



# **Questioning Youth: Identifying Youth Who Are Unsure of Their Sexual Orientation**

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- Research on sexual-minority (i.e. non-heterosexual) adolescents has increased over the past 20 years (Diamond, 2003)
- Research on sexual-minority youth has traditionally taken a dichotomous approach: Heterosexual vs Non-heterosexual (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008)
- This dichotomy has led to a lack of research that includes youth who question their sexuality
- Research on LGBTQ youth has been limited due to small sample sizes
  - Disproportionate sample sizes between non-heterosexual and heterosexual youth
  - Small samples of sexual-minority youth
  - Research on youth outside the hetero-non-hetero (i.e. questioning) dichotomy is smaller



- Evidence exists that youth who identify as questioning, on average, report higher levels of depression and anxiety (Hollander, 2000; Gonzalez et al., 2016)
- Fears of “coming out” include (Hershberger & D’Augelli, 2000):
  - Social isolation
  - Rejection by peers
  - Discrimination
  - Victimization
  - Abandonment by family, caregivers, and peers



- *Body Image: Questioning More Than Just Your Looks* (Gonzalez et al., 2016)
  - Poster presented at APA Annual Convention 2016 in Denver, Colorado
- Purpose of study was to examine youth and young adults' body image satisfaction within the context of their sexual identities.
- **Findings:**
  - Participants who identified as questioning had lower body image satisfaction scores on the Physical Appearance subscale of the Self Description Questionnaire III (SDQ-III) than participants who identified as heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual/queer
  - When compared to heterosexual participants, questioning participants, on average, scored 3.98 points lower on the SDQ-III – Physical Appearance.





- Questioning youth are considered to be at higher risk for:
  - Self-isolation
  - Substance Use and Abuse
  - Aggression
  - Depression
  - Suicide Ideation and attempts
  - Sexual health problems
- Youth questioning their sexual orientation may be vulnerable to victimization by peers (Williams, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2003)
- Students who were questioning their sexual orientation reported more bullying, homophobic victimization, unexcused absences from school, drug use, feelings of depression, and suicidal behaviors than either heterosexual or LGB students (CDC, 2016)



- The purpose of this study was to see if there were distinct demographic characteristics of youth questioning their sexual orientation.
- Results from this study will be used to inform potential interventions designed to identify ways to support questioning youth.
- Given that questioning youth are an understudied group, this research will add to our ability to support questioning youth.



- This research project is part of a larger, cross-sectional international study with youth and young adults ages 13-25 year-old.
- Data collection for this study took place between June and December 2014 using the Qualtrics online platform.
- Participants were recruited using social media, postcards, and venue booths across the United States.
- This research project focuses exclusively on youth (ages 13 – 18,  $n = 922$ ) participants.



What is your sexual orientation?

1 = Straight

2 = Lesbian

3 = Gay

4 = Bisexual

5 = Queer

6 = Questioning

7 = I prefer not to disclose

8 = Other (please specify)





	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Orientation</b>		
Straight	318	34.5%
Lesbian/Gay	233	25.3%
Bisexual/Queer	247	26.8%
Questioning	100	10.8%
Did not disclose	24	2.6%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	376	40.8%
Female	510	55.3%
Transgender	7	.8%
Genderqueer	24	2.6%
Did not disclose	5	.5%



- Stepwise multinomial regression was used to identify variables that predicted sexual orientation
  - Questioning used as the reference category
- The selected model predicted orientation as a linear combination of age and gender
  - Gender was restricted to male and female due to low sample sizes in the other categories



- Both age ( $\chi^2 = 22.297, p < .01$ ) and gender ( $\chi^2 = 313.09, p < .01$ ) were a significant predictor of sexual orientation

	$\beta$	<u>s.e.</u>	<u>p</u>	<u>exp(<math>\beta</math>)</u>
<i>Age</i>				
Bisexual/queer	.16	.079	.043*	1.341
Lesbian/Gay	.294	.087	<.001*	2.006
Straight	-.005	.075	.95	.895
<i>Gender</i>				
Bisexual/queer	.448	.25	.073	1.538
Lesbian/Gay	2.954	.285	<.001*	18.767
Straight	-.334	.075	.183	.711



- **Identity Formation**

- Developing one's sexual orientation is a process
- Fluid over time—doesn't just happen at one time point

- **Pubertal Development**

- **Females vs Males**

- Puberty occurs, on average, about two years earlier in girls than boys (Grumbach & Styne, 1998).
- Girls have greater difficulty in accommodating to early pubertal changes (Carter, Silverman, Jaccard (2011)



- Important to support Questioning youth
- Our results suggest that Questioning youth may need increased levels of support across ecological systems (i.e. family, friends, school, community, society)
- Need to provide resources for questioning youth who are developing their sexual identity
  - GLSEN: <https://www.glsen.org/>
  - Advocates for Youth: <https://www.advocatesforyouth.org/parents-sex-ed-center-home>
  - Born This Way Foundation: <https://bornthisway.foundation>
  - Center for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth.htm>
  - The Trevor Project: <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>





- Can you think of three local resources that you can give youth right now if asked?







- Demographic questions need to include questions about sexual orientation.
  - These questions should be inclusive of “questioning” option
- More research on questioning youth is needed
- Look at outcomes of questioning youth with support vs questioning youth without support
- Mixed-methods studies may give a more complete picture of questioning youth’s experience
- Longitudinal studies may be helpful in documenting developmental patterns regarding sexual orientation



- Exploratory study and cannot make any directional conclusions
- Participant's from this study were recruited from Lady Gaga's Born This Way Foundation, concert tours, and fan base. Thus, they may display unique demographic features when compared to the general population.



Questions?