Lesbian and Gay Youth and Leisure: Implications for Practitioners and Researchers

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to understand how young people between the ages of 18-23, who self-identify as lesbian or gay, conceptualize and understand the term leisure. A qualitative research design was used with a purposive sample of ten young people. Participants were interviewed using a standardized, open-ended interview in San Francisco, California during July and August, 1993. The results of this study suggest that the social construction of leisure for lesbian/gay youth involves issues of sexual identity, safety, and coming out. Implications for leisure service providers suggest examining programs for accessibility to lesbian/gay youth, and implications for researchers suggest broadening the underlying assumptions about adolescents, identity formation, and leisure.

KEY WORDS: Lesbian and gay youth; youth; leisure.

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"You have to be cautious of what you’re doing and who you’re around [because] you’re just afraid of the harassment or afraid of someone beating you up because of your sexual orientation. You have to always be aware. You still see ‘kill fags’ up on the bathroom walls."

"I’d love to be able to go to the movies holding my lover’s hand without having to worry about anyone saying anything."

— Mark1, who describes himself as a 23-year old, gay, African-American male.

"It would just be wonderful if there was more social things for queer people to do that’s easily accessible... I want to do social things with gay people that take team work, physical activity and talk at the same time. I think if there was more of that even some of my friends might be into that because it would just seem
normal, as opposed to oh, something a straight person would do, or would typically do."

— Jake, who describes himself as “23, half Korean, half American, young, gay Asian male... HIV+ (positive) asymptomatic.”

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to provide a forum for young people such as Mark and Jake and to explore how other lesbian and gay young people, ages 18-23, currently and retrospectively define, understand, and conceptualize their leisure or free time. Several findings in this study provide support for the theoretical assertions made by Grossman (1992) who argued that stigma and prejudice, resulting in homophobia, an irrational fear and hatred of lesbian/gay people, negatively affect the lives of lesbian/gay youth, their leisure, and their access to leisure. Ultimately, the findings of this study can be used to assist leisure service providers and researchers in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of social/recreational programs that will be inclusive of and responsive to lesbian/gay youth.

Research Overview

This study asked respondents to define how they conceptualize leisure in their lives today and to reflect on how they understood leisure in the past five years, a time period that was inclusive of mid to late adolescence. Despite the obvious importance of understanding the recreation needs of gay and lesbian youth (Grossman, 1992), a review of the literature reveals only a few theoretically-based articles on this segment of the adolescent population. Grossman (1992) suggested that lesbian and gay adolescents have not been a visible client population within recreation and leisure. In addition, because lesbian and gay adolescents are a high-risk population for suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, truancy, and HIV infection (Gibson, 1989), Grossman (1992) suggested that they, perhaps more so than many of their non-lesbian and gay peers, need opportunities to engage in recreation and leisure.

Statement of the Problem

It is estimated that of the 30 million adolescents between the ages of 10 and 20 in the United States today, 3 million or 10% are homosexual (Deisher, 1989). Although adolescence is considered a difficult time for all young people, the experience can be even more stressful for lesbian and gay youth (Gibson, 1989; Hunter & Schaecher, 1987). Because of the fear of rejection and threats of verbal and physical abuse (Gibson, 1989; Hunter & Schaecher, 1987), many adolescents who are lesbian and gay do not self-identify or come out as lesbian and gay to family members, peers, teachers, and others until they leave home. Similarly, many adolescents who have come out while living at home have found themselves on the streets, kicked out because of their sexual orientation (Rickett, 1991).

Self-identified lesbian and gay young people who have been either forced to leave home or who choose to leave because of verbal and physical threats often
end up living on the streets in youth shelters, foster care, and/or in juvenile
detention (Ricketts, 1991). Ricketts (1991) further suggested that “gay, lesbian,
‘questioning,’ and other sexual minority youth . . . form a significant proportion
of the population requiring foster care” (p. 120). Moreover, a 1989 study,
commissioned by the Department of Health and Human Services, indicated that
suicide among lesbian and gay adolescents may account for 30% of all suicides
in the United States (Gibson, 1989). Despite an awareness of the issues and
stresses that gay youth face, Gibson (1989) and Grossman (1992) argued that
there is a lack of program resources for lesbian and gay youth:

Many social and recreational programs for youth make no effort to incorporate
gay young people into their services. Few programs will accept or support a gay
adolescent in their sexual orientation (Gibson, 1989, p. 3-130).

