants answered the questionnaire referencing a same-sex friend instead of a romantic partner. Scores ranged from 10.00 to 35.00 ($M = 26.92$, $SD = 5.84$), which was slightly lower than that found by Hendrick (1988; $M = 29.14$, $SD = 6.41$). Also in the current study, the RAS demonstrated high internal consistency with $\alpha = .89$.

Anxiety

Levels of anxiety were investigated using the 21-item Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI; Beck, Epstein, Brown, & Steer, 1988). Participants were asked to rate each question according to how they felt during the past week. Items are rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 3 (severely—it bothered me a lot). Higher scores reflect higher levels of anxiety. With a clinical sample of
individuals diagnosed with an anxiety disorder (i.e. panic disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, agoraphobia, and social and simple phobia), the average score on the BAI equaled 24.59, $SD = 11.41$ (Beck et al., 1988). In the present study, scores were much lower and ranged from 0 to 30.00 ($M = 9.87$, $SD = 7.54$). Also in the present study, the BAI had strong internal consistency with an alpha coefficient of .87.

**Depressive Symptomatology**

Depressive symptomatology was assessed using the 20-item Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D Scale; Radloff, 1977). Participants were asked to rate each question according to how they felt during the past week. Items are rated on a 4-point scale with 0 = rarely or none of the time (less than 1 day), 1 = some or little of the time (1-2 days), 2 = occasionally or a moderate amount of time (3-4 days), 3 = most or all of the time (5-7 days). Higher scores reflect higher depressive symptomatology. The CES-D scale is considered a strong measure of depressive symptomatology in the general population (Radloff, 1977). Using probability samples of households in two U.S. communities, mean scores equaled 9.25, $SD = 8.58$ (Radloff, 1977). In contrast, with a clinical in-patient sample, the average score was much higher, $M = 24.42$, $SD = 13.51$. In the current study, scores ranged from 1.00 to 44.00 ($M = 13.93$, $SD = 9.93$); internal consistency was high with an alpha coefficient of .91.

**Parental Attachment**

To assess emotional attachment to parents, the 55-item Parental Attachment Questionnaire was given to participants (PAQ; Kenny, 1987). The
questionnaire taps perceived parental availability, understanding, acceptance, respect for autonomy, interest in interaction with parents and affect toward parents during visits, help-seeking behavior in situations of stress, and satisfaction with help obtained from parents. The PAQ contains three scales, Affective Quality of Attachment, Parental Fostering of Autonomy, and Parental Role in Providing Emotional Support. Participants were asked to respond to each item by choosing a number on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much), that best describes their relationship with their parents. Higher scores reflect more positive relationships with parents. In a study conducted by Kenny & Donaldson (1991), with a sample of first-year college students from the Northeast, the average PAQ score for males was $M = 194.34$, $SD = 31.06$ and $M = 210.40$, $SD = 29.88$ for females. In the present study, scores for parental attachment ranged from 139.00 to 246.00 ($M = 201.48$, $SD = 29.00$). The internal consistency estimate for the overall parental attachment measure was .96, which is consistent with previous research using this measure (Kenny, 1990).

Event Centrality

To assess how central an event is to a person’s identity and life story, participants completed the 20-item Centrality of Event Scale (CES; Berntsen & Rubin, 2006). Specifically, participants were asked to think back over the coming out interview they just completed as they answered each question on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). If participants came out to both parents, they completed two versions of the Centrality of Events Scale.
Scale, one for their mother and one for their father. Higher scores reflect an event being more central to the life story. For coming out to their mother (CES-M), scores ranged from 29.00 to 92.00 ($M = 61.49$, $SD = 15.90$). For their father (CES-F), scores ranged from 21.00 to 94.00 ($M = 60.49$, $SD = 20.63$). In the present study, the item average was $M = 3.07$, $SD = .80$ for the CES-M and $M = 3.02$, $SD = 1.03$ for the CES-F. In comparison, with a sample of undergraduates from four North American Universities, the item average was $M = 3.56$, $SD = .80$ for individuals with high post-traumatic stress disorder checklist scores and $M = 2.84$, $SD = .89$ for those with low scores (Berntsen & Rubin, 2006). The CES-M and CES-F are reliable in the current study, with $\alpha = .92$ and .97 respectively.

**Coding Narrative Structure**

Each coming out narrative was coded according to the following criteria: complexity, coherence, generality versus specificity, and level of descriptiveness.

**Complexity**

As a first step to coding for complexity, the length of each narrative was measured. The total number of words ($M = 791.89$, $SD = 756.67$) and sentences ($M = 78.60$, $SD = 252.70$) were counted using a standard word processing program (Microsoft Office Word 2003). Complexity was then assessed by computing Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level scores (FRE & FKGL; Flesch, 1949), also with a standard word processing program (Microsoft Office Word 2003). Both scores are calculated using average sentence length (number of words divided by number of sentences) and the average number of syllables per word (number of syllables divided by number of words). FRE
scores range from 0-100, with higher scores for text that is easier to read. Standard documents typically receive FRE scores between 60 and 70. In the current study, the average FRE score was 80.67, $SD = 6.29$. FKGL scores reflect grade-school level of the text (e.g. a score of 8 means that an 8th grader could understand the document). Standard documents are typically written between the 7th and 8th grade level. In the current study, the average FKGL score was 6.23, $SD = 1.87$. In the current study, complexity levels may be lower than typical levels reported in other studies because they are computed on spoken rather than written narratives.

Coherence

Coherence was assessed using a rating scale developed by Bohanek, Fivush, & Walker (2005). Specifically, coherence was coded on the following 4-point scale: 1 (Narrative is very disorganized and unclear. It also has very few details and may be difficult to follow.); 2 (Narrative is significantly lacking in either chronology or completeness. A major part of the story is missing, or major events are recounted out of order.); 3 (Narrative has a sense of chronology as well as some detail. It is still lacking in either one or both dimensions.); 4 (Narrative follows a clear chronological order, giving a complete account of the event, along with extensive detail).

Different from methods used in the current study, Bohanek et al., (2005) asked participants to nominate four personally experienced events that varied along two dimensions, valence and level of intensity. This formula yielded an intensely negative experience, a moderately negative experience, an intensely
positive experience, and a moderately positive experience. Participants were then asked to write about each of the four events continuously for 10 minutes, not worrying about spelling and punctuation. Participants were also instructed to incorporate the facts of what happened, as well as their thoughts and feelings about the events. All participants wrote about each narrative for the full 10 minute period. Two independent coders rated each narrative on coherence. Reliability was calculated using an intraclass correlation, with alpha = .88.

In the present study, three coders (the primary investigator and two graduate students blind to the study hypotheses) coded 12 transcribed coming out narratives for practice purposes. Disagreements on the practice narratives were resolved via discussion. The remaining 41 narratives were also coded for coherence by the same three coders. The percent agreement among coding pairs (i.e. 1, 2; 1, 3; & 2, 3) was .76, .72, and .68 respectively, with an average agreement of .72. In order to compare ratings of coherence among all three coders, Cronbach's alpha was computed and equaled .88. Coding differences rarely were dramatic. Ninety-eight percent of the disagreements between all coders were off by one step (i.e. 4 versus 3).

In the current study, if participants came out to only their mother, both parents at the same time, or both parents separately, but the narratives were interwoven, they received only one coherence score. If participants came out to parents on different occasions and the narrative for each parent could be considered completely separate, the participant received two coherence scores. This occurred in 11 narratives. In these cases, coherence scores were averaged.
across mothers and fathers narratives. The correlation between coherence ratings for mothers and fathers was $r = .78, p = .004$.

**General vs. Specific**

Specificity was assessed using coding rules developed for evaluating autobiographical memories (e.g., Pillemer, Goldsmith, Panter, & White, 1988). Narratives that contained “descriptions of particular episodes” were coded as specific (Pillemer, 2001, p. 128). In contrast, narratives that focused instead on “general themes or happenings,” were coded as general memories (Pillemer, 2001, p. 128). One coder (primary investigator) assigned all 53 narratives to general versus specific categories, and a second coder blind to the hypotheses coded 12 randomly selected narratives. The agreement between coders was 100%. In the current study, 100% of the narratives were coded specific. All participants fulfilled the interviewers request for a description of a precise coming out episode. Due to the lack of variation in specificity, subsequent analyses were not conducted using this variable.

**Descriptiveness**

Prior to data collection, the majority of coming out narratives were expected to be specific; therefore, level of descriptiveness was also examined. Use of descriptive language--including adjectives, adverbs, and modifiers--was coded to assess the narrative richness of coming out narratives (Han, Leichtman, & Wang, 1998). One person coded all 53 narratives for level of descriptiveness, while a second person coded 20 narratives. The agreement between coders was 85% for number of adjectives and for number or adverbs, and 95% for
number of modifiers, with an overall average of 88%. Because the number of adjectives, adverbs, and modifiers could be related to the length of the narrative, a proportion of total descriptive words to total words per narrative was calculated and used in subsequent analyses ($M = .07, SD = .02$).

