ADOLESCENT PEER PERCEPTIONS REFLECTED IN THE YEARBOOKS
OF MORMON HOMOSEXUAL AND HETEROSEXUAL MEN

by

David C. Pruden

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
in
Family and Human Development
ABSTRACT

Adolescent Peer Perceptions Reflected in the Yearbooks of Mormon Homosexual and Heterosexual Men

by

David C. Pruden, Master of Science
Utah State University, 2003

Major Professor: Dr. Kathleen W. Piercy
Department: Family and Human Development

This study explored the peer perceptions of adolescent heterosexual males and their homosexual counterparts who had not disclosed their feelings of erotic same-sex attraction to their classmates. The study focused on members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a conservative Christian denomination with clear doctrinal prohibitions against homosexual behavior. The handwritten messages from peers found in the senior high school yearbooks of 30 heterosexual and 30 same-sex attracted adolescent men were content analyzed to examine similarities and differences in the themes that emerged from the data.

The results indicated that there is a difference in the kind of activities that are common in the lives of these heterosexual and same-sex attracted males. The same-sex attracted men received messages predominately from female peers concerning their talent and themes connected with the arts. The heterosexual men received more of their messages from male peers addressing the topics of sports, recreation, and invitations to
engage in shared activities. The research raises questions about the well being of young men who may not identify with most of the dominant images of masculinity available to them. The absence of an adequate cultural script for same-sex attracted youth who must reconcile their sexual feelings with the beliefs of their conservative religious traditions is discussed.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Kathleen Piercy for serving as my major professor and advisor on this research project. She went far beyond the call of duty, becoming a valued mentor and friend. I would also like to thank Dr. Marcelo Diversi and Dr. Randall Jones for their support, encouragement, and direction as members of my committee. The faculty and students in the Department of Family, Consumer, and Human Development have blessed my educational experience more than they will ever know.

I would especially like to thank God, family, and friends for their love and support during this demanding time in my life. Finally, I want to thank the young men and women who daily meet the challenges of dealing with same-sex attraction in an unreceptive world. Their courage and integrity inspire me.

David C. Pruden
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives and the Research Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent Peer Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Social Construction of Masculinity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same-sex Attracted Youth and Peer Abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditionally Religious Same-Sex Attracted Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Issues of “Differentness” and Homosexual Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. METHODS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design Overview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment Procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection of Human Subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Sample Demographics</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

It is widely accepted in the developmental literature that child and adolescent peer relationships make a unique contribution to social and emotional development (Buhrmester, 1990). Youth who do not develop intimate friendships may miss out on important validating interactions that can persist as painful memories well into adulthood. Harry Stack Sullivan (1953) was one of the first theorists to contend that adolescent peer relationships have long-term implications for an individual’s feelings of competence and self-worth. Now studies provide evidence that friendships function as a source of ego support, emotional security, intimacy, and are key in assisting individuals to see themselves as competent and worthwhile (Furman & Robbins, 1985).

What is the effect on teenage males who are unsuccessful in their attempts at establishing meaningful friendships? While all adolescents face challenges in establishing meaningful friendships, some researchers have suggested that self-identified gay adolescents experience a life of disapproval, rejection, isolation, discrimination, and abuse (Smith & Drake, 2001). This pattern of rejection has been associated with substance abuse, running away from home, dropping out of school, and even prostitution. In a study published in the American Journal of Public Health (Russell & Joyner, 2001), gay adolescents were reported to be twice as likely to attempt suicide as their heterosexual peers. Clearly a problem exists for those adolescents who have chosen to come “out of the closet.” Researchers have noted that peer abuse and peer rejection is an
underestimated and neglected area of study (Besaq, 1989). While child abuse by adults has been the focus of policy makers for several decades, there is no parallel effort in regard to peer abuse.

While scholars are beginning to take an interest in the difficulties of self-disclosed gay and lesbian adolescents, there has been almost no research examining the lives of same-sex attracted adolescents who have chosen to remain "in the closet." Their desire for confidentiality predisposes them to be a group far less available for investigation, yet there is evidence that heterosexual students, such as female athletes or males interested in the theater arts, may suffer from peer abuse as a result of not fitting gender stereotypes (Bart, 1998). If merely "being different" can subject an adolescent to emotional abuse, how successful are these non self-identified, same-sex attracted youth in managing their quest for friendships while avoiding the rocky shoals of peer abuse?

The majority of contemporary gay youth report coming out to a select few friends in their late teens and to their parents in their early twenties (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 1999). Adolescents growing up in conservative religious households in which a homosexual orientation is incompatible with the doctrines of their religious belief would seem even less likely to disclose their sexual identity to their peers or their parents during their high school years. Young people growing up as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are taught that homosexual behavior is a serious sin and that even erotic same-sex thoughts and feelings "should be resisted and redirected" (Oaks, 1995, p. 9). The conservative cultural environment of the Latter-day Saint community would present an even greater challenge to the adolescent dealing with homosexual feelings than might be found in the larger society, thus providing these adolescents with a
much greater incentive to suppress information about their sexual orientation for as long as possible.

Most of the information we have concerning adolescent friendships and feelings of being different or unable to connect with peers comes from retrospective reports from adult homosexuals who, during their high school years, had yet to disclose their same-sex attractions to others. While it is very important to respect these reflections on their adolescent lived experiences, it is also essential that we keep in mind the limitations they present. Retrospective self-reports create debatable assumptions concerning the accuracy of adult memories of childhood sexual behaviors or feelings (Boxer & Cohler, 1989). The passage of time, the knowledge that they were keeping a “secret” from their peers, and their current feelings about their sexual identity might influence their perspective of those high school years.

In content analysis, researchers can choose to focus on documents that were methods of communication prepared for personal reasons and not subject to the revisions of personal memory. Analyzing the messages found in the senior high school yearbooks of heterosexual and homosexual men allows the examination of explicit themes, compares various topics, and notes the amount of space devoted to specific subjects of communication. This is useful because as Geertz (1983) tells us, social institutions, customs, and changes are in some sense “readable.” Researchers who wish to explore the multiple and conflicting voices of normally silenced groups sometimes can find important expressions in alternative perspectives offered in the mundane communications of everyday life (Hodder, 2000).
While the vast majority of the Latter-day Saint men who are dealing with homosexuality as adults worked hard to keep information concerning their sexual orientation a secret during their high school years, they too report feeling different and unaccepted by their male peers (Hyde & Hyde, 1997). Hyde and Hyde quoted one man as reporting, “Manhood seemed to come naturally to other guys my age, but somehow not to me. It was safer to be alone than risk being rejected by the crowd” (p. 58). Others speak of having nothing in common with their male peers, and feeling lonely and rejected. In anecdotal accounts of their adolescent experiences found in the book, *A Place in the Kingdom: Spiritual Insights from Latter-day Saints About Same-Sex Attractions* (1997), men reported that they not only felt different but also were treated differently from their peers, even when their peers presumably did not know that they were dealing with feelings of erotic same-sex attraction.

Underlying all questions concerning homosexuality and differences is a political discussion of genuine consequence. One conservative position is that homosexual men and women are just like everyone else, except for those they choose to love. Known as accommodation, this concept suggests that if homosexuals act or look different, it is because our society discriminates against and persecutes known homosexuals, and if they were treated respectably, there would be no abnormalities or unusual behavior (Savin-Williams, 1990). The more traditional gay liberation position maintains that homosexuals are, perhaps due to biological or developmental factors, atypical. Behavioral differences do exist, they maintain, and such concepts as masculinity and femininity must be separated from existing cultural norms relating to biological sex and characteristics of individuals.
Objectives and the Research Question

Manning and Cullum-Swan (1994) compared searching the various levels of social reality to an archaeological dig in which each study or research project represented an attempt to penetrate ever more deeply into a site. My major objective is to gain insight into peer relationships of adolescent heterosexual males and their homosexual counterparts who had not disclosed their feelings of erotic same-sex attraction to their classmates. If, as they report, many non-disclosed same-sex attracted adolescent males were treated differently than their heterosexual classmates by their high school peers, then understanding how those differences were perceived will offer some useful insights and make a contribution to the research literature on homosexuality.

I have chosen to study members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a conservative Christian denomination with clear doctrinal prohibitions against homosexual behavior. This allows me to accomplish my second objective, to support adolescent members of conservative religious organizations that feel that it is necessary to conceal their erotic same-sex attraction feelings from themselves and others. The findings of the study might assist adolescents in comparable contexts in religious communities, thereby making a contribution to the existing knowledge base.

High school yearbooks provide a unique medium for a research project. The messages are personal communications from adolescent peers that were probably written somewhat spontaneously. The fact that the messages were personal, generally private impressions of classmates written prior to any overt disclosure of sexual orientation could
provide a researcher with a small window through which they might obtain a subtle impression of how “differentness” is socially constructed.

This study will address the primary research question by asking the following:

Are there themes, patterns, gender, or content similarities or differences that emerge from an analysis of the classmate messages found in the yearbooks of 30 heterosexual and 30 homosexual (same-sex attracted) adolescent men?

Definition of Terms

Active Member: An individual who is “active” in participating in the activities, rituals, and practices of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Homosexuality: A preponderance of sexual or erotic feelings, thoughts, fantasies, or behaviors desired with members of the same-sex (Savin-Williams, 1990).

LDS or Latter-day Saint: A member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints sometimes known as Mormons.

Same-sex Attraction: A term preferred in the LDS community for homosexuality because it may be less likely to imply homosexual behaviors. In deference to the Latter-day Saint participants, this study used the term same-sex attracted (SSA) rather than homosexual or gay when referring to participants with sexual feelings that are primarily homosexual.