Rationale

Recreation provides an important dimension in the lives of all youth (Kelly,
1990). Not yet old enough to assume “adult” responsibilities and at the same time
“too old” to be treated as children, adolescents spend a great deal of non-
obligatory time pursuing recreational activities (Kelly, 1990). Adolescence is a
period when the:

...nonwork elements of life take on great importance. It is precisely in school,
sports, social events, dating, vacation trips, activity groups, clubs, and other
‘youth’ activities that the crucial process . . . [of forming one’s identity] takes
place (Kelly, 1990, p. 54).

The transition from childhood to adulthood is a difficult one that can be
made even more difficult if access to a variety of life experiences, including
recreation, is limited or denied because of sexual orientation (Gibson, 1989;
Hunter & Schaecher, 1987). For example, opportunities for lesbian and gay
adolescents to experience leadership, social interaction, self-reflection, and
growth through recreation are often denied because the leisure needs of these
adolescents are, at best, unknown or, at worst, ignored because of prejudice and
indifference. Indeed, the pressure to appear heterosexual is so pervasive that
young people who are lesbian and gay might refrain from participating in certain
activities—organized sports, clubs, choruses, drama, elected offices. O’Connor
(1994) suggested that

often in order to survive in school, many gay and lesbian teens have to construct
a false, heterosexual self. . . Some teenagers have sex with members of the
opposite sex to prove they’re straight and to avoid being called ‘queer’ or
‘dyke’. Lesbian and gay youth may also engage in anti-gay violence in an
attempt to hide their homosexuality” (p. 11).

Clearly, opportunities for recreation and leisure are important in the lives of
adolescents and access to such services should not be limited or denied because
one is lesbian and/or gay.
Personal Reflection

The recent death of a friend had a profound impact. Last fall, Mary Ann put a gun to her head and killed herself. Mary Ann was a 21-year-old lesbian. Many questions about her death still linger: To what extent did her identity as a lesbian affect her view of herself? To what extent did the invisibility that surrounds lesbian/gay youth affect her? To what extent are we all implicated in contributing to the death of this woman, this young person, this lesbian?

Leisure service providers have opportunities to observe and shape the experiences of their constituents. It is hoped that the narratives of the participants in this study will encourage us to re-examine our programs and our research to ensure that the voices of lesbian/gay youth are being heard and serve as a basis in our work.

Background

In the same way that women’s experiences of leisure were invisible and presumed to be reflective only of the leisure experiences of men, the leisure experiences of adolescents who are lesbian and gay have also been invisible and presumed to be similar to leisure experiences of non-gay adolescents. Thus, the justification that was previously articulated by feminist theorists about the need to examine, understand, and make visible women’s leisure (Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw, & Freysinger, 1989; Wearing & Wearing, 1988) can be applied as a justification for examining and understanding the leisure of lesbian and gay adolescents. This study is an attempt to make visible the leisure experiences of lesbian/gay youth.

Study Design

Study Overview. This study took place during July and August, 1993 in San Francisco, California. I interviewed ten (N=10) lesbian/gay young people who had been associated with The Lavender Youth Recreation and Information Center (LYRIC)².

San Francisco is a major metropolitan area with a population of approximately 700,000 residents. Known as the lesbian/gay “mecca” of the United States, San Francisco has a visible and politically active lesbian/gay community. Lesbian and gay leaders have positions on the board of supervisors, the board of education, and municipal and superior courts. In addition, San Francisco’s gay community supports three weekly lesbian/gay newspapers, and hundreds of social, political, recreational, AIDS/HIV-related organizations are available to meet the diverse needs of this city’s lesbian/gay community.

LYRIC History. LYRIC was established in 1988 to provide social and recreational opportunities for young people who are lesbian, gay, and bisexual. LYRIC is located in the Castro, a predominantly gay district in San Francisco. The majority of LYRIC participants live in San Francisco or in one of the four surrounding counties: Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, and San Mateo. Both females and males, in equal proportion, participate in LYRIC’s events, and the majority are youth of color — African American, Asian-American (Korean, Vietnamese, Pilipino, Chinese, Japanese) Latino/Latina (Puerto Rican, Mexican) and Native American.
At least ten percent of LYRIC’s male participants are HIV positive. LYRIC currently sponsors weekly, peer-led support groups; an HIV prevention/education program; vocational and psychological counseling referrals; an information switchboard for lesbian/gay youth staffed by lesbian/gay young people; sports teams; an after-school recreation program for lesbian, gay and bisexual young people under 18; and hikes and camping trips.