**Coding Memory Content**

Each narrative was examined by the primary researcher for prominent content themes. Some of these content categories were derived based on the study hypotheses and their mention in the sexuality literature: who initiated the coming out process, which parent was told first, whether participants came out to their parents separately or together, how parents were told (i.e. directly or indirectly), and whether the emotional reactions of participants and their parents were positive (presence of positive emotion words), negative (presence of negative emotion words), mixed (positive and negative emotion words), or neutral (no emotion words). Several other thematic categories were added by the primary investigator due to their frequent occurrence: location of participants when they came out to their parents, whether parents expressed fear for their children due to their homosexual identity, and whether parents' hopes of weddings and grandchildren were dashed during the disclosure process.

The primary investigator read and coded each narrative for thematic content. A second coder blind to the hypotheses evaluated 20 narratives for the presence of each theme. In order to assess agreement between coders, percent agreement was calculated for each content theme. Agreement ranged between
80% and 100%. Please see Table M1 for a complete list of themes and their associated percent agreement.
CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Results of the current study are presented in several major sections. First, qualitative analyses probing memory themes in coming out narratives are described. Second, the relation between well-being, memory, and event centrality for the entire sample are presented. Next, because a number of factors could affect the relation between autobiographical memory structure and well-being, results are examined using controls for level of education, time since disclosure to mothers, and emotional valence of narratives when coming out to mothers.

Analyses of Memory Themes

Memory themes represented in coming out stories provide a vivid description of this critical life transition. In addition, thematic analysis is used to test several hypotheses based on prior studies. Consistent with previous research, in the current study 66% of the participants first disclosed their sexual identity to a friend, 13% to their mother, and 21% to a different person, such as a sibling or guidance counselor (hypothesis 1a). When disclosing ones sexuality to parents, all of the participants (N = 53, 100%) did so to their mother, with 23% coming out to their mother only. Also consistent with the literature, fewer participants (77%) revealed their sexual orientation to their father in addition to their mother (hypothesis 1b). The pattern of findings for hypotheses 1a and 1b
was the same for both males and females. Both parents were told at the same
time by 28% of the participants and 49% told their parents on separate
occasions. If disclosure was made to parents on separate occasions, mothers
were told first 96% of the time. As hypothesized, when disclosure was made to
both parents (whether separately or together), participants were more likely to
disclose to their mother before their father (61%; hypothesis 1c). Mothers were
told when participants were between ages 12 and 23 years. The average age at
which participants came out to their mother was 17.03 years, $SD = 2.28$.
Participants were between 15 and 25 years-old when they came out to their
father. Fathers were told approximately one year later than mothers ($M = 18.05$
years, $SD = 2.18$). When participants came out to both parents, the age at which
disclosure occurred to mothers versus fathers was statistically significant $t(41) = -
3.10, p = .004$. Again, the pattern of findings was consistent for males and
females.

Fifty-three percent of participants initiated coming out to their mother,
while 64% initiated coming out to their father. Mothers initiated with process with
47% of participants, while fathers did so among 36% of participants (hypothesis
1e). Initiation also differed among males and females. Approximately 75% of
females initiated the disclosure process with their mother, while only 28% of
males did ($\chi^2 = 8.47, p = .04$). For 72% of males, their mother first inquired about
their sexuality, which subsequently led to their sons' disclosure of homosexual
identity (hypothesis 1e). When participants came out to both parents at the same
time, this usually was initiated by participants rather than parents (93%), and this percentage did not differ between males and females.

Regarding the method by which disclosure took place, approximately 89% of participants informed their mother using direct face-to-face methods, (i.e. conversation). In contrast, only 42% of the fathers in the current study were told in a direct manner. The majority of participants (58%) disclosed their sexual orientation to their father using indirect methods, such as a letter, or through another person, typically their mother (hypothesis 1d). When parents were told at the same time, it was usually done via direct methods (80%). The manner by which disclosure took place did not differ among males and females.

The location in which participants came out to their mother, father, or parents together was typically at home, 65%, 73%, and 67%, respectively. Eighty-three percent of males came out to their mother at home, compared to 47% of females ($\chi^2 = 6.18, p = .05$). An unexpected finding was that 15% of mothers were told while they were driving in the car. Thirty-seven percent of females, compared to only 6% of males, revealed their sexual orientation to their mother in this manner.

During the disclosure process, 62% of participants stated that their parents mentioned normative events for heterosexual individuals, such as getting married and having children. This result was the same for both males and females. Also, in 70% of the narratives participants' parents expressed fear for their safety, health, and/or happiness. Males and females differed on this finding,
with parents expressing fear for 48% of males and 11% of females ($\chi^2 = 8.42, p = .004$).

Content coding of emotions expressed in memories of coming out to parents displayed a wide range of reactions, with a strong representation of negative affect. How participants felt when coming out to their mother occurred was coded as positive 27%, negative 40%, mixed 29%, and neutral 4% of the time. How participants thought mothers felt during disclosure was coded as positive 21%, negative 45%, mixed 25%, and neutral 9% of the time. How participants felt when initially coming out to their father was coded as positive 15%, negative 44%, mixed 37%, and neutral 5% of the time. Lastly, how participants thought fathers felt during disclosure was coded as positive 12%, negative 42%, mixed 24%, and neutral 22% of the time.

In contrast to emotion content coding of coming out narratives, participants’ own ratings of their current feelings about the coming out experience were more positive. When thinking back upon coming out to their mother, 55% of the participants rated their current feelings about the experience as positive, 11% as negative, 25% as mixed, and 9% as neutral. With respect to fathers, when thinking back upon coming out to their father, 45% of the participants rated their current feelings about the experience as positive, 17% as negative, 31% mixed, and 7% neutral.

Well-being, Memory, and Event Centrality

To examine the relation between measures of psychological well-being (attitudes toward homosexuality, attachment, relationship satisfaction, anxiety,
and depression), autobiographical memory structure (complexity, coherence, descriptiveness), and event centrality, a series of correlations were run. Since the present study is correlational in nature, it should be noted that one cannot specify the direction of effects for measures. For example, it could be that individuals who feel good about their homosexuality are more likely to have satisfying same-sex romantic relationships. However, it is also possible that being involved in a satisfying same-sex relationship could promote positive homosexual attitudes. With respect to memory coherence and psychological well-being, achieving narrative coherence could promote well-being, but it is also possible that enhanced well-being will lead to the construction of more coherent memories. Due to the correlational nature of the present study, causation cannot be established.

Attitudes Toward Homosexuality and Parental Attachment

Hypothesis 2. Attitudes toward homosexuality will be positively related to romantic relationship satisfaction, and negatively related to anxiety and depression.

The relation between attitudes toward homosexuality and romantic relationship satisfaction, anxiety, and depression were not statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level, but trends in the hypothesized direction were evident for both romantic relationship satisfaction ($r = .24, p = .08$), and anxiety ($r = -.23, p = .09$). Please see Table M2 for correlations among psychological well-being variables for the entire sample.
Hypothesis 3. Securely attached individuals will be more comfortable with their homosexuality, more satisfied with romantic relationships, and less anxious and depressed than those who are insecurely attached. Also, securely attached individuals will have disclosed their sexual orientation earlier than insecurely attached individuals.

As hypothesized, parental attachment was positively related to attitudes toward homosexuality ($r = .35, p = .01$) and negatively related to anxiety ($r = -.27, p = .05$). The relation between parental attachment and depression ($r = -.23, p = .09$) also approached significance. Contrary to hypotheses, parental attachment was not related to age at disclosure to mothers or fathers ($r = .06, p = ns, r = -.13, p = ns$), respectively. Please see Table M2 for correlations among psychosocial variables for the entire sample.

Autobiographical Memory Structure

Hypothesis 4. Individuals producing more complex, coherent, specific, and descriptive coming out narratives will be more comfortable with their own sexuality, more securely attached to their parents, and less anxious and depressed.

Contrary to predictions, few correlations between memory variables and measures of well-being were statistically significant. Significant correlations were isolated and difficult to interpret. Importantly, ratings of memory coherence were not significantly related to any of the measures of psychological well-being. Regarding narrative complexity, both grade level and reading ease were significantly related to parental attachment ($r = -.36, p = .01; r = .31, p = .02$).
respectively. Positive relationships with parents were associated with lower grade level scores for text, as well as text that was easier to read. The previous findings were contrary to the hypothesis for complexity. With respect to level of descriptiveness, the proportion of descriptive words per narrative was positively related to depression scores ($r = .30, p = .03$). Again, this was contrary to the hypothesized findings. Please see Tables M3-M5 for correlations between complexity, coherence, level of descriptiveness and psychosocial variables for the entire sample.

**Event Centrality**

**Hypothesis 5.** If the memory of coming out is seen as a central negative life event it will be associated with poorer social and emotional outcomes, specifically internalized homophobia, romantic relationship satisfaction, anxiety, and depression. It will also be associated with poor narrative coherence.