Heterosexual: A preponderance of sexual or erotic feelings, thoughts, fantasies, or behaviors desired with members of the opposite-sex. For ease of identification of heterosexual yearbooks, the acronym OSA was sometimes used.
Theoretical Framework

Symbolic interactionism, “more than any other of the family theories, calls for paying attention to how events and things are interpreted by actors” (Klein & White, 1996, p. 88). The most basic assumption of symbolic interactionist theory suggests that it is impossible to understand human behavior without knowing the meaning the behavior holds for the actor. Thomas and Thomas (1928) noted that what humans define as real is real in its consequences. These concepts are important to consider as one examines this study. There is an interaction between the adolescent male and the world in which he lives. Through this interaction, the adolescent projects an image of himself to the world and receives feedback from others (Lazar, 1987). Peer relationships are of concern to the teenage male. Adolescents are wondering what their peers are thinking of them and how peers assess their behavior. This concept of taking the role of the other is directly analogous to what Cooley (1902) described when he spoke of the “looking glass self.” A content analysis of the messages found in the high school yearbooks of male adolescents could provide a unique perspective on these relationships.

Developmental systems models stress the reciprocal changes pertinent in understanding how biological, psychological, and contextual issues all combine to promote behavior and development in adolescents (Lerner & Castellino, 2002). This concept suggests that the researcher examine how individual and contextual processes relate in comprising the progression of developmental change. While researchers have examined the effects of peer-group acceptance, rejection, and isolation in adolescents, the
study of controversial groups is difficult because most samples include only a small number of these adolescents (Berndt & Savin-Williams, 1993).

A similar study of the yearbook messages of female adolescents would be just as interesting and important. Unfortunately, access to this population could prove difficult since the number of women served by Latter-day Saint support groups such as Evergreen or Disciples is very limited at this time. Recruiting a sufficient number of individuals within this specific religious community without access to some type of specific communication vehicle aimed at homosexual Latter-day Saint women favored the selection of males for this study.
A feeling of erotic attraction towards members of one’s own sex is both a personal and social issue of developmental significance. Most young people are raised in families, associate with peer groups, and attend institutions where heterosexuality is the norm (Savin-Williams, 1990). The effects of being invisible or understanding that the social institutions on which one relies for his self-image, label one’s feelings as deviant, sick, or immoral is likely to become a major factor in the development of a negative self concept (Coleman, 1982). While there is some research addressing homosexuality and adolescence, there is little information concerning the potential challenges faced by young homosexuals who have chosen to remain “in the closet” during their adolescent years. This prompts the question, do their peers sense dissimilarity, and are homosexual adolescents treated differently than their classmates even when there is no explicit acknowledgement of homosexual feelings?

There are several areas of research that are relevant to the research question. They include (a) adolescent peer relations; (b) the social construction of masculinity; (c) same-sex attracted youth and peer abuse; (d) traditionally religious same-sex attracted youth; (e) and, the issue of “differentness” and homosexual development. Each of these subjects will be addressed in turn, followed by a brief summary account of how they inform this specific research question.
Adolescent Peer Relationships

Harter (1990) has argued that the development of a self is a social construction that emerges from an adolescent's interactions with others. As teenagers tend to spend less time with family, it is in their increasing association with peers that they navigate the social, emotional, and physical changes associated with adolescent development (Douvan & Adelson, 1966). Blos (1979) wrote of the central role of peers in providing the emotional support and socialization necessary to develop a more individuated sense of self. It is in these adolescent years that young people may experiment with new behaviors, attitudes, and ideas. These peer networks can promote healthy development and positive outcomes; however, they also can hamper adolescents from achieving their potential (Carins, Neckerman, & Carins, 1989). In addition, outright peer rejection has a well-established link to adult psychopathology (Parker & Asher, 1993). Adolescents who lack supportive friendships or are rejected by peers show poor psychological, social, and academic adjustment (Berndt, 1989). A New Zealand birth cohort study, which has followed 1007 individuals since birth, found that at age 21, gays and lesbians were significantly more likely to have mental health problems than those classified as heterosexual (Fergusson, Horwood, & Beautrais, 1999).

Schools are the social institutions in which many adolescent peer relationships and friendships are developed. In fact, many peer relationships would not exist absent a school environment. Research shows that students who perceive their school environment as supportive and respectful may find it easier to make and maintain supportive friendships (Way & Pahl, 2001), in contrast to those who perceive school to be a hostile
environment. As important as peer groups are, a surprisingly large number of adolescents are either isolated from school peer groups, or are rejected or neglected by their peers (Ennett & Bauman, 1996; Wentzel & Asher, 1995). This is important in light of Coleman's (1961) assertion that one major purpose served by peer group affiliation is the opportunity to form and enhance friendships. Thus, the positive features of friendship are strongly related to adolescent' self-perceptions of their acceptance by peers (Keefe & Berndt, 1996).

While research suggests that friendship is a more robust predictor of self-esteem than is peer acceptance (Bishop & Inderbitzen, 1995; Sullivan, 1953), it is important to understand what elements researchers suggest are involved in a friendship. Buhrmester (1990) pointed out that while all the features that comprise friendships are open to debate, at a minimum, friendships involve the opportunity for self-disclosure. Parker and Gottman (1989) believe that adolescents have an increased desire for self-disclosure to meet a natural need for validating interactions. Those who lack this intimacy can be left with feelings of insecurity and increased anxiety. Research also indicates that the core process of intimate interactions is not disclosure, per se, but the experience of being cared for, understood, and the validation that comes from self-disclosure (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Perhaps that is why Youniss (1980) concluded that friendship might be an adolescent’s most important relationship during his or her transition from child to adult.
The Social Construction of Masculinity

Kimmel (1997) views masculinity as a constantly changing collection of meanings that are constructed through our relationships with others and the world around us. Every day male adolescents are negotiating what it means to be masculine in their relations with their high school peers. Researchers have noted that the fear of being labeled a homosexual is a powerful social controllant of adolescent masculine behaviors (Lehne, 1976). Traditionally, sex roles were defined in terms of masculine and feminine polarities (Lazur, 1987). This model suggests that there is an implicit standard, somehow "known" by males, against which men measure themselves.

How do we define masculinity? Bem (2000) in his study of 686 gay men and 337 heterosexual men in San Francisco defined a child who enjoys rough-and-tumble play and competitive team sports as participating in male-typical activities. He also noted that it is male-typical for boys to have boys as childhood friends. Bem, a respected gay researcher at Columbia University, went on to state that "childhood gender conformity or nonconformity was not only the strongest, but also the only significant, childhood predictor of later sexual orientation for both men and women" (p. 94). Cross-cultural research suggests that gender and sexuality are more fluid that many biological models would predict (Kimmel, 2000), and while sex-role stereotyping in the United States may be slowly changing, Corbett (1998) noted that boys whose mixed gender experience moves beyond conventional categories of masculinity are still often labeled as pathological due to a reluctance to recognize the reality of gender variance.
Same-sex Attracted Youth and Peer Abuse

Even for heterosexual adolescents, normal developmental tasks can be demanding and complex. The high school years are when many of these developmental tasks are taking place, and during high school years merely being different can subject an individual to abuse (Bart, 1998). Fontaine and Hammond (1996) found that derogatory labels for homosexuals are often applied to anyone who is disliked. A name-calling message might be that a boy was too feminine or not masculine enough, but more commonly it was because he was simply different or had undesirable characteristics (Savin-Williams, 1998). Younger children often understand that they are being harassed with sexual terminology and know that they feel uncomfortable, but do not really understand the names they are being called (Shoop & Hayhow, 1994). In Ambert’s (1994) study of peer abuse, 26.6% of the graduate students she interviewed described the negative peer treatment they were subjected to in early adolescence as having detrimental consequences for several years, often continuing up to the time they participated in the study. While age was not asked to preserve anonymity, most of the students were in the 19-23 year age range.

This name-calling and verbal abuse has real consequences. At the very least, victimization can cause physical symptoms like headaches, lethargy, gastrointestinal distress, and sleep disturbances (Steineger, 1997). A hostile school climate makes learning difficult, and many targets try to handle the problem by altering their lives to avoid potential harassment (Shoop & Hayhow, 1994). For gay and lesbian youth who have chosen to “come out” to their peers, high school can be downright dangerous.
Pilkington and D'Augelli (1995), in their research with gay and lesbian high school students, found that as many as 80% of the respondents have been verbally harassed, 43% have had an object thrown at them, 17% have been physically assaulted, and 10% had been assaulted with a weapon, all because of their sexual orientation. For many it is a life of disapproval, rejection, isolation, and abuse.

Even if they escape actual physical assaults, Savin-Williams (1998) reported that the same-sex attracted youth that he interviewed felt that the most significant effect of the harassment was what it did to their personality. They became increasingly withdrawn from social interaction, despondent, and were self-absorbed. The most frequent presenting problem at The Institute for the Protection of Gay and Lesbian Youth in New York City was found to be social, emotional, and cognitive isolation (Hetrick & Martin, 1987). Isolation, increased depression, anxiety, disproportionate substance abuse, and a suicide rate several times higher than the general population follow what Kevin Jennings, executive director of the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, has called “an epidemic of harassment” (Smith & Drake, 2001, p. 155).

The relationship between differentness and self-esteem problems and self-esteem and suicide has been a topic of several research projects (McFarland, 1998; Sullivan & Schneider, 1987). A report in the American Journal of Public Health states that gay adolescents are more than twice as likely to attempt suicide as their heterosexual peers (Russell & Joyner, 2001). The report also shows that gay adolescent males are more likely to attempt suicide than same-sex attracted females. Some researchers suggest that males are more susceptible to antigay peer pressure than girls because the issue of gender nonconformity is much more of a factor with boys (Remafedi, Farrow, & Deisher, 1991).
Many gay males feel particularly ill at ease with archetypal male activities, especially loathing aggressive team sports (Savin-Williams, 1998). These differences set them apart from their peers and their culture. Rotheram-Borus, Rosario, and Koopman (1991) noted that most abused youth were those who failed to incorporate cultural ideals of gender appropriate behaviors and roles.

