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EXPLORING THE VALIDITY OF
ESTABLISHED LESBIAN, GAY, AND
BISEXUAL STAGE MODELS OF SEXUAL
IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT: A GROUNDED
THEORY STUDY OF WOMEN AND ETHNIC
MINORITY MEN.

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EXPLORING THE VALIDITY OF ESTABLISHED LESBIAN, GAY, AND BISEXUAL
STAGE MODELS OF SEXUAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT: A GROUNDED THEORY
STUDY OF WOMEN AND ETHNIC MINORITY MEN.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my loving partner and husband of 10 years, Brandon Stobaugh. Over the course of my development as a clinician and now as a researcher you have offered nothing but support, never said no, and never placed any demands on me which would have delayed or prohibited my dreams. It is because of you that I was able to devote the majority, if not all, of my free time to this endeavor. You always listened intently while I pondered theories, processed my doubts, and questioned my own ability to complete this successfully. I would not have been able to complete this without you. Words will never completely express my appreciation. I love you.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to develop a foundational understanding of how women and ethnic minority men come to espouse a lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity in an effort to develop a coherent theory. While stage models of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identity currently exist, their validity with the female and ethnic minority male populations was called into question. A grounded theory approach was used with participants from the southeastern United States who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Three main patterns emerged: Recognition and Progression of Identity Endorsement; Barriers to Identity Endorsement; and Rejection of Categorical Labels.

The results of this study will add to the current body of knowledge as it relates to sexual identity development and the differential developmental trajectories that women and ethnic minority men take in forming a lesbian, gay or bisexual identity.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

As the counseling profession has evolved, four forces have been identified as key influences to the manner in which clients are conceptualized and the resultant therapy is provided (Ivey, D'Andrea, Ivey & Morgan, 2007). While initially guided by psychodynamic tenets, followed by the cognitive-behavioral and then humanistic, it is the fourth force of multicultural and feminist perspectives which provides a richer conceptualization of the client's world and his or her place in it. Within this force emphasis is placed on aspects such as: gender, socio-economic status, ethnic identification, as well as sexual orientation/gender expression.

In considering the multicultural perspective Arredondo et al. (1996) set forth a method in which the competencies within this perspective could be utilized. Most notable is the counselor's awareness of the client's worldview. As the knowledge component of this competency espouses, counselors should possess specific knowledge of the group with whom they are working. Additionally, counselors should be aware of the societal forces which can have a maladaptive impact on their client's development.

In beginning to develop an understanding of how different groups come to establish an espoused identity, models pertaining to specific populations emerged. While being initially focused on the development of a racial/ethnic identity, other models began to emerge which shifted focus towards particular populations (e.g. Caucasian, African American, Native American, etc.). Models which considered feminism, homosexuality,

and disability also followed. Given that the term multicultural has its roots in the identification as being a part of a particular ethnicity, it has since become an umbrella term to also include such elements as sexual orientation. Sexual orientation has received continued research focus and specific practice-related competencies as developed by the Association of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling (ALGBTIC) (Logan & Barret, 2005) but there remains a fundamental practice and conceptualization component of working with this population which still needs empirical research and validation.

According to a 2012 Gallup poll, it is estimated that about 3.5% of the United States population identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) (Gallup, 2013). Research has shown that members of this population are often hesitant to seek counseling services given both the stigma of their identities and the lack of competence that clinicians possess in providing quality care (Israel, Gorcheva, Walther, Sulzner & Cohen, 2008; Robinson-Wood, 2009). Early termination is common among those who do seek services as is the resultant negative viewpoint of counseling (Dorland & Fischer, 2001; Liddle, 1996). In addition, counselors have indicated that they feel ill-prepared to work with LGBT clients as their graduate programs did not place enough of an emphasis on this population (Dillon, Worthington, Savoy, Rooney, Becker-Schutte & Guerra, 2004; Farmer, 2011; Matthews, 2005; Robinson-Wood, 2009). Troutman and Packer-Williams (2014) argue that The Council on the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) has perpetuated this trend as they no longer specifically mention programmatic components which address developing competence for practice with the LGBT population in their most recent set of standards (CACREP,

2009). CACREP does however include sexual orientation in their working definition of multicultural.

For the purposes of this study, the lesbian, gay and bisexual subgroups of the larger LGBT population were selected as they have been subjected to the most inquiry. The transgendered and queer subgroups were omitted as the nature and expression of these identities should be considered as separate research endeavors given the varied venues of expression, identity endorsement, and general scope of the sub-identities.

Given that positive depictions of LGB individuals in popular media has increased with time, along with several states validating the relationships of this population, there is still more to be learned about how those who identify as sexual minorities come to realize their identities. Positive depictions in popular media have also been shown to aid in the identity development process as the LGB identification is more normalized in the context of the programming (Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011).