Because hypothesis 5 focuses on individuals who experienced coming out as a negative life event, analyses were run on narratives that were coded as negative or mixed when coming out to their mother ($n = 36$) and when coming out to their father ($n = 33$). Coming out was coded as negative if participants answered the follow-up question of “How did you feel when you came out to your mother/father?” using negative language (i.e. scared, nervous, angry). Coming out was coded as mixed if participants answered the previously presented question using a combination of negative and positive language.

A correlation was run among the centrality of events measure for each parent, the psychological well-being variables, and narrative coherence. As
hypothesized, when describing coming out to mothers, event centrality was negatively associated with attitudes toward homosexuality ($r = -0.39$, $p = 0.02$). There were no other significant findings related to event centrality and well-being or narrative coherence with mothers. When describing coming out to fathers, event centrality was related to narrative coherence, such that the more central the event, the greater the rated level of coherence ($r = 0.38$, $p = 0.03$). This was in opposition to the hypothesized findings. Additional significant results related to event centrality with fathers and well-being were not found.

**Analyses Controlling for Education, Time Since Disclosure, and Emotional Valence**

In the total sample, the relation between memory qualities and well-being were weak and not readily interpretable. Because a number of factors could influence the relation between psychological well-being and autobiographical memory, different controls were employed for subsequent analyses. Correlations were computed for college students only; when controlling statistically for time since coming out to mothers; and when controlling for emotional valence of coming out to mothers. Because level of education could impact narrative complexity, the relatively small numbers of non-high school graduates ($n = 7$), high school graduates ($n = 9$), and college graduates ($n = 7$) were removed from one set of analyses; correlations were run with current college students only ($n = 30$). Because the amount of time since disclosure could influence narrative complexity and the emotional salience of the event, this factor was controlled using partial
correlation. Lastly, because memory variables may be affected by valence of the event (Bohanek, et al. 2005), participants whose emotional reactions when coming out to their mother were negative (n = 21) or mixed (n = 15) were combined and examined separately from the small number of participants who were positive (n = 14) or neutral (n = 2).

**College Students Only**

**Autobiographical Memory Structure.** Consistent with the entire sample, grade level (grade-school level of the text) was significantly related to parental attachment ($r = -.44, p = .01$), and reading ease (text complexity; higher score = less complex) showed a positive trend ($r = .37, p = .07$). As with the entire sample, memory coherence was not significantly related to any psychological well-being variables. The findings related to level of descriptiveness and depression were not replicated with the college student sample ($r = .11, p = ns$). Please see Table M6-M8 for correlations between complexity, coherence, level of descriptiveness, and psychosocial variables for the college student sample.

**Controlling Time Since Coming Out-Mother**

**Autobiographical Memory Structure.** As in the entire sample, both grade level and reading ease were significantly related to parental attachment ($r = -.37, p = .01; r = .31, p = .02$), respectively. Consistent with the entire sample, memory coherence was not significantly related to any psychological well-being variables. Also consistent with findings from the entire sample, the proportion of descriptive words per narrative was positively related to depression scores ($r = .28, p = .05$).
Please see Table M9-M11 for partial correlations between complexity, coherence, level of descriptiveness, and psychosocial variables.

**Negative & Mixed Event Reactions Only-Mother**

Autobiographical Memory Structure. Consistent with the entire sample, grade level was significantly related to parental attachment ($r = -.34, p = .04$), and reading ease shared a similar trend ($r = .31, p = .06$). As with the entire sample, coherence was not significantly related to any psychological well-being variables. Consistent with findings from the entire sample, the proportion of descriptive words per narrative was positively related to depression scores ($r = .44, p = .01$). Please see Table M12-M14 for correlations between complexity, coherence, level of descriptiveness, and psychosocial variables among negative and mixed disclosure episodes.

In summary, the three sets of follow-up analyses largely confirm the pattern of results found for the entire sample.
CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

Disclosure of sexual orientation to parents may be one of the most arduous acts of individuation faced by homosexual youth (D'Augelli, 1991). The main goal of the present study was to explore characteristics of memories of this influential personal event and how they relate to indices of successful functioning. To accomplish this, memory content and structure of coming out narratives, and their relation to current social and psychological functioning (anxiety, depression, romantic relationship satisfaction), emotional attachments, and attitudes toward homosexuality, were examined.

First, the thematic content of coming out narratives is discussed in relation to prior research. Second, results concerning attitudes toward homosexuality and parental attachment are examined. Third, findings pertaining to the relation between narrative structure and social and emotional indices are considered. Lastly, sampling and methodological issues, as well as suggestions for future research that address study limitations, are presented.

Content Analysis of Memory Themes

With respect to disclosure of one’s homosexual identity to peers and parents, an attempt was made to find the most recent psychological research; in some cases research has not been conducted since the early to mid-nineties.
Many of these older studies are still being readily referenced in contemporary journals. Thus, the current study provides an up-to-date replication of the results of previous studies. Consistent with earlier findings (D’Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; OutProud, 1998; Savin-Williams, 1998b), the majority of participants in the present study first disclosed their sexual orientation to a friend. Also replicating findings in the literature, more participants came out to their mother than to their father (Savin-Williams, 1990). If disclosure was made to both parents, mothers were more likely to be told prior to fathers (D’Augelli, 2003; Savin-Williams, 1998a). Similar to findings reported by Ben-Ari (1995), participants were more likely to disclose to their father using indirect methods, such as a letter or via another person. For example, one participant commented:

Um, I never meant to do it and then my mom was on the phone with him one day and was she was fighting with him about something and she goes you don’t know anything about your kids. You don’t even know that your son is gay and I went mom!

(participant #0764)

In contrast, mothers were most often told using direct methods, such as a face-to-face conversation (Herdt & Boxer, 1993), as in the following coming out narrative.

I was young. I was only sixteen so, I’d kinda just like went downstairs one day to my mom was like, you know, I, I think I’m gay and um, she doesn’t like when I say she freaked out, but she
kinda pretty much did. She got a little upset, cried, said it was a phase, girls go through that. (participant # 3995)

As reported by Savin-Williams (2001), mothers tended to first inquire about their sons' sexuality, which ultimately led to their disclosure. For example,

She’s like, but I have a question. I’m like what? She’s like you’re gay right? Yeah? Like I was kinda hesitant, but I didn’t really care cause I knew she already knew. I just, I didn’t wanna say it for myself. I wanted her to say it for me. I don’t know why I just felt like she needed to and I was just like yeah and she was like ok just checking. (participant #5826)

In the current study, mothers inquired about sexual orientation less frequently with their daughters.

Based on support for hypotheses 1a-1e, it is likely that characteristics of disclosure have not changed dramatically in the last 10-12 years. Even the mean age of disclosure in the current study is approximately 17 years, consistent both with contemporary and earlier research (D’Augelli, 2006; Savin-Williams, 2001). This replication of previous findings also speaks to the representativeness of the current sample.

One quality of disclosure not reported previously in the literature involved location when coming out to parents. A majority of disclosures occurred at home, with males coming out at home more frequently than females. Driving in the car was an unexpected disclosure location, with females far more likely than
males to disclose to their mother in this manner. A potential explanation for choosing to disclose in the car can be garnered from the following narrative:

I think it’s because I wasn’t looking like directly at her. Like I knew she was concentrating on the road and I was just kind of staring you know face forward with my hands in my lap. I think I had my head down most of it too. I was just like yeah, but I didn’t look at her directly. I was just like telling her while I wasn’t looking at her.

(participant #9184)

One can infer from the previous quote that disclosing to a parent in this manner is perhaps the most “indirect” way of “directly” coming out, short of having a telephone conversation; there is minimal eye contact, and attention is divided between two tasks. It is possible that females who prefer to tell their mother in a direct manner rely on the contextual qualities of the situation to shift some of the attention away from themselves. If mothers are told while not driving, distracters would not be present and attention would be focused directly on the participant.

Attitudes Toward Homosexuality and Parental Attachment

Although the focus of the present study is on characteristics of coming out memory narratives, it also was possible to examine the relation between attitudes toward homosexuality, parental attachment, and indices of well-being. Several findings replicate prior research in these areas.

The results indicate that individuals with more positive attitudes toward homosexuality are more satisfied with romantic relationships and are less anxious (hypothesis 2). While these findings only approach statistical
significance, they are consistent with the previous research (Dupras, 1994; Ross & Rosser, 1996; Igarta et al., 2003). Perhaps with a larger sample and hence greater statistical power the prior findings would be replicated more strongly.

Parental attachment also plays a role in emotional outcomes of gay and lesbian young adults. In agreement with previous research, individuals in the current study who have more positive relationships with parents are more secure in their homosexual identity and less anxious (hypothesis 3; Mohr & Fassinger, 2003; Leondari & Kiosseoglou, 2003). In contrast, individuals with highly central and negative or mixed feelings about coming out to their mother are less secure in their homosexual identity (hypothesis 5).

In summary, having a positive attitude toward one's sexual identity and having supportive and loving parents appear to be important components of successful psychosocial adjustment.

**Memory Structure and Psychological Well-being**

A major focus of the present study was to examine the relation between memory complexity, coherence, and descriptiveness, and measures of psychological well-being. As presented earlier, complex, coherent, and descriptive narratives may be associated with current levels of psychological functioning, such that simplistic, fragmented, and non-descriptive recall could be indicative of a failure to fully and successfully integrate the event as part of one's identity and life story.