Approximately 75 people participate each week in LYRIC-sponsored programs and activities. Although LYRIC targets lesbian/gay/bisexual young people as the population it serves, disclosures of sexual orientation are not required of participants nor is it a prerequisite for participation in LYRIC’s programs.

Sample. Purposive sampling made it possible to select a group of young people who would be able to articulate clearly their conceptualizations of leisure. Only publicly self-identified gay and lesbian youth, ages 18-23, were included in this study. Younger adolescents were not included because they might not have been out to family members and, thus, would be unable to secure parental consent to participate in this study without revealing their sexual identity. Similarly, younger lesbian and gay youth living in foster care families and/or juvenile detention might have been unable to receive consent to participate from social workers and/or guardians.

Those respondents who were aged 20 and older were only interviewed if they had self-identified as lesbian/gay during adolescence (prior to the age of 20). This caveat created the means for obtaining retrospective information about respondents’ adolescent leisure experiences. The sample reflected the diversity of San Francisco: five women and five men, eight of whom were youth of color.

Method. A qualitative research design was used to gather data using a standardized, open-ended interview (Patton, 1990). All of the respondents were contacted by telephone to ask if they would be willing to participate in this research project. Respondents determined when and where the interviews were held. The interviews were conducted at respondents’ homes, coffee shops, and at the LYRIC office. Recollections about each person were recorded in the researcher’s field notes prior to each first interview. The first interview was scheduled for 1:30 p.m. on July 15th, and at approximately 12:30 p.m. that afternoon, recollections of the respondents were mentally reviewed and recorded. Field notes for July 15th illustrate this process:

YG is a 19-year old female of Hispanic and Native American descent. She lives with her mother and siblings in an apartment in the Mission. I think she came out as a lesbian approximately two years ago. She attended a private high school, and I’m not sure how her education was paid for. Her mother works, but her family does not have a great deal of money. She’s from a working class and/or poor background. I met YG several years ago through LYRIC.

This process was used as a way of acknowledging the lens through which the researcher saw these youth and also as a way of verifying previous knowledge about respondents.

Interviews were prefaced by asking respondents to say what was on their mind, not to say what they thought the researcher wanted to hear. During the first interviews, the standardized, open-ended interview was chosen to allow respon-
Please describe yourself to me and describe yourself to me as if I did not know you. I followed this statement with the following question: When did you realize you were lesbian and gay? and When did you come out (self-define to yourself and others that you were lesbian and/or gay)?

Please describe your leisure and free time and discuss what you do in your free time?

Additional probes included:
  Who do you do things with?
  Are there things that keep you from doing what you want to do? If so, what are they?

Tell me about your free time in the past five years.

Tell me about your free time before you self-identified as being lesbian/gay and after you self-identified.

Any other thoughts about yourself or your free time?

Data Analysis

A variety of data sources (researcher field notes, initial and follow-up interviews) and multiple perspectives (social/psychological and feminist) were used to analyze the data (Janesick, 1994). Concepts and categories that emerged were considered provisional until they were verified, revised, or discarded through the process of member checking in the follow-up interviews.

The information gathered from this analytic process was used during the second interview to verify the information presented by participants and to begin to identify some of the general, emergent themes. This constant comparative process allowed the researcher to “compare incidents applicable to each category, and integrate categories and their properties . . .” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 105).

Findings

The goal of this research project was to explore how lesbian and gay young people, ages 18-23, currently and retrospectively define, understand, and conceptualize their leisure or free time. While respondents defined leisure in terms of time (e.g., time left over from work, school and other obligations) and/or
activity (e.g., participation in sports, social interactions with peers and doing something for fun), they also clearly articulated a connection between their identity as lesbian/gay youth and their understanding of leisure.

Three central themes emerged from the findings:

1) sexual identity was related to what respondents did in their free time and with whom;

2) issues of safety (physical and emotional) were relevant to the issue of leisure choice — where to go to participate in leisure activities and with whom; and

3) while “coming out” was not necessarily an easy process, several respondents commented that coming out was an empowering and liberating process in terms of leisure. Respondents commented that they felt as if they could be themselves, that they didn’t have to hide anymore and that they could perhaps enjoy themselves more fully in their leisure. These three themes are discussed in the sections that follow.

Respondents also spoke about the importance of participating in programs such as LYRIC, that are sensitive and responsive to the social/recreational needs of lesbian/gay youth.