Traditionally Religious Same-Sex Attracted Youth

Adolescents continue to develop a core sense of self as they carry on the process of integrating newly discovered roles, role expectations, and identities (Erikson, 1963; Marcia, 1980). One of the most important changes is a growing awareness of their sexuality (Cates, 1987). An individual’s internal sense of sexuality emerges during adolescence. Same-sex attracted youth have particular challenges when they are members of traditional religious communities that condemn alternative sexual orientation. Newman and Muzzonigro (1993) noted that some of the criteria used to define traditional family values in research focusing on homosexual “coming out” processes were the importance of religion, an emphasis on marriage, and the significance of having children. A same-sex orientation brings into question important fundamental beliefs of traditional religious communities.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) is a conservative Christian denomination with clear doctrines concerning homosexuality. While drawing a distinction between unchosen homosexual feelings and homosexual behaviors, the church states unequivocally that homosexual relations are sinful (Byrd, 2001). Spencer W. Kimball (1987), a former leader of the faith, states the position clearly, “Homosexual
conduct is serious sin. ... The Lord condemns and forbids this practice with a vigor equal to his condemnation of adultery and other such sex acts. And the Church will excommunicate as readily any unrepentant addict” (p. 274). This understanding of sexually appropriate behavior is taught to LDS children from a very early age. Ecclesiastical leaders in the church receive further instruction from the publication *Understanding and Helping Those Who Have Homosexual Problems* (1992) which states, “A person may be troubled by homosexual thoughts and feelings even though there has been no homosexual behavior or such behavior has been eliminated. These thoughts and feelings need to be overcome. Members of the Church are commanded to control their sexual thoughts and desires” (p. 3). Adolescents who have same-sex attractions are not only forbidden to act on those feelings, but their ultimate goal, according to their church leaders, should be to eventually eliminate the feelings as well.

Like most homosexual adolescents, young LDS men report having an early awareness of feeling different from their peers and experience overwhelming feelings related to this awareness (Brzezinski, 2000). In Troiden’s (1979) study, many gay adult males retrospectively report a sense of alienation, gender inequality, and less opposite-sex interest as children than did other males. But where does an adolescent raised in a traditional religious household go for help? Several studies suggest that locating a support system protects youth against many of the risks associated with homosexuality (Berger & Mallon, 1993; D’Augelli, 1989). Young people know when they are different from their peers, and they must deal with the disparity between their sexual feelings and their religious beliefs. How those closest to youth might respond to their concerns about same-
sex attractions will impact their feelings about the quantity, quality, and security of their social support network (Nesmith, Burton, & Cosgrove, 1999)

While it cannot be assumed that all information applicable to sexual minority adults or research based on retrospective studies from adults is relevant to homosexual youth but it can offer a useful perspective. In a small qualitative study, Goodwill (2000) found that four of the five adult male LDS homosexuals she studied dealt with the incompatibility between church doctrines and sexuality by significantly reducing or even banishing church activity from their lives. Newman and Muzzonigro (1993) found that families with a strong emphasis on traditional values were perceived as less accepting of homosexuality, and those who had disclosed to family members perceived them as reacting with more disapproval. All of these factors place enormous pressure on LDS adolescents who are experiencing feelings of same-sex attraction to hide their sexual concerns for as long as possible.

In his study of Latter-day Saint families dealing with the “coming out process” of adult homosexual sons, Benson (2001) noted that the impression often prevailed that family members refused to put aside negative preconceptions. Feeling shamed and rejected, these LDS homosexual males found it difficult to ask for the active interest or understanding of family members.

The Issue of “Differentness” and Homosexual Development

There continues to be a debate not only concerning the etiology of homosexuality but also on certain developmental differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals. Learning theorists explain homosexuality as the result of conditioning and socialization,
whereas essentialists maintain that homosexual orientation is the product of innate biological factors (Mills, 1990). The social constructionists would argue that what has been socially constructed can be deconstructed. Furthermore, they would suggest that the term homosexuality does not refer to something real but is a linguistic construct fashioned by society to talk about a behavior (Greenberg, 1988). The essentialists maintain that a homosexual identity is a central organizing factor in the development of a certain fraction of the population, and for those individuals, their same-sex attractions cannot be altered (Savin-Williams, 1998). Most essentialists argue that homosexuality is a real essence tied to the core of one's self as a human being so that same-sex sexuality is a naturally occurring, morally blameless behavior (Sullivan, 1995).

Etiology is important to this study only as it influences another debate concerning the question of "differentness." Interestingly, both the social constructionists and the essentialists are divided on both sides of this question. Minton and Mattson (1998) believe that in order to develop a "queer identity," a homosexual man must become aware that he no longer fits into the privileged heterosexual category and begin the construction of a self-identity based on difference. Some research (Bell, Weinberg, & Hammersmith, 1981; Troiden, 1988) suggests that homosexual identity often begins in childhood when the individual has a vague feeling of being different. While the terminology of some gay and lesbian theorists might seem radical to them, Latter-day Saint men who are dealing with feelings of same-sex attraction have similar experiences of "differentness" (Hyde & Hyde, 1997). In fact, their reports of feeling different from their peers from the time of their first memories are a hallmark of their growing up stories.
Within the homosexual community there is a position taken by some theorists that suggests that homosexuals are basically like everyone else, differing only in whom they desire to love (Savin-Williams, 1998). These writers, often called accommodationists or assimilationists, argue that if people would treat same-sex attracted individuals like they treat the rest of society these superficial differences that now seem so apparent would simply go away (Pinar, 1998). Under this concept, while the origins of homosexuality might be primarily biological, the "differentness" in nonsexual behavior is socially constructed. Following this logic, a young person who had yet to disclose his homosexual feelings to others would not experience this discrimination based on sexual orientation. While he might know of their feelings, if no one else knew of his homosexual attractions, then why would they behave in any distinctive way or be treated differently than others in their peer group?

The more traditional perspective of the gay and lesbian community is that sexual-minority youth are different. Those in the "queer" movement have argued that homosexuals are different from the mainstream, and those differences should be celebrated (Slagle, 1995). In addition they argue that to expect gays, through some sort of socialization process, to conform to the heterosexual mainstream is not realistic. They believe that these differences begin very early; perhaps even at birth, and that homosexual adolescents experience a life course substantially different from that of heterosexual adolescents. Thus Seidman (1993) discourages normalization of homosexual behavior in favor of living out acts that challenge the status quo. This call for the celebration of "differentness" is not so much concerned with any sexual act, rather the appreciation that gay and lesbians act, think, and behave differently from
heterosexuals. The logical extension of this argument would be that even if one wanted to
"stay in the closet," it would be almost impossible to hide the fact that he was different.

Finally, it is important to give some attention to the deconstructionist theory
influenced by Foucault (1978) that maintains that while homosexual behavior exists,
there is no such thing as a homosexual person. Pinar (1998) advocates dismantling the
dualistic notions of homosexuality as opposed to heterosexuality; male as opposed to
female. These theorists are concerned that in the pursuit of civil rights, the traditional gay
and lesbian community's attempt to suggest that homosexuality is an identity only
reinforces an outdated social construct of sexual differences as fixed, regulatory
mechanisms of the dominant culture (Carroll, 2001).

Summary

For both heterosexual and homosexual adolescents, peer relationships are a
significant influence in the developmental process. Peer groups often present the occasion
to develop friendships, and it is with friends that one has an opportunity for self-
disclosure. However, the disclosure that one is gay is often emotionally, if not physically,
dangerous. And if that individual also belongs to a religious community that condemns
homosexual behavior in ways that cannot be misunderstood by even the adolescent
members, he would keep these feelings secret for as long as possible.

Some theorists (e.g., Slagle, 1995) suggest that homosexuality cannot be hidden.
They believe that homosexuality is such an essential element of who a same-sex attracted
person "is," that others would sense the differences regardless of any actual sexual
behavior. Other theorists (Foucault, 1978; Kourany, 1987) argue that it is the disclosure
of one’s homosexuality that can create a social stigma that contaminates the process of adolescent identity formation and that burden causes an individual to act differently. Homosexuals, they state, are just like their peers until we socially construct “differentness.”

Although there are retrospective accounts that describe feelings of differences and rejection among gay males during adolescence, there are no studies that examine perceived differences during adolescence. No studies have been conducted that focus on Latter-day Saint adolescents that have not disclosed their feelings of same-sex attraction. This study could provide needed insight into their peer relationships and the question of perceived “differentness.”
CHAPTER III
METHODS

Research Design Overview

This study explores the peer perceptions of non-disclosed same-sex attracted, male teens and their heterosexual counterparts. Relatively little is known about this issue, so the study is exploratory in nature. The researcher believes that by examining the senior high school yearbooks of 30 heterosexual and 30 same-sex attracted adolescent men, he may be able to discern if there are themes and content similarities or differences that emerge from the messages written to them by their peers. Studying documents of a normally silenced group can provide insights into the social construction of the lives of those around us who, more often than not, are hidden from view (Hodder, 2000). The purpose of the study of this silenced group is to extract from written materials some of the order, sense, and meaning of their life experiences.

The majority of research on gay and lesbian development has involved retrospective studies of adult males, and heterosexual comparison groups have not always been utilized (Zera, 1992). Most studies drew their sample from participants in counseling and support groups (Edwards, 1996), who have often spent many hours examining their adolescent experiences, trying to make sense of their lived experience.

