

Risk Factors Associated with Lesbianism May Be Higher than with Gay Men

By Roy Waller

A study conducted by Professor Lisa Lindley of Western Kentucky University suggests that a homosexual lifestyle could be slightly more dangerous, in several respects, for lesbians than for gay men.

Lindley presented her findings last December to the American Public Health Association.

The study queried 927 lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered students. It was conducted with the cooperation of 135 LGBT college associations, and was reported in an article in the gay-themed magazine *The Advocate* (February 18, 2003).

Professor Lindley's study has gathered some unexpected statistics—particularly because it has been widely assumed that a gay lifestyle is associated with greater risk factors for men than for women.

Beginning with the risk factor of suicide, the study found that 62.1% of lesbians in the sample studied had considered suicide during their lifetimes, compared to 58.2% of gay men, while the figures for those who have actually attempted it were 29.2% for women and 28.8% for men.

Substance Abuse a Serious Problem

The respondents to the Internet-conducted study also provided data that suggests lesbians are more likely to smoke, drink liquor, use such controlled substances as cocaine, Ecstasy, LSD, and mescaline, as well as being more prone to be overweight and even—in this particular study—to have more sex partners than gay males.

Lindley puts forward the idea—common to nearly every

other study that has found negative factors associated with homosexuality—that high-risk lifestyles among lesbians are likely due to pressures resulting from society's disapproval. She suggested that lesbians' tend to "come out" later than their male peers and, consequently, they endure the pressures of coping with their homosexuality without support for a longer period of time than do homosexually oriented men.

Researchers With an Agenda: The Search for Funding

Lindley's disturbing study results have been questioned by gay-activist groups and other researchers.

In a piece written for *The New York Times*, Professor Ritch Savin-Williams of Cornell University responded to Lindley's findings. Savin-Williams—who is himself a gay-activist writer and researcher—argues that most such studies are conducted with a specific agenda in mind; namely, attempting to document the mistreatment gay youth and young adults have suffered so that more research funding can be obtained for programs that serve the gay community.

"The research is delivering what I call 'the suffering suicide script,' which essentially tells them, 'Hey, look how horrible it is to be gay,'" says Savin-Williams.

Lindley herself is cited in *The Advocate* as stating that there has been too much emphasis on the negativity of the homosexual youth experience. In response, she says she now plans to embark on study of homosexually oriented people's "resilience and intellect." ■

August 2003