

Gender Nonconformity, Childhood Rejection, and Adult Attachment: A Study of Gay Men

Monica A. Landolt, Ph.D.,¹ Kim Bartholomew, Ph.D.,^{2,4} Colleen Saffrey, B.A. (Hons),²
Doug Oram, M.A.,² and Daniel Perlman, Ph.D.³

Received January 14, 2002; revision received December 11, 2002; accepted December 15, 2002

Several childhood factors are reported to be associated with a homosexual orientation in men, including gender nonconformity and rejection by parents and peers. The purpose of this study was to explore the associations between these childhood factors and attachment anxiety (the tendency to experience anxiety regarding potential loss and rejection in close relationships) and attachment avoidance (the tendency to avoid versus seek out closeness in relationships) in gay and bisexual men. A community sample of 191 gay and bisexual men completed questionnaires and an attachment interview. Gender nonconformity was significantly associated with paternal, maternal, and peer rejection in childhood. In addition, paternal and peer rejection, but not maternal rejection, independently predicted attachment anxiety. Peer rejection and, to a lesser extent, paternal rejection mediated the association between gender nonconformity and attachment anxiety. Finally, peer rejection mediated the association between paternal rejection and attachment avoidance. Findings highlight the role of gender nonconformity in contributing to childhood rejection and the importance of peer relationships in the socialization of gay men.

KEY WORDS: gender nonconformity; parent–child relations; attachment; gay male sexual orientation.

INTRODUCTION

In this work, we applied attachment theory, one of the dominant perspectives guiding research on close relationships (Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Hazan & Shaver, 1994), to understanding the adult relationship experiences of gay men. Specifically, we explored how childhood gender nonconformity and recollected quality of childhood relationships with parents and peers may predict anxiety and avoidance in gay men's adult attachment relationships. We further examined whether childhood rejection may

mediate the associations between gender nonconformity and adult attachment orientation.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory proposes that parenting quality is an important influence on child development and subsequent adult relationships (Bowlby, 1988). Internal working models, which develop as a result of caregiver–child interactions, are proposed to be the mechanisms underlying continuity of attachment patterns across the life-span. Key aspects of these working models are beliefs about the self as an individual worthy of care (the model of self), as well as beliefs about the availability and trustworthiness of significant others (the model of the other) (Bowlby, 1973). Internal working models are theorized to impact on adult relationships through the interpretation of ambiguous social experiences and through habitual behavioral and emotional responses within relationships (e.g., Collins & Read, 1994; Feeney & Noller, 1996).

¹Centre for Community Child Health Research, Children's and Women's Health Centre of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

²Department of Psychology, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada.

³School of Social Work and Family Studies, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

⁴To whom correspondence should be addressed at Department of Psychology, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia V5A 1S6; e-mail: bartholo@sfu.ca.

Building on the work of Main, Kaplan, and Cassidy (1985) and Hazan and Shaver (1987), Bartholomew (1990) systematized Bowlby's notion of working models in a two-dimensional model of adult attachment (see also Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Individual differences in attachment are conceptualized as being a function of the positivity of models of the self and of close others. A complementary way of conceptualizing the self- and other-models is in terms of the dimensions of anxiety and avoidance (Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994a). The *anxiety* dimension refers to the degree of sensitivity to potential threats to relationship security, such as loss and rejection. Individuals range from showing an internalized sense of relationship confidence and faith in their partners (low anxiety) to being hypervigilant to rejection cues (high anxiety). The *avoidance* (vs. closeness) dimension describes the behavioral strategy that individuals engage in to regulate anxiety generated in the context of an attachment relationship. Individuals who feel threatened range from seeking out and maintaining contact with their attachment figures to reduce felt anxiety (closeness or low avoidance) to withdrawing and avoiding closeness in relationships as a means of reducing anxiety (high avoidance). Previous research suggests that these two dimensions underlie individual differences in adult attachment (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Fraley & Waller, 1998; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994a).

Theory and research have tended to focus on the role of parenting quality in the development of individual differences in attachment orientations (Bowlby, 1973; Bretherton, 1985). Evidence suggests that, in addition to parental relationships, peer relationships may have an independent influence on current attachment strategies. Epstein (1983), for example, showed that while maternal acceptance was important for lovability, an important component of self-esteem, peer acceptance was more important for all other components of self-esteem. Moreover, parents are likely to influence the development and quality of peer relationships by directly managing the social lives of their children (e.g., by facilitating access to peers) and by indirectly imparting social skills, values, and expectations which are then applied in social interactions with peers (Rubin, Coplan, Nelson, Cheah, & Lagace-Sequin, 1999). Elicker, Englund, and Sroufe (1992), for example, found that the quality of the infant-caregiver attachment relationship predicted peer competence. In moving from childhood to adolescence, the importance of peers as agents of socialization likely grows. This is partially a function of the amount of time spent interacting with peers, which tends to be inversely related to time spent with parents (Hartup, 1983). Whereas both parents and peers are

important sources of socialization, over the course of development peer norms may come to validate or filter parent norms (Siman, 1977). Therefore, peer relationships may mediate the associations between parental relationships and subsequent adult attachment.

Attachment and Gay Men

There are only a handful of empirical studies looking at attachment processes in gay men (e.g., Elizur & Mintzer, 2001; Holtzen, Kenny, & Mahalik, 1995; Kurdek, 1997; Landolt & Dutton, 1997). Moreover, just one empirical study examined the association between childhood experiences and adult attachment orientation. In a sample of gays and lesbians recruited through gay and lesbian university organizations, Ridge and Feeney (1998) failed to detect a hypothesized link between recollection of parenting quality and adult attachment styles. Ridge and Feeney speculated that this finding may reflect the stronger influence of peers than parents on adult attachment orientations in gay individuals, though, unfortunately, no measures of peer relations were included in the study. It also may be that limitations of the study compromised its power to identify the effect. Attachment was assessed by a self-report measure of attachment (the Relationship Questionnaire; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), which has not been formerly validated in gay men (Callander, 1999). In addition, the use of categorical rather than continuous ratings of attachment significantly reduced the power of the analyses (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994b). A further limitation is that early parenting quality was assessed by a forced choice (yes, no) checklist consisting of just eight negative (e.g., critical) and eight positive (e.g., affectionate) adjectives. Finally, the select nature of the sample limits the generalizability of these findings.