Identity Development and Leisure

The first theme suggests that respondents believe that sexual identity was related to what they did in their free time and with whom. Their comments are noted below:

I prefer to play on the gay teams ever since I joined the gay softball league because it’s more fun, it’s not just the softball, it’s like this whole, I don’t know what you call it, we have all these different events and it’s like a family thing.
— a 23-year old Puerto Rican lesbian

I would much prefer to play on a lesbian team than (an) all woman’s team. I mean, lesbian and bisexual, whatever... I like being in places where people are lesbian or bisexual... If I’m part of a team I want to feel like I belong on that team and if it’s a place, it’s an environment that’s very heterosexual then I don’t think I would feel like I belong there very much... I don’t really have much desire or energy to deal with people’s ignorance... if it’s something I’m going out to do for fun I wouldn’t choose something where I felt like I had to be always educating people or dealing with people’s ignorance. — a 23-year old Jewish lesbian

I also play in the city league which is predominantly straight and I see the difference right there because predominantly in the gay league it’s more relaxed, more, you know, people go out there to have fun and really enjoy playing; it’s like, there’s no stigma... when we play in a city league... it’s very competitive and you constantly have to sort of be aware of how you react so if a ball came to me and then just for the fun of it I [wanted] to scream or whatever, you can’t do that because you’ll be afraid of the fact that they’re going to tease you, saying ‘you sissy,’... so you have to get a little macho attitude when you play in that league. — a 23-year old gay African-American male
These narratives indicate a relationship between identity based on a lesbian and/or gay sexual orientation and leisure.

Researchers have documented the inter-relationships among self-concept, identity development and identity formation throughout the literature on adolescence and adolescence and leisure (e.g. Larson, 1994; Silbereisen & Todt, 1994; Deaux, 1992; Kelly, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Hendry 1983; Csikszentmihalyi, 1981; Marcia, 1980; Csikszentmihalyi, Larson & Prescott, 1977). In addition, several articles discussing lesbian/gay identity formation (e.g. Sophie, 1985/86; Cass, 1979, 1984; Coleman, 1982; Lee, 1977; Ponse, 1978; Schafer, 1976; Troizen, 1977, 1979; Weinberg, 1977, 1978) and lesbian/gay identity formation and adolescence (e.g. Boxer, Cohler, Herdt & Irvin, 1993; Coyle, 1992; Zera, 1992) have been published.

Yet, no articles that specifically address the issue of leisure and lesbian/gay identity formation appear in the published literature. Indeed, the underlying assumption of the literature on adolescents, identity formation and leisure is that heterosexuality is the norm (Larson, 1994; Kelly, 1990; Anthony, 1985; Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Hendry, 1983). Kelly (1990) in a widely used text on leisure has suggested that “most courtship takes place in a context of leisure” (p. 55). Such courtship is presumed to be heterosexual because this chapter focuses on the role of marriage and its relationship to leisure over the lifespan. The reference from Kelly is illustrative of the heterosexual norm that is pervasive throughout the literature on adolescent development and leisure and adolescents.

This underlying heterosexual assumption is consistent with the work of Erikson and his writings on identity and development. Erikson (1968) has suggested, like Freud, that homosexuality is a phase that all adolescents experience, a phase that is the result of gender identity confusion. Normative adolescence, Erikson writes, requires resolution of gender identity confusion (i.e., vulnerability to ‘homosexual cliques’) so that one will be able to find an opposite sex life partner. To what extent has this heterosexual bias affected our willingness to accept homosexuality as an authentic category of identity for adolescents? Clearly, the narratives in this study lend support to the notion that this heterosexual “norm” is not representative or inclusive of the experiences of lesbian/gay young people.

**Safety and Leisure Choice**

The second theme suggests that physical and emotional safety was related to the issue of leisure choice — that is, where to go to participate in leisure activities and with whom were central concerns for participants. They commented that:

I could, for example, join a city softball team, but I’d probably be one of the only lesbians on the team, one of the only girls if it was a women’s league...it’s a safety issue. When you’ve got people on the sidelines calling someone on the other team a fag and it’s not in a, in an affectionate way, for example, like it is in the Gay Softball league, it’s different and it’s dangerous and I can’t...it’s hard to concentrate on the game when... I have to watch, like have my guards up... where the game is concerned, when I’m trying to have fun... There is
no point in being in a situation where you are doing it for fun and it turns out to be more stress and worry and just fear than fun. These are serious issues, it's not something you can just kind of brush off.—a 19-year-old, Chicana lesbian

