

School-Age Coping: Themes Across Three Generations of Sexual Minorities

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Abstract

Because sexual minorities are an at-risk population, researchers conducted retrospective life story interviews with 191 sexual minority people comprising participants from a marriage equality cohort, an HIV/AIDS epidemic cohort, and a Stonewall rebellion cohort. The participants were located within 80 miles of four major metropolitan areas in the United States. Of the 191 participants interviewed, 90 participants talked about their school-age experiences and how they coped during elementary, middle, and high school. Five themes were identified in the interview data that were coded by the research team: (a) the influence of relationships, (b) experiencing emotions, (c) coming out, (d) coping behaviorally, and (e) coping cognitively. Implications for school counseling practice and future research are provided for educators, researchers, and helping professionals.

Keywords: coping, counselor, LGBT, qualitative research, school

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Sexual minority youth and emerging adults have reported mixed support from trusted adults during their school-age years (Kosciw et al., 2018; Author, 2019). In 2019, a Scottish man punched a young boy in the chest because he presumed him to be gay (Villarreal, 2019). Similarly, in Florida, a pre-teen son was left on the side of the highway because his father thought he was gay (Kaplan, 2019). In 2017, a mother stabbed and killed her 17-year-old son in Brazil because he was gay (Bollinger, 2017). She was sentenced to 25 years in prison (Baume, 2019). In 2019, a father shot and killed his 14-year-old gay son in Nevada (Advocate, 2019). In 2020, festival goers in Croatia burned an effigy of two men and their child (Duncan, 2020). The act of hatred, which was condemned by Croatia's president, was observed by many young people.

Due to the ongoing lack of support of sexual minority youth in schools and society at large, school counselors are encouraged to support sexual minority students in developing proper coping skills. However, sexual minority advocacy competence (i.e., advocacy for and with sexual minority students) among school counselors varies (Simons et al., 2017). When one reviews the findings of GLSEN's Annual School Climate Survey (Kosciw et al., 2018), clearly the unique needs of sexual minority students remain unmet. Additionally, GLSEN (2018) has reported that in the current sociopolitical climate progress for these students has been slowing. As such, this article reports the qualitative findings of a study that examined the process of coping during the school-age years among 90 sexual minority people. The purpose of the study was to explore the coping experiences of sexual minority students during K-12 education in

order to improve the role of school counselors and other educators in helping sexual minority youth cope effectively with experiencing and observing challenges.

Earlier studies have found that sexual minority students are vulnerable to the effects of minority stress (Toomey et al., 2018) and they may not have adequate support at home (Scourfield et al., 2007) nor at school (Mayo, 2015). Meyer (2003) has suggested that mental health disparities exist among sexual minority students in K-12 education because they are part of a marginalized group. For example, due to intrapersonal (e.g., internalized heterosexism; Szymanski et al., 2008) and interpersonal stressors (e.g., being bullied based on sexual minority status), the mental well-being of sexual minority students is compromised both inside and outside of schools (e.g., at home). Fortunately, the minority stress model is useful in exploring how they cope with challenges because it helps them to explore the interrelationships between rejection, victimization, and well-being (Toomey et al., 2018).

Coping skills serve as a buffer between minority stress and outcomes. The school counselor is in a unique position to teach about this relationship and how students can cope most effectively. Few recent empirical studies exist that focus exclusively on coping skills among sexual minority students (e.g., Goldbach & Gibbs, 2015; Kuper et al., 2013). Subsequently, gaining more knowledge and understanding about how sexual minority students cope is paramount.

This study fills a gap in the literature by examining how sexual minority students cope, then discusses the implications for school counselors as they teach sexual minority students and their parents/guardians about coping during the school-age years. In this study, coping is defined as becoming more resilient in order to have more energy

to challenge stressors associated with being of a sexual minority. That is, how one copes is tied directly to their personhood as a sexual minority person. The aim of this study has been to explore the coping experiences of sexual minorities during their school-age years via retrospective self-report data gathered from three cohorts of study participants who have answered questions about their K-12 school experiences and coping as sexual minorities.