In the early part of this century, social scientists regularly studied people by trying to extract from written materials some sense of the meanings of their life experiences (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994). The process of document or content analysis examines messages of typical individuals that are prepared for personal rather than official reasons.
This procedure has the tremendous advantage of allowing the researcher to be virtually unobtrusive. This avoids a problematic reliance on formal interviews as a primary source of data. When a researcher is dealing with sexually and culturally sensitive subjects like teenage same-sex attractions, document analysis has particular advantages, and avoids problems like inaccurate recall or the social desirability of the subject matter.

Geertz (1983) reminds us that social institutions, customs and changes are in some sense “readable.” This study is an attempt to discover the extent to which peer relationships are readable in the high school messages of male adolescents. With the advent of personal computers and the development of software designed to assist in the investigation of text, content analysis has reemerged as an analytic technique, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative operations. From this perspective, content analysis is neither positivistic nor reductionistic. It allows the researcher to listen to the words of the text and better understand the relationship that existed between the author of the message and the individual who was to receive the message (Berg, 1998). This is an essential element for the research question in this study. The study also examines a subject and a population that is both complex and about which little is known. In the absence of existing research, Glasser and Strauss (1967) recommended that a researcher suspend theoretical hypothesis and allow the data to speak for itself. In this way a researcher can discover whether any theory or hypothesis could be developed directly from the patterns found in the data.
Sample

The sample for this study was 60 Mormon males between the ages of 19 and 30 years of age currently living in the Wasatch region of Northern Utah. Thirty of the men are self-identified heterosexuals, and 30 of the men are self-identified same-sex attracted. Sexual identity was determined by the individuals who classified the preponderance of their sexual or erotic attractions, thoughts, fantasies, or behaviors as directed toward either members of the opposite sex or members of the same-sex. Participants were relied on directly to identify their sexual orientation and religious affiliation.

Recruitment Procedures

Participants were recruited by contacting three groups for volunteers. Two groups, Evergreen International and Disciples, were contacted because they are Utah organizations composed primarily of Latter-day Saints who are dealing with same-sex attractions. Students who identified themselves as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the College of Family Life at Utah State University also were recruited to participate in the study. Once a core group was recruited, the remainder of the participants were located through word of mouth and snowball referral.

The directors of Disciples and Evergreen International advertised the research project through their website and member newsletters. The chairperson of the department at Utah State University was approached and agreed to the researcher’s request for permission to recruit volunteers among departmental graduate students for the study. Once permission was granted to involve Utah State University students, a notice was placed in the campus mailboxes of individual students, presenting the background for the
study and requesting volunteer participation. Five of the heterosexual participants came directly from the Family and Human Development department solicitations. Evergreen and Disciples participants were contacted through their respective support groups. Sixteen of the same-sex attracted men volunteered for participation in the study because of their involvement in those organizations. The remaining volunteers presumably saw the advertisements in the organizational publications or found out about the study by word of mouth and contacted the researcher directly.

It was emphasized that the study was in no way intended to discriminate against any group and everything possible was done to insure participant confidentiality. An informal summary of the intent and scope of the study was distributed to all potential participants with an explanation of the anticipated commitment involved (Appendix A).

Demographics

When the high school yearbooks were collected, the participant filled out a brief demographic survey (Appendix C). Information concerning the respondents' current age (in years), educational attainment, marital status, income, current church activity level, and sexual orientation were then collected and coded for identification purposes to correspond to the similarly coded yearbook. In addition, participants provided demographic information concerning their family of origin at the time of their senior year in high school. Data were obtained concerning the parent's marital status, the number of children in the family, the rural, suburban or urban location of the household, their father's occupation, and the family's church activity level.
Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the sample. Ages ranged from 19 to 28 in the heterosexual group \((M = 23.7, SD = 2.06)\) and 19 to 30 in the homosexual group \((M = 25.1, SD = 3.36)\). In both groups all had finished high school and 90% \((n = 54)\) had attended some college, graduated from college, or completed some advanced degree. Fifty percent \((n = 15)\) of the heterosexual men were married, while 30% \((n = 9)\) of the same-sex attracted men currently were married. Eighty-seven percent of the heterosexual men \((n = 26)\) had a current annual income of less than $30,000, while 63% of the same-sex attracted group \((n = 19)\) had incomes of less than $30,000. A higher percentage of same-sex attracted men earned more than $30,000 ($30,000 to $70,000 = 37\%) than heterosexual men ($30,000 to $70,000 = 13\%). All of the heterosexual men characterized their current church activity as either moderately or very active \((n = 30)\) while 73\% \((n = 22)\) of the same-sex attracted men reported being currently moderately or very active. One of the heterosexual men reported that their parents were divorced when they were in high school (divorced or separated = 3\%) and four of the same-sex attracted men reported that their parents were divorced or separated (divorced or separated = 13\%). When it comes to the neighborhood where the men attended high school, 70\% of the same-sex attracted men \((n = 21)\) lived in small towns or in rural areas while 93\% of the heterosexual men \((n = 28)\) attended high school in the city or suburbs. The same-sex attracted men grew up in families with ranging from 2 to 10 children \((M = 5.3, SD = 2.04)\) and the heterosexual men grew up in families with from 2 to 8 children \((M = 4.3, SD = 1.44)\). The family income when they were in high school for 40\% of the heterosexual men \((n = 12)\) was $70,000 or higher, while 60\% \((n = 18)\) earned between
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Heterosexual men</th>
<th>Same-sex attracted men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.S. graduate</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College graduate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced degree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current marital status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single, never married</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less than 15,000</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>67.7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15,000 – 30,000</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30,000 – 50,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50,000 – 70,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not active</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat active</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately active</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very active</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s marital status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>96.7</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced/separated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburb</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small town</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15,000 – 30,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30,000 – 50,000</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50,000 – 70,000</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70,000 – 90,000</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 90,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family church activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not active</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat active</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately active</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very active</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>96.7</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.S. church activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not active</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat active</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately active</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very active</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>96.7</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
$30,000 and $70,000. The family income while they were in high school of 20% of the same-sex attracted men ($n = 6$) was greater than $70,000, whereas 73% of the families ($n = 22$) earned between $30,000 and $70,000, and 7% of the families ($n = 2$) earned less than $30,000. The church activity levels for the family and the individual yearbook owners were almost exactly the same. Ninety-seven percent of heterosexuals ($n = 29$) reported that they and their families were very active (very active families = 97%; very active individually = 97%). The same-sex attracted men also reported high rates of activity. Ninety percent of the men ($n = 27$) reported having grown up in very active or moderately active, and 87% of the men ($n = 26$) reported that they were very or moderately active.

Protection of Human Subjects

Procedures were followed to protect human subjects while also preserving the quality of the data. Prior to participation in the study, all subjects were informed of the procedures to be followed in the research project. Subjects were also informed in writing as to the purposes of this study and a written informed consent was obtained for each respondent (Appendix B).

The personal nature of the yearbooks made masking all identification with a removable opaque covering necessary. Each yearbook belonging to a self-identified same-sex attracted individual was coded A1 through A30. The yearbooks belonging to the self-identified heterosexual men were coded B1 through B30. Once this was accomplished, all subjects were identified by code only. Participants were assured that
their yearbook contents would remain confidential and that their names would not be linked to any specific results or findings generated from this study.

Procedures for conducting this research were submitted to and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Utah State University (Appendix D). All records were stored in locked files and all yearbooks were returned unaltered to the subjects upon completion of the study. The only remaining records of the research project are identified by code only.

Data Collection

As soon as the yearbooks were collected, all marks of identification were masked and the data source was coded for confidentiality. The primary researcher then entered each individual message, identified as belonging to a specific yearbook, into Microsoft Word 2000 (9.0.3821 SR-1) and QSR NUDIST, Version 5 (N5, 2000).

Analysis

Procedures for analyzing the data followed a content analysis design recommended by experts in the field (Berg 1998; Weber, 1990). The objective in the content analysis procedure was to identify themes or patterns that are common in the yearbook messages. Classical content analysis comprises techniques for reducing texts into a unit-by-variable matrix and then doing a quantitative analysis to test a hypothesis (Bernard, 2000). The analysis consisted of a 2-tier system of sorting (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). Specifically, labels were assigned to segments of text allowing for the collection of related segments within and across yearbook messages. To be considered
representative, each category must have evidenced itself at least five times. This stage continued until no new categories were discovered. A second sorting process then took place to integrate the categories into central categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in which essential themes or patterned ideas emerged from the data.

To make valid inferences from the text, the classification procedure must be reliable (Weber, 1990). Reliability “concerns the extent to which an experiment, test, or any measuring procedure yields the same result on repeated trials” (Carmines & Zeller, 1979, p. 11). Early in the coding process the researcher’s committee chairperson assisted in testing the coding procedures and in revising the coding rules to insure consistency and to assist in establishing that the coding represented what the investigator intended to measure. Any differences in coding schemes were discussed and resolved.

When handling large amounts of raw data, computerized data management programs can be particularly effective (Richards & Richards, 1994). We used Microsoft Word 2000 (9.0.3821 SR-1) and QSR NUDIST, Version 5 (N5, 2000) to organize the data and assist in classifying the words in the yearbook messages into content categories.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

The study focused on the handwritten messages in the high school yearbooks of 30 self-identified heterosexual men and 30 self-identified same-sex attracted men, all of whom are members of a conservative religious tradition, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. None of the same-sex attracted men had come out during their high school years to either family members or high school peers.

This chapter summarizes the findings of a content analysis of those 2,868 individual messages as themes, patterns, or content similarities or differences emerged from the data. Themes and patterns that were found within the individual messages are identified and documented. The results are presented in four sections, namely: (a) a general overview, (b) specific themes and patterns, (c) the similarities between the two groups and, (d) differences between the two groups. When quoting directly from the yearbook messages, same-sex attracted recipients of the yearbook messages are identified by the three-letter acronym SSA (same sex attracted) and heterosexual recipients by the acronym OSA (opposite sex attracted).