Recollections of childhood experiences with parents are generally predictive of adult attachment orientations in heterosexual samples (e.g., Hazan & Shaver, 1987) and there is no reason not to expect that the same processes would be observed in the development of gay men. In addition, there is theoretical work on the psychosocial development of gay men indicating the potential value of an attachment perspective. Notably, Colgan (1987) proposed that gay men experience difficulties in intimate relationships because of negative responses from family and peers to gender nonconformity in childhood. Colgan described gay men's interpersonal difficulties in terms of overattachment and overseparation in close relationships. Although Colgan did not present these ideas within an attachment framework, his concept of overattachment bears a striking conceptual similarity to attachment anxiety and

his concept of overseparation to attachment avoidance. In this study, we tested the model that gender nonconformity leading to rejection is predictive of anxiety and avoidance in gay men's intimate relationships.

Consistent with findings in heterosexual samples, we expected that the quality of childhood parenting would have an association with gay men's current attachment strategies. However, research on gay men's recollected relationships with fathers and mothers suggests that the relative importance of fathers and mothers may differ. A small body of literature indicates that gay men report more rejecting and distant childhood relationships with their fathers than do heterosexual men (e.g., Evans, 1969; Milic & Crowne, 1986; Phelan, 1996; Thompson, Schwartz, McCandless, & Edwards, 1973). Findings regarding the mother-son relationship are more equivocal. Some studies indicate that gay and heterosexual samples report similar maternal behaviors (e.g., Milic & Crowne, 1986), others suggest that mothers of gay men are more enmeshed in their relationships with their sons (e.g., Evans, 1969; Thompson et al., 1973). No empirical research that we know of has addressed the question of whether mothers or fathers are more influential in the interpersonal development of gay men. However, we speculate that the higher rejection of gay men's fathers, perhaps accompanied by greater variability in the quality of the father-son than mother-son relationship, may translate into the father-son relationship being somewhat more predictive of adult attachment outcomes than the mother-son relationship.

Gender Nonconformity

Because sexual orientation only becomes fully apparent after childhood (Harry & Devall, 1978), it is implausible that homosexuality per se could somehow causally lead to negative parent and child relations. However, gender identity and gender-typical behavior patterns emerge between the ages of 2 and 4 (Fagot, 1985; Ruble & Martin, 1998). It could be that gender nonconformity, defined as the relative absence of masculine traits and relative presence of feminine traits during boyhood, is linked with negative parent and child relations. Retrospective studies comparing gay and heterosexual men have consistently found that gay men report having experienced greater gender nonconformity as children (Bailey & Zucker, 1995).

Research has indicated an association between gender nonconformity and lower quality father-son relationships in gay samples (e.g., Beard & Bakeman, 2000; Freund & Blanchard, 1983). This association is likely attributable to fathers' difficulty in accepting gender non-

conforming behavior in their sons. Some studies have found that fathers, in comparison to mothers, encourage more sex-typed behavior in their children (e.g., Lytton & Romney, 1991) and have a lower tolerance of nongender conforming behavior in their sons' play (e.g., Bradley & Gobbart, 1989). In contrast, gender nonconformity has not generally been linked with the recollected quality of mother-son relationships. Although mothers do find sons' nongender conforming behavior more distressing than daughters' (Tauber, 1979), they do not intervene to the same extent as fathers do (Langlois & Downs, 1980). As a result, mother-son relationships may not be as affected by sons' gender nonconforming behavior.

Gender nonconformity during childhood may also negatively impact upon peer relations. From very early ages, peers punish boys who exhibit cross-gendered behaviors (Carter & McCloskey, 1983/1984; Fagot, 1977; Langlois & Downs, 1980) and many gay men recall being teased mercilessly during childhood because of their gender nonconformity (Saghir & Robins, 1973). Further, gay men are likely to report that peer rejection in childhood continues well into adolescence. For example, Remafedi (1987) found that 30% of his bisexual and gay adolescent sample reported being physically abused by peers, and 50% reported being verbally abused by peers, and Rotheram-Borus, Rosario, and Koopman (1991) found that gender nonconforming gay adolescents received the greatest abuse. However, research has shown that the majority of gay males, even those who were particularly gender nonconforming in childhood, defeminize by adulthood (e.g., Saghir & Robins, 1973; Whitam, 1977), primarily as a reaction to persistent social pressure (Bell, Weinberg, & Hammersmith, 1981; Harry, 1982).

Overview of Current Study

The purpose of the present study was to explore the associations between childhood gender nonconformity, quality of relationships with fathers, mothers, and peers, and gay men's current levels of attachment anxiety and avoidance in close relationships. The following research questions were addressed: (1) Is childhood gender nonconformity predictive of recollections of parental and peer rejection?; (2) Are recollections of parental and peer rejection predictive of adult attachment anxiety and avoidance?; (3) Does peer rejection (at least partially) mediate any associations between parental rejection and attachment anxiety and avoidance?; (4) Does relationship rejection (with mothers and/or fathers and/or peers) mediate the associations between gender nonconformity and attachment anxiety and avoidance?

METHOD

Participants

This study was one component of the West End Relationship Project, a project designed to explore the relationship experiences of gay and bisexual men residing in the West End of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. The West End is a district known for its vital gay community. The study consisted of two phases: a telephone survey and an in-person interview session. The present study focuses upon the second phase.

Initial recruitment involved a telephone survey of a community sample of 300 gay and bisexual men and 876 heterosexual men. All men 19 years or older in the target district had an equal likelihood of being selected for the survey. Potential participants were told the survey was about “men that live in the West End.” The response rate, calculated as the number of respondents who completed interviews divided by the number of known eligible respondents, was 49%. After some initial demographic questions, men were asked to describe their sexual preference or orientation as either heterosexual, gay, or bisexual. Heterosexual men completed a short version of the survey that assessed demographics. Bisexual and gay men completed the full survey which took approximately 15–20 min and included a series of demographic, relationship abuse, and health-related questions. For further details of the survey methodology, see Regan, Bartholomew, Oram, and Landolt (2002). At the end of the survey, gay and bisexual respondents were asked if they could be recontacted and invited to participate in a second phase of the project in which we hoped to learn about “the experiences of gay and bisexual men living in the West End in more depth.” Attempts to recontact respondents were made within 2 weeks of the original telephone survey date.