Coping as a Sexual Minority During Youth and Adolescence

Sexual minority adolescents cope in ways that are distinctly different than heterosexual adolescents (Toomey et al., 2018). For example, Goldbach and Gibbs (2015) claimed that sexual minority adolescents utilize 43 unique coping statements to cope with stress. Mayo (2015) reported that sexual minority adolescents find support by participating in groups where they meet others like themselves such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs). This latter outcome is congruent with Meyer's (2003) minority stress model, which presumes that participating in groups such as GSAs counteracts sexual minority stress more effectively than trying to cope with sexual minority stress on one's own. Nevertheless, the stress that sexual minority young people experience and how they cope is likely varied given the resources that are available to them along with their age and when they were enrolled in school. Additionally, some sexual minority youth may choose to avoid joining GSAs because for them joining groups is about fitting in at school without a label. They don't join GSAs because they want to avoid the stigma that results when they become labeled as part of LGBT community. This study extends the findings of prior studies by exploring retrospective accounts of coping among sexual minorities during their school-age years. For example, Kuper et al. (2013) interviewed a

sample of sexual minority adolescents about how they coped with stress and 10 themes were identified including, but not limited to, being guarded, ignoring stress, helping others, and becoming stronger.

Method

This qualitative research study explored coping among three cohorts of sexual minorities during their school-age years by providing voice to their lived K-12 school experiences. The emic perspective has been referred to one's "perspective of reality" (Fetterman, 1998, p. 20). Researchers allow for multiple perspectives of reality in order to more fully understand a situation. The following research question was explored: How do sexual minority youth and emerging adults describe how they coped during their school-age years?

Participants

Ninety participants from three cohorts were included in the study. Participants were from a Stonewall cohort (52-59 years old in 2015 [older cohort]), an HIV/AIDS cohort associated with the HIV/AIDS epidemic cohort (34-41 years old in 2015 [middle cohort]), and a same-sex marriage cohort (18-25 years old in 2015 [younger cohort]). The sample was comprised of a diverse sample of participants who shared about coping during the school-age years as sexual minorities: 35 (39%) were cisgender females, 14 (16%) were genderqueer people, and 41 (46%) were cisgender males. Concerning sexual orientation, 19 (21%) were bisexual people, 35 (39%) were gay people, 15 (17%) were lesbian people, 5 (6%) were either gay or lesbian people, 5 (6%) were pansexual people, and 11 (12%) were queer people. Regarding race and ethnicity, 6 (7%) were American Indian people, 13 (14%) were Asian people, 16 (18%) were

African American people, 21 (23%) were Hispanic/Latino/a/x people, 14 (16%) were multiracial people, and 20 (22%) were European American people.

Instrument

Interviews were guided by life stories. To minimize bias, a standardized interview protocol (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) was used. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions. Interviews lasted between two to three hours. The questions were asked to explore themes in the data related to our research question. The question items were focused on (a) community, (b) coping, (c) health, and (d) stress. The same questions were asked of each participant, which allowed participants' responses to be compared. Last, to maximize the likelihood of acquiring balanced and objective findings, more than 20 interviews were conducted across all cohorts. Twenty is the minimum number recommended for conducting semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Data Analysis

Each of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. A constant comparative method was used to conduct data analysis. Transcripts were coded based on consensus. The constant comparative method is related to grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As a result, use of this method allowed us to identify a variety of perspectives shared by the participants regarding their unique experiences (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). Data were gathered, transcribed, and compared through interviews (Lichtman, 2006).

For this research, the first participant's data were transcribed and subsequently analyzed to uncover topics. Thereafter, salient topics were compared with data

gathered in the next rounds of interviews. As more interviews were conducted, data were compared using codes throughout the coding process. New data were compared with previously analyzed data. Then, simple codes were grouped into broader themes. Next, we identified significant patterns discovered in the broader themes to explain the experience of coping during the school-age years. Findings also contributed to implications for school counselors, counselor education, and future research.

Results

Five themes emerged to illuminate our understanding of the school-age coping experiences among sexual minority participants in each of the three cohorts. Themes one through five were as follows: (a) the influence of relationships; (b) experiencing emotions; (c) deciding to come out; (d) actions to cope with being a sexual minority, including involvement in extracurricular activities; and (e) coping cognitively (unique to the younger cohort).