A General Overview

The 30 yearbooks belonging to self-identified heterosexual men (OSA) contained 1633 handwritten messages, and the 30 yearbooks from self-identified same-sex attracted men contained 1235 handwritten messages. The pattern most evident in the analysis
process was the very general and indistinct content in the majority of messages to both SSA and OSA men. The following are several examples:

Well it’s finally over. Well it’s been nice to be able to know you have a good life.
Male to SSA

It has been great this year. Congratulations! Have a great year and life.
Male to SSA

Dude, what’s up? Man could you actually see the point of chewing the 4th quarter? It sucked.
Female to OSA

When themes do emerge, they are distinctive in several ways. First, those sending the messages do the communicating, while the receiver remains silent. Second, yearbook signing rituals may vary from school to school, but generally those who participate do so of their own accord. This suggests that the form and content of the messages are determined by the writer, and are intended to be private communications.

The yearbook messages contain references to many specific content areas, including, shared classes, anticipated attendance at college, shared sports or recreational activities, and serving a mission for the LDS Church. The 12 content areas will be explored in depth in the next section of this chapter. Second, in almost every case the individual writing the message can be identified as being either male or female. Tradition dictates that the person writing the message sign their name. Often they would sign both their first and last names. Graduating students apparently have small “calling cards” printed that they include in their graduation announcements and, these cards are often attached to the messages they write in the yearbook with a sticker or tape. Having the entire yearbook, complete with photographs of the students, was of assistance in those very few cases where identification of the message writer needed to be confirmed.
Finally, the content of the message itself often suggested a general level of intimacy. In her study of high school yearbook messages, Giordano (1995) noted that in spite of obvious limitations, yearbook messages could still provide a “window on relationships” (p. 664).

The different level of intimacy communicated is evident in the following two messages to the same same-sex attracted (SSA) recipient:

Sorry I popped your balloons at the wedding. I have fingernails. Bye, bye buff boy!
Female.

Hey buddy. This year has been an awesome one. I can’t believe it’s over. You are an awesome guy. We’ve known each other for a long time. Good luck in your future. Keep smiling and remember who you are.
Female.

The different levels of intimacy were no less evident in those messages written to males from their male peers. Here are examples of two different messages written to the same heterosexual (OSR) recipient:

Soccer was great. I’m glad we were on the same team. Good luck in New Mexico.
Male.

What can I say? We’ve been friends for a long, long time. Well, let’s hang out this summer. Good luck at Westminster, if you get in. Can you believe that it is almost time for your mission? Yikes! We’ll need to go on our “death march”. Maybe we’ll die or maybe not. Our last deadly march up Bell Canyon we almost died twelve times. What great memories.
Male.

While the level of intimacy varied from message to message, both same sex attracted men and the heterosexual (OSA) men received numerous messages that could be characterized as both more intimate and less intimate. Those patterns were consistent in messages written by both males and females.
Themes

In the analysis of the yearbook messages, 12 themes emerged from the data. A theme was identified as a subject that was mentioned consistently enough in the 60 yearbooks to have appeared on the average of at least once per yearbook. Themes that appeared on the average of at least twice in each yearbook were considered strong themes, and those strong themes are noted in the analysis. Themes will be reviewed in the order of their relative strength from strongest theme to weakest theme mentioned in the yearbook messages.

Sports

References to different sporting activities were the strongest theme that emerged in the yearbook messages. These references covered a variety of sporting activities from football and rugby to swimming and track. A differentiation was made between sports and various recreational activities, which were classified as a separate theme in the initial coding. The following are a characteristic sample of this theme:

I really look up to you. I think you’re a really good runner. I wish I had your dedication to a sport. Good luck in all that you do.
Male to SSA

You did awesome in football. Good luck! Hope you have a great summer. We’ll have to double and go dancing or something.
Love, Female to OSA

Soccer was the best. You were a goal-scoring animal. Maybe we’ll play again sometimes.
Male to OSA
College

The second strongest theme emerged as a portion of messages that talked about the recipient going to college. Sometimes a specific institution was mentioned and at other times the message just referred to college in general. The following exemplify the college theme:

Hey, good luck next year at Snow. Thanks for being a good friend. Stay cool and I hope you have a great future!
Male to OSA

Good luck in college. I really had fun. You made my day when I was down. Smile.
Female to SSA

I’m sure you’ll have a great time at BUY or BYU or BSU or wherever you’re going. Just remember you’re going to be a freshman again. I’ll be a sophomore. Good luck in the future.
Male to SSA

Shared Classes

There were many messages that spoke of a class that the writer and the recipient shared. Most of the time the writer mentioned a specific class:

I believe we have had two classes our entire career in high school. That’s biology freshman year and U.S. history last year. I had fun in those classes because you were in them. I’ll miss you next year. I’ve known you since junior high. You better keep in touch. Good luck next year.
Female to SSA

Hey boy with the crossword puzzle in my math class. Don’t ever change. Stay in touch.
Female to OSA

In other messages just the teacher, the class period, or a general mention of an unidentified class was noted.
Poor baby, you’re leaving. Didn’t we have fun in class? Well, miss you the best where ever it is.
Female to SSA

Mission

Male members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are expected to serve a two-year missionary assignment when they turn 19. The yearbook messages would often reflect this expected calling in a general acknowledgement of the impending obligation.

You’re a great guy and I’m glad I’ve had the chance to get to know you.
You’ll have fun on your mission.
Male to OSA

Well, have fun on your mission and write me while you are gone, okay? Don’t ever forget me. Love ya.
Female to SSA

Sometimes the mission call had evidently been extended and the recipient and his classmates knew where he would be going as in the following:

Well, what can I say? It will be so hard to see you go cause I probably won’t see you much after that – but can I just say how lucky Sydney Australia is? You will touch many lives.
Female to OSA

Artistic Ability

A significant theme that also emerged from the yearbook messages are those topics that were grouped under the theme of artistic ability. Messages made flattering mention of the recipient’s ability in the field of music, dance, theater, or painting. The following are a representative sample of those messages:
Have a great summer and take it easy. Keep up the singing and acting. You’re awesome.
Male to SSA

I can’t believe how amazing a French horn player you are. Well, actually I can. No problem. You’ll go far. Love,
Female to SSA

Acapella was the best. Good luck in your life. Keep singing!
Male to OSA

Shared Religious Understanding

Members of various religious traditions often share a distinct “faith” language that indicates their common spiritual heritage. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is no different. The yearbook messages were replete with references to missionary farewells, a special good-bye meeting for those departing on their missions, or seminary classes, which consist of special religious instruction classes that often take place in church owned buildings located just off the high school campus. The following are messages that contain that religious language understood by Latter-day Saints:

Please let me know about your farewell and when it is. I will be there. Love ya lots. I will miss you.
Female to OSA

You are such a great guy. I had fun in seminary. I’m going to miss seeing you in the halls at church. Stay the greatest guy you are. Maybe I’ll see you around.
Female to OSA

I would like to tell you that out of the many examples that I have had, even seminary council, you have been the one to show me the way in these latter days. Thanks again for the great testimony you share and the bright light that you give to me, the light of Christ. Thanks for being that special example to many others and me.
Male to SSA
Summer Invitation

Many of the yearbook messages contained “have a great life” or “have a cool summer” thoughts. Most of these seemed to be just a neutral way to end a general greeting written in the yearbook. More significant were the messages that extended specific invitations for the recipient to join the writer in a summer activity. Examples of these messages convey a very clear “I want to get together” messages as these examples illustrate:

- Call me over the summer and maybe we could do some web surfing. 
  Female to OSA

- We have always written in each other’s yearbook “let’s play over the summer” but I do really mean it this time. Let’s play over the summer! 
  Female to SSA

- This summer I’ll see you at the sports mall. We’ll have to play some hoop. 
  Male to OSA

Humor

Adolescent humor can take many forms. Messages in the yearbooks reflected a wide variety of humor, from sly sexual humor to gentle teasing. While humor was present in only a moderate number of messages with specific themes, these are representative examples:

- You are so hot. Just kidding, I’m not gay. I like hooters. I’m so glad we are done. 
  Male to OSA

- You really ought to not talk so much. It’s really embarrassing. Just kidding. Have a great life. It was fun! Love always. 
  Female to SSA

- I want to hang with you more. I’m not writing my number so you can use it in the Idaho lottery. 
  Male to OSA
Talent

Throughout the 60 yearbooks, messages were written that spoke of the attributes of the recipient. Many of these referred to the specific themes that are addressed in this section. There were also messages that made reference to the specific word “talent” as a general compliment in itself or terms like, “you are so talented.” These are typical of the comments made in the yearbooks:

You are so talented and I hope you have a successful future because if anyone deserved it, it would be you.
Female to SSA

You are so talented. You don’t know how much I look up to you. Thanks for being such a great example and thanks for Sadie’s. It was a blast.
Female to SSA

You are the most talented guy I know. I’m really glad I got to know you.
Male to SSA

Ask Me Out

Some of the female message writers clearly wanted to send a note to the male recipients that they would welcome the opportunity to go with them on a date. Some were more restrained than others but these are illustrative of the “ask me out” communication found in many of the yearbooks:

You’re a hottie alright! You better not forget to call me. Remember, we’re going to seven peaks and anywhere you want to invite me. Love ya!
Female to OSA

I think you are one of the few guys that I would break my promise to myself and go out with someone I attended elementary with.
Female to SSA

Ever since 8th grade I knew you were the coolest! How come you never call me anymore? I miss you. Honestly, I do! Call me lots this summer. 111-2222 in case you forgot. I love you.
Female to OSA
Recreation

Some of the messages referred to shared recreational experiences. Writers spoke of swimming, water and snow skiing, camping, and a variety of activities that common to high school students. Some of the messages talked about recreational activities that they shared in the past and others were invitations to get together in the future as the following examples suggest:

We will be playing a lot of Frisbee this summer so you better be up to it.
Male to OSA

We'll for sure soak up all the volleyball and ultimate we can before everyone disappears! See ya.
Female to OSA

Hey, boarding was fun.
Female to SSA

Dating

Almost one message in each of the 60 yearbooks spoke of a shared dating experience. Usually the message was from a female who had gone on a date with the recipient but occasionally a male writer would refer to a shared double date. The following are typical examples of messages from female dating partners:

Thanks for being such a great example and thanks for Sadie’s. It was a blast.
Female to SSA

I just want to thank you for the dates we have been on and hope that we can go on many more.
Female to SSA

Honestly, senior prom was like a dream come true. I can’t thank you enough. I can say that I love you. This year really wouldn’t have been the same if you wouldn’t have asked me to homecoming.
Female to SSA
Similarities Between the Two Groups

The 30 yearbooks of the heterosexual men contained 1,633 individual messages. There were an average of 54 messages per yearbook. It is interesting to note that one of the yearbooks contained 126 individual messages while another contained only 8. In those yearbooks there were 1107 individual theme messages.