LGB sexual identity development has received the focus of researchers for some time (e.g. Cass, 1984; Troiden, 1989; Savin-Williams, 1990; Fassinger, 1991). Numerous models have been proposed, however, a single unifying model which incorporates all facets of LGB identity development has yet to be offered. Moreover, the conceptualization of LGB clients during the progression of developing a coherent sexual identity places many clinicians at a fundamental disadvantage as they may attempt to conceptualize these clients using heterosexual models of identity formation. The researcher therefore argues that client conceptualization is further complicated by the question of what impact ethnicity and gender have on the process of LGB identity development. It should also be noted that the development of a coherent holistic model

of sexual identity development is also complicated by between-group as well as within-group differences (Worthington & Reynolds, 2009).

Stage models of sexual identity development, proposed in the latter half of the twentieth century, attempted to identify a specific linear progression of development. These models were initially posited by seminal researchers Cass (1979), Troiden (1979), and Coleman (1981) and subsequently expanded upon by other researchers such as Savin-Williams (1990), Fassinger (1991), and Lipkin (1999). As inquiry continued on this topic, lifespan models were offered by such researchers as D'Augelli (1994), Fox (1995), Klein (1993), and Rhoads (1994) that considered sexual identity development in a broader context. While each of the two general conceptualizations of LGB sexual identity development has its strengths with the population which provided data, the researcher argues that each also has fundamental shortcomings as it relates to those who are other than Caucasian males. These shortcomings indicate that more research is needed in this area.

Many models of LGB sexual identity development exist for clinicians to conceptualize their clients but few have been empirically tested or have used a diverse enough sample to make them generalizable to ethnic minorities (Cox & Gallois, 1996; Eliason, 1996). The impact of gender also has not been considered as a factor which leads individuals on a different developmental trajectory over the course of their identifying as LGB. Given that clinicians must have a firm perception of their clients beyond the client's presenting concerns, their understanding of their clients' quality world and the evolution of their identity is limited by models which have not taken into

account the 'whole' person. The deficiencies of these models as related to women and ethnic minority men will be expanded on further in Chapter 2.

Sexual identity development for those who identify as LGB is particularly unique in that there are more factors which contribute to the progression and resultant firm identity than those for their heterosexual counterparts (Glover, Galliher & Lamere, 2009). For instance, research has indicated that factors such as family of origin, social class, positive identification with peers who have a similar identity, and the availability or support resources have a marked impact on the development of a solid sexual identity (Rosario, Schrimshaw & Hunter, 2008). These factors, while also present in their heterosexual peers, have less impact on the sexual identity of the majority population which resides in a heteronormative society where developmental milestones and expectations are clear (Brown, 2002; Cox & Gallois, 1996). Moreover, identifying as LGB has increasingly moved from an endeavor reserved to late adolescence and early adulthood to an endorsement of the identity in childhood and early adolescence (Calzo, Antonucci, Mays & Cochran, 2011; Rust, 2008). This is not a factor included in many models of sexual identity development (Calzo, Antonucci, Mays & Cochran, 2011; Floyd & Bakeman, 2006). Another factor to consider is within-group ethnic-based differences that individuals experience during the course of sexual identity development (Worthington & Reynolds, 2009).

The early stage models of sexual identity development were based on the conception of a homogeneous population of males (e.g. Cass, 1979 & Troiden, 1979). In the researcher's analysis, these models made no reference to the impact of ethnicity and gender on an individual's progression through the proposed universal stages. While it is

widely understood that different ethnicities have varying views on what it means to identify as LGB, can be argued that the resultant impact of that family system on the individual which may delay, accelerate, or make void aspects of the models. Moreover, the gender of the individual who identifies as LGB within his or her ethnic group can also impact the manner in which he or she progresses through the developmental models.

Also of note, the earlier models were established over 50 years ago when the United States was a much different country as it relates to social issues and the visibility of non-dominant groups. In fact, those who identified as LGB lacked presence. As such, the question then becomes whether or not these models remain relevant for those who have developed an LGB identity in contemporary society? Clinicians who espouse the validity of these models, either for their linear simplicity and/or choice of theoretical orientation, attempt to generalize from a model which by definition cannot be generalized given the manner in which it was developed. Further, while recent studies have attempted to provide possible modifications on the models (e.g. Adams & Phillips, 2009; Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter & Braun, 2006; Maguen, Floyd, Bakeman & Armistead, 2002), these new studies also have not sampled ethnic minorities or women in a manner which will make their own modifications generalizable to a more diverse and open generation of LGB individuals in contemporary society.