Phase 2 included a questionnaire packet and a one-to-one, in-person attachment interview (the History of Attachments Interview). Interviews took place in an office in the West End and were conducted either by a gay male psychotherapist or by one of two female doctoral students knowledgeable about gay male experiences. Interviews lasted approximately 2 hr. Participants were paid a \$20 honorarium.

A total of 300 self-identified gay and bisexual men completed the telephone survey. From the initial survey, 266 (87%) gay respondents indicated their willingness to be re-contacted and told about the second phase of the study. Of these, 195 men participated in phase 2 of the study or 65% (195/300) of those who were originally surveyed. Of the 195 men, 192 participants completed both phase 2 components (questionnaire and interview), two

participants completed the questionnaire but not the interview, and one participant completed the interview but not the questionnaire component. Analyses were based on data from 191 participants who fully completed both the questionnaire packet and interview.⁵ Participants ranged in age from 20 to 70 years, with a mean of 38.6 years ($SD = 9.4$). In terms of relationship status, 26% of participants were living with a same-sex partner, 23% were currently in a relationship with a same-sex partner, and the remainder had been involved in same-sex relationships in the past. In addition, two participants reported having opposite-sex relationships. Eighty percent of the sample reported that most or all of their family knew of their sexual orientation, and 95% reported that most or all of their close friends knew of their orientation. Table I lists additional demographic information on the participants. We could not assess the representativeness of the gay sample because Canadian census data do not include sexual orientation. However, we compared those gay men who completed Phase 2 of the study, the sample for the current study, with the larger sample of 300 who completed the Phase 1 telephone survey on all demographic variables available. There were no notable differences between the groups.

Measures

Boyhood Gender Conformity Scale (BGCS; Hockenberry & Billingham, 1987)

The BGCS originally included 20 statements designed to assess boyhood gender conforming (and non-conforming) behavior and identity. Each statement is rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *never or almost never true* to *always or almost always true*. An example item is “As a child, I was considered a sissy by other boys.” One item from the original scale, “As a child, I felt like a girl,” was dropped because it was judged to be offensive in pilot testing. One additional, theoretically relevant item was added: “As a child, I liked to engage in rough-and-tumble play.” Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was .86.

Recollections of Early Childrearing (EMBU; Perris, Jacobsson, Lindstrom, von Knorring, & Perris, 1980)

This scale measures respondents’ memories of their upbringing. The EMBU was originally developed in Sweden (Gerslma, Emmelkamp, & Arrindell, 1990) and

⁵One participant was dropped because of too many missing values in the self-report measures.

Table I. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants ($N = 191$)

Demographic characteristic	Proportion
Sexual Orientation	
Homosexual	93.8%
Bisexual	6.3%
Ethnic Background	
British/English/Scottish/Welsh/Irish	45.8%
Other European	27.6%
French Canadian	5.2%
Aboriginal/First Nations	1.0%
Other Canadian	12.5%
Latin/Central/South American	2.1%
Chinese/East Asian	1.6%
African	1.0%
Southeast Asian	.5%
Not specified	2.6%
Education	
Some or all of a postgraduate education	13.6%
Some or all of a university education	39.6%
Some or all of a community college education	29.7%
Some or all of a high school education	15.1%
Some or all of a grade school education	1.5%
Employment	
Full-time	77.1%
Part-time	5.7%
Student	1.0%
Working at home without pay	1.0%
On leave (i.e., medical)	4.2%
Retired	4.7%
Unemployed	6.3%
Income	
\$50,000 or more	24.0%
\$40,000 to \$49,999	16.1%
\$30,000 to \$39,999	24.0%
\$20,000 to \$29,999	18.2%
\$20,000 or less	16.7%
Refused	1.0%

has been translated and widely used with English speaking samples (Ross, Campbell, & Clayter, 1982). This 80-item scale describes particular cognitive, emotional, or behavioral scenarios that are rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from *never occurred* to *always occurred*. Maternal and paternal behaviors are rated separately. For purposes of this study, only subscales assessing recollections of parental rejection and warmth were included, comprising 40 items. The rejection and warmth subscales were combined to create an overall index of rejection because the scales were highly correlated ($-.63$ for fathers and $-.61$ for mothers). An example from the rejection subscale is “My father (or mother) would punish me hard, even for little things” and an example from the warmth subscale is “If I had a difficult task in front of me, I felt support from father (or mother).” Alphas for the paternal rejection composite and maternal rejection composite were $.78$ and $.73$, respectively.

The Mother–Father–Peer Scale (MFP; Epstein, 1983)

The MFP scale assesses acceptance and rejection by mothers, fathers, and peers. Items are ranked on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Only the 10 items pertaining to peer acceptance and rejection were used in this study. Example items are “When I was a child, other children liked to play with me” and “When I was a child, other children picked on me and teased me.” The correlation between the acceptance subscale ($\alpha = .88$) and rejection subscale ($\alpha = .90$) was $-.75$.

The Inventory of Peer Attachment (IPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987)

The IPA is a 25-item scale assessing recollections of the quality of childhood/adolescent friendships and attachments. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *almost never or never true* to *almost always or always true*. The three subscales of the inventory are: trust (e.g., “As a child/adolescent, I trusted my friends”), communication (e.g., “As a child/adolescent, I liked to get my friends’ point of view on things I was concerned about”), and alienation (e.g., “As a child/adolescent, I felt alone or apart when I was with my friends”). The three sub-scales strongly correlated with each other (r ’s ranged from $.66$ to $.81$); therefore, all items were combined to create a total score ($\alpha = .95$).

Peer Relationships Composite Measure

The IPA total scale was highly correlated with the MFP peer acceptance and rejection subscales, $r = .72$ and $r = -.62$. Therefore, we used principal components analysis to create a composite index of peer rejection.

