

TESTING A TYPOLOGY OF ADAPTATIONS TO SAME-SEX SEXUAL ORIENTATION AMONG MEN

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ABSTRACT: *Previous research has yielded important understandings of how sexual minorities adjust to living in a heteronormative culture, but scholarly critiques of assimilation and Merton's research on adaptations to deviance suggest value in examining whether there are distinct types of adaptation. Applying Merton's definition of adaptations in anomic environments suggests that different patterns can be defined depending on the importance placed on assimilation and on sexual expression. Using the 1996 Urban Men's Health Study (n = 2,585) data, four different adaptation patterns are defined: MSM conformist, MSM innovator, MSM nonconformist, and MSM uninvolved. To establish criterion validity, expected correlates of membership in each group are then examined. The distinct groups, each representing from 20 percent to 30 percent of the sample, largely conformed to expectations on measures of sexual self-identification, involvement in gay culture, intimacy and sexual exploration, health, and income. Scholarly and policy implications of the adaptation typology are considered.*

Keywords: *assimilation; adaptation; MSM; sexual orientation; identity; gay*

BACKGROUND

Given that sexual minorities spend their lives in environments dominated by norms of heterosexuality, how do they find reasonable means to experience their sexuality while avoiding the stressful stigmas of being deviant in a heteronormative environment? Variations on this question have been addressed by scholars extensively, particularly within the decades since the advent of the modern gay political movement in the 1960s. While such research has been invaluable in developing appropriate policy and health-related responses to the specific needs of sexual minorities, there is a concern that the existing research contains assumptions

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that the sexuality-related life paths of sexual minorities are relatively uniform, except as accounted for by variation of relatively discrete factors such as social statuses or psychological resources (Plummer 2003; Savin-Williams 2001). For example, research comparing the experiences of working-class or ethnic minority gays to middle-class or white gays yields valuable insights, but the analytical approach assumes that gay experiences are largely the same with class simply adding or subtracting from various experiences. Similarly, the extensive research on sexual-minority behavior factors (e.g., HIV risk), psychological factors (e.g., openness), or contextual factors (e.g., discrimination policies) has resulted in a picture of the diversity, and diversity of resources, within sexual minority culture, but does not accommodate the possibility of there being relatively distinct patterns of adaptation among sexual minorities.

Although general population research on sexual minorities has been dominated by these assumptions of relative commonality, a few scholars have called for an acknowledgement that there may be distinct patterns of sexual adaptation among sexual minorities. In what is considered to have been a ground-breaking work, *Homosexualities* (1978), Bell and Weinberg identified five groups of gay males and lesbians based on measures of their sexual experience. Using this typology, they found important relationships between group membership and social and psychological adjustment. More recently scholars (e.g., Green 2008; Plummer 2003) from a more explicit social constructionist perspective have focused on the need to recognize distinct variations in sexual scripts among sexual minorities.

Gay Culture Critique

Scholarship subsequent to Bell and Weinberg on hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) and on sexual citizenship (Seidman 2001) suggests that key to differentiating adaptations found among sexual minorities is by their adherence to mainstream norms. More specifically, the historic social, political, and philosophical conflicts of gay culture point towards distinctions between sexual minority members who focus primarily on assimilation into mainstream culture and those who primarily focus on development of a uniquely gay culture (Armstrong 2002; Bedfellows 1996; Shepard 2001).

Though these latter critiques suggest an assimilation/non-assimilation split, a close reading of the literature suggests that more than one type of non-assimilationist adaptation is possible. One set of critiques, focusing on political sexual liberation (see Shepard 2001; Warner 1999), argue that a subculture focused on same-sex sexual expression provides a needed challenge to traditional heterosexual models of organizing access to sexuality and intimacy. This conceptualization, often labeled as "sex positive," focuses on the freedom to explore one's sexuality in diverse and relatively public ways. Research on non-monogamy in gay male relationships (Adam 2006; Hoff, Beougher, Chakravarty, Darbes, and Neilands 2010), as well as research on sex clubs and bathhouses (Woods, Binson, Pollack, Wohlfeiler, Stall, and Catania 2003), reinforces this perspective.

A second theme in critiques of assimilation focuses more on inequality (Barrett and Pollack 2005; Green 2007). Such research notes that those gays who are most likely to assimilate to the dominant culture are those with characteristics similar

to the dominant culture—that is, those who are middle-class (or above) and white. Among working-class or minority men¹ who have sex with men (MSM), however, assimilation to middle-class white norms regarding sexual identity expression would be much less likely to occur because the economic, social, and cultural resources necessary to mimic traditional heterosexual lifestyles may simply be unavailable, or the working-class/minority environment may be such that it is not in one's best interest to attempt to mimic heterosexual relationships. Moreover, working-class pride might even suggest the need for a resistance to the dominant, middle-class, gay culture.

Taken together, scholarship on gay culture suggests at least three different adaptations: one based on assimilation; one rejecting assimilation and focusing on sexual expression from a liberation, sex-positive, perspective; and one where sexual expression is more salient than assimilation due to structural factors that limit the ability to assimilate.

Sociological Explanations of Adaptation

The adaptations described above have a strong parallel to the sociological deviance literature, specifically Merton's (1964) classification of five adaptations for social groups that lack the resources to conform to the dominant culture's expectations. Although subsequent researchers have debated the specific categories and the number of categories in Merton's classification (see Einstadter and Henry 2006:151–79), Merton's original conceptualization offers a useful approach for refining and expanding upon the possible adaptations.

Merton's proposed adaptation typology was based on whether members of social groups shared goals defined by the larger culture and had the means to meet those goals. When applied to sexual minorities the issue becomes the extent individuals desire acceptance by the dominant culture and the extent their non-heterosexual intimacy and sexual expression limits their means for assimilating. Note that in the context of this research, the means part of Merton's classification must be stated in the reverse since having the structurally defined means to be part of the larger culture would require appearing heteronormative and thus devaluing same-sex sexual expression. With this clarification of terms, we see that using Merton's typology results in a refinement of the previously suggested adaptations into three of his five types of adaptation, plus a logical fourth derived from those three.