In the current study, there was a surprising lack of support for the relation between indicators of memory complexity, coherence, and descriptiveness, on
the one hand and psychological well-being on the other. There were no consistent findings for the main hypothesized indicator—coherence—which has been a strong predictor of psychological functioning in previous studies (i.e. Egeland & Susman-Stillman, 1996; Moulds & Bryant, 2006; Van Minnen et al., 2002). The absence of these relationships will be discussed in detail in later sections on methodology and sampling.

Nevertheless, there were some scattered findings related to narrative variables. A consistent and unexpected result across the entire sample and all subcategories (college students only, controlling education, time since disclosure to mothers, and emotional valence of coming out to mothers), is grade level and reading ease being related to attachment. Specifically, a positive relationship with parents is associated with a more simplistic coming out narrative. This finding has not been previously reported in the literature. Thematic content analyses suggest a possible explanation. When examining narratives with high scores on parental attachment and low scores on complexity, a common theme emerges; coming out is rather uneventful. Consider, one strongly attached participant's narrative about coming out to her parents:

I was like I'm gay and looked at the floor. Hmm, can't look at you. And my dad says, oh is that all? Like he didn't care at all...and my mom was fine with it. Neither of them was at all unaccepting you know. (participant #7421)

Similarly, when a securely attached male participant was asked what happened after you told your mother, he replied:
I think she was baking that evening and she was just continued baking and I was doing homework at our kitchen counter. Yeah, everything went on as normal. (participant #3518)

Perhaps for individuals who have a very good relationship with their parents and coming out is not seen as an earth shattering event, there is simply not much to report. This muted parental response, combined with positive parental relationships being associated with a secure homosexual identity and less anxiety, could account for the lack of a complicated or sophisticated story for the child to recount. In contrast, complicated parental relationships may lead to complicated coming out experiences and narratives.

Another unexpected finding is that individuals with more descriptive narratives, as measured by the proportion of adjective, adverbs, and modifiers, are more depressed. A possible explanation is offered by Fivush, Bohanek, Marin, & McDermott Sales (under review), in which the authors report that, in general, memories of negative events are longer and more detailed than memories of mundane or positive events. In the current study, depression is higher among individuals with negative and mixed coming out experiences to mothers than positive or neutral ones. Taking both of these findings into consideration, one might infer that there is a synergistic relationship between descriptiveness, emotional valence, and depression. However, the correlation between these variables is not significant when the sample includes college students only, thereby lessening our confidence in the robustness of this finding.
Based on clinical literature (i.e. Egeland & Susman-Stillman, 1996; Moulds & Bryant, 2006; Van Minnen et al., 2002), it was expected that individuals with highly central and negative coming out experiences would produce less coherent narratives. Contrary to hypotheses, individuals fitting this profile produced more coherent narratives when coming out to their father. However, because this result was not replicated when coming out to mothers, it must be considered tentative.

In previous studies, memory coherence has been assessed primarily for open-ended or extended narratives rather than pinpointed episodes. Because participants in the current study were asked to report only the specific event of coming out to their parent(s) the relation between memory coherence and event centrality may be better explained by consulting the flashbulb memory literature. In flashbulb memory studies, individuals with highly emotional reactions to a specific event often have the most elaborate and most consistent memories overtime (e.g. Conway et al., 1994). Similarly, in a study on effects of the September 1999 earthquake in western Turkey, Er (2003) found individuals closer to the epicenter had more consistent and elaborate memories of the disaster. It is possible that coming out to one's father produces a similar flashbulb effect: central negative emotions produce clear and coherent memories. Supporting this idea, several participants voiced that coming out to their father was a more uncomfortable and awkward experience than coming out to their mother. For example, a participant's reply to how she felt when coming out to her father:
More nervous than I've ever been in my life. Like for some reason it really mattered what he said and like I felt like I was gunna cry at that exact moment in time. I was; you put yourself out to a slaughter right then and there. (participant #8214)

Also, in order to better prepare themselves for this highly central negative event and minimize their level of discomfort, participants also may have rehearsed the event both prior to and following coming out to their father. Increased rehearsal, both before and after the event, could have also led to the event being more coherent.

**Sampling Issues**

Limitations to the present study could have accounted for an overall lack of significant findings. One factor is the relatively small sample size (N = 53). In the present study, it was very difficult and time-consuming to recruit participants. Similarly, in other studies on sensitive or potentially stigmatizing topics, such as child abuse or HIV status, recruitment and retention of participants can be an issue (i.e. Kinard, 2001; Records & Rice, 2006; DeSantis, 2006; Pappas-Deluca et al., 2006). This difficulty can be explained by hesitation of potential participants to reveal something private about themselves and their lives. Reticence such as this on the part of participants might have played a role in the low participation numbers of the current study.

Regarding specific support groups, Portsmouth and Manchester Outright have small numbers of people who are 18 and older attending group meetings (the majority of attendees are under 18); thus the pool of potential participants
from which to draw from is relatively low. Another reason for recruitment
difficulties was the decision not to include bisexuals. This decision is grounded in
theoretical reasoning related to the “bisexual myth” that some parents may hold
when a child discloses their bisexuality (Savin-Williams, 2001). For example, the
myth that a daughter has equally strong attractions to males and females often
implies to parents that their child can at some later point simply choose males
and forget females altogether (Savin-Williams, 2001). The perpetration of this
myth may affect the coming out experience of bisexuals, making it a qualitatively
different experience than that of homosexuals. It has also been shown that
bisexuals are likely to experience “double discrimination” from both heterosexual
and homosexual communities (Ochs, 1996; Mulick & Wright, 2002). Thus,
“biphobia” or the negative attitudes about bisexuality and bisexual individuals
(Bennett, 1992) may adversely impact indices of psychological and social well-
being differentially for bisexuals. Due to the use of this sampling restriction,
recruitment from the UNH Alliance was impeded. Some bisexual individuals
were offended by the inability to participate and thus asked their gay and lesbian
friends to boycott the study. In future research, to avoid potential conflicts and to
gain a better understanding of bisexuality, it would be beneficial to include
individuals identifying as bisexual, although data from these participants would
need to be analyzed separately.

Individuals who participate in a study of this type may not be
representative of the larger homosexual population. For example, over half of
the sample is comprised of current college students and all but one participant is
Caucasian. Thus, results cannot be generalized to individuals with varying
degrees of education and differing racial backgrounds. Another selection issue
concerns the motivations underlying homosexual youths’ decisions to join
support groups. Savin-Williams (2001) states:

Perhaps youths who join community or collegiate groups do so
because they believe that their life is significantly difficult that they
need the assistance of a support group.... Thus, youths in social
and political groups might have exceptional reasons for deciding
whether, how, and when to come out to their parents and have
parents who react to the disclosure in an inimitable, albeit negative
and distressing manner. (p. 246-247)

Since all of the participants in the current study are involved in a collegiate
or community support group, this could have an effect on the data, but not in the
particular direction Savin-Williams (2001) posits. In the present sample, a
substantial percentage of participants, when looking back upon coming out to
their parents, currently rate the experience as positive. Thus, it is possible that
participants had an overall better coming out experience than is typically found
when using a support group sample. The relatively positive reaction also could
limit the variability in narrative coherence. Specifically, Bohanek et al. (2005)
found that intensely positive narratives were rated as more coherent than
intensely negative ones. Given the large number of positive ratings by
participants and over half of their narratives receiving a coherence score of three
or above, the predictive capability of coherence ratings was limited.
One factor that could explain differences between Savin-Williams (2001) and the present study is participant age. For research approval purposes, the sample was limited to participants 18 years and older. Yet, a large number of community support group attendees were under the age of 18, with far fewer being over 18. One could speculate that under-age individuals are more troubled and are in greater need of the "special services" that Savin-Williams (2001) speaks of. Since the average amount of time current participants were "out" to their mother is three years, these older participants have had a longer period of time to adjust to their homosexual identity and may be attending support groups for different reasons than their younger counterparts. Specifically, with the Portsmouth and Manchester Outright groups, older support group members have the opportunity to take part in training in order to serve as peer mentors. Every year a handful of members do complete this training and act as mentors and confidants to younger attendees, particularly to those who have not disclosed their sexual identity outside of the group setting.

In the future, if a sample of homosexual youth is drawn from support groups, an important question to ask participants would be their reasons for attending group meetings. Identifying motivations for support group affiliation could be an important moderating variable in future studies.

**Methodological Issues**

The paucity of results regarding narrative structure may be related to methodological differences from studies by researchers who have found a strong relation between coherence, complexity, and well-being. Most important, other
studies have obtained extended rather than circumscribed memory narratives. For example, Bohanek et al.'s (2005) participants nominated four personally experienced events that varied along two dimensions, valence and level of intensity. Participants were required to write about each of four events continuously for an entire 10 minutes.