Theme one concerned the influence of relationships. While participants in all cohorts talked about the influence of relationships, participants in younger and middle cohorts talked the most about the influence of relationships, which may or may have involved parents and were either favorable or unfavorable. In the younger cohort ($n = 48$), 17 instances of relations with parents (or not) were mentioned. The positive impact of relationships was mentioned 27 times, and the negative impact of relationships was mentioned 13 times.

When parent relationships were discussed, they were most often discussed in a negative light. For example, younger participants reported that parents were

unsupportive because they were absent, mentally ill, having conflicts, or working.

UT_4059 shared:

My sister and my mom started fighting because she was gay. (...) That was the day that she got kicked out. We were told—me and my brother had to go in your room and grab all of her things and cut her clothes and burn her things on the back porch. That was it. (...) I was angry at my mom, cuz I was like, what are you doin'? You're behavin' like a child. (...) I knew at that point. Just—I was like, if this is what it's gonna be like, then you can count on me never telling you [that I am gay too].

Relationships were found to be positive and desirable if they allowed participants to learn more about themselves and how to deal with specific challenges by interacting with and observing others (e.g., classmates who were openly gay, teachers, and counselors). UCSC_1099 stated:

[My friend] went through some stuff during her early years of high school and pretty much all the people around her thought that she was never going to change and was gonna keep downward but she actually really improved. Her grades [however] were getting better and she was actually really smart. She was actually trying and doing stuff. I guess at the moment I got motivated because I was just like, "Wow. Come on. If Christina can do it you can, too." (...) I remember right there on the computer in her room that's when I was like, "I need to change." I started looking at community college classes.

Conversely, some participants reported having negative relationships in lieu of not having positive relationships. Although sometimes these relationships resulted in growth, they were often characterized by drug use and abuse, sexual assault, physical fights within the family, and ineffective experiences with counselors. UT_4025 shared:

My first real relationship I had had little [sic] relationships in high schools with dudes. This was my first love. It was a difficult relationship. She wasn't out to her family and we moved in really fast and—we broke up and I hit my first bout of severe depression around that time in 2001.

In the middle cohort ($n = 30$), the positive impact of relationships was mentioned 17 times, and the negative impact of relationships was mentioned 15 times. Positive relationships were characterized by having healthy relationships, having mentors and supportive family members, and an abundance of friends even if they were outcasts. UT_4006 disclosed, "All my friends were skaters who sometimes smoked pot. (...) From seventh to ninth grade, those were the friends that I had because they understood feeling different from other people, and feeling left out of things, or just not understanding them." Relationships were found to be negative if they offered mixed support (e.g., in families), involved being ignored or rejected, and weren't safe. In the older cohort ($n = 12$), relationships were either positive or negative depending on the level and quality of parent support. Additional examples of responses to all significant themes are in the Appendix.

Theme two was experiencing emotions. Clear evidence existed in each cohort to support the idea that experiencing and learning how to manage emotions was important. Participants in the younger cohort were most likely to experience being sad, angry, afraid, different, and depressed. UA_3043 shared:

There was one time when me and my friend at the time—well, she ended up being my girlfriend later on in our high school. We went to Disneyland, and we were really romantic, holding hands, kissing and stuff, and I noticed people looking at us, giving us dirty looks and stuff, and that really

hurt me. (...) I just felt disturbed and upset and angry that people were just viewing me like I'm a [*sic*] animal.

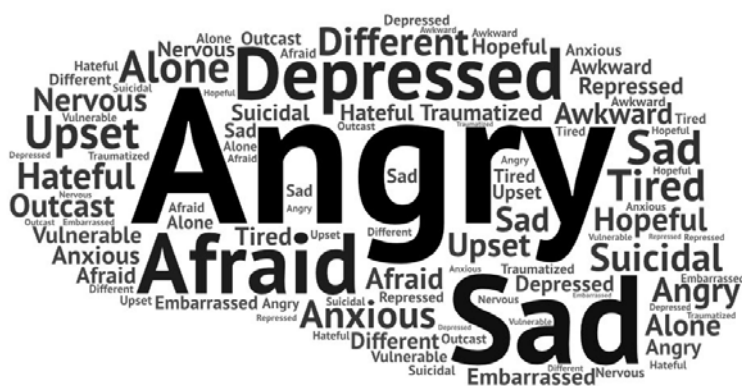
UA_3033 added:

I became really mean in the eighth grade. I became really mean. At the time, I just powered through. I didn't cry, because I felt like crying was a form of weakness. I just kept walking. Kept dealing. I compiled all of that. Dished out so much anger in the eighth grade. I think I picked up a kid by his collar at one point and shoved him into a locker. It was a mess. Eighth grade was a mess.