Merton suggested that the most common adaptation would be conformist given that sharing the goals of the dominant culture and having the means to meet those goals would be easiest for individuals. In the context of this research, these would be people who share those mainstream cultural goals and place a low value on expressing their same-sex sexuality since the latter would be contradictory to the heteronormativity required for entrance to the dominant culture. The gay culture research described this group as focusing on assimilation, but in keeping with Merton's terminology, this classification will be called MSM conformist.²

Merton's second group is innovators, people who share the goals of the dominant culture but do not have the means to meet those goals and thus develop alternative strategies to meet cultural goals. This approach also involves assimilating, but at the same time places a high value on same-sex sexual expression, which

is contradictory to fitting into the dominant culture. In gay culture research terms, this is the group described as "sex positives." Again, to be consistent with Merton's terminology, this group will be labeled MSM innovators.

In keeping with the pattern seen in the gay culture research on inequality, the third group would be composed of people who do not share the goals of the dominant culture nor have the means to meet the dominant cultural goals. That is, they value sexual expression but not assimilation. In Merton's classification these non-conforming non-assimilationists fall into two groups: (1) retreatists who essentially withdraw from participation in the dominant culture, and (2) rebels who actively reject the culturally defined goals and means and develop alternative strategies. In terms of the dynamics addressed in this research, such a distinction is problematic. It is reasonable to expect that some who meet the criteria of ranking assimilation low and sexual expression high would be sexuality-focused gay activists who could be considered rebels, while others might live gay lives separate from mainstream society and thus be considered retreatists. However, it is likely that sexual rebels would overlap with the previously defined sexual innovators. In keeping with the evidence from the literature from gay politics and the likelihood that some of what would be considered to be rebels are MSM innovators, we predict that men who rank assimilation low and value sexual expression will form only one group, MSM nonconformists.

Missing from the gay culture research is a logical fourth group. Merton labels this group ritualist for placing a low value on cultural goals but having the means to achieve those goals. In the context of this research, this group would include sexual minorities who rank assimilation low yet do not value the same-sex sexual expression that is contradictory to heteronormativity. Given that this analysis focuses on deviation from the mean of heteronormativity rather than adherence to it, it is inappropriate to describe this group as ritualistically following heteronormativity. Since they place a low value on sexual expression, they are described as MSM uninvolved here.

Table 1 illustrates the expected typology that would evolve based on the values of assimilation and on same-sex sexual expression. Comparisons of this conceptualization to the Bell and Weinberg solution, as well as to Merton's five adaptation solution, will be addressed in later sections.

This categorization has received some previous validation in qualitative research by the first author. An ethnographic pilot study focusing on adaptation suggested three general patterns of adaptation that match closely with the theoretical outline described above. One group, similar to the MSM conformist adaptation, had life histories characterized by a focus on work and on developing and maintaining relatively conventional, marriage-like, dyadic relationships; most of the men in that group also showed a discomfort with gay culture. A second group, similar to the MSM nonconformist adaptation, had life histories where their relationship and work patterns focused on expressing and exploring their sexuality (e.g., moving to cities with major gay cultures) instead of professional development or long-term dyadic commitments. The third group, similar to the MSM uninvolved pattern, were men whose lives were characterized by a relative lack of focus or goals and who devalued sexual expression. There was also a fourth group of men who were relatively young or new to exploring their sexuality and who seemed to be exploring various ways to accommodate

TABLE 1
Expected Typology of Adaptation^a

<i>Adaptations</i>		
	<i>Valuing Assimilation</i>	<i>Valuing Expression of Same-Sex Sexuality</i>
MSM conformist	+	-
MSM innovator	+	+
MSM nonconformist	-	+
MSM uninvolved	-	-

a. Table is an adaptation of Merton (1964:140).

their sexuality in life. The qualitative work did not identify a group that would be considered to be combining both assimilation with sexual expression (i.e., the MSM innovators), but that may be due to the qualitative sample being mostly working-class.

Validating the Adaptations

Validating the proposed adaptation categories means first determining whether they can be identified in a representative sample from a sexual minority population and, once identified, examining whether category membership is related to the life circumstances in predictable ways. How are life circumstances expected to be related to the expectations? Following are the general dimensions expected; specific relationships are identified in the Measurement section. The MSM conformists are defined as putting a high value on the cultural goals of assimilation and a low value on expression of sexuality; thus, they are expected to be heteronormative (similar to heterosexual norms) in terms of relationships, have less of a focus on sexual culture, and have middle-class demographics due to their place in mainstream culture. MSM innovators also seek to conform to cultural norms, but they also value, and therefore are unwilling to forego, expression of their sexuality. Thus, MSM innovators should be high in social status while at the same time focusing on sexual identity expression and sexual culture. MSM nonconformists, on the other hand, tend to be outside of mainstream culture and thus are expected to be lower on measures of social class and higher on various measures related to sexual expression. Finally, an MSM uninvolved group contains a mix of people who, for psychological, social, or economic reasons, devalue same-sex sexual expression and also have a limited ability to assimilate. Essentially this fourth group is expected to be composed of outsiders, lower not only in social class but also low in comfort with their sexuality.

METHODS

Sample

Since the goal of the study is to validate a cultural adaptation typology, it is important to utilize data on a wide range of variables (demographic, behavioral, and psychological) from a demographically diverse sample that is generalizable to a male sexual

minority population. The Urban Men's Health Study (UMHS) focused on HIV risk, but the survey instrument covered social, psychological, and health topics thought to be antecedents or correlates of HIV risk and prevention behavior. The breadth of the measures included in the UMHS interview allow for a quantitative examination of the typology of adaptation to same-sex sexual orientation and how demographic characteristics and behavioral variables correlate with those adaptations.