History of Attachment Interview (HAI)

This 2-hr semistructured interview asks participants to describe their relationships with their parents (as children and adults) and their significant close friendships and romantic relationships. They are also asked about loneliness, shyness, trust of others, impressions of others’ evaluations of themselves, and hopes for any changes in their social lives. In addition, gay men are asked about early recollections of their sexual orientation, their coming out experiences, and their AIDS-related loss experiences. The interview is designed to assess both participants’ characteristic experiences and feelings in close relationships, as well as the internal coherence and

consistency of their relationship accounts. Trained raters listened to the audiotapes and coded the interviews using the attachment framework proposed by Bartholomew (1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

The two attachment dimensions, anxiety and avoidance, were derived from ratings of four prototypic attachment patterns (secure, dismissing, preoccupied, and fearful). Each participant's degree of correspondence to each of the four prototypic patterns was rated on 9-point scales (ranging from 1 (*no correspondence*) to 9 (*excellent fit*). The *secure* prototype is characterized by valuing intimate relationships, the capacity to maintain close relationships without sacrificing personal autonomy, and coherence and thoughtfulness in discussing relationships and related issues. The *dismissing* prototype is characterized by downplaying the importance of emotional relationships, restricted emotionality, an emphasis on independence and self-reliance, and a lack of clarity or credibility in discussing relationships. The *preoccupied* prototype is characterized by anxiety, an overinvolvement in close relationships, a dependence on other peoples' acceptance for a sense of personal well-being, a tendency to idealize others, and incoherence and exaggerated emotionality during discussion of relationships. The *fearful* prototype is characterized by anxiety resulting in the avoidance of closeness in relationships for fear of rejection, a sense of personal insecurity, and a distrust of others. The attachment dimensions of anxiety and avoidance were derived from the prototype ratings using the procedure outlined by Griffin and Bartholomew (1994a). Anxiety was derived by summing preoccupied and fearful scores and subtracting secure and dismissing scores. Avoidance was derived by summing dismissing and fearful scores and subtracting secure and preoccupied scores. A second trained coder rated 53 of the interviews, and inter-rater reliability for anxiety and avoidance was .74 and .70, respectively.

RESULTS

The means and *SDs* of all measures are reported in Table II. Consistent with prior research, the mean rating for paternal rejection was significantly higher than the mean rating for maternal rejection, $t(179) = 4.80, p < .001$. In addition, attachment anxiety was rated significantly higher than attachment avoidance, $t(190) = 3.90, p < .001$. Zero-order intercorrelations among all key variables are presented in Table III.

Gender Nonconformity and Childhood Relationship Rejection

There was a positive association between gender nonconformity and the three measures of recollected quality

Table II. Mean Scores for Self-Report and Interview Measures

Measure	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Range
Paternal rejection ^a	-0.42	1.27	-2.83 to 2.75
Maternal rejection	-1.23	1.07	-3.00 to 2.00
Boyhood gender nonconformity	4.13	0.97	1.81 to 6.76
Peer relationships composite	0.00	1.00	-2.00 to 2.50
Attachment anxiety	1.31	4.11	-9.00 to 9.00
Attachment avoidance	-0.21	3.88	-9.00 to 7.00

Note. $N = 191$. Absolute ranges for the measures are as follows: Paternal and Maternal Rejection: -3.00 to 3.00; Boyhood Gender Nonconformity: 1.00 to 7.00; Peer Relationships Composite: Standard Scores; Attachment Anxiety and Avoidance: -9.00 to 9.00.

^a $N = 180$.

of parental and childhood relationships (paternal rejection $r = .26$, maternal rejection $r = .19$, composite of peer rejection $r = .37$).

Childhood Relationship Rejection and Adult Attachment

Recollected quality of childhood relationships was predictive of adult attachment anxiety: Attachment anxiety was associated with paternal rejection ($r = .27$), maternal rejection ($r = .12$), and peer rejection ($r = .38$). However, only paternal rejection ($r = .15$) and peer rejection ($r = .23$) were predictive of adult avoidance.

Path Models

We constructed path models to test whether peer relationships mediate the relationship between parental rejection and adult attachment orientation (Research Question

Table III. Intercorrelations Among Self-Report Measures and Interview Attachment Ratings

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. EMBU paternal rejection ^a						
2. EMBU maternal rejection	.58**					
3. Boyhood gender nonconformity	.26**	.19**				
4. Peer relationships composite	.37**	.32**	.37**			
5. HAI anxiety	.27**	.12*	.26**	.38**		
6. HAI avoidance	.15*	.03	-.04	.23**	.08	

Note. $N = 191$.

^a $N = 180$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$, one-tailed.

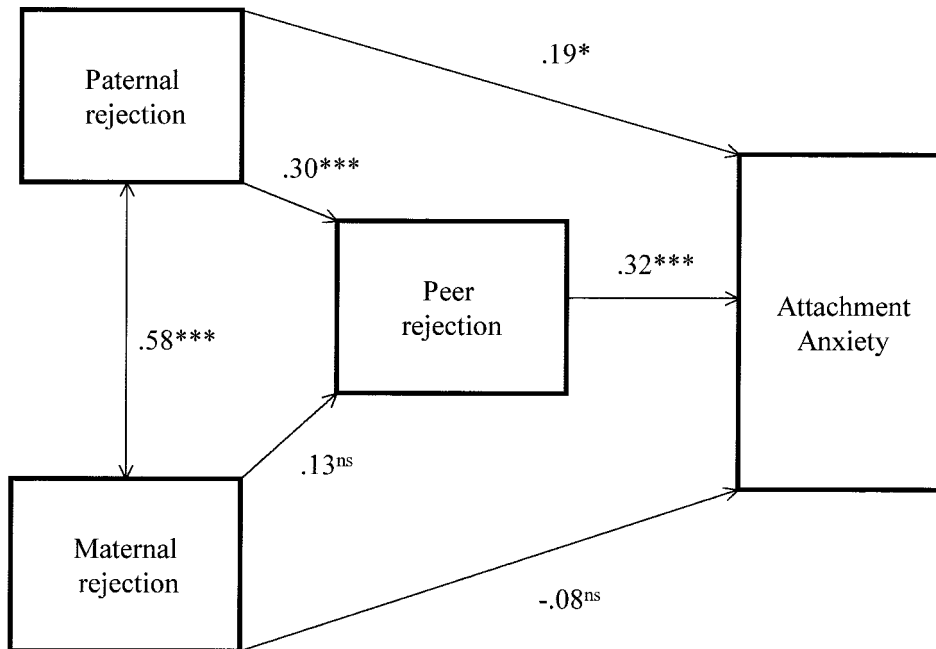


Fig. 1. Path model of parental and peer rejection to anxiety. Note. Values are path coefficients. $N = 180$.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