Other researchers have obtained memory narratives using even more extended and open-ended interview methods. In soliciting narratives from mothers who had been abused as children, Egeland & Susman-Stillman (1996) asked a series of general questions related to their upbringing. For example, participants were asked to report “how they were raised, including the make-up of their family, their living conditions, feelings toward parents, how affection was expressed, how disciplined, and degree of emotional support” (p. 1125). In turn, coherence of mothers’ extended narratives was found to be predictive of whether or not they were currently abusing their own children. Main (1991) also used open-ended interviews to question adults with infant children about their own childhood relationships with parents. Questions broadly referred to adults’ childhood experiences, and the narratives varied considerably with respect to specificity and coherence (Rothbard & Shaver, 1994).

In contrast, participants in the current study verbally reported one very specific episode, coming out to their parents. Participants were not given a time frame in which to fill; they could speak for as long or as short as they liked. Some spoken narratives are very long, while others are as short as a few sentences:
Um, so I just said mum I'm gay. She's like ok, I already knew, and that was that and she loves me ever since. Never had like a huge topic of conversation about it. It was like, does your dad know? Does your sisters know? I still love you the same. I love you for who you are. (participant #3339)

The request to describe one specific episode of any length could act as a built in narrative organizer, as illustrated by only one person's narrative being coded as incoherent. In the current study, asking participants to provide one pinpointed coming out memory appeared to limit the variations in narrative coherence and the potential predictability of psychological well-being. Perhaps participants would be more likely to report irrelevant, inconsistent, or overly general commentary if they were required to talk for a specified time frame or were given more open-ended memory prompts.

**Future Directions**

The lack of variation in memory specificity, and the absence of a relation between narrative coherence and well-being, suggests that these aspects of narrative structure are not well suited for analyses of pinpointed episodes. In future research, it could be beneficial to word narrative questions in a more open-ended manner. Instead of asking participants to talk about the singular event of coming out to each of their parents, one might frame the questions much more generally. For example, participants might be asked to describe sexual identity issues while growing up, with a focus on their relationships with parents. This open-ended questioning method, in contrast to that utilized in the current study,
would allow participants to guide the level of specificity and coherence in the
telling of their story. Instead of the researcher probing for a particular episode,
participants would need to construct thematic organization on their own. This
method should lead to greater variation in narrative specificity and coherence,
and better predictability of psychosocial outcomes. A comparison between study
designs—one eliciting extended narratives and the other eliciting pinpointed
memories—would provide valuable methodological guidance concerning the
value and suitability of coherence coding in autobiographical memory research.

Conclusions

Even though methods of the present study target a minority population
and address a very specific topic, they are relevant to a variety of individuals
across a number of contexts, one of which is the autobiographical memory
researcher. Research on autobiographical memory has been extended to a
population and topic that receives little attention in the social science literature.
The current study has also provided methodological insights about the
appropriateness of using memory structure as a predictor of psychological well­
being, especially when the remembered event is specific. In particular, follow up
research should compare the predictability of well-being by narrative coherence
when utilizing specific versus general interview probes.

Results are also applicable to attachment researchers. In the current
study, the attachment relationship between parent and child has been evaluated
in a unique manner, while interviewing an equally unique population about a
highly salient life event. Specifically, parental attachment relationships among
gay and lesbian young adults have been shown to be an important component in healthy psychosocial adjustment and attitudes.

Results of the current study are also central to sexuality researchers, as well as mental health practitioners who center their efforts on issues affecting gay and lesbian young adults. Findings have provided some insight into the process by which adolescents and young adults negotiate coming out to loved ones, as well as the manner in which their decision impacts critical areas of their social and emotional life. In particular, the present study has validated what we already know about the experience of coming out as gay or lesbian. Our knowledge has also been expanded by revealing findings not previously reported in the literature, including disclosure location, salient parental concerns and fears, and participants' relatively positive retrospective evaluations of the coming out experience.

In order to better educate sexual minority youth on what to expect during the disclosure process, normative information should be shared with them. Youths' increased knowledge may help to alleviate their own psychological discomfort. For example, they could be informed that although disclosure may first be conceptualized as a negative event, appraisal is altered over time, such that when looking back it is re-appraised as a more positive event. Although coming out is often a difficult and taxing process early on, circumstances often change and the situation eventually improves. This insight, if shared with homosexual youth during the coming out process, could build confidence in their decision to disclose their sexual minority status to others. Given that disclosure
is not a one-time event, but a repeated process across the lifespan, perhaps a little confidence could go a long way, as it did for the following participant.

Um, what I learned from talking to my mom was, it's really about delivery and how, how I kind of approach it. When I went in with my mom I talked to her fearing rejection I guess and kind of uncertain, not about my own orientation, but about how she would perceive me and whatnot. And I realized that that kind of, those behavioral cues I guess kind of triggered some of her own stuff. I think she picked up on some of my fear and whatever and kinda fed into that. And when I told friends, when I told my siblings, it was just a declarative statement. It wasn't like a questioning kind of, are you going to accept me. It was a hey, you know I'm gay right and or, I'm gay. And, and, it's not really open to negotiation or anything like that and take me or leave me. This is who I am, you know and when I've said it with confidence, um I've had no problems with anybody. (participant #0692)

This statement reflects a confidence and positive sense of self that should be the goal of any intervention based on current and future research.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

1) ‘Now I'd like you to tell your coming out story to your parents, sparing no details, even if you think the details are not important. Let's get started. Have you come out to your parents? Did you do so together or separately?’ If separately: ‘Which parent did you tell first? Let's start there.’

2) Non-directive probes will be used to obtain as full an account as possible: ‘Do you have anything else that you would like to share with me?’

3) If participant told parents on separate occasions a second series of probes will be used: ‘You've told me about coming out to your mother. Now I'd like you to tell me about coming out to your father?’
APPENDIX B

Follow-up Questions Mother

INSTRUCTIONS FOR QUESTIONS: Please think back upon the interview you just had and coming out to your mother as you answer the following questions.

1) How old were you at the time of this experience? Give best estimate. _Years

2) When this experience originally occurred, I felt (circle one):

1----------------------2----------------------------3------------------4----------------------5
Not at all emotional              Extremely emotional

3) Memories of the past often bring up emotions in the present. When I think back on this experience today, I feel (circle one):

1----------------------2----------------------------3------------------4----------------------5
Not at all emotional              Extremely emotional

4) When I think back on this experience today, my current feelings about this experience are (check one):

____ Positive    ____ Negative    ____ Mixed Positive & Negative    ____ Neutral

5) Sometimes a past experience can continue to influence how a person feels about him or herself in the present. The impact of this experience on how I currently feel about myself as a person is (circle one):

1----------------------------2------------------3------------------4----------------------5
No impact                        Extreme impact

6) When this experience originally occurred, did it affect your relationship with your mother? (circle one):

1----------------------------2------------------3------------------4----------------------5
Not at all                        Extremely

7) Does this experience continue to affect your relationship with your mother? (circle one):

1----------------------------2------------------3------------------4----------------------5
Not at all                        Extremely
APPENDIX C

Follow-up Questions Father

INSTRUCTIONS FOR QUESTIONS: Please think back upon the interview you just had and coming out to your father as you answer the following questions.

1) How old were you at the time of this experience? Give best estimate. _Years

2) When this experience originally occurred, I felt (circle one):

1- Not at all emotional 2- 3- 4- 5- Extremely emotional

3) Memories of the past often bring up emotions in the present. When I think back on this experience today, I feel (circle one):

1- Not at all emotional 2- 3- 4- 5- Extremely emotional

4) When I think back on this experience today, my current feelings about this experience are (check one):

_____Positive  _____Negative  _____Mixed Positive & Negative  _____Neutral

5) Sometimes a past experience can continue to influence how a person feels about him or herself in the present. The impact of this experience on how I currently feel about myself as a person is (circle one):

1- No impact 2- 3- 4- 5- Extreme impact

6) When this experience originally occurred, did it affect your relationship with your father? (circle one):

1- Not at all 2- 3- 4- 5- Extremely

7) Does this experience continue to affect your relationship with your father? (circle one):

1- Not at all 2- 3- 4- 5- Extremely
APPENDIX D

Demographics

1) Age: _____

2) Gender (check one): _____Male _____Female _____Transgender

3) Sexual Identity (check one): _____Bisexual _____Gay _____Lesbian
   _____Heterosexual _____Uncertain

4) To whom are you most attracted? (check one): _____Women _____Men
   _____Both men and women

5) Racial Background (check one): _____African American _____Native American
   _____Asian American _____Caucasian _____Hispanic American _____Other

6) Your highest level of education (check one): _____Some high school
   _____High school graduate
   _____Current college student
   _____College graduate

7) Mother's Education (highest level; check one): _____Non applicable
   _____Did not complete high school
   _____Completed HS or GED
   _____Took/taking college classes
   _____Completed college
   _____Beyond college
   _____Don't know
8) Father's Education (highest level; check one):  ____Non applicable

      ____Did not complete high school
      ____Completed HS or GED
      ____Took/taking college classes
      ____Completed college
      ____Beyond college
      ____Don't know

9) Place yourself on the following continuum with respect to friends knowing about your sexual orientation:  1 no friends know, 2 one friend knows, 3 several friends know 4 most friends know, 5 all friends know (circle one):

    1------------------2-------------------3------------------4-------------------5

10) Place yourself on the following continuum with respect to family knowing about your sexual orientation:  1 no family knows, 2 one family member knows, 3 several family members know 4 most family members know, 5 all family members know (circle one):

    1------------------2-------------------3------------------4-------------------5

11) List the members of your immediate family that know about your sexual orientation and the age at which you came out to them (e.g. mother, father, sister, brother):

12) To whom did you come out to first? (check one):  ____Friend

      ____Mother
      ____Father
      ____Other (specify):
APPENDIX E

Adaptation of Nungesser Homosexual Attitudes Inventory

INSTRUCTIONS FOR QUESTIONS: The following scale contains statements related to one's attitudes towards homosexuality. Please respond to each item by circling the number on a scale of 1 to 4 that best describes your feelings.