The UMHS conducted telephone interviews completed between November 1996 and February 1998 with a probability sample of MSM living in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco (Catania, Osmond, Stall, Pollack, Paul, Blower, Binson, Canchola, Mills, Fisher, Choi, Porco, Turner, Blair, Henne, Bye, and Coates 2001). The collection of the UMHS data and the sample's representativeness have been addressed extensively in other articles utilizing the dataset (see Barrett and Pollack 2005; Catania, Canchola, Pollack, and Chang 2006). The sample consists of 2,881 men age 18 and older (up to 85) who reported having same-gender sex since age 14 or who self-identified as gay or bisexual. The original sample included some men who had early same-sex experience but no subsequent regular pattern of same-sex activity; these men received only partial interviews and are thus eliminated from this analysis. The resulting subsample includes those men who were sexually active with men in the last 5 years ($n = 2,580$) plus men who identified as homosexual or bisexual but did not engage in sexual activity over the past 5 years ($n = 70$). Missing values on one or more variables necessary to identify adaptation group (see below) excluded sixty-five cases yielding a final sample of 2,585 men.

Measures

Construct Validity: Initial Grouping Variables. The proposed typology defines distinct patterns of adaptation based on the comparative importance of assimilation to heteronormative norms versus expression of same-sex sexuality. An ideal measure of the role of heteronormative assimilation among MSM would assess their participation in, and attitudes towards, conventional work and relationship patterns as well as the importance placed on acceptance within the dominant culture. An ideal measure of the role of sexual identity expression would assess the importance of sexual expression, the resources expended (e.g., time, energy, and tangible resources) toward sexual expression, and the importance of having a community of like-minded others.

Although the UMHS dataset lacks succinct and direct measures of these dimensions, men within each type of adaptation would be expected to vary in predictable ways on each of two measures that, in combination, reflect the assimilation and sexual identity expression dimensions. These measures are of feelings of achievement and of feelings of affiliation with the gay community. Using MSM conformist as an example (see Table 1), since assimilation is a primary component of their lives while sexual identity expression is more secondary, scores on achievement are expected to be high while scores on gay community affiliation are expected to be low.

The achievement measure used in this analysis is operationalized with a new six-item scale derived from factor analysis of a measure of psychological well-being (Ryff and Keyes 1995); scale items measured feelings about the ability

to manage daily life, having a sense of accomplishment, feeling in charge of life, feeling pleased with their lives, and negative worded items of feeling disappointment with their achievements and stressed by the demands of life. All items were assessed on a 6-point agreement scale and at least four of the six questions had to be answered for a scale mean to be calculated. Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha for the scale is .76; the scale score has a sample mean of 4.90, median of 5.00, and standard deviation of .93.

The affiliation with gay community measure is based on the work of Herek and Glunt (1995). The scale is composed of seven items asking whether the respondent feels that he is a part of the city's gay community, feels that participating in the city's gay community is a positive thing to do, feels a bond with other men who are gay or bisexual, feels proud about the city's gay community, feels it is important to be politically active in the city's gay community, whether working with others can solve community problems, and whether the respondent feels that problems in the community are his problems as well. Items were assessed on a 4-point agreement scale. Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha for the scale is .78; scale values are the mean of the item scores and respondents had to answer at least five of seven items to be given a score. The scale ranges from 1 to 4 with a mean of 3.31, a median of 3.43, and a standard deviation of .53. As indicated by the wording of the items, the scale assesses commitment to the gay community and thus could yield a high score regardless of the individual's commitment to sexual identity expression. Qualitative analysis by the first author, however, suggests that gay men who place a relatively low salience on sexual identity expression tend to distance themselves from the gay community.

Criterion Validity: Correlates of Adaptation. Criterion validity is assessed by examining whether a diverse set of characteristics co-vary by adaptation group membership in predictable patterns. Since the dataset is cross-sectional, and the focus is on the validity of the adaptation typologies themselves, the selection of correlates for assessing criterion validity does not take into consideration whether the factor is a possible cause for being in an adaptation or a consequence of being in that adaptation. Correlates of adaptation include resources (e.g., social class) that influence or are a consequence of the particular adaptations to be followed, the daily behaviors that are part of following that adaptation (e.g., patterns of sexual behavior), and the more enduring factors that would be an outcome from following that adaptation (e.g., psychological health).

For this analysis, the correlates of adaptation group membership are broken down into six groups: demographics, sexual self-identification, gay community involvement, intimate partnership, sexual exploration, and health-related measures. What follows is a description of each correlate by group including its expected relationship with each adaptation and how it was assessed.

Demographic Correlates. The two assimilation-based adaptations (MSM conformist and MSM innovator) are expected to score higher on demographic indicators of social class. Under the assumption that negotiating the MSM innovator adaptation may require extraordinary resources in order to overcome societal resistance to their culturally deviant form of sexual expression, this group should score the highest on measures of social status. Since it is assumed that MSM

nonconformist and MSM uninvolved are not likely to be in line with assimilation expectations, these latter groups should score similarly lower on social status indicators. Expectations regarding the relationship between age and the adaptations are addressed further below.

Social status and social class background are assessed with *respondent's education* (in years) and respondent's *household income*. The income measure is highly skewed and thus household income is dichotomized at \$40,000 or more. It should be noted that since this is a measure of household income it will be affected by whether the respondent is in a relationship.

Since social class effects for racial and ethnic minorities are likely to be compounded by effects due to cultural differences and discrimination, a measure of being non-minority is included in all analyses. The sample is predominantly non-Hispanic *white* with insufficient variation by other racial groups for reliable analysis; thus, a dichotomous measure is used.

The limited ethnographic research suggested that adaptation patterns are relatively consistent across the life course and thus are not related to *age*, but it is important to consider whether they may be cohort effects. The sample ranges to age 85, and thus older individuals in the sample are more likely to have become sexually active during a period when there was much more stigma associated with being openly gay (i.e., a cohort effect); thus, it is important to examine whether older respondents are less likely to have followed the two adaptations expected to be associated with more open and public expression of sexuality (MSM innovator and MSM nonconformist).

Sexual Self-Identification. Since a key factor in the adaptations is the role of expression of sexual identity in one's adaptation to sexual orientation, those for whom sexual identity expression is more salient (MSM innovator and MSM nonconformist) are expected to be characterized by a greater likelihood than MSM conformists and MSM uninvolved of early acknowledgment of same-sex interest, of labeling oneself as gay, and of openness to family and others.

As a measure of early identification as gay, we use the age at which the respondent *first decided* that he was gay. Since the variable is skewed towards lower age, it is dichotomized at the median value of 18.