The yearbooks of the same-sex attracted men contained 1,235 individual messages. There were an average of 41 messages per yearbook. One of the yearbooks contained 140 individual messages while another contained only 10. In those yearbooks there were 891 individual message themes. In all 60 of the yearbooks in the study, some of the yearbook messages contained references to more than one theme. Many yearbook messages contained no specific theme messages.

The yearbooks came from an assortment of rural, suburban, and city high schools where the size of the student body could vary greatly. Sixty percent of the same-sex attracted participants (n = 18) in the study attended high school in predominately rural areas and small towns, while 93% of the heterosexual men (n = 28) came from high schools located in cities or suburbs. This could account for the differences between the higher number of messages received by the heterosexual men who probably attended larger, city schools where more classmates were available to participate in yearbook signing. Some high schools have a traditional “yearbook signing day” where everyone is encouraged to attend, while other schools simply pass out the yearbooks on the last official day of the school year. It is difficult to attach much significance to the average number of yearbook messages in a limited sample of only 60 when so many factors might
account for the differences in the number of messages written and received. It can be noted that the numbers varied more within each yearbook group than they did between the two groups.

In half of the theme categories the differences between the heterosexual participant’s yearbook messages and the same-sex attracted participant’s yearbook messages were statistically insignificant. Messages concerning dating were similar for the same-sex attracted men \((M = 3.94, SD = 5.0)\) and the heterosexual men \((M = 3.44, SD = 4.04)\), \(t(60) = -0.43, p \geq 0.672\). Shared classes were mentioned in similar proportion for the same-sex attracted \((M = 4.40, SD = 3.09)\) and the heterosexual men \((M = 4.60, SD = 4.25)\), \(t(60) = -0.21, p > 0.836\). Humorous themes were topics that were communicated in messages to both same-sex attracted men \((M = 4.61, SD = 4.36)\) and heterosexual men \((M = 8.78, SD = 10.95)\), \(t(60) = -1.94, p > 0.06\). Finally, the invitation to “ask me out” was a theme for both groups with same-sex attracted men \((M = 3.47, SD = 4.85)\) and heterosexual men \((M = 4.27, SD = 5.12)\), \(t(60) = -0.62, p > 0.54\).

Messages that addressed specific religious themes were worth noting in a population that was composed exclusively of members of a conservative religious tradition. Messages pertaining to Latter-day Saint missions for same-sex attracted men \((M = 7.99, SD = 9.94)\) were not significantly different from those received by heterosexual men \((M = 11.23, SD = 15.16)\), \(t(60) = -0.98, p > 0.333\). Messages that addressed topics of shared religious understanding in the yearbooks of same-sex attracted men \((M = 8.75, SD = 9.27)\) were statistically insignificant when compared to the messages concerning shared religious understanding found in the yearbooks of the heterosexual men \((M = 8.77, SD = 6.87)\), \(t(60) = -0.01, p > 0.993\). These two notes written
to the same SSA recipient demonstrate how the themes of mission and shared religious understanding are often woven inexorably together in some of the yearbook messages:

You better let me know what’s going on and when you’re going on your mission. It was fun serving on Seminary council with you.
Female

All I want to say is you are such an awesome person and you are going to be an awesome missionary. Your testimony strengthens mine. Wow, I just don’t know what else to say besides you’re the one who rocks spiritually and physically (meaning your music). Come to summer seminary.
Male

When the two theme categories that both represent important religious themes, missions and shared religious understanding, are combined they represent 19.1% of the SSA yearbook recipient’s messages and 20.3% of the OSA yearbook recipient’s messages.

There is also a similar equivalence in the number of messages from female peers written in the yearbooks of both the same-sex attracted men and the heterosexual men. The SSA recipients received an average of 28 messages from females and the OSA men received an average of 23.8 messages from their female classmates.

Differences Between the Two Groups

There were six theme categories where the differences between the same-sex attracted yearbook recipients and the heterosexual yearbook recipient’s messages varied to a statistically significant degree. The heterosexual men received significantly more messages that talked about sports ($M = 27.35, SD = 16.28$) than did the same-sex attracted men ($M = 4.22, SD = 12.62$), $t (60) = -6.15, p < .000$. The heterosexual men received a significantly more messages concerning summer invitations ($M = 8.85, SD = 6.88$) than did the same-sex attracted men ($M = 2.66, SD = 3.84$), $t (60) = -4.30, p < .000$. 
Finally, the heterosexual men received many more messages concerning recreational activities \((M = 4.96, SD = 5.41)\) than did their same-sex attracted counterparts \((M = 1.96, SD = 4.39)\) \(t(60) = -2.35, p < .02\). In the heterosexual recipient’s yearbooks these references to sports, shared recreational activities and a specific invitation to do something this summer represented almost 39% of their total themed messages, while the same themes represented only 8.4% of the same-sex attracted men’s themed messages.

The same-sex attracted men received more messages that talked about the arts \((M = 18.81, SD = 14.48)\), than were mentioned in the yearbook messages of heterosexual men \((M = 2.34, SD = 4.49)\) \(t(60) = 5.95, p < .000\). The same-sex attracted men also received more messages concerning college \((M = 16.3, SD = 14.27)\) than did the heterosexual men \((M = 7.96, SD = 10.52)\) \(t(60) = 2.58, p < .013\). Finally, the same-sex attracted men received significantly more messages concerning talent \((M = 8.34, SD = 11.75)\) than did their heterosexual counterparts, who received very few messages using the compliment “talent” or “talented” \((M = .44, SD = .98)\) \(t(60) = 3.67, p < .001\). All together, messages about their abilities in the arts and references to their talent comprised 30.1% of the same-sex attracted men’s themed messages. The same themes were only noted in 2.8% of the heterosexual men’s themed yearbook messages. While there were more references to college in the same-sex attracted men’s yearbooks, the actual percentage (90%) of individuals who actually attended college was exactly the same for both groups.

There is also a contrast in the number of messages from male and female peers written in the yearbooks of both the same-sex attracted men and the heterosexual men. The same-sex attracted recipients received significantly more messages from females \((M\)
= 37.00, SD = 21.26), than were received by the heterosexual men (M = 23.77, SD = 16.25), \( t(60) = -2.71, p < .009 \). The heterosexual yearbook recipients received significantly more messages from male peers (M = 30.67, SD = 16.71) than did the same-sex attracted men (M = 17.33, SD = 16.71) \( t(60) = 3.18, p < .002 \).
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this chapter I compare previous research presented in the literature review to the present data, and discuss how they relate to the research question as explored in this study. I begin with a review of the research objectives and the primary research question. I then analyze the similarities and differences found in the yearbook message themes of the same-sex attracted and heterosexual men. Following the analysis of similarities and differences, I present a discussion of how these inform important concepts surrounding the social construction of masculinity, adolescent peer relationships, the issue of "differentness," and traditionally religious same-sex attracted youth. Finally, I offer some concluding remarks about the implications of the research findings, along with the limitations of the study and some suggestions for future research.

Summary of Research Objective and Question

The major objective of this study was to gain insight into peer relationships of adolescent heterosexual males and their same-sex attracted (homosexual) counterparts who had not disclosed their feelings of erotic same-sex attraction to their high school classmates. It was noted in the introduction that many same-sex attracted men recall being treated differently than their heterosexual classmates by their high school peers. This study analyzed the messages written in high school yearbooks to explore whether or
not differences were discernable, and how any similarities or differences might offer some useful insights or make a contribution to the research literature on homosexuality.

The primary research question was as follows:

Are there themes, patterns, gender, or content similarities or differences that emerge from an analysis of the classmate messages found in the yearbooks of thirty heterosexual and thirty homosexual (same-sex attracted) adolescent men?

**Similarities**

A shared culture is evident in many of the yearbook messages. Reading across all of the more than 2,800 yearbook messages, it is possible to know a good deal about the social world of Latter-day Saint adolescents. Regardless of what they may have been experiencing in their inner thoughts and feelings concerning their sexual attractions, these students shared many of the same values and beliefs.

Talk of upcoming church missions, shared seminary (religious instruction classes) experiences, friendships or memories born in the atmosphere of shared school classes are evident in the yearbooks of both the heterosexual and same-sex attracted men. When a yearbook yielded a reasonable number of messages to analyze, it was evident that these men had in common encouraging relationships, dating experiences, and friends that used humor to characterize their camaraderie. These messages, clustering around similar themes, offered a consistent and integrated portrait of Latter-day Saint high school experiences.