1) Homosexuals should be allowed to have or adopt children if they want to.

1---------------------------2--------------------------3---------------------4
Disagree Strongly Disagree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Agree Strongly

2) I am glad to be gay/lesbian.

1---------------------------2-------------------------3---------------------4
Disagree Strongly Disagree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Agree Strongly

3) My homosexuality does not make me unhappy.

1---------------------------2-------------------------3---------------------4
Disagree Strongly Disagree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Agree Strongly

4) I wish I were straight.

1---------------------------2-------------------------3---------------------4
Disagree Strongly Disagree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Agree Strongly

5) Whenever I think a lot about being gay/lesbian, I feel sad or depressed.

1---------------------------2-------------------------3---------------------4
Disagree Strongly Disagree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Agree Strongly

6) Marriage between two homosexuals should be legalized.

1---------------------------2-------------------------3---------------------4
Disagree Strongly Disagree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Agree Strongly

7) Whenever I think a lot about being gay/lesbian, I feel critical about myself.

1---------------------------2-------------------------3---------------------4
Disagree Strongly Disagree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Agree Strongly
8) Homosexual lifestyles are not as fulfilling as straight lifestyles.

1---------------------------------------------4
Disagree Strongly   Disagree Somewhat   Agree Somewhat   Agree Strongly

9) I am proud to be part of the lesbian and gay community.

1---------------------------------------------4
Disagree Strongly   Disagree Somewhat   Agree Somewhat   Agree Strongly

10) I would not give up my homosexuality even if I could.

1---------------------------------------------4
Disagree Strongly   Disagree Somewhat   Agree Somewhat   Agree Strongly

11) Homosexuality is not as good as heterosexuality.

1---------------------------------------------4
Disagree Strongly   Disagree Somewhat   Agree Somewhat   Agree Strongly

12) When I think about coming out to a straight friend, I am afraid he/she will pay more attention to my body movements and voice than to me, the person.

1---------------------------------------------4
Disagree Strongly   Disagree Somewhat   Agree Somewhat   Agree Strongly

13) I am afraid people will harass me if I come out more publicly.

1---------------------------------------------4
Disagree Strongly   Disagree Somewhat   Agree Somewhat   Agree Strongly

14) If I were outed, I would be extremely unhappy.

1---------------------------------------------4
Disagree Strongly   Disagree Somewhat   Agree Somewhat   Agree Strongly

15) If others knew about my homosexuality I would be afraid that they would see me as being masculine/feminine.

1---------------------------------------------4
Disagree Strongly   Disagree Somewhat   Agree Somewhat   Agree Strongly
16) If my straight friends knew about my homosexuality I would feel uncomfortable.

1 2 3 4
Disagree Strongly Disagree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Agree Strongly

17) I would not mind if my neighbors knew that I am gay/lesbian.

1 2 3 4
Disagree Strongly Disagree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Agree Strongly

18) If people know of my homosexuality, I am afraid they would begin to avoid me.

1 2 3 4
Disagree Strongly Disagree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Agree Strongly

19) It is important for me to conceal the fact that I am gay/lesbian from most people.

1 2 3 4
Disagree Strongly Disagree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Agree Strongly

20) When people know of my homosexuality, I am afraid they will not treat me as a man/woman.

1 2 3 4
Disagree Strongly Disagree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Agree Strongly

21) Whenever I tell my straight friends about my homosexuality, I worry they will try to remember things about me that appear to fit the stereotype of a homosexual.

1 2 3 4
Disagree Strongly Disagree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Agree Strongly

22) If people my age knew of my homosexuality, I am afraid that many would not want to be my friend.

1 2 3 4
Disagree Strongly Disagree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Agree Strongly
23) When I think about coming out to a straight friend, I worry that he/she might watch me to see if I do things that are stereotypically homosexual.

1----------------- 2----------------- 3----------------- 4
Disagree Strongly  Disagree Somewhat  Agree Somewhat  Agree Strongly
APPENDIX F

Relationship Assessment Scale

INSTRUCTIONS FOR QUESTIONS: Please answer the following questions regarding your most recent romantic relationship. If you have never had a romantic relationship, please answer in regards to your best same sex friend and check here _____.

1) How well does your partner meet your needs? (circle one)

1________________2________________3________________4________________5
Poorly Average Very Good

2) In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship? (circle one):

1________________2________________3________________4________________5
Unsatisfied Average Very Satisfied

3) How good is your relationship compared to most? (circle one)

1________________2________________3________________4________________5
Poor Average Excellent

4) How often do you wish you hadn’t gotten into this relationship? (circle one)

1________________2________________3________________4________________5
Never Average Very Often

5) To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations? (circle one)

1________________2________________3________________4________________5
Hardly at All Average Completely

6) How much do you love your partner? (circle one)

1________________2________________3________________4________________5
Not Much Average Very Much

7) How many problems are there in your relationship? (circle one)

1________________2________________3________________4________________5
Very Few Average Very Many
APPENDIX G

Beck Anxiety Inventory

INSTRUCTIONS FOR QUESTIONS: Below is a list of symptoms, please rate how much you have been bothered by each of the following symptoms over the PAST WEEK by circling the number next to the question.

1) Numbness or tingling

   0---------------------------1-------------------------2------------------------3
   Not at All                 Mildly                     Moderately               Severely

2) Feeling hot

   0---------------------------1-------------------------2------------------------3
   Not at All                 Mildly                     Moderately               Severely

3) Wobbliness in legs

   0---------------------------1-------------------------2------------------------3
   Not at All                 Mildly                     Moderately               Severely

4) Unable to relax

   0---------------------------1-------------------------2------------------------3
   Not at All                 Mildly                     Moderately               Severely

5) Fear of the worst happening

   0---------------------------1-------------------------2------------------------3
   Not at All                 Mildly                     Moderately               Severely

6) Dizzy or lightheaded

   0---------------------------1-------------------------2------------------------3
   Not at All                 Mildly                     Moderately               Severely

7) Heart pounding or racing

   0---------------------------1-------------------------2------------------------3
   Not at All                 Mildly                     Moderately               Severely
8) Unsteady

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9) Terrified

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10) Nervous

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11) Feelings of choking

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12) Hands trembling

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13) Shaky

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14) Fear of losing control

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15) Difficulty breathing

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16) Fear of dying

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17) Scared

0---------------------------1--------------------------2------------------------3
Not at All                    Mildly                    Moderately                Severely

18) Indigestion or discomfort in abdomen

0---------------------------1--------------------------2------------------------3
Not at All                    Mildly                    Moderately                Severely

19) Faint

0---------------------------1--------------------------2------------------------3
Not at All                    Mildly                    Moderately                Severely

20) Face flushed

0---------------------------1--------------------------2------------------------3
Not at All                    Mildly                    Moderately                Severely

21) Sweating -not due to heat

0---------------------------1--------------------------2------------------------3
Not at All                    Mildly                    Moderately                Severely
APPENDIX H

Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale

INSTRUCTIONS FOR QUESTIONS: Below is a list of the ways you might have felt or behaved. Please tell me how often you have felt this way during the PAST WEEK by circling the number next to each question.

1) I was bothered by things that usually don’t bother me.

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<tr>
<th>Rarely/none time</th>
<th>Some/little time</th>
<th>Moderate amount time</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>( &lt; 1 day)</td>
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2) I did not feel like eating; my appetite was poor.

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3) I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with help from my family or friends.

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4) I felt that I was just as good as other people.

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5) I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing.

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6) I felt depressed.

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7) I felt that everything I did was an effort.

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8) I felt hopeful about the future.

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9) I thought that my life had been a failure.

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10) I felt fearful.

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11) My sleep was restless.

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12) I was happy.

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13) I talked less than usual.

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14) I felt lonely.

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15) People were unfriendly.

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16) I enjoyed life.

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17) I had crying spells.

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18) I felt sad.

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19) I felt that people dislike me.

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20) I could not get “going.”