Whether respondents *self-label as gay* is assessed by a question asking respondents whether they thought of themselves as gay, queer, bisexual, homosexual, heterosexual, straight, or something else. Answers are dichotomized between those who used only the terms *gay* or *queer* or *homosexual* in describing themselves, versus those who did not.

Openness is measured with two sets of questions. The first dichotomous measure assesses whether or not participants' *families know* that they are gay or sexually interested in men, regardless of whether they told them. An *openness index* was also created based on the extent that they were out to family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and employers. The index is the average of answers on 5-point scales ranging from "all" to none"; the scale is skewed towards the positive and thus was dichotomized at above the median of 4.20 or lower.

Gay Community Involvement. Similar to the sexual self-identification measures, MSM conformists and MSM uninvolved should be lower than MSM

innovators and MSM nonconformists on measures of involvement with the gay community. Four factors are used to measure involvement with the gay community and feelings about the gay community. Three of the factors used are from previous research and include whether the respondent *lived in a gay neighborhood* (see Mills, Stall, Pollack, Paul, Binson, Canchola, and Catania 2001), whether they had any participation in a *gay organization* (Barrett and Pollack 2005), and the extent to which respondents perceived the *gay community as being exclusionary* based on race, age, or appearance. Since a high score on the latter exclusion measure is a negative comment on the gay community, assumptions about the direction of effects for this variable are reversed from the assumptions presented at the beginning of this section.

Participants were also asked how often they utilized various venues for socializing with other men. Some of these venues are explicitly associated with sexual activity and so are included in the next group of variables related to sexual exploration. Gay bars, however, may serve multiple social purposes including that of neighborhood community center. The skewed distribution of the frequency of usage of *gay bars* resulted in scores being dichotomized at the median of fourteen visits in the past year.

Intimate Partnership. Given the assumption that MSM conformists adhere to mainstream cultural expectations, MSM conformists should have the highest rates of intimate partnership, while MSM nonconformists' focus on sexual expression should result in a lower rate of partnership. MSM uninformed, having less resources in general, should be the lowest in rates of partnership. What is more difficult to predict, however, is the partnership status of MSM innovators. Though their affinity for sexual identity expression suggests a relatively low likelihood of intimate partnership, their assimilative tendency suggests a higher likelihood of partnership. We thus predict MSM innovators to have higher rates of partnership than MSM nonconformists but lower than MSM conformists. To assess whether respondents were involved in an intimate partnership, participants were classified by whether they stated that they were in a relationship with another man that they would describe as their *primary partner*.

Sexual Exploration. The expected patterns of association between the adaptation types and indicators of sexual exploration are influenced by the characteristics of the variables available. All of the available measures reflect behaviors challenging conventional norms of sexual identity expression, but also reflect the sort of public situation typically encountered by men with relatively few resources for meeting intimacy and sexual needs. Thus, the two groups where sexual identity expression is high (MSM innovator and MSM nonconformist) and the MSM uninformed should be similarly higher than the MSM conformist on all of the sexual exploration variables.

Sexual exploration was measured with multiple dichotomous variables including whether respondents had more than the median of *three partners*, had *sex in a public place* (e.g., park or bathhouse), or visited a *sex club* in the previous 12 months.

Health-Related Measures. Since the adaptations are related to involvement in sexual culture, they should vary on factors related to sexual health as well as on factors that may be related to stresses from being openly sexual. Given that

the MSM conformist adaptation by definition involves greater adherence to mainstream culture and so should engender both less stress and less exposure to sexual health effects, this group should score the lowest on all of these factors. Consequently, the predictions below focus on the other three groups.

One set of questions measure exposure to harassment for being gay (see Herek, Gillis, Cogan, and Glunt 1997). The measure assesses whether the participant had experienced any violence, property damage, or verbal harassment due to being gay in the previous 12 months; participants were dichotomized by whether they reported experiencing any of these forms of *harassment*. For this measure, since the three adaptations other than MSM conformist would suggest engaging in public activities surrounding their sexual expression that might engender backlash, these three (MSM innovator, MSM nonconformist, MSM uninvolved) should be similar and higher than MSM conformists.

As an indicator of sexual health, we use HIV status. Being HIV positive is likely to represent less structured situations for sexual activity and thus reflect both challenging of sexual norms as well as situations encountered by those with relatively few other options. Thus, the two groups focusing on sexual expression (MSM innovator and MSM nonconformist) and the MSM uninvolved group should be similar and higher than MSM conformist on self-reported status as *HIV positive*.

Three measures are also used as indicators of substance use or mental health problems. Problems in these areas are likely to be related to stress, and a key source of stress is challenges to validation of self. Since MSM innovators and MSM nonconformists have sources of validation (either in the dominant culture or the gay community), they should be similar to the MSM conformists and lower than the MSM uninvolved on all three measures. For substance use problems, two dichotomous measures are used: (1) whether they report drinking weekly and more than five drinks at a time (*heavy drinker*) (see Cahalan 1970), and (2) whether they reported using more than two of eleven types of drugs (a median split) other than alcohol in the past 6 months (*multiple drug use*). Respondents also answered the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D); for this analysis scores were dichotomized into whether the respondent was likely to be *clinically depressed* (score of 22 or higher) or not (Radloff 1977).

Statistical Analysis

For the initial construct validity analysis, K-means cluster analysis was conducted using the Quick Cluster algorithm in SPSS Version 16. The cluster analysis was used to assess whether the value placed on factors related to assimilation (measured with achievement) and on factors related to sexual identity expression (measured with gay affiliation) group respondents into categories that equate with the predicted adaptation typology. Cluster analysis solutions are sensitive to extremes in variation in the variables and both of the variables were highly and negatively skewed, so both variables were modified by first reversing the scale score, then transforming the reversed scale score to base 10 logarithm, and finally re-reversing the transformed score for use in the cluster analysis.

The subsequent criterion validity analysis tests the validity of the adaptation groups by examining their relationship with six groups of correlates. SPSS

one-way ANOVA was used to compare group means for all continuous correlates. For all dichotomous correlates, logistic regressions were used to statistically compare group proportions. The Benjamini-Hochberg method for controlling Type I error was employed when assessing multiple pairwise comparisons (Benjamini and Hochberg 1995).