Family and personal circumstances also demonstrated that these two groups of adolescents shared some common ground. Almost all of the men went to college or
vocational school. They and their families were active in the LDS Church while they were growing up, and most of the men are still active now that they have reached their twenties. Compared to the national average of about two children per family, on the average, these men grew up in families that were fairly large. Finally, while a few of the families encountered some degree of wealth or poverty, the majority of these men grew up in middle class homes.

Savin-Williams (2001) reminds us that adolescents experiencing same-sex attractions are similar to all youths. These shared yearbook themes of heterosexual and same-sex attracted Latter-day Saint young men support the concept they, too, had much in common. It is important to remember that it is in the interaction with the world in which he lives that an adolescent young man constructs an image of himself and receives feedback from others (Lazur, 1987). If these young men, both heterosexual and same-sex attracted, were to frame their self-images in terms of these shared themes and family experiences, they would find that they had much in common.

Differences

There were some differences these young men experienced in their families of origin that could be important. For example, many of the same-sex attracted young men grew up in small towns or rural areas, while in this study their heterosexual counterparts primarily grew up in cities or suburbs. An important consideration is how much more difficult is it to be different, and those differences to remain relatively unnoticed, if one attends a small high school or lives in a town where everyone knows everyone.
In addition, the difference in the rural or suburban community in which they grew up may also account for the fact that the same-sex attracted men grew up in families where the income was slightly lower and the families were slightly larger. Small town life was likely to require less income to be considered average by community standards and likewise, larger families are also more common in rural areas (Lamanna & Riedmann, 2003).

I believe that the more profound distinctions arise in the differences to be found in two sets of clustered theme messages. As noted earlier, the heterosexual adolescents were receiving messages from their peers concerning sports, recreational activities, and specific invitations to join their friends in shared summer activities. The same-sex attracted adolescents were receiving messages from their peers complimenting them on their talents, with repeated references to their artistic abilities. In fact, in the thirty yearbooks of same-sex attracted men, only one had any noteworthy number of references to a sport of any kind, while in the thirty yearbooks of the heterosexual men, there was never an individual with a substantial number of references to “talent” or the arts. It is important to note that “talent” never went together with sports prowess in the writings of their adolescent peers. It was always a reference to music, drama, or artistic ability. These were two groups of men that had much in common, but in the arena of their selected activities, they were having dissimilar experiences.

Most of the young men were growing up in very active Latter-day Saint families, so it is expected that we find common church experiences noted in the yearbooks of both groups. High school requires a somewhat set curriculum, so references to shared classes might be expected in the yearbook messages of both groups. In the sphere of their lives
that was most influenced by their family, culture, and society, these heterosexual and same-sex attracted men had much in common. They went to the same church, attended the same school, and shared classes with one another. They rode the same bus to school and passed each other in the halls.

In the segment of their lives where they could exercise more personal control, they were making entirely different choices. Their selected extra curricular activities, which were most likely based on their abilities and interests, were not the same. The yearbook messages of the heterosexual adolescents were from disproportionately male messengers delivering traditionally masculine messages. The messages to same-sex attracted males were more often from female peers with whom they presumably shared many artistically creative activities.

The Social Construction of Masculinity

Just how does one go about constructing a masculine identity? In the 1990's there was a resurgent men’s movement, fueled by popular literature on masculinity, that argued true masculinity is formed when a young man is initiated into the world of men and urged to withdraw psychologically from women (Bly, 1990; Keen, 1991)

In a current study on masculinity, Dempsey, Hiller, and Harrison (2001) reported in their article, Gendered (S)exploration among Same-sex Attracted Young People in Australia, “Hegemonic masculinity, which finds expression in widespread adulation of various sporting heroes and media representatives of men with power, authority, and virility, also brings into focus what it defines itself against. (p. 68)
In other words, masculinity is still defined on the playing fields and reinforced in media images that are exemplified by a current television beer commercial showing two beautiful women fighting and tearing each other’s clothing off in a shallow fountain while arguing over whether Miller Lite has less calories or tastes great. If this is how masculinity is currently being socially constructed, heterosexual youth who can meet the expectations that they should be playing sports and engaging in outdoor recreational activities are better able than their homosexual counterparts to meet the requirements of the dominant cultural discourse. Young men with talents that are more literary or artistic may not feel that they fit in with more popular peers. We do not know if these young men felt that they did not fit in, but the findings suggest that what peers acknowledge them for were mostly not contained in the dominant cultural discourse.

In contrast, Connell (1992) suggested a decade ago that this view of masculinity was inconsistent with contemporary research. He believes that there is a considerable range of masculinities represented within given cultures at any given time. Perhaps both scholars have a point. Undoubtedly there are a variety of masculinities represented, even in small town Utah, but are these masculinities apparent to adolescent males?

Adolescence is a time when youth are concerned with fitting in with their peers. I suggest that the teenage male world currently is far more narrow than the variety of options that might be available to adults. Adolescence is a time when the psychological rewards of belonging to a group and being admired by group members is usually enough to assure conformity to group norms (Sherif & Sherif, 1964). Thomas and Thomas (1928) remind us that what we define as real is real in its consequences, and the liability that
exists when one cannot fit into the traditionally conceived masculine world of adolescence can have very real consequences for same-sex attracted youth.

_Adolescent Peer Relationships_

The development of adolescent friendships, and defining one's relationships with peers are important psychological processes. Adolescent relationships "contribute to an evolving sense of identity" (Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990, p. 278). In the United States, the primary adolescent social context is often located within the school that students attend. In Utah, where the population is 75% Latter-day Saint, the culture within most schools is greatly influenced by church and community cultural norms.

In their study of gay men, Flowers and Buston (2001) pointed out that it is within the school context that both same-sex attracted and heterosexual young people first start making comparisons, and it is within those school relationships that the results are most keenly felt. In the present study there was evidence that most of the participants had a network of friends and admirers. They also received a great deal of peer recognition, and the messages reflected a desire to excel. It was also evident that the gender of these friends and the focus of their admiration were different. This finding supports research that suggests that a failure to conform to the cultural definitions of masculinity could force same-sex attracted males into more noteworthy relationships with girls to avoid becoming expatriated (Savin-Williams, 1998).

Cultural narratives are shaped by behavioral expectations that are often very specific to the group (Gamson, 1992). They delimit the boundaries of group belonging. To be accepted, Gamson noted that the individual must be able to maintain "narrative
fidelity” to the extant beliefs, myths, and cultural expectations (p. 69). If the narrative is overly narrow, and those who do not fit into the script recognize the expectation of both gender conformity to traditional conceptions of masculinity and a societal view of compulsory heterosexuality, there is the likelihood of genuine dejection on the part of those who find themselves on the outside looking in (Flowers & Buston, 2001).

**Differentness**

Simmel (1950) pointed out, “For the actions of the individual, his difference from others is of far greater interest than his similarity with them. It largely is differentiation from others that challenges and determines our activity” (p. 30). Often, young people experiencing feelings of erotic same-sex attractions are unable to identify just exactly what is happening to them. These young men probably understood that they did not identify with most of the dominant images of masculinity available to them in their small town high schools. If, as some writers suggest, we live in a world of compulsory heterosexuality, it could have been very evident to these adolescents that they were different (Flowers & Buston, 2001).

This differentness may have severe implications for the same-sex attracted youth. Plummer (2001) explained that homophobia has its early roots in boyhood “otherness,” while Thurlow (2001) proposed that in the school and in the classroom there is a natural peer rivalry as individuals stake their claim to being normal. One of the ways people demonstrate their normality is to point out who is the “other.” When an adolescent male fails to meet the expectations of the high school peer group, he may not be labeled as homosexual, but he may be viewed as different. His ability to negotiate this “otherness”
could be the difference between experiencing high school as a relatively pleasant rite of passage, or being the target of abuse.

*Traditionally Religious Same-sex Attracted Youth*

As young persons reach puberty, they begin to consolidate their own adult sexual identity (Plummer, 2001). While many same-sex attracted youth probably feel that something is “wrong” with them, the young man growing up in a conservative religious tradition like The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is likely to feel this even more acutely. A Latter-day Saint teenager would have an almost impossible time forming a homosexual identity. Church doctrine makes it clear that no one is a homosexual. To a Latter-day Saint, homosexuality is only a behavior and that behavior is expressly forbidden. In an article published in the October, 1995 edition of *The Ensign*, a Latter-day Saint Church magazine, Elder Dallin H. Oaks (1995) stated, “The words homosexual, lesbian, and gay are adjectives to describe particular thoughts, feelings, or behaviors. It is wrong to use these to denote a condition…” (p. 8).

We live in a world that presumes heterosexuality. When a Latter-day Saint child reaches puberty, there is an expectation of heterosexual sexual feelings. In a healthy family or church environment, those sexual feelings are not denied or ignored. Adults acknowledge the feelings, help the teen understand the cultural script that requires chastity, and let them know that there is always someone available to help them make sense out of their sexuality. Local church leaders are expected to talk to the youth about sexuality, and to be available for confidential conversations if problems with sexuality arise. Young people who violate the doctrine of chastity also know that there is a script
for how they can repent and continue to receive all the blessings of church membership. In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, there is a clear cultural script concerning heterosexual sexuality.

No similar, familiar cultural script exists for the same-sex attracted adolescent, their parents, or their local ecclesiastical leaders. The doctrines of the LDS Church presumably will not change. Given the presence of same-sex attracted youth in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, there needs to be a more inclusive cultural script that upholds the standards of chastity for members, while creating a safe and supportive environment for those experiencing feelings of same-sex attractions.

Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

This selection of yearbooks is neither random nor necessarily representative of Latter-day Saint men. In this study, certain adolescents are not represented. Those individuals who did not buy a yearbook or did not ask others to write messages in their yearbook were not eligible for data collection. Those teens that might have been most alienated from their classmates were probably less likely to have participated in the yearbook signing tradition.