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INSTRUCTIONS FOR QUESTIONS: The following pages contain statements that describe family relationships and the kinds of feelings and experiences frequently reported by young adults. Please respond to each item by circling the number on a scale of 1 to 5 that best describes your parents, your relationship with your parents, and your experiences and feelings. Please provide a single rating to describe your parents and your relationship with them. If only one parent is living or if your parents are divorced, respond with the reference to your living parent or the parent with whom you feel closer.

1) In general, my parents are persons I can count on to provide emotional support when I feel troubled.

1-------------------2-------------------3-------------------4-------------------5
Not at All Somewhat Moderate Amt. Quite a Bit Very Much
0-10% 11-35% 36-65% 66-90% 91-100%

2) In general, my parents support my goals and interests.

1-------------------2-------------------3-------------------4-------------------5
Not at All Somewhat Moderate Amt. Quite a Bit Very Much
0-10% 11-35% 36-65% 66-90% 91-100%

3) In general, my parents live in a different world.

1-------------------2-------------------3-------------------4-------------------5
Not at All Somewhat Moderate Amt. Quite a Bit Very Much
0-10% 11-35% 36-65% 66-90% 91-100%

4) In general, my parents understand my problems and concerns.

1-------------------2-------------------3-------------------4-------------------5
Not at All Somewhat Moderate Amt. Quite a Bit Very Much
0-10% 11-35% 36-65% 66-90% 91-100%

5) In general, my parents respect my privacy.

1-------------------2-------------------3-------------------4-------------------5
Not at All Somewhat Moderate Amt. Quite a Bit Very Much
0-10% 11-35% 36-65% 66-90% 91-100%
6) In general, my parents restrict my freedom or independence.

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7) In general, my parents are available to give me advice or guidance when I want it.

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8) In general, my parents take my opinions seriously.

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9) In general, my parents encourage me to make my own decisions.

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10) In general, my parents are critical of what I can do.

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11) In general, my parents impose their ideas and values on me.

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12) In general, my parents have given me as much attention as I have wanted.

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13) In general, my parents are persons to whom I can express differences of opinion on important matters.

1--------------------2----------------------3----------------------4--------------5
Not at All Somewhat Moderate Amt. Quite a Bit Very Much
0-10% 11-35% 36-65% 66-90% 91-100%

14) In general, my parents have no idea what I am feeling or thinking.

1--------------------2----------------------3----------------------4--------------5
Not at All Somewhat Moderate Amt. Quite a Bit Very Much
0-10% 11-35% 36-65% 66-90% 91-100%

15) In general, my parents have provided me with the freedom to experiment and learn things on my own.

1--------------------2----------------------3----------------------4--------------5
Not at All Somewhat Moderate Amt. Quite a Bit Very Much
0-10% 11-35% 36-65% 66-90% 91-100%

16) In general, my parents are too busy or otherwise involved to help me.

1--------------------2----------------------3----------------------4--------------5
Not at All Somewhat Moderate Amt. Quite a Bit Very Much
0-10% 11-35% 36-65% 66-90% 91-100%

17) In general, my parents have trust and confidence in me.

1--------------------2----------------------3----------------------4--------------5
Not at All Somewhat Moderate Amt. Quite a Bit Very Much
0-10% 11-35% 36-65% 66-90% 91-100%

18) In general, my parents try to control my life.

1--------------------2----------------------3----------------------4--------------5
Not at All Somewhat Moderate Amt. Quite a Bit Very Much
0-10% 11-35% 36-65% 66-90% 91-100%

19) In general, my parents protect me from danger and difficulty.

1--------------------2----------------------3----------------------4--------------5
Not at All Somewhat Moderate Amt. Quite a Bit Very Much
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20) In general, my parents ignore what I have to say.

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21) In general, my parents are sensitive to my feelings and my needs.

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22) In general, my parents are disappointed in me.

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23) In general, my parents give me advice whether or not I want it.

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24) In general, my parents respect my judgment and decisions, even if different from what they would want.

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25) In general, my parents do things for me that I could do for myself.

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26) In general, my parents are persons whose expectations I feel obligated to meet.

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27) In general, my parents treat me like a younger child.

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28) During recent visits or time spent together, my parents were persons I looked forward to seeing.

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29) During recent visits or time spent together, my parents were persons with whom I argued.

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30) During recent visits or time spent together, my parents were persons with whom I felt relaxed and comfortable.

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31) During recent visits or time spent together, my parents were persons who made me angry.

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32) During recent visits or time spent together, my parents were persons I wanted to be with all the time.

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33) During recent visits or time spent together, my parents were persons toward whom I felt cool and distant.

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34) During recent visits or time spent together, my parents were persons who got on my nerves.

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35) During recent visits or time spent together, my parents were persons who aroused feelings of guilt and anxiety.

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36) During recent visits or time spent together, my parents were persons to whom I enjoyed telling about the things I have done and learned.

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37) During recent visits or time spent together, my parents were persons for whom I felt a feeling of love.

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38) During recent visits or time spent together, my parents were persons I tried to ignore.

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39) During recent visits or time spent together, my parents were persons to whom I confided my most personal thoughts and feelings.

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40) During recent visits or time spent together, my parents were persons whose company I enjoyed.

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41) During recent visits or time spent together, my parents were persons I avoided telling about my experiences.

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42) Following time spent together, I leave my parents with warm and positive feelings.

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43) Following time spent together, I leave my parents feeling let down and disappointed by my family.

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44) When I have a serious problem or an important decision to make I look to my family for support, encouragement, and/or guidance.

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45) When I have a serious problem or an important decision to make I seek help from a professional, such as a therapist, college counselor, or clergy.

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Not at All Somewhat Moderate Amt. Quite a Bit Very Much
0-10% 11-35% 36-65% 66-90% 91-100%

46) When I have a serious problem or an important decision to make I think about how my family might respond and what they might say.

1-2-3-4-5
Not at All Somewhat Moderate Amt. Quite a Bit Very Much
0-10% 11-35% 36-65% 66-90% 91-100%

47) When I have a serious problem or an important decision to make I work it out on my own, without help or discussion with others.

1-2-3-4-5
Not at All Somewhat Moderate Amt. Quite a Bit Very Much
0-10% 11-35% 36-65% 66-90% 91-100%

48) When I have a serious problem or an important decision to make I discuss the matter with a friend.

1-2-3-4-5
Not at All Somewhat Moderate Amt. Quite a Bit Very Much
0-10% 11-35% 36-65% 66-90% 91-100%

49) When I have a serious problem or an important decision to make I know that my family will know what to do.

1-2-3-4-5
Not at All Somewhat Moderate Amt. Quite a Bit Very Much
0-10% 11-35% 36-65% 66-90% 91-100%

50) When I have a serious problem or an important decision to make I contact my family if I am not able to resolve the situation after talking it over with my friends.

1-2-3-4-5
Not at All Somewhat Moderate Amt. Quite a Bit Very Much
0-10% 11-35% 36-65% 66-90% 91-100%
51) When I go to my parents for help I feel more confident in my ability to handle problems on my own.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Moderate Amt.</th>
<th>Quite a Bit</th>
<th>Very Much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-10%</td>
<td>11-35%</td>
<td>36-65%</td>
<td>66-90%</td>
<td>91-100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

52) When I go to my parents for help I continue to feel unsure of myself.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Moderate Amt.</th>
<th>Quite a Bit</th>
<th>Very Much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-10%</td>
<td>11-35%</td>
<td>36-65%</td>
<td>66-90%</td>
<td>91-100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

53) When I go to my parents for help I feel that I would have obtained more understanding and comfort from a friend.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Moderate Amt.</th>
<th>Quite a Bit</th>
<th>Very Much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-10%</td>
<td>11-35%</td>
<td>36-65%</td>
<td>66-90%</td>
<td>91-100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

54) When I go to my parents for help I feel confident that things will work out as long as I follow my parents’ advice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Moderate Amt.</th>
<th>Quite a Bit</th>
<th>Very Much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-10%</td>
<td>11-35%</td>
<td>36-65%</td>
<td>66-90%</td>
<td>91-100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

55) When I go to my parents for help I am disappointed with their response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Somewhat</th>
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<th>Very Much</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-10%</td>
<td>11-35%</td>
<td>36-65%</td>
<td>66-90%</td>
<td>91-100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INSTRUCTIONS FOR QUESTIONS: Please think back upon the interview you just had and coming out to your mother as you answer the following questions in an honest and sincere way. Please respond to each item by circling the appropriate number.

1) This event has become a reference point for the way I understand new experiences.

1------------------------2------------------------3------------------------4------------------------5
Totally Disagree                        Totally Agree

2) I automatically see connections and similarities between this event and experiences in my present life.

1------------------------2------------------------3------------------------4------------------------5
Totally Disagree                        Totally Agree

3) I feel that this event has become part of my identity.

1------------------------2------------------------3------------------------4------------------------5
Totally Disagree                        Totally Agree

4) This event can be seen as a symbol or mark of important themes in my life.

1------------------------2------------------------3------------------------4------------------------5
Totally Disagree                        Totally Agree

5) This event is making my life different from the life of most other people.

1------------------------2------------------------3------------------------4------------------------5
Totally Disagree                        Totally Agree

6) This event has become a reference point for the way I understand myself and the world.