RESULTS

To assess the construct validity of the adaptation classification, a K-means cluster analysis was conducted of the logarithm-transformed achievement and affiliation factors. Three analyses were conducted to determine whether the proposed four cluster solution was optimal. The first analysis specified three clusters; this analysis did not arrive at a convergent solution and thus was dropped.

The second analysis specified four clusters and arrived at a convergent solution after eleven iterations. Cluster center scores, the size of each cluster, and test of within-cluster variation on each scale are provided in Table 2. The results are largely consistent with what was expected (see Table 1), especially regarding sexual identity expression. The two groups (MSM innovator and MSM nonconformist) that focus on sexual identity expression are similar and higher (.48 and .47, respectively) on the affiliation measure than the MSM conformist or MSM uninvolved groups (.25 and .31, respectively), which in turn are similar on the measure. The patterns of assimilation also met expectations, but with unexpected variations. The two assimilation groups (MSM conformist and MSM innovator) are higher on achievement than the other two groups, but there was more variation than expected between the two assimilation groups (.59 and .69, respectively) and between the two non-assimilation groups (.41 and .26, respectively).

To examine the possibility of five unique adaptations as described by Merton, the above analysis was repeated specifying five clusters. That analysis creates three groups similar to the MSM conformist, MSM innovator, and MSM uninvolved groups in Table 2. The five cluster solution, however, rather than create a group

TABLE 2
Adaptation Group Characteristics

	<i>MSM Conformist mean (s.d.)</i>	<i>MSM Innovator mean (s.d.)</i>	<i>MSM Nonconformist mean (s.d.)</i>	<i>MSM Uninvolved mean (s.d.)</i>	<i>F</i>
Achievement ^a	.59 (.11)	.69 (.08)	.41 (.08)	.26 (.10)	2,798.96, <i>df</i> = 2,581, <i>p</i> < .001
Affiliation ^a	.25 (.08)	.48 (.08)	.47 (.08)	.31 (.10)	1,284.85, <i>df</i> = 2,581, <i>p</i> < .001
<i>N</i>	580	723	762	520	
% of sample	22.4%	28.0%	29.5%	20.1%	

a. To accommodate a negatively skewed distribution, scale scores were reverse scored, transformed to base 10 logarithm, and then re-reverse scored.

similar to the MSM nonconformist created two groups that are similar to the rebel and retreatist divisions suggested by Merton's adaptation schema. Criterion correlate analysis indicated that the rebel and retreatist groups performed similarly in comparisons to other groups as did the MSM nonconformist group, but that the rebels and retreatists were not meaningfully different on correlates. Given that the four cluster solution is more parsimonious and that the five cluster solution creates two clusters that are similar, the four cluster solution is used in this analysis.

The four cluster solution provides initial validation of the typology, but the proof of the validity of the typology is in the relationships between the typology and the resources, attitudes, and behaviors that are assumed to be correlates of adaptation. To facilitate the presentation of the multiple between-group comparisons without providing a cluttered and difficult-to-follow statistical presentation, statistical comparisons of the correlates are presented in Tables 3a and 3b using columns on the left as the base for comparisons to columns on the right. Analysis of correlates serves two purposes, first to assess criterion validity by examining whether the correlates fit with the typology in the expected directions, and then to provide a more in-depth description of each typology. Consequently, the results are presented by correlate group in the Results section and then re-summarized by adaptation group in the discussion.

Demographic Correlates

It was assumed that the MSM innovators would be highest on markers of social status followed by the MSM conformists, with both the MSM nonconformists and MSM uninvolved being similar and lower. On the three indicators of social class only income is significantly related to group membership (see Table 3a), with MSM innovators being significantly more likely to have income over \$40,000 (68.0 percent) than any other adaptation group, and MSM conformists (59.8 percent) being significantly more likely than MSM uninvolved (42.0 percent) to have an income over \$40,000. Contrary to expectations, MSM conformists are not different from MSM nonconformists (59.8 percent and 57.5 percent, respectively) on income. It should be noted that this significant social status relationship should be interpreted with caution since the income measure is of household income and the statistical relationships here follow very closely the statistical relationships for having a live-in partner (discussed below).

Age was not related to adaptation group, providing one indication that the adaptation groups do not reflect variation by whether participants became sexually active before or after contemporary gay liberation.

Sexual Self-Identification

For these measures MSM innovators and MSM nonconformists were expected to be similar and higher than MSM conformists and MSM uninvolved, with the latter two expected to be similar. On the measure of deciding gay before age 18, MSM conformists were significantly less likely than only MSM nonconformists, though the overall pattern was similar to what was expected. The three sexual self-identification variables that measure adult differences in identification do perform

TABLE 3A
Correlates of Adaptation Group Membership

	<i>Means and Percentages^a</i>			
	<i>MSM Conformists</i>	<i>MSM Innovators</i>	<i>MSM Nonconformists</i>	<i>MSM Uninvolved</i>
<i>Demographics and family history</i>				
Respondent education (number of years)	16.03	16.27	16.06	15.93
Household income of \$40,000 or more	59.8% ^{b,d}	68.0% ^{c,d}	57.5% ^d	42.0%
White	77.8%	78.3%	81.4%	79.6%
Age	39.57	39.28	39.23	39.27
<i>Sexual self-identification</i>				
First decided gay at age 18 or younger	46.6% ^c	52.5%	53.9%	53.3%
Self-labels as gay	66.4% ^{b,c}	85.1% ^d	84.9% ^d	68.4%
Family knows gay	81.9% ^{b,c,d}	94.9% ^d	95.0% ^d	88.9%
Openness > median	37.9% ^{b,c}	60.5% ^d	57.9% ^d	38.0%
<i>Gay culture involvement</i>				
Lives in gay neighborhood	40.4% ^c	46.8% ^d	47.6% ^d	36.7%
Member of gay organization	60.2% ^{b,c,d}	79.5% ^d	83.5% ^d	67.5%
Used gay bars more than median of 14	45.6% ^{b,c}	55.1% ^d	54.4% ^d	43.9%
Gay community is exclusionary scale	2.61 ^{b,d}	2.42 ^{c,d}	2.64 ^d	2.86

a. All significance tests are two-tailed, $p \leq .05$, adjusted for multiple comparisons.

b. Significantly different from MSM innovators.

c. Significantly different from MSM nonconformists.

d. Significantly different from MSM uninvolved.

largely as expected, with MSM innovators and MSM nonconformists being similar and significantly different from MSM conformists and MSM uninvolved. The only exception among these variables is that the MSM uninvolved was significantly higher on family knowing they were gay (88.9 percent) than MSM conformists (81.9 percent), although both of these groups were still significantly lower on this measure than MSM innovators (94.9 percent) and MSM nonconformists (95.0 percent).