3), and whether childhood relationship quality mediates the associations between gender nonconformity and adult attachment (Research Question 4). To test a mediational model, three conditions must be satisfied. First, the predictor must be associated with the criterion variable (e.g., parental rejection must be associated with adult attachment). Second, the mediator must be associated with the criterion (e.g., peer rejection must be associated with adult attachment). Third, the predictor and the mediator must be associated (e.g., parental rejection must be associated with peer rejection). If these conditions are met, mediation can be tested by regressing the criterion variable on the predictor and mediator. Mediation holds if the effect of the predictor on the criterion variable is reduced when the mediator is controlled. Perfect mediation holds if the predictor has no effect after the mediator is controlled; however, this is difficult to achieve since measurement error in the mediator tends to underestimate the effect of the mediator and overestimate that of the predictor (Baron & Kenny, 1986). All path models were run using LISREL 8.

Peer Rejection as a Mediator of Parental Rejection and Adult Attachment

The conditions for testing a mediational model were satisfied for both parents for the prediction of attachment anxiety. The result of the path analysis assessing whether peer rejection mediated parental rejection and adult at-

tachment is depicted in Fig. 1. With the inclusion of peer rejection in the model, the association between paternal rejection and anxiety dropped ($\beta = .19$, $t = 2.23$, $p < .05$) and the association between maternal rejection and anxiety ceased to be significant ($\beta = -.08$, $t = -0.90$, ns). Thus, peer rejection largely mediated the association between parental rejection and attachment anxiety. In addition, peer rejection contributed to attachment anxiety independently of parental rejection ($\beta = .32$, $t = 4.27$, $p < .001$).

Paternal rejection, but not maternal rejection, was associated with attachment avoidance. Therefore, a path model involving paternal rejection, peer rejection, and attachment avoidance was run. After controlling for peer rejection, the former association between paternal rejection and avoidance was no longer significant ($\beta = .07$, $t = 0.84$, ns), suggesting that peer rejection mediates the association between paternal rejection and adult avoidance.

Childhood Rejection as a Mediator of Gender Nonconformity and Adult Attachment

For attachment anxiety, the conditions of a mediational model were met, including a significant association between the predictor (gender nonconformity) and the criterion (anxiety). The result of the path model is depicted in Fig. 2. Inspection of the path coefficients show that rejection did mediate the relationship between gender

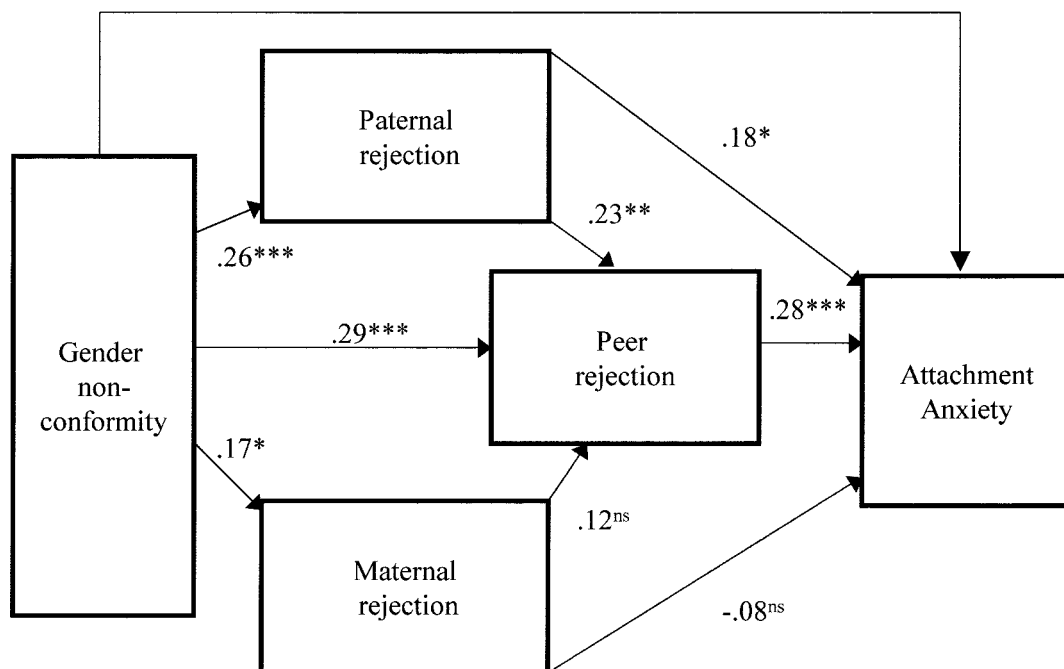


Fig. 2. Path model of gender nonconformity to rejection to anxiety. Note. Values are path coefficients. $N = 180$.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

nonconformity and anxiety as the direct path was not significant ($\beta = .13$, $t = 1.76$, *ns*) when paternal and peer rejection were included in the model. Furthermore, as implied by the pattern of results, the mediational effect was driven by peer rejection ($\beta = .28$, $t = 3.60$, $p < .001$). Because neither gender nonconformity nor maternal rejection were associated with attachment avoidance, the mediational model could not be tested for attachment avoidance.

DISCUSSION

Gender nonconforming behavior in childhood was associated with maternal, paternal, and peer rejection. The associations between gender nonconformity and both paternal and peer rejection were consistent with prior research (e.g., Freund & Blanchard, 1983; Langlois & Downs, 1980). However, little prior research has considered the relationship between gender nonconformity and maternal rejection. A couple of studies have found associations between gender nonconformity and excessive maternal warmth rather than maternal rejection (e.g., Thompson et al., 1973). In contrast, a recent study by Beard and Bakeman (2000), using similar measures to

those administered in this study, also found that gender nonconformity was significantly associated with maternal rejection. Moreover, rejection by peers (and to a lesser extent, rejection by fathers) mediated the relationship between childhood gender nonconformity and adult attachment anxiety. Thus, gender nonconformity may be associated with anxiety in close adult relationships primarily because it contributes to peer rejection, which, in turn, influences anxiety.