Participants in the middle cohort were most likely to experience feeling angry, afraid, depressed, and sad. Like participants in the younger and middle cohorts, participants in older cohort also experienced depression. Across all cohorts, the most common emotions experienced were depression, sadness, anger, and fear (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Word Cloud of Emotions Reported by Study Participants



Theme three was deciding to come out. Deciding to come out was a prominent theme identified in the data gathered and analyzed from participants in each of the three cohorts. In the younger cohort, 23 instances of deciding to come out (or not) were

mentioned. In the middle cohort, 11 instances were mentioned, and in the older cohort, 6 instances were mentioned.

Theme four was actions to cope with being a sexual minority, including involvement in extracurricular activities. In the younger cohort, 13 instances of actions to cope were mentioned. Actions included, but were not limited to, crying to manage emotions, ignoring bullies, keeping two Facebook pages, writing in a journal or writing a letter to a teacher, and requesting to meet with a counselor. UCSC_1099 said:

The people who I came out to were people who already knew or were accepting of gay people. I was a very opinionated and open-minded and loud person. (...) I was very selective of the people I would talk to and I can just tell who were okay with it or not.

He added:

This one time we were watching a video about Hitler and the Holocaust and they talked about who Hitler targeted, etc., and then he brought me up saying I should've been one of those people. I just had enough so I (...) told the counselor and then the counselor talked to him and this other guy who were both on me about that kind of stuff. The counselor didn't really do anything to them; he just told them not to say anything. Then, when he met me personally he just said, "Yeah, people shouldn't do that to you." At the end he said, "People shouldn't hate on you because of a choice you make." I was just like, "It's not a choice." I walked out. I still really didn't feel like I had any support but I was still happy I had my friends and I was just living life.

In the middle cohort, 22 instances of use of specific actions to cope were mentioned. A wide array of actions, ranging from unhealthy to healthy, included being promiscuous,

isolating oneself, attending summer school, developing leadership skills, standing up for others, and preparing to physically fight to defend oneself. CU_288 stated:

I got tired of being tormented at school by the kids, and I brought my father's switchblade to school. Not that I was gonna do anything to anybody, but I wanted to scare them. Somebody saw me with it, and I was suspended.

UCSC_1336 reported, "I got in fights with a lot of people. One guy called me a faggot. Punch me in the mouth, broke my tooth at 17 and I started beating him down in front of the principal's door in high school." In the older cohort, two instances were mentioned. Actions included throwing oneself into schoolwork, and, similar to participants in the middle cohort, physically defending oneself. UCSC_1057 said the following:

When I went to Sacred Heart, Roots came out. Sacred Heart, it was like six blacks in the whole fucking school. Anyway, people would call me nigger. My mom and dad grew up in Mississippi. I was always taught never to ever accept nigger. I went home and told my dad. My dad told me point blank, "Anyone calls you nigger, you knock 'em out." After knocking about 12 people out, principal at Sacred Heart calls my dad and tells him, "We're gonna have to start suspending your son. He's beating these guys up for calling him nigger." My dad told him, "You need to have an assembly and control your fucking students and tell them not to call my son nigger, because every time he knocks somebody out, I told him to do that. If you suspend my son for beating somebody up for calling him nigger, I will sue your school." I'll be damned. Two weeks later they had an assembly.