Gay Community Involvement

As was the case above with the sexual self-identification variables, MSM innovators and MSM nonconformists should be similar and higher than MSM conformists and MSM uninvolved on these measures; the results for membership in a gay organization and for using gay bars conform to those expectations.

The results for the other two measures are close to the expected results, but with relatively minor exceptions. One such exception was living in a gay neighborhood,

where MSM innovators and MSM nonconformists were more likely to live in a gay neighborhood (46.8 percent and 47.6 percent) than the MSM uninvolved (36.7 percent), but only the MSM nonconformists were significantly more likely to live in a gay neighborhood than the MSM conformists (40.4 percent).

The data on exclusivity also were only partially in line with expectations. Since a high score on the measure of the gay community as exclusionary is a negative statement on the gay community, results for this were expected to be in the opposite direction of the results on other involvement measures. The MSM innovators do have a significantly lower mean score (2.42) than all other groups, and the MSM uninvolved are significantly higher (2.86), but what was not expected was that the MSM nonconformists and MSM conformists would be similar on this measure (2.64 and 2.61, respectively).

Intimate Partnership

Rates of intimate partnership should be highest for MSM conformists, lower for MSM innovators, lower still for MSM nonconformists, and lowest for MSM uninvolved. The results partially met these expectations (see Table 3b). While the MSM uninvolved indeed was less likely than all other groups to report having a primary

TABLE 3B
Correlates of Adaptation Group Membership

	<i>Means and Percentages^a</i>			
	<i>MSM Conformists</i>	<i>MSM Innovators</i>	<i>MSM Nonconformists</i>	<i>MSM Uninvolved</i>
<i>Intimate partnership</i>				
Has primary partner	29.3% ^{b,d}	39.4% ^{c,d}	30.5% ^d	22.0%
<i>Sexual exploration</i>				
More than 3 partners in past 12 months	45.3% ^c	47.0% ^c	56.2% ^d	48.6%
Sex in public in past 12 months	27.9% ^{c,d}	29.6% ^{c,d}	40.8%	36.9%
Visited sex club in past 12 months	24.7% ^{c,d}	26.6% ^c	36.4%	32.2%
<i>Health-related</i>				
Any harassment in past 12 months	14.9% ^{b,c,d}	21.7% ^c	30.0%	25.0%
HIV positive	11.4% ^{b,c}	20.8%	21.5% ^d	15.9%
Heavy drinking in past 6 months	7.5%	5.6%	7.8%	9.1%
Using more than 2 types of drugs in past 6 months	14.8% ^c	16.7%	21.4%	18.4%
Clinically depressed	7.1% ^{c,d}	3.5% ^{c,d}	18.6% ^d	45.2%

a. All significance tests are two-tailed, $p \leq .05$, adjusted for multiple comparisons.

b. Significantly different from MSM innovators.

c. Significantly different from MSM nonconformists.

d. Significantly different from MSM uninvolved.

partner (22.0 percent), unexpectedly the MSM innovators were significantly higher than any other group (39.4 percent), and the MSM conformists (29.3 percent) and MSM nonconformists (30.5 percent) fell in between the two but were not significantly different.

Sexual Exploration

Since most of the variables measuring sexual exploration tap both an assertive, "sex-positive" nonconformity and a more passive nonconformity due to a lack of resources, it was expected that MSM innovators, MSM nonconformists, and MSM uninvolved would be similar and higher than MSM conformists. The results are somewhat more complex.

On all three measures MSM conformists were significantly lower than MSM nonconformists. However, MSM innovators were unexpectedly statistically indistinct from MSM conformists on all measures, and on most measures were unexpectedly significantly lower than MSM nonconformists. The pattern for the MSM uninvolved also did not conform with expectations, being similar to MSM conformists on two variables and falling in the middle (and thus not significantly different) on other variables. For example, on the measure of visiting sex clubs, MSM conformists (24.7 percent) are significantly lower than MSM nonconformists (36.4 percent) and MSM uninvolved (32.2 percent), but MSM innovators (26.6 percent) are only significantly different from the MSM nonconformists.

In reviewing these findings on sexual exploration, it is important to note that although there are differences between the groups that are important for understanding variations in sexual adaptation, even the MSM conformists do not follow middle-class heterosexual norms of having very low involvement in sexual exploration.

Health and Health-Related Factors

As predicted, MSM conformists are lower in likelihood of having been harassed than the other groups (MSM conformist 14.9 percent, MSM innovator 21.7 percent, MSM nonconformist 30.0 percent, and MSM uninvolved 25.0 percent), although the difference between the two sexual identity expression adaptation groups (MSM innovator and MSM nonconformist) is unexpectedly large and significant.

MSM conformists were predicted to have a lower HIV prevalence than the other three adaptation groups, while the other three adaptations would be similar. The results for HIV status only partially met expectations. MSM innovators are similar to MSM nonconformists in terms of HIV prevalence (20.8 percent and 21.5 percent HIV positive) and significantly higher than MSM conformists (11.4 percent). However, MSM uninvolved (15.9 percent) were significantly less likely than MSM nonconformists to be HIV positive.