Paternal rejection independently predicted adult attachment anxiety, but maternal rejection did not. In addition, paternal rejection, but not maternal rejection, was associated with adult attachment avoidance. Based on the original framing of attachment theory in which mothers were seen as primary attachment figures (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bretherton, 1985), we would have expected mothers to have a significant impact on adult attachment. However, research is beginning to show that paternal influence uniquely and independently explains child and adult outcomes (Rohner, 1998). For example, Barnett, Marshall, and Pleck (1992) found that when measures of both maternal and paternal relationship quality were considered simultaneously, only paternal relationship quality was related to adult sons' anxiety and depression. This may be particularly true in the case of

gay men. Isay (1990) emphasized the special importance of paternal relationships in gay male identity development (although he did not minimize the importance of mothers) and asserted that paternal rejection was an important reason why some gay men have difficulty forming loving and trusting relationships in adulthood.

Some findings from the adult attachment field may also help explain the results suggesting a stronger influence of fathers over mothers. Collins and Read (1990) found in their heterosexual sample that recollection of the quality of childhood relationships with opposite-sex parents predicted romantic partner attachment style dimensions. Similarly, Shaver, Belsky, and Brennan (2000) found that married women's feelings and expectations about male romantic partners were more strongly associated with their feelings and expectations about their fathers than their mothers. Thus, opposite-sex parents appear to have a particular influence on expectations about, and dynamics within, opposite-sex relationships, possibly through a relationship modeling process. Extending the logic to gay relationships, same-sex parents may influence expectations about, and dynamics within, same-sex relationships. Thus, poor relationships with fathers in childhood may impact on gay men's attachment security in their adult romantic relationships.

As expected, peer rejection largely mediated the associations between parental rejection and both attachment anxiety and avoidance. There are many processes through which parents may impact on the peer relationships of their children (see Kerns, Contreras, & Neal-Barnett, 2000, and Parke & Ladd, 1992, for in-depth treatments of these processes). Research conducted from an attachment perspective suggests that the link between the quality of parent-child relationships and peer relations is mediated, at least in part, by affect regulation, social cognitive processes such as the tendency to make negative attributions in response to ambiguous social information, and behavioral patterns such as the capacity to interact in a cooperative and synchronous manner (e.g., Contreras, Kerns, Weimer, Gentzler, & Tomich, 2000). Other research has focused on the various ways in which parents may more directly impact on their children's peer relationships, including arranging opportunities for peer interaction, monitoring and supervising peer interaction, and coaching children on how to deal with challenges in their peer relations (Ladd, Le Sieur, & Profilet, 1993). Peer rejection not only mediated the effect of parental rejection on adult attachment, it also independently predicted adult attachment orientations. This finding is consistent with research suggesting that peer relationships independently predict intra- and inter-personal adjustment in adulthood (e.g., Bagwell, Newcomb, & Bukowski, 1998; Harris, 1998).

Consistent with Colgan's speculations (Colgan, 1987), we found that childhood paternal and peer rejection largely mediated the associations between gender nonconformity and adult attachment orientation. In contrast, gender nonconformity was not related to attachment avoidance in adult relationships. In addition, childhood rejection was more strongly and consistently related to adult anxiety than avoidance. We would have expected gender nonconformity to predict rejection and, in turn, for rejection to predict attachment avoidance, based on the premise that rejected children learn that it is dangerous to become close to others. However, we speculate that to the degree that gender nonconformity is shown in expressive and affiliative behavior, and to the extent that some gender nonconforming boys form stronger peer relations with girls than boys, such boys may lay the foundation for closeness, rather than avoidance, in later relationships. Future research could help clarify the associations between gender nonconformity and adult attachment by distinguishing between rejection by male and female peers.

Reports of childhood rejection were retrospective and thus may have been susceptible to memory distortions. For example, participants reported higher levels of rejection in childhood from fathers than mothers. It may be that fathers of gay men are more rejecting in childhood, possibly in response to gender nonconforming behavior. However, the rejection may have started later in life, when the gay men "came out" to their families. It might be this current alienation that accounted for recollection of paternal rejection in childhood.

Whereas it is reasonable to speculate that influence runs from parents to peers (and not in the other direction), we cannot draw causal conclusions with contemporaneous data. Moreover, paternal and maternal rejection combined only accounted for 15% of the variance in peer rejection, indicating that other factors also impact on peer rejection. For example, peers might be rejecting because an individual violates a peer group norm to which parents are oblivious (e.g., the child fails to conform to fashion trends). Similarly, many factors other than childhood rejection are likely to have impacted on adult attachment. Notably, heredity likely accounts for substantial variance in the tendency toward attachment anxiety (Brussoni, Jang, Livesley, & MacBeth, 2000). More generally, our model linking gender nonconformity, childhood rejection, and adult attachment is limited by reliance on data collected at one point in time. The tested path model was chosen because it was theoretically grounded and psychologically meaningful; however, other models are also possible. Longitudinal designs are needed to help disentangle the direction of effects. It also would be useful to

supplement self-report data with corroborative information from siblings, parents, peers, and teachers.

Although recruitment of a broad community sample using a random sampling methodology was a strength of this study, we could not determine what self-selection processes may have impacted upon the sample because available census data have not included sexual orientation. However, at best, this sample could only be representative of gay men living in the West End of Vancouver, a well known urban gay district.

There has been relatively little psychological research on relationship functioning in gays and lesbians (Allen & Demo, 1995; Peplau & Spalding, 2000) and the methodology used in this research has tended to lag behind that found in the general relationships field (Deenen, Gijs, & van Naerssen, 1994). Notably, research on gay men has typically relied on convenience samples, much of the research has focused on questions of “how much” and “how often” (Clement, 1990; Deenen et al., 1994), and much is comparative in nature, contrasting gay and heterosexual relationships. Deenen et al. (1994) recommend that gay relationship studies might be improved by broadening theory and research topics and by connecting with the general field of close relationships research. We attempted to address the limitations of prior work on gay relationships by recruiting a randomly selected sample of gay men and using an attachment framework to explore the developmental antecedents of attachment orientations in adult close relationships. We also incorporated childhood gender conformity within our model, a childhood factor of particular relevance to gay male socialization.