1------------------------2------------------------3------------------------4------------------------5
Totally Disagree                        Totally Agree
7) I believe that people who haven’t experienced this type of event think differently than I do.

1-------------------2---------------------3--------------------4--------------------5
Totally Disagree                           Totally Agree

8) This event tells a lot about who I am.

1-------------------2---------------------3--------------------4--------------------5
Totally Disagree                           Totally Agree

9) I often see connections and similarities between this event and my current relationships with other people.

1-------------------2---------------------3--------------------4--------------------5
Totally Disagree                           Totally Agree

10) I feel that this event has become a central part of my life story.

1-------------------2---------------------3--------------------4--------------------5
Totally Disagree                           Totally Agree

11) I believe that people who haven’t experienced this type of event, have a different way of looking upon themselves than I have.

1-------------------2---------------------3--------------------4--------------------5
Totally Disagree                           Totally Agree

12) This event has colored the way I think and feel about other experiences.

1-------------------2---------------------3--------------------4--------------------5
Totally Disagree                           Totally Agree

13) This event has become a reference point for the way I look upon my future.

1-------------------2---------------------3--------------------4--------------------5
Totally Disagree                           Totally Agree

14) If I were to weave a carpet of my life, this event would be in the middle with threads going out to many other experiences.

1-------------------2---------------------3--------------------4--------------------5
Totally Disagree                           Totally Agree
15) My life story can be divided into two main chapters: one is before and one is after this event happened.

1-2-3-4-5
Totally Disagree Totally Agree

16) This event permanently changed my life.

1-2-3-4-5
Totally Disagree Totally Agree

17) I often think about the effects this event will have on my future.

1-2-3-4-5
Totally Disagree Totally Agree

18) This event was a turning point in my life.

1-2-3-4-5
Totally Disagree Totally Agree

19) If this event had not happened to me, I would be a different person today.

1-2-3-4-5
Totally Disagree Totally Agree

20) When I reflect upon my future, I often think back to this event.

1-2-3-4-5
Totally Disagree Totally Agree
APPENDIX K

Centrality of Events Scale Father

INSTRUCTIONS FOR QUESTIONS: Please think back upon the interview you just had and coming out to your father as you answer the following questions in an honest and sincere way. Please respond to each item by circling the appropriate number.

1) This event has become a reference point for the way I understand new experiences.

1---------------------2---------------------3---------------------4---------------------5
Totally Disagree          Totally Agree

2) I automatically see connections and similarities between this event and experiences in my present life.

1---------------------2---------------------3---------------------4---------------------5
Totally Disagree          Totally Agree

3) I feel that this event has become part of my identity.

1---------------------2---------------------3---------------------4---------------------5
Totally Disagree          Totally Agree

4) This event can be seen as a symbol or mark of important themes in my life.

1---------------------2---------------------3---------------------4---------------------5
Totally Disagree          Totally Agree

5) This event is making my life different from the life of most other people.

1---------------------2---------------------3---------------------4---------------------5
Totally Disagree          Totally Agree

6) This event has become a reference point for the way I understand myself and the world.

1---------------------2---------------------3---------------------4---------------------5
Totally Disagree          Totally Agree
7) I believe that people who haven’t experienced this type of event think differently than I do.

1-----------------2------------------3------------------4------------------5
Totally Disagree Totally Agree

8) This event tells a lot about who I am.

1-----------------2------------------3------------------4------------------5
Totally Disagree Totally Agree

9) I often see connections and similarities between this event and my current relationships with other people.

1-----------------2------------------3------------------4------------------5
Totally Disagree Totally Agree

10) I feel that this event has become a central part of my life story.

1-----------------2------------------3------------------4------------------5
Totally Disagree Totally Agree

11) I believe that people who haven’t experienced this type of event, have a different way of looking upon themselves than I have.

1-----------------2------------------3------------------4------------------5
Totally Disagree Totally Agree

12) This event has colored the way I think and feel about other experiences.

1-----------------2------------------3------------------4------------------5
Totally Disagree Totally Agree

13) This event has become a reference point for the way I look upon my future.

1-----------------2------------------3------------------4------------------5
Totally Disagree Totally Agree

14) If I were to weave a carpet of my life, this event would be in the middle with threads going out to many other experiences.

1-----------------2------------------3------------------4------------------5
Totally Disagree Totally Agree
15) My life story can be divided into two main chapters: one is before and one is after this event happened.

1-----------------2---------------------3------------------4---------------------5
Totally Disagree Totally Agree

16) This event permanently changed my life.

1-----------------2---------------------3------------------4---------------------5
Totally Disagree Totally Agree

17) I often think about the effects this event will have on my future.

1-----------------2---------------------3------------------4---------------------5
Totally Disagree Totally Agree

18) This event was a turning point in my life.

1-----------------2---------------------3------------------4---------------------5
Totally Disagree Totally Agree

19) If this event had not happened to me, I would be a different person today.

1-----------------2---------------------3------------------4---------------------5
Totally Disagree Totally Agree

20) When I reflect upon my future, I often think back to this event.

1-----------------2---------------------3------------------4---------------------5
Totally Disagree Totally Agree
Institutional Review Board Approval Page

University of New Hampshire

Research Conduct and Compliance Services, Office of Sponsored Research
Service Building, 51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585
Fax: 603-862-3564

31-Oct-2006

Rossi-Bastarache, Nicole
Psychology, Conant Hall
Durham, NH 03824

IRB #: 3782
Study: Coming Out Stories of Gay and Lesbian Young Adults: Relation Between Memory Characteristics and Psychological Well-Being
Approval Date: 25-Aug-2006

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved the protocol for your study as Expedited as described in Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 46, Subsection 110.

Approval is granted to conduct your study as described in your protocol for one year from the approval date above. At the end of the approval period, you will be asked to submit a report with regard to the involvement of human subjects in this study. If your study is still active, you may request an extension of IRB approval.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the attached document, Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects. (This document is also available at http://www.unh.edu/osr/compliance/irb.html.) Please read this document carefully before commencing your work involving human subjects.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,

Julie F. Simpson

105
### TABLE M1

Percent Agreement among Coders for Thematic Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic Content</th>
<th>Agreement</th>
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<tr>
<td>Who participant came out to</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Came out to parents separately or together</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directly or indirectly to mother</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directly or indirectly to father</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directly or indirectly to parents</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place came out to mother</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place came out to father</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place came out to parents</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiated coming out to mother</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiated coming out to father</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiated coming out to parents</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<td>Parent mentions heterosexual topics (i.e. wedding, grandchildren)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent expresses fear</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>How participant felt telling mother</td>
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<tr>
<td>How mother felt</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How participants felt telling father</td>
<td>80%</td>
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<tr>
<td>How father felt</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Agreement</strong></td>
<td><strong>93%</strong></td>
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TABLE M2

**Correlations Between Psychosocial Variables for the Entire Sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NHAI</th>
<th>PAQ</th>
<th>RAS</th>
<th>BAI</th>
<th>CESD</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

_Note._ *p < .05, **p < .01_
TABLE M3

Correlations Between Narrative Complexity & Psychosocial Variables for the Entire Sample

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NHAI</th>
<th>PAQ</th>
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Note. *p ≤ .05, **p ≤ .01
TABLE M4

Correlations Between Narrative Coherence & Psychosocial Variables for the Entire Sample

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<th>NHAI</th>
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*Note. *p ≤ .05, **p ≤ .01*
TABLE M5

Correlations Between Level of Descriptiveness & Psychosocial Variables for the Entire Sample

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*Note. *p ≤ .05, **p ≤ .01
### TABLE M6

**Correlations Between Narrative Complexity & Psychosocial Variables for College Students Only**

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</tbody>
</table>

*Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001*
### TABLE M7

*Correlations Between Narrative Coherence & Psychosocial Variables for College Students Only*

<table>
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<th>BAI</th>
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*Note.* "p < .05, **p < .01, p < .001***
TABLE M8

Correlations Between Level of Descriptiveness & Psychosocial Variables for College Students Only

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Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, p < .001***
TABLE M9

Correlations Between Narrative Complexity & Psychosocial Variables-Controlling Time Since Disclosure to Mother

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Note. *p ≤ .05, **p < .01, p < .001***
TABLE M10

Correlations Between Narrative Coherence & Psychosocial Variables-Controlling Time Since Disclosure to Mother

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Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, p < .001***
TABLE M11

Correlations Between Level of Descriptiveness & Psychosocial Variables-
Controlling Time Since Disclosure to Mother

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Note.  `p ≤ .05, "p < .01, p < .001 ***"`
# TABLE M12

**Correlations Between Narrative Complexity & Psychosocial Variables-Negative and Mixed Reactions Only**

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*Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, *p < .001***
TABLE M13

Correlations Between Narrative Coherence & Psychosocial Variables-Negative and Mixed Reactions Only

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Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, p < .001***
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Correlations Between Level of Descriptiveness & Psychosocial Variables-Negative and Mixed Reactions Only

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Note. "p ≤ .05, "p < .01, p < .001""