On the indicators of possible substance abuse and emotional health problems, it was hypothesized that the MSM uninvolved would be the outlier, having the highest rates of such problems. This was not entirely the case. The four groups have similar low rates on likelihood of being a heavy drinker. On the indicator of

multiple drug use, only MSM conformists and MSM nonconformists are significantly different (14.8 percent vs. 21.4 percent), while MSM innovators and MSM uninvolved (16.7 percent and 18.4 percent) are not statistically different from the other groups. On the measure of clinical depression, the MSM uninvolved, as expected, were significantly higher (by a wide margin) than all others (45.2 percent), but in addition MSM nonconformists (18.6 percent) were significantly higher than MSM conformists (7.1 percent) and MSM innovators (3.5 percent).

DISCUSSION

Scholarship on hegemony and heteronormative assimilation from a gay cultural perspective, along with sociological theory on adaptation to anomic situations, indicated that relatively distinct styles of adaptation could be defined based on the value placed on assimilation to middle-class norms and the value placed on sexual identity expression. Construct validity of a four-category typology of adaptation using surrogate measures of achievement and sexual exploration resulted in four adaptation groups: MSM conformist, MSM innovator, MSM nonconformist, and MSM uninvolved. Subsequent criterion validity analysis largely confirmed the value of this categorization, although there are exceptions to the assumptions.

MSM conformists were expected to be likely to have achieved mainstream norms and to be removed from the openly sexual side of gay culture. In this sample, 22 percent of the men were MSM conformist and their position on most of the correlates fits with this description as relatively conventional vis-à-vis mainstream culture. MSM conformists are less likely than the two sexual identity adaptation groups (MSM innovator and MSM nonconformist) to self-identify as gay, be open about being gay, and be involved in the gay community. Although this group scored low on indicators of health problems, they are not as statistically distinct from MSM innovators or MSM uninvolved on as many of those health measures as expected. Also, they did not score as high as expected on partnership or social status variables.

MSM innovators were predicted to have managed to incorporate mainstream assimilation while still maintaining a focus on sexual identity expression. The results largely support that model, but with some important exceptions. At 28 percent of the sample, this group is the second largest in the sample. In line with expectations, this group is both successful as defined by income and much more gay-affirming than MSM conformists. Unexpectedly, though, they have the highest rates of all groups on being in a primary partnership. On most of the sexual exploration measures, rather than being similar to MSM nonconformists as anticipated, this group instead looks very similar to MSM conformists. This latter finding suggests that the results may not be tapping all of the dimensions of sexual exploration. However, on HIV status, they are (as had been predicted) more similar to MSM nonconformists.

MSM nonconformists, with their focus on sexual identity expression and de-emphasis on assimilation, were predicted to come closest to the classic stereotype of a separate gay subculture. Interestingly, 30 percent of the men fall into this group, making it the largest in the sample. As predicted, these men scored high on measures of sexual self-identification, gay community involvement, and sexual

exploration as well as on health measures that would be expected to be related to sexual exploration. The group also reports significantly higher rates of harassment and clinical depression than the two assimilation adaptations (MSM conformists and MSM innovators).

About 20 percent of the sample were classified as MSM uninvolved. As expected, this group's lack of focus on assimilation or sexual expression was related to being poorer, more marginalized (e.g., perceiving the gay community as exclusionary), and less likely to be involved in an intimate relationship. They were also lower on sexual self-identification and less involved in the gay community when compared to the two sexual identity adaptation groups, although they did not differ from the MSM conformist group on most of these measures. There is one important health distinction for this group. MSM uninvolved have an alarmingly high rate of clinical depression compared to all of the other adaptations, with more than four out of every ten men being scored as clinically depressed. This suggests that the MSM uninvolved approach, with its concomitant lack of either assimilation or gay identity resources, is the most stressful adaptation for gay men.

One unexpected difference across groups was that MSM conformists did not have the highest rate of intimate relationships, but in fact were similar to the MSM nonconformist on relationship status, while MSM innovators were unexpectedly highest on being in relationships. It was assumed that MSM conformists would be characterized by conformity to the perceived mainstream norms of relative sexual conservatism and a focus on conventional organization of emotional life, which presumably includes the highest likelihood of being in stable, marriage-like dyadic relationships. One possible explanation for the unanticipated results is that men in the MSM conformist group may be more likely to desire a relationship, but their lower gay cultural involvement may actually inhibit participation in the sorts of settings that enhance the chance of actually developing relationships. Absent a measure of desire for a relationship, it is not possible to assess this possibility. However, this contention of an environmental suppression of chance for a relationship is lent some credence by the fact that the highest proportion of men in intimate relationships was in the group that ranked both assimilation and sexual expression high, the MSM innovators.

Also unexpected was the finding that MSM innovators were lower than MSM nonconformists, and more similar to MSM conformists, on sexual exploration measures. However, this finding of similarity to conformist is contradicted by the fact that MSM innovators were similar to MSM nonconformists on the sexual health measure of HIV status. This contradiction suggests that the research may be missing something. For example, the UMHS data do not speak to whether men in couples negotiate sexually open relationships, a relatively common characteristic of gay male relationships (Hoff et al. 2010). It may be that the sexual exploration variables used in these analyses are not picking up such forms of sexual exploration.

Considering that two important exceptions to predictions involve MSM innovators, it should be noted that this adaptation fits a pattern often seen in gay culture and commonly referred to in the media as "A-gays" (Beaudoin 2008). Though scholarly research on "A-gays" was not available, the profile of the group defined by the correlates analysis largely fits with what is typically associated with the concept of "A-gay" in the media—men who are very successful both occupationally

and sexually in gay culture, but due to wealth and status limit their sexual explorations to situations where there is little potential for public exposure of their sexuality. Clearly more research is needed to better understand the MSM innovator group.

Another unexpected outcome was the general lack of demographic differences between the four groups. The theoretical assumptions suggest that a focus on sexual identity expression would be an alternative that might be used by those who have less access to the traditional class-based resources that provide a validating assimilation to society; thus, MSM nonconformists were expected to be lower on social status measures than either of the groups focusing on assimilation. The generally poor performance of class-related correlates in this analysis did not support that. However, the lack of significant class-based correlates in this study may be due to a combination of the inability to examine occupational status or individual income, and to the overall urban and well-educated nature of this sample. This urban characteristic may also explain the surprising similarity between the MSM conformist and MSM uninvolved groups on many key correlates.