In summary, this is the first empirical work which we are aware of to link both gender nonconformity and childhood parental and peer relationship quality to adult attachment in gay men. Consistent with prior research, childhood gender nonconformity was predictive of parental and peer rejection. Extending and replicating work with heterosexual samples, parental (and especially paternal) and peer rejection were predictive of attachment-related anxiety and avoidance in adulthood. In addition, the findings are consistent with a model in which peer rejection mediated the associations between parental rejection and adult attachment insecurity, highlighting the importance of childhood peer relationships for gay men. Finally, the findings suggest that childhood gender nonconformity leads to peer and parental rejection, which in turn predict attachment anxiety in adulthood. Thus, intervention efforts aimed at changing attitudes toward gender nonconforming behavior, and thereby reducing the rejection often associated with such behavior, may be effective in shifting this developmental pathway toward greater attachment security in adulthood.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This article is based on Monica Landolt's doctoral dissertation at the University of British Columbia. The project was supported by a grant to Kim Bartholomew from the Wayne F. Placek Fund of the American Psychological Foundation. We would like to thank the Editor and three anonymous reviewers for their feedback on previous drafts of this article.

REFERENCES

- Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Allen, K. R., & Demo, D. H. (1995). The families of lesbian and gay men: A new frontier in family research. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *57*, 111–127.
- Armsden, G. C., & Greenberg, M. T. (1987). The inventory of parent and peer attachment: Individual differences and their relationship to psychological well-being in adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *16*, 427–454.
- Bagwell, C. L., Newcomb, A. F., & Bukowski, W. M. (1998). Preadolescent friendship and peer rejection as predictors of adult adjustment. *Child Development*, *69*, 140–153.
- Bailey, J. M., & Zucker, K. J. (1995). Childhood sex-typed behavior and sexual orientation: A conceptual analysis and quantitative review. *Developmental Psychology*, *31*, 43–55.
- Barnett, R. C., Marshall, N. L., & Pleck, J. H. (1992). Adult son–parent relationships and the associations with sons' psychological distress. *Journal of Family Issues*, *13*, 505–525.
- Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator–mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *51*, 1173–1182.
- Bartholomew, K. (1990). Avoidance of intimacy: An attachment perspective. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *7*, 147–178.
- Bartholomew, K., & Horowitz, L. M. (1991). Attachment styles among young adults: A test of a four-category model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *61*, 226–244.
- Bartholomew, K., & Shaver, P. R. (1998). Methods of assessing adult attachment. In J. A. Simpson & W. S. Rholes (Eds.), *Attachment theory and close relationships* (pp. 25–45). New York: Guilford.
- Beard, A. J., & Bakeman, R. (2000). Boyhood gender nonconformity: Reported parental behavior and the development of narcissistic issues. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Psychotherapy*, *4*, 81–97.
- Bell, A. P., Weinberg, M. S., & Hammersmith, S. K. (1981). *Sexual preference: Its development in men and women*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 2. Separation*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1988). *A secure base: Parent–child attachment and healthy human development*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bradley, B. S., & Gobbart, S. K. (1989). Determinants of gender-typed play in toddlers. *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, *150*, 453–455.
- Brennan, K. A., Clark, C. L., & Shaver, P. R. (1998). Self-report measurement of adult attachment: An integrative overview. In J. A. Simpson & W. S. Rholes (Eds.), *Attachment theory and close relationships* (pp. 46–76). New York: Guilford.
- Bretherton, I. (1985). Attachment theory: Retrospect and prospect. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, *50*(1–2, Serial No. 209), 3–35.
- Brussoni, M. J., Jang, K. L., Livesley, W. J., & MacBeth, T. M. (2000). Genetic and environmental influences on adult attachment styles. *Personal Relationships*, *7*, 283–289.