The study was a convenience sample. The research design could have been strengthened by matching participants on selected demographic characteristics, by age and location, for example.

It is also important to remember that these messages were not intended to be read by outsiders. They are situated within a context that cannot be fully known to the researcher. There are also issues related to the interpretation of the messages. While
content analysis is recognized as a valid system for analyzing written communications, there are concerns when a researcher is assigning a general meaning to what has been written. However, there were more than 2800 messages written in the yearbooks from a specific population, Latter-day Saint adolescents, and it is possible to make some general observations about the trends exhibited among the study participants.

There is so much that we do not know about adolescents who are experiencing feelings of same-sex attraction and who are growing up in conservative religious cultures. Conservative religious traditions often are reluctant to speak about sexuality. Faithful members frequently are concerned that by participating in research projects they will be held up to ridicule, or that the information offered will be misrepresented. Researchers need to observe the same sensitivity when discussing religious values that they often extend to race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.

It would be helpful to know how same-sex adolescents segregate their lives into heterosexual and same-sex attracted spheres. How do they make sense of the conflict they are experiencing between their sexual feelings and their religious convictions? It would be useful to know what religious adults who are same-sex attracted remember about their first realization that the church's probation on homosexual behavior was referring to the feelings they were experiencing. Finally, it would be important to understand how the cultural narrative about homosexuality varied across different conservative religious traditions.
Concluding Remarks

Findings from this study suggest that there is a difference in the kind of activities that are common in the lives of heterosexual and same-sex attracted adolescent males. This research supports information that was collected in a retrospective study funded by the National Institute of Health some years ago that found that men who became homosexual were far less likely than most men to remember having enjoyed sports such as baseball and football, and were twice as likely to have enjoyed drawing, music, and reading (Bell et al., 1981).

In examining the 2868 messages found in the yearbooks of thirty heterosexual men and thirty same-sex attracted men, I found that heterosexual male adolescents were far more likely to have themes surrounding sports, shared activities and recreation represented in their messages than were the same-sex attracted men. They also received three times as many messages from their male peers than did the same-sex attracted males. Conversely, the same sex-attracted adolescent males were far more likely to have messages referring to their talents, and the themes that were contained in their yearbook messages were many times more likely to be about drama, music, or other artistic activities.

The choice of a single individual to participate in a particular activity may seem of little consequence. If there exists a cultural narrative that provides peer acceptance and a presumption of healthy masculinity for both the football player and the drama student, then there is really nothing to be concerned about. However, the rising incidence of reported cases of adolescent peer abuse aimed at teens that are “different,” and the
growing number of suicide attempts by same-sex attracted youth are clear indications that something is wrong. In addition, the absence of a rational cultural script for same-sex attracted youth growing up in some conservative religious traditions could leave many of these teens frightened and confused.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
Appendix A. Recruitment Handout
Appendix A
Recruitment Handout

Informal Summary of the Intent and Scope of the Study

Dr. Kathleen Piercy and a student researcher, David Pruden in the Department of Family and Human Development at Utah State University are conducting a research study to find out more about peer perceptions of male high school classmates. To do this we will be studying the messages written in high school yearbooks.

To conduct the study we will need the junior or senior high school yearbooks of men between the ages of 19 and 30 who are willing to confidentially identify themselves to the researchers as either being primarily heterosexual (individuals attracted to members of the opposite sex) or primarily homosexual (individuals attracted to members of their own sex), and who are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or were members during their high school years. In addition, there must be a minimum of ten different messages written in your yearbook. Volunteers are being recruited from students on the Utah State University campus and several Latter-day Saint organizations via newsletters, Internet bulletin boards, and flyers.

All identities of the individuals and the personal information gathered from the yearbooks will be held in the strictest confidence. Each individual volunteer selected for the study will also be asked to fill out a brief, 12-question confidential demographic survey. The research project would require the use of your high school yearbook for approximately four months. Once the study is completed your yearbook will be returned to you undamaged and unaltered in any way. Any cost of shipping or mailing the yearbook will be the responsibility of the research team.

This study is intended to gather information that can help researchers better understand peer relationships of young men who were experiencing same-sex attractions in their high school years but had not disclosed those feelings to their classmates. In addition, we wish to understand any differences, patterns, or themes that might be found when these yearbooks are contrasted with the yearbooks of their heterosexual peers.

Please be assured that this information and research project is in no way intended to discriminate against any individual or group of individuals. We would hope that the information gathered could be useful in understanding and protecting at risk youth.

If you might be willing to be involved in this research project would you please contact David Pruden at 801-363-0254 in Salt Lake City or at 435-752-7234 in Logan, for more information.

Thank you!
Appendix B. Informed Consent
Appendix B

Informed Consent

Adolescent peer perceptions reflected in the yearbooks of Mormon homosexual and heterosexual men

Introduction
This informed consent form is designed to acquaint the participants with the purpose and benefits of the study, the research methods to be used, and the risks of participation. Please understand that your choice to participate is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the research project at any time without consequence.

Purpose of the Study
Dr. Kathy Piercy in the Department of Family and Human Development at Utah State University and a student researcher, David Pruden, will be conducting a research study to find out about peer perceptions of male high school classmates. Specifically, we are examining the yearbook messages of male Latter-day Saint males, half of whom are heterosexuals and half of whom are homosexuals, for patterns or themes. We are seeking individuals who had not disclosed their homosexual feelings to others during their high school years. Your participation will aid in gaining insight and understanding of adolescent experiences. There will be approximately 60 other participants in the study.

Procedures
If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to give your high school yearbook to the research team for four months so that an analysis of the messages written therein can be conducted. In addition, you will be requested to fill out a background questionnaire.

Risks
There are minimal risks associated with this study. The possibility of emotional discomfort in answering the background questions is minimal.

Benefits
There will probably not be any direct benefit to you for participation in this study; however, the information gathered may assist researchers in understanding adolescent experiences.

Explanation and Offer to Answer Questions
David Pruden has explained this study to you and answered your questions. If you have other questions or research-related problems, please feel free to contact Dr. Piercy at 435-797-2387.
Costs and Payments
There are no costs for participating in this study, nor will there be any financial reimbursement for your involvement.

Confidentiality
Research records will be kept confidential consistent with federal and state regulations. Each yearbook and background questionnaire will be assigned a code number and your name will not appear on any written document. Only Dr. Piercy and the student researcher, David Pruden, will have access to the data. All information associated with the study will be kept in a locked file cabinet in a room that is locked whenever the student researcher is not there. Once messages are transcribed, the yearbook will be returned to you. The background questionnaire will be destroyed once the study is completed, and no later than December 2002.

IRB Approved Statement
The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects at Utah State University has reviewed and approved this research project.

Copy of Consent
You have been given two copies of this Informed Consent. Please sign both copies and retain one copy for your files.

Investigator Statement
I certify that the research study has been explained to the individual, by me or my research staff and that the individual understands the nature and purpose, the possible risks and benefits associated with taking part in the research study. Any questions that have been raised have been answered.

Signature of PI & Student Researcher

Dr. Kathy W. Piercy
Principal Investigator
435-797-2387

David Pruden
Student Researcher
801-363-0254

Signature of Subject
I have read and understand this Consent Form and by signing below, I agree to participate in the study.

Name of participant ____________________________

Participant’s signature _______________________ Date ____________
Appendix C. Sample Survey
Appendix C

Background Information

1. What is your date of birth? __________

2. What is the highest level of education you have finished?
   a. didn’t finish high school
   b. graduated from high school
   c. vocational or trade school
   d. attended college but did not graduate
   e. graduated from college
   f. graduate or professional degree

3. What is your current marital status?
   a. married
   b. single
   c. divorced
   d. separated
   e. widowed

4. What was your approximate level of income during the past year?
   a. less than $15,000
   b. $15,000 to $30,000
   c. $30,000 to $50,000
   d. $50,000 to $70,000
   e. $70,000 to $90,000
   f. more than $90,000

5. My sexual feelings are:
   a. primarily heterosexual
   b. primarily homosexual
   (attracted to the opposite sex) (attracted to the same sex)

6. How active are you in the LDS Church at this time?
   a. not active
   b. somewhat active
   c. moderately active
   d. very active

7. At the time of your junior and senior year in high school your parents were:
   a. married
   b. divorced/separated
   c. one parent was deceased

8. Which best describes the area your family lived in while you were in high school?
   a. city
   b. suburb
   c. town
   d. rural

9. How many children were there in your family? __________

10. What was your father’s occupation when you were in high school?
11. In what income category was your family during your high school years?
   a. less than $15,000  
   b. $15,000 to $30,000  
   c. $30,000 to $50,000  
   d. $50,000 to $70,000  
   e. $70,000 to 90,000  
   f. more than $90,000

12. How active in the LDS Church was your family when you were in high school?
   a. not active  
   b. somewhat active  
   c. moderately active  
   d. very active

13. How active in the LDS Church were you when you were in high school?
   a. not active  
   b. somewhat active  
   c. moderately active  
   d. very active
Appendix D. IRB Approval Letter
MEMORANDUM

TO: Kathy Piercy
    David Pruden

FROM: True Rubal, IRB Administrator

SUBJECT: Peer Perception of Adolescent Self as Reflected in the Yearbooks of Mormon Homosexual and Heterosexual Men

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval.

In giving its approval, the IRB has determined that:

X There is no more than minimal risk to the subjects.
   There is greater than minimal risk to the subjects.

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file for the period of one year. If your study extends beyond this approval period, you must contact this office to request an annual review of this research. Any change affecting human subjects must be approved by the Board prior to implementation. Injuries or any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board.

Prior to involving human subjects, properly executed informed consent must be obtained from each subject or from an authorized representative, and documentation of informed consent must be kept on file for at least three years after the project ends. Each subject must be furnished with a copy of the informed consent document for their personal records.