The findings also address a concern raised in various discussions of typologies of adaptations, which is whether the adaptations are patterns that are relatively stable across the life span, are patterns that may be related to changes in stages of development, or may even be patterns that are easily invoked or ended depending on relatively minor changes in life circumstances. The lack of a relationship between age and adaptation membership would suggest that these do not vary across the life course, but that alone does not suffice as support for stability since it is questionable whether gays negotiate their sexual identity in a linear pattern with similar starting points. However, two sets of statistical relationships provide further support for the assumption that the adaptations may be relatively stable: (1) the consistency of findings with factors that typically occur only once in a person's life (self-labeling as gay, being out to family, HIV status), and (2) the consistency with measures assessed over a 12-month period (sexual exploration measures and the sexual harassment measure). Since both sets of relationships represent enduring patterns, the consistency of these relationships suggests that the adaptations reflect generally stable patterns. An assumption that the patterns of adaptation are relatively stable is also consistent with cultural and historical critiques that trace divisions between assimilation and sexual liberation as being relatively common throughout history.

What about the relationship between this typology and the groups identified by Bell and Weinberg (1978)? Although their categorization was based strictly on measures of sexual activity and relationship status, there are a number of similarities. Like the present study, they found a group that was largely uninvolved or uncomfortable with their sexuality (the MSM uninvolved in this analysis, a combination of "dysfunctionals" and "asexual" in their analysis) and a group that largely organized their lives around their sexuality (the MSM nonconformist in this analysis, their "functionals"). Due to using couple status in their classification, Bell and Weinberg's other two groups do not fit quite as well with these findings, although their "open-couples" do have sexual openness that is similar to the MSM innovators and their "closed-couples" have a de-emphasis on sexual

exploration that is similar to the MSM conformists. That their categories are based on sexual behavior and relationship statuses that are susceptible to change makes their categories problematic for addressing basic differences within sexual culture. However, the fact that their classification overlaps with adaptations found in this research suggests that a typology based on relatively stable attitudinal differences may be useful both in research and in policy.

Before turning to the policy and scholarly implications of this research, some limitations of the study need to be addressed. First and foremost, while the Urban Men's Health Study database is one of the richest in terms of measurement and the only multi-city probability sample of MSM in the United States, it was designed to assess HIV risks and correlates of HIV risk, not gay assimilation. As noted at various points in the text, multiple variables that would have facilitated the analysis were not available.

In addition, the sample is largely reflective of the characteristics of urban gay and gay-friendly neighborhoods: well educated, relatively high incomes, predominantly white, and typically having moved to the city from elsewhere. Same-sex active working-class and minority men are less likely to live in such areas (Barrett and Pollack 2005), which may have resulted in the sample not being reflective of the diversity of experiences of all MSM in the United States. The first author's ad hoc observations of gay and same-sex active life in smaller cities and rural areas suggest that the adaptation groups seen here would still apply in such areas, but that men in those areas would be more likely to be MSM conformists or MSM uninvolved with sexual identity expression lower in salience, while men who would follow one of the sexualized adaptations would have been more likely to move to an urban environment where such an adaptation would be easier.

It is also important to consider the age of the data. Public acceptance of gays has increased relatively steadily in the decade since the data were collected, as has the availability of legal domestic partnership or same-sex marriage. While these social and policy changes would suggest greater participation in the MSM conformist adaptation, the facts of the ongoing gay-cultural critiques of assimilation along with the continued popular opposition to legal equal protection for sexual minorities suggest that the fit of the assimilation perspective with the lives of men who are same-sex active continues to be an unsettled question. Furthermore, since the sample contains men ranging from 18 to 85 who have different historic experiences of gay acceptance, the fact that cohort is not related to adaptation also suggests that the differences in adaptation are relatively stable despite variations in gay acceptance.

Implications

This research validates the assertion by various scholars that there are important distinctions in the ways that men express their same-sex sexuality, and that ignoring those distinctions obscures important issues. Mental and physical health care provides one clear example of the value of understanding the diversity in adaptations. Approaches to patient care would clearly benefit from an understanding that patterns of health risk, along with sources of

social support and of identity-related stress, are not simply due to individual variation in resources or background but instead represent broad patterns seen and experienced within gay culture. This research thus further highlights the concerns expressed by some researchers (see Martin 2006) that understandings of HIV risk and of drug use problems need to focus on the multiple and inter-related factors that result in higher levels of health problems for identifiable subgroups within gay culture.

These findings clearly also have implications for contemporary sexual rights issues. Only 22 percent of the adult MSM in the sample were classified as giving a high rank to the conformist combination of high assimilation and low sexual expression that fits with heteronormative standards. The lives of the significant number of men in adaptations focusing on sexual-identity expression (MSM nonconformists and MSM innovators), plus MSM uninvolved, reflect multiple inter-related factors (e.g., openness regarding one's sexual identity, public sexuality, experiences of harassment) that are often not included in contemporary sexual civil rights efforts that focus on gaining heteronormative relationship rights while downplaying the need for continued protection from sexual discrimination (Richardson 2004).

As suggested by the range of implications just noted, scholarship that further investigates patterns of adaptations is clearly needed. Developing better measures to tap the clusters created by the tension between assimilation and sexual identity expression is needed as is research that examines adaptation patterns by social and geographical diversity in sexual minority populations. Clearly research examining adaptation patterns among non-male sexual minorities is also needed. Additionally, a logical step would be ethnographic research to examine whether the adaptations draw on readily accessible sexual scripts (Simon and Gagnon 2003) that are evidenced in gay culture. Given better and more extensive use of the adaptation schema, a clearer understanding should develop of how cultural tensions and opportunities are manifested through health and legal consequences encountered by many sexual minorities.

It is also important to note that although this research has focused on same-sex active males, it would also be of value to extend this perspective to sexuality research in general. In particular, it should be useful in addressing the decline in rates of heterosexual marriage.

NOTES

1. The concerns raised in this research apply to both men and women. However, the available data are on women and thus the focus of this article is on men.
2. Since the extent to which same-sex active individuals identify as gay is expected to be related to their type of adaptation, we use "MSM" (men who have sex with men) as a modifier rather than "gay" in the names of the adaptations.

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