I will only go to gay clubs because first of all, [in] straight clubs I wouldn't feel safe. I couldn't be myself... same ole thing, same as high school, same as anything being in the straight world.
Whenever we go out, we always have to go to the Castro... just to be around the Castro, it just feels safe, everyone does their own thing... what I mean by safe is that I don't feel judged, at least not for being gay, that's normal. I don't feel judged about that, I can be myself and that's pretty much what I mean by safe.—a 23-year-old, Puerto Rican lesbian

Henderson (1991) has identified safety as an antecedent constraint to women's leisure. She writes that "the fear of sexual assault from going out at night or participating in activities by oneself is omnipresent in many women's minds" (p. 371). So too, is the fear for personal safety in the minds of lesbian and gay youth. Gibson (1989) and Hunter & Schaecher (1987) suggest that lesbian and gay youth are fearful for their personal safety — they are afraid of being either verbally or physically assaulted by family members, school administrators and their peers. Respondents in this study clearly echoed these concerns for a safe environment in which to engage in social/recreational activities with their peers.

"Coming Out" and Enjoyment in Leisure

The third theme that emerged indicates that some of the respondents were able to enjoy themselves more fully as a result of "coming out." One respondent noted that:

And then when I came out... that was the biggest change for my whole life...
... I finally felt at home with myself and I finally felt like I really knew who I was. A lot of my friends would always joke before that I had no sense of humor... that I just didn't get jokes and that I just couldn't make a joke for anything and just wasn't funny. Then after I came out everyone talked about how suddenly I got a sense of humor... once I came out... I was comfortable enough with myself to have part of what makes a sense of humor — a rhythm with yourself and having confidence to put yourself out there because, you're making yourself a little bit vulnerable. I think the confidence, the self-confidence [of coming out] has a lot to do with how I have spent my free time...
... I would very rarely have an active participation in making any decisions... now, there is a big difference... I'm more aware of what I do and don't want to do than I used to be and actually I think that has had a big impact on how I spend my time.—23-year-old Jewish lesbian

I found a lot of freedom in the queer community and with the queer friends that I have. I can do almost anything as opposed to being in your typical straight environment.—23-year-old African-American lesbian

The significance of this theme is the paradox that it invokes — "coming out" can be a difficult process for lesbian/gay youth because of prejudice and stigma that result in homophobia (Grossman, 1992); and it can also be liberating because
young people might no longer feel compelled to hide their “true” and “authentic” identities as lesbian/gay youth.

For some of the respondents, “coming out” allowed them to have more freedom and hence more choices in their lives and in their leisure. For others, coming out now meant that they had to be more conscious and more careful in their leisure to ensure that they were not seen in the gay district of town or that they were not seen walking hand-in-hand with their partner. This paradox of “coming out” has implications for leisure service providers that will be discussed in the next section.

Clearly, these three themes overlap with one another — issues of identity are connected to issues of “coming out” and of safety — and also intersect to form the basis for how these respondents construct and make use of the term “leisure” in their lives. Ultimately, these findings and the three central themes that emerged can provide the groundwork for a dialogue among lesbian/gay constituents, leisure service providers, and leisure researchers.

Discussion

The findings and the themes which emerged raise many issues, concerns and questions for leisure service providers and leisure researchers. Moreover, these findings have implications for both leisure researchers and practitioners.

Implications for Researchers

Since so many of the respondents spoke about issues of identity, perhaps future leisure research should focus on the relationship between leisure and adolescent identity development among and between lesbian/gay adolescents and young adults. Moreover, future research questions however should perhaps shift away from social-psychological understandings of individual, developmental issues and focus more broadly on social, political, economic and historical forces which shape the contexts in which individuals live.

Indeed, theorists who focus on developmental stages of identity formation need to broaden their worldview to include larger, macro considerations. A parallel for how such a shift may occur can be found in a recent article by Susan Phelan entitled “Lesbian Identity and Politics.” Phelan (1993) suggests that we need to shift our thinking away from questions that reify the category of lesbian [and/or gay] as something that is “natural” or “authentic” — a category that can be used to “…measure and justify our existence” (Phelan, 1993, p. 771). Instead, Phelan suggests that we ask

Why is heterosexism so central to Western thought and why is there so little tolerance for diversity? Why should it be important that we all develop heterosexual attachments and desires? What are the stakes here? . . . These questions need asking not because a truth exists ‘out there’ that, once found, will eliminate heterosexism and homophobia; rather, the questions usefully shift the focus from lesbian/[gay] identity to heterosexist social institutions (Phelan, 1993, p. 771).
Similarly, we also need to shift our thinking away from research that views adolescence as a natural and authentic category. Instead, we need to focus on questions that help us understand how such categories of identity operate in this culture and to what extent they affect the individual in relation to society and in relation to her/his view of leisure.