Across all cohorts, participants shared about coping with their sexual minority status by participating in extracurricular activities. The activities included attending church, joining

a technology group, playing sports (e.g., basketball), exercising, volunteering, and joining GSAs or related groups. UA_P318 was introduced to academic decathlon. The opportunity served as a turning point in her life. After participating she thought more highly of herself. She explained as follows:

After I failed chemistry, I had a professor—or, I guess, a teacher, sorry, it was high school—teacher come to my class. He said that he needed students to do academic decathlon. My friend signed up for it, so I was like, oh, yeah, okay, I'll try it out. Went to the introductory first day, where you take a test and they tell you if you're gonna be good at it or not. I took the test, and the teacher came up to me and he said, "You're really talented. You're really smart. You're good at reading. You could be great at this. You could be on our team. Here are all these people who are gonna be on this team with you and support you in this." It was just this incredible, wonderful thing, cuz it was that mentor I had been hoping for, somebody who was gonna take recognition of me, and then pay me a lot of attention. He was a really good coach, and it was a really good group of kids. I would stay there for hours after school, and I would show up there two hours before school, so it allowed me to escape the environment with my mother. Then, my boyfriend would call and say, "Oh, you need to come over," things like that. I'd be like, "Well, can't. I'm doing academic decathlon. I'm stuck at practice for hours." It really was a lifesaver.

Theme five was unique to the younger cohort. Theme five, coping cognitively, was mentioned 18 times among participants in the younger cohort. The younger participants mentioned the importance of thinking differently about themselves and their situations in order to cope as sexual minorities. This ranged from getting to a point to where they were able to think positively about themselves to not caring about what others thought of them. According to UT_4029:

[Others'] would bully me about my glasses. I had really crooked teeth, so they would bully me on that. That's all I can really remember. After a certain point, I just started to block all that out. I was like, "I don't need to listen to that. It doesn't matter what they say." Throughout the last couple months of my freshman year, I was focused on trying to better myself as a person, and get through high school, and ignore everybody and what they were saying. (...) The bullying didn't really matter after that point. It mattered in the moment, but after that, once I realized who cares what they're saying about me, it didn't really bother me anymore.

Similarly, CU_215 shared:

It was then in high school I started developing more or less like a "don't give a fuck" attitude. I didn't really care if anyone found out, but I didn't tell nobody [*sic*] because in high school it's all about obeying what the teacher says and passing the tests. This might sound a little weird—not really weird but kind of asshole-ish but I needed to use those people to get through school. I made acquaintances who I knew were uncomfortable around gay people, but because I kept my sexual identity a secret, I was able to work peacefully with them and get projects and homework assignments and stuff done without any issues.

Discussion and Conclusion

While discussion of relationships was present in all cohorts, unlike participants in the younger and middle cohorts, participants in the older cohort did not talk as much about the influence of relationships nor school-age experiences. However, when compared to younger participants, they talked most about working through identity development. This could mean that as one gets older, one takes more personal responsibility for one's life because coping mechanisms are developed over time as one gains more knowledge about how to effectively deal with challenges that they face.

Coping is a learning process and it is okay to make mistakes along the way; it is practically expected that mistakes are made when trying to cope whether one wants to make them or not. In a study, however, by Simons and Russell (2019), the authors hypothesized that this was not the case. That is, among a sample of sexual minorities interviewed about their school-age experiences, including interactions with school counselors, the researchers presumed that some sexual minorities would be more effective at coping than others by virtue of an innate mechanism such as personality. This was not found—What seems to be the most important though is that individuals cope the best they can with the skills they have at any given time and learn from mistakes in order to become more effective at coping over time.

The current study found that older participants may have gained more knowledge about their school age experiences over time and could talk about the experiences with more clarity (i.e., understand their experiences from a more knowledgeable perspective in depth, more accurate, and defined). Or, because of the older participants' unique experiences that occurred during the sociopolitical time in which they were attending K-12 education as sexual minorities, they were more likely to cope with their minoritized status in ways that participants of other cohorts did not.

Limitations

This research had several limitations. First, cohort effects are a concern because the possibility of different age groups of subjects (cohorts) may have unique characteristics because of their different histories (Kazdin, 2016). Second, because qualitative research is limited to the experiences of the population under study, our findings are only reflective of the data gathered from the participants in this study.

However, the experiences of the participants across themes one through four are likely to be similar to those of other sexual minorities outside the study. Third, the small sample size of the older cohort ($N = 10$) is another limitation. Nonetheless, data from this study have contributed to an area in which recruitment of any sexual minority people who are willing to speak about coping during the school-age years is valuable. Few studies in the area exist. As a result, future coping studies should utilize recruitment strategies that will be more likely to increase the number of sexual minority participants who came of age during the Stonewall rebellion who wish to share about their school experiences in the context of coping.