- Callander, M. L. (1999). *Validation of the four-category model of attachment in a sample of gay men*. Unpublished master's thesis, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada.
- Carter, D. B., & McCloskey, L. A. (1983/1984). Peers and the maintenance of sex-typed behavior: The development of children's conceptions of cross-gender behavior in their peers. *Social Cognition*, 2, 294–314.
- Colgan, P. (1987). Treatment of identity and intimacy issues in gay males. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 14, 101–123.
- Collins, N. L., & Read, S. L. (1990). Adult attachment, working models and relationship quality in dating couples. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61, 644–663.
- Collins, N. L., & Read, S. L. (1994). Cognitive representations of attachment: The content and function of working models. In K. Bartholomew & D. Perlman (Eds.), *Advances in personal relationships: Attachment processes in adulthood* (Vol. 5, pp. 53–90). London, England: Jessica Kingsley.
- Contreras, J. M., Kerns, K. A., Weimer, B. L., Gentzler, A. L., & Tomich, P. L. (2000). Emotion regulation as a mediator of associations between mother–child attachment and peer relationships in middle childhood. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 14, 111–124.
- Deenen, A. A., Gijs, L., & van Naerssen, L. X. (1994). Thirty-five years of research into gay relationships. *Journal of Psychology and Human Sexuality*, 7(4), 19–39.
- Elicker, J., Englund, M., & Sroufe, L. A. (1992). Predicting peer competence and peer relationships in childhood from early parent–child relationships. In R. D. Parke & G. W. Ladd (Eds.), *Family–peer relationships: Modes of linkage* (pp. 77–106). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Elizur, Y., & Mintzer, A. (2001). A framework for the formation of gay male identity: Processes associated with adult attachment style and support from family and friends. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 30, 143–167.
- Epstein, S. (1983). *The mother–father–peer scale*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Massachusetts–Amherst.
- Evans, R. B. (1969). Childhood parental relationships of homosexual men. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 33, 129–135.
- Fagot, B. I. (1977). Consequences of moderate cross-gender behavior in preschool children. *Child Development*, 48, 902–907.
- Fagot, B. I. (1985). Changes in thinking about early sex role development. *Developmental Review*, 5, 83–98.
- Feeney, J., & Noller, P. (1996). *Adult attachment*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Fraley, R. C., & Shaver, P. R. (2000). Adult romantic attachment: Theoretical developments, emerging controversies, and unanswered questions. *Review of General Psychology*, 4, 132–154.
- Fraley, R. C., & Waller, N. G. (1998). Adult attachment patterns: A test of the typological model. In J. A. Simpson & W. S. Rholes (Eds.), *Attachment theory and close relationships* (pp. 77–114). New York: Guilford.
- Freund, K., & Blanchard, R. (1983). Is the distant relationship of fathers and homosexual sons related to the sons' erotic preference for male partners, or to the sons' atypical gender identity, or to both? *Journal of Homosexuality*, 9, 7–25.
- Gerslma, A., Emmelkamp, P. M. G., & Arrindell, W. A. (1990). Anxiety, depression and perception of early parenting: A meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 10, 251–277.
- Griffin, D. W., & Bartholomew, K. (1994a). Models of the self and other: Fundamental dimensions underlying measures of adult attachment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67, 430–445.
- Griffin, D. W., & Bartholomew, K. (1994b). The metaphysics of measurement: The case of adult attachment. In K. Bartholomew & D. Perlman (Eds.), *Advances in personal relationships: Attachment processes in adulthood* (Vol. 5, pp. 17–52). London, England: Jessica Kingsley.
- Harris, J. R. (1998). *The nurture assumption: Why children turn out the way they do*. New York: Free Press.
- Harry, J. (1982). *Gay children grown up: Gender culture and gender deviance*. New York: Praeger.
- Harry, J., & Devall, W. B. (1978). *The social organization of gay males*. New York: Praeger.
- Hartup, W. W. (1983). Peer relations. In P. H. Mussen (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology* (Vol. 4, pp. 103–196). New York: Wiley.
- Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. (1987). Conceptualizing romantic love as an attachment process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52, 511–524.
- Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. R. (1994). Attachment as an organizational framework for research on close relationships. *Psychological Inquiry*, 5, 1–22.
- Hockenberry, S. L., & Billingham, R. E. (1987). Sexual orientation and boyhood gender nonconformity: Development of the Boyhood Gender Conformity Scale (BGCS). *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 16, 475–492.
- Holtzen, D., Kenny, M. E., & Mahalik, J. R. (1995). Contributions of parental attachment to gay or lesbian disclosure to parents and dysfunctional cognitive processes. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 42, 350–355.
- Isay, R. A. (1990). *Being homosexual: Gay men and their development*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.
- Kerns, K. A., Contreras, J. M., & Neal-Barnett, A. M. (Eds.). (2000). *Family and peers: Linking two social worlds*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Kurdek, L. A. (1997). The link between facets of neuroticism and dimensions of relationship commitment: Evidence from gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 11, 503–514.
- Ladd, G. W., Le Sieur, K. D., & Profilet, S. M. (1993). Direct parental influences on young children's peer relations. In S. Duck (Ed.), *Understanding relationship processes 2: Learning about relationships* (pp. 152–183). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Landolt, M. A., & Dutton, D. G. (1997). Power and personality: An analysis of gay male intimate abuse. *Sex Roles*, 37, 335–358.
- Langlois, J. H., & Downs, A. C. (1980). Mothers, fathers, and peers as socialization agents of sex-typed play behaviors in young children. *Child Development*, 51, 1237–1247.
- Lytton, H., & Romney, D. M. (1991). Parents' differential socialization of boys and girls: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 109, 267–296.
- Main, M., Kaplan, N., & Cassidy, J. (1985). Security in infancy, childhood, and adulthood: A move to the level of representation. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 50, 66–106.
- Milic, J. H., & Crowne, D. P. (1986). Recalled parent–child relations and need for approval of homosexual and heterosexual men. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 15, 239–246.
- Parke, R. D., & Ladd, G. W. (Eds.). (1992). *Family–peer relationships: Modes of linkage*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Peplau, L. A., & Spalding, L. R. (2000). The close relationships of lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals. In C. Hendrick & S. S. Hendrick (Eds.), *Close relationships: A sourcebook* (pp. 111–123). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Perris, C., Jacobsson, L., Lindstrom, H., von Knorring, L., & Perris, H. (1980). Development of a new inventory for assessing memories of parental rearing behaviors. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 61, 265–274.
- Phelan, J. E. (1996). Recollections of their fathers by homosexual and heterosexual men. *Psychological Reports*, 79, 1027–1034.
- Regan, K. V., Bartholomew, K., Oram, D., & Landolt, M. (2002). The structure of physical violence in male same-sex relationships. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 17, 235–252.
- Remafedi, G. (1987). Male homosexuality: The adolescent's perspective. *Pediatrics*, 79, 326–330.
- Ridge, S. R., & Feeney, J. A. (1998). Relationship history and relationship attitudes in gay males and lesbians: Attachment styles and gender differences. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 32, 848–859.
- Rohner, R. P. (1998). Father love and child development: History and current evidence. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 7, 157–161.

- Ross, M. W., Campbell, R. L., & Clayter, J. R. (1982). New inventory of measurement of parental rearing patterns: An English form of the EMBU. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, *66*, 499–507.
- Rotheram-Borus, M. J., Rosario, M., & Koopman, C. (1991). Minority youth at high risk: Gay males and runaways. In M. E. Colten & S. Gore (Eds.), *Adolescent stress: Causes and consequences* (pp. 181–200). New York: Aldine.
- Ruble, D. N., & Martin, C. L. (1998). Gender development. In W. Damon (Ed.), N. Eisenberg (Ser. Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 3. Social, emotional, and personality development* (pp. 933–1016). New York: Wiley.
- Saghir, M. T., & Robins, E. (1973). *Male and female homosexuality: A comprehensive investigation*. Baltimore, MD: Williams & Wilkins.
- Shaver, P. R., Belsky, J., & Brennan, K. A. (2000). The adult attachment interview and self-reports of romantic attachment: Associations across domains and methods. *Personal Relationships*, *7*, 25–43.
- Siman, M. L. (1977). Applications of a new model of peer group to naturally existing adolescent friendship groups. *Child Development*, *48*, 270–274.
- Tauber, M. A. (1979). Sex differences in parent–child interaction styles during a free-play session. *Child Development*, *50*, 981–988.
- Thompson, N. L., Schwartz, D. M., McCandless, B. R., & Edwards, D. A. (1973). Parent–child relationships and sexual identity in male and female homosexuals and heterosexuals. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *41*, 120–127.
- Whitam, F. L. (1977). Childhood indicators of male homosexuality. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *6*, 89–96.