Moreover, perhaps research on adolescents and constraints to leisure could be broadened to include studies that examine safety as a constraint for lesbian/gay youth. Similarly, researchers might also want to consider more closely how issues of sexual identity, safety and "coming out" impact the social construction of leisure for young people who are lesbian and/or gay. With a broader understanding of the experiences of lesbian/gay youth and issues of identity development and leisure, researchers might be able to assist leisure service providers in their attempts to be more aware of and responsive to their lesbian/gay youth constituents.

Implications for Practitioners

Grossman (1992) has articulated the importance of providing support for lesbian/gay youth through the development of recreation programs that are inclusive of and responsive to their needs. The narratives presented herein indicate the extent to which lesbian/gay youth want opportunities to engage in leisure with their peers in a safe and supportive environment. Their comments also speak to the need for individuals who work with adolescents — educators, mental health workers, recreation professionals, and parents — to become sensitized to the needs of the lesbian and gay segment of their adolescent community (Grossman, 1992).

Grossman (1992) has also provided specific examples of how leisure service providers can be more responsive to the social and recreational needs of lesbian/gay youth. Specifically, he argues that service providers must initially examine their assumptions and biases about lesbian/gay youth; second they need to provide them opportunities to engage in meaningful activities. He suggests that

Specific programs are needed to assist lesbian and gay and bisexual youth in exploring their sexual identities within leisure settings and after-school programs — such as art, music and drama activities which include the works of homosexually identified individuals (Grossman, 1992, p. 46).

Also, practitioners should examine the extent to which they have, perhaps unwittingly, made lesbian/gay youth invisible in their programs. Are there any posters or fliers about lesbian/gay youth on the walls? Are there resources in your files that would enable you to refer someone to get support that you might not be able to provide? Are in-service trainings that focus on working with lesbian/gay youth available for staff and volunteers in your organization? Do programs make lesbian/gay youth feel welcome? and are there opportunities for lesbian/gay youth to interact with their peers in a safe and supportive environment?

In acknowledging the pluralistic society in which we live, a society filled with a variety of lifestyles, Murphy et al., (1991) suggest that
leisure service organizations, no matter the particular form of sponsorship, best respond to participants, consumers and clients by incorporating a full and diverse array of professional roles that fall along a service delivery continuum — from direct service to information referral and enabler to advocate (p. 116).

Leisure service providers can use this model to determine the kinds of services that will best serve the needs of lesbian/gay youth. Indeed, a combination of direct service, enabling facilitation and advocacy might meet the leisure service needs of lesbian/gay youth.

Conclusions

The findings suggest that lesbian/gay youth, like their non-gay peers, enjoy participating in leisure activities. Further, they want opportunities to socialize with their peers in safe and supportive environments. What differentiates lesbian/gay youth from their non-gay peers is not their subjective conceptualization of leisure — both groups view leisure as "free time" or as activity — but rather, what differentiates the two groups is the way in which society negatively views and responds to homosexuality.

Clearly, leisure is an important context for all young people and may be even more important for lesbian/gay youth. In an attempt to respond to this need, we, as leisure service providers can begin to make programs more inclusive of lesbian/gay youth; and as leisure researchers, we can continue to examine research assumptions to ensure that the voices of the "other" — lesbian/gay youth, youth of color, youth with disabilities — are included in our work.

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References


**Notes**

1 Any names referred to herein have been replaced by pseudonyms.

2 The author was the former director of this organization, and had previous contact with all of the participants. She had not, however, previously conducted formal interviews with them about their conceptualizations of leisure or free time.

3 For example, one respondent told me about how he had spent one year of his life caring for a close friend who was dying from AIDS. After our interview, I wrote these comments, dated July 27, 1993:

Although he [the respondent] told me the story in a very matter of fact way, I wasn’t sure if he was numb or if he had worked through his feelings about it, but there was something in the way he told the story and in the substance of it that made me sad, made me cry.