Implications for School Counselors

First, given that younger sexual minorities reported the importance of being able to think differently about themselves and their situation during K-12 education, it is recommended that in addition to encouraging them to become involved in extracurricular activities, school counselors assess whether it might be beneficial to teach them cognitive behavioral techniques to use in coping. For some participants, it is necessary to work toward changing internal dialogue in order to make positive behavior change (e.g., not responding to all forms of harassment).

Second, the findings support the idea that school counselors recognize the value in having sexual minority students talk about their feelings. Being in touch with one's feelings was characteristic of a significant number of sexual minority people across all three cohorts when they talked about their school age experiences in the context of coping. As such, acknowledging one's feelings appears to be cathartic, and denying one's feelings may lead to additional challenges in one's life. Part of coping includes

addressing issues. If one does not deal with their feelings, which has benefits such as asking for help, arguably they are not effectively coping. Eventually the distress they are experiencing will have to be confronted, and by delaying this process, it makes the process more difficult to resolve. Consequently, sexual minority students will benefit from school counselors who assist them in processing their feelings.

Third, school counselors are responsible for accurately assessing whether sexual minority students have enough support to come out of the closet. This recommendation is congruent with findings from prior studies about youth who have faced familial rejection and thus became homeless because they were forced out of their family homes (Corliss et al., 2011; Diamond et al., 2011; Ryan et al., 2010). Helping these young people make new friends and have new experiences (e.g., participation in extracurricular activities) may serve as a buffer to the stress they might experience when they try to come out at different times and places. However, involvement in extracurricular activities may also assist them in burying their core identities (Roberts et al., 2007). Helping professionals should assess and challenge this process if it is present.

Fourth, regarding the influence of relationships in the lives of sexual minority students, it is important to teach parents and guardians about how to support sexual minority students. This process may be complex, especially with parents and guardians who do not accept nor validate their student. As a result, school counselors should plan to include related parent education in their comprehensive school counseling programs at the beginning of each school year (Simons, 2019). It is recommended that parents and guardians be referred to Parents and Friends of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and

Transgender People (PFLAG) to meet other parents and guardians who have sexual minority students. If the local area PFLAG has a Safe Schools program, school counselors are encouraged to utilize the program in order to invite older sexual minority people into the schools to share their coming out stories to students. The PFLAG Safe Schools program is a valuable resource, especially for schools that do not have GSAs.

Fifth, school counselors should learn to teach about the importance of friendships and how to make them, but they should also become astute at helping sexual minority students gauge the degree to which their interpersonal relations are helpful based upon how negative or positive they are. In this context, the following question is asked: Are one's relationships either more additive or more subtractive? School counselors encourage assessment of relationships with parents too. This is important because some sexual minority students may feel a need to stay in negative relationships. Sometimes the need for any form of social support will outweigh the deleterious impact of a negative relationship. While this may not always be an issue, sometimes it may be a concern. For example, sexual minority students may be susceptible to using or abusing drugs and/or alcohol as a coping mechanism. In this study, participants in the younger and middle cohorts made mention of using substances to cope 10 times. The substances included marijuana, hallucinogens such as ecstasy, and alcohol. School counselors should teach students about the negative effects of substances.

Future Research

It may be possible that a sexual minority student's ability to not be influenced by what others (e.g., bullies) think about them may promote increased self-acceptance and improve their willingness to come out. Some of this study's findings suggest that *not*

caring occurs after one accepts self or comes out. It might also be related to the different types of adverse childhood experiences one has experienced or one's personality or age. Surprisingly, some of those who talked about getting to a point of not caring about what others thought of them, did so much earlier in life than others. More research would help understand this sort of personal development better. Finally, the field of school counselor education and supervision is rich with literature on training and practice. However, there is little research on the education and supervision of current and future school counselors in meeting the needs of sexual minority students. Given the findings of this study, further research related to sexual minority students and additional focus on effectively training and supervising school counselors are warranted.

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Appendix

Additional Examples of Responses to All Major Themes

Theme	Example Responses
Influence of Relationships	<p data-bbox="558 411 1419 499">My parents would try to put dresses on me, and I would take them off and just be totally free to the world because I didn't want to—I wasn't into dresses. I would wear pants and take my brother's shirt.</p> <p data-bbox="558 533 1419 621">I would think okay well what I'd doing right now I don't really like, but I want to get to where I can hang out with those kids that I do not relate to and that I do like and are doing things that I admire.</p> <p data-bbox="558 655 1419 831">I spend a lot of time hoping that a counselor or teacher at school would take notice of me. Of course, there was no reason for them to because I was a good student and didn't have any problems at all. I just had this fantasy of someday there's going to be some sort of mentor who is going to show me that this isn't a good environment, but I also didn't know how to get out of it.</p>
Experiencing Emotions	<p data-bbox="558 865 1419 1012">It would be just a ton of negative comments. That's how I coped. Just trying to outdo myself in ridiculousness. Those were the types of jokes. I also think it's very indicative of how I felt, because every single thing I was saying was negative. I was just too absolutely against everyone and everything.</p> <p data-bbox="558 1045 1419 1163">I watched this guy get beat up by two straight guys. At least I thought they were straight I could be wrong. They called him faggot and they beat him up because they could tell he was not the same as them. I watched it [but] I couldn't do anything because I was scared.</p>
Deciding to Come Out	<p data-bbox="558 1197 1419 1314">I played it very close to the chest. I was very good at not exposing myself too much. I was very good at fading. I mean I was intentionally a wallflower. I was very good at not bringing too much focus to myself unless I wanted to for some reason.</p>
Actions to Cope	<p data-bbox="558 1348 1419 1402">Certain members of my family don't accept me, but they're aunts and uncles, and I just don't talk to them anymore.</p> <p data-bbox="558 1436 1419 1554">Then maybe for me I would be a teacher's pet. That was my way to kind of deal with it. Because then I could get good feedback at least and feel secure in those relationships and have a little bit of protection in some ways.</p> <p data-bbox="558 1587 1419 1675">At that point I had tried to overdose on Aspirin and thank god I wasn't successful. I didn't know how much I needed to take. I think I took something like 12 or 13 Aspirin.</p> <p data-bbox="558 1709 1419 1824">They're telling me they're going to rape me and kill me because I'm a fag or I'm a dyke or whatever they were saying. A monitor walked by and didn't say anything or stop to do anything, and I was yelling for help. I punched, I kicked, I fought, and I got out of there.</p>

Theme	Example Responses
Coping Cognitively	<p data-bbox="558 268 1422 384">Some teasings [<i>sic</i>], they led to fights and stuff. Even though I wasn't good at defending myself. I still fought. I threw things. I did what I have [<i>sic</i>] to do. I guess at that time, to a kid, that was survival mode. Just trying to get away.</p> <p data-bbox="558 415 1422 474">It was then in high school I started developing more or less a don't give a fuck attitude.</p> <p data-bbox="558 506 1422 562">Yeah because I'd say about ninth grade, I stopped caring about what people thought.</p>

Biographical Statements

Dr. Jack D. Simons is an assistant professor in the Department of Counseling at Mercy College. He trains school and clinical mental health counselors. Jack teaches human development, multicultural and group counseling, and assessment. His scholarship is focused on identity behavior theory, competency-based assessment, cross-national studies, and adolescence. Jack is also an active member of the LGBTQ community and presently studies how to increase participation among females in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jack D. Simons, 555 Broadway, Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522 (email: jsimons1@mercy.edu).

Dr. Melissa Ramdas (she/her) is a licensed mental health counselor with over ten years of clinical experience. She has worked with adolescents and substance abuse clients. And as an adjunct professor, at Mercy College, she has taught several undergraduate and graduate courses in psychology, sociology and mental health counseling. Her work as a professor and clinician has inspired her research interests. Her overall research interest includes gender roles and gender identity and counseling education issues in today's society.

Dr. Stephen T. Russell is an expert in adolescent and young adult health. He studies health risk and resilience among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth and young adults, with an emphasis on gender and race/ethnic/cultural difference in sexual minority health. Multiple NIH and foundation grants have supported his research. His current research directly contributes to two research areas: population health and education, and work and inequality. A new project combines over a decade

of school-based youth surveys with separate principal and teacher surveys, along with geocoded structural/political data; the data archive will serve as the basis of future grant efforts. Finally, Dr. Russell leads a new campus-wide “pop-up” initiative on “Discrimination and Population Health Disparities” at UT-Austin.

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