Statement of the Problem

It is the researcher's opinion that the sexual identity stage models currently available have failed to address the impact of ethnicity and gender on the development of a sexual minority identity to an extent that the findings would be generalizable to the entire LGB population. While there have been a few researchers who have attempted to

expand on what is known about the manner in which ethnicity or gender impact progression through the stage models, sample sizes have been small and in many cases were derived from data that was collected with other research goals in mind. For example a study conducted by Dube & Savin-Williams (1999) utilized data that was collected for census purposes and therefore lacked the data points necessary to make proper inferences. Several qualitative studies are also available which indicate the need for more research on the impact of ethnicity on sexual identity development as a whole but they have not addressed the stage models specifically. Finally, specific inquiry based on the combined impact of ethnicity and gender on sexual identity formation is absent from the current body of knowledge.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide the study:

- 1) How do ethnic minority males and females come to endorse an identity as lesbian, gay, or bisexual?
- 2) What are common developmental trajectories between- and within-groups?
- 3) Is the progression of ethnic minority males divergent from the stage models?
- 4) Is the progression of ethnic minority females divergent from the stage models?
- 5) Is the progression of females divergent from stage models?

The process by which the answers to these questions were derived is discussed further in Chapter 3.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the stage models of LGB sexual identity development. More specifically, the researcher attempts to discover the impact of ethnicity and gender on sexual identity development. In doing so, the results will be added to the knowledge provided by other studies which have attempted to capture some facet of the influence of ethnicity and gender on the progression through the stages espoused by current models. Therefore, this study will increase the knowledge base and lead to more detailed and specific inquiry. In a larger context, the goal of the study will be to provide both counseling students and practitioners with a better understanding of how ethnicity and gender interact with an individual's identity as lesbian, gay or bisexual.

The findings derived from this study will serve as the foundation of a larger research agenda to develop a generalizable, empirically-valid theory of LGB sexual identity development which considers the 'whole' person not only as a sexual minority but also in a social context. Given that it has been noted that the context in which individuals develop their identities is a determinant of the course, it is hoped that this study will help to add more knowledge to this idea (Brown, 2002; Cox & Gallois, 1996).

Conceptual Framework

The current study was based on the tenets of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Within this framework information collected through interviews was used to develop a working theory of how participants experienced their development of an LGB identity. Over the course of coding the interviews, categories and themes were generated. It was assumed that each participant will have uniqueness about her or his path to self-discovery and concordant narratives centering on ethnicity and gender which the data

show. The content of the completed interviews were based on the work completed by Loicano (1989) as he sought to understand sexual identity development in African Americans.

Grounded theory, as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), was chosen over that of a phenomenological approach. While phenomenological inquiry would be able to describe how the participants experienced their development, the researcher would be unable to allow for the operationalization of a working theory for practice afterward. The grounded theory approach provides an explanation for the differential development of a gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity.

Participants were recruited with flyers sent to LGBT community centers in the southeastern United States. In an effort to recruit additional participants, LGBT student organizations on college campuses in the southeastern United States were contacted via electronic communication. Requirements for participation included: identifying oneself as lesbian, gay, or bisexual; identifying oneself as a member of an ethnic minority group (e.g. African American, Asian American/Pacific Island Native, Latino/a, or Native American Indian, etc.); developed his or her LGB identity while residing in the southeastern United States; aged 18 or older. Sampling was as purposeful (McMillan, 2004) as possible in that the intent was to try to control for the overrepresentation of males found in previous studies and to adequately represent ethnic minorities as equitably as possible. Additionally, it was hoped that the initial call for participants would generate a snowball sampling (McMillan, 2004) technique.

Operational Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions are provided:

Coming Out: “To recognize one’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or sex identity, and to be open about it with oneself and others.” (Gender Equity Resource Center, 2013)

Bisexual: “A person who is attracted to two sexes or two genders, but not necessarily simultaneously or equally.” (Gender Equity Resource Center, 2013)

Ethnic Minority/ies: “A group of people with the same culture and traditions who live in a place where most people have a different culture and different traditions.” (MacMillan Dictionary, n. d.)

Ethnicity: “The recognition by both the members of a group and by others of common social ties among people due to shared geographic origins, memories of an historical past, cultural heritage, religious affiliation, language and dialect forms, and/or tribal affiliation.” (Pinheiro, 1990)

Gay: “A man who acknowledges his homoerotic orientation and incorporates this knowledge into his identity and carries this identity into interpersonal relationships.” (Robinson-Wood, 2009, p.229)

Homosexual: “Attraction to the same sex for physical and emotional nurturance.” (Robinson-Wood, 2009, p.229)

Lesbian: “Women who are attracted to women.” (Gender Equity Resource Center, 2013)

Race: “A group of people of common ancestry, distinguished from others by physical characteristics, such as hair type, color of eyes and skin, stature, etc.” (Sinclair, 2000)

Sexual Identity: “The deep-seated direction of one’s sexual (erotic) attraction.” (Gender Equity Resource Center, 2013)

Stage Models: Sexual identity development models based on the study of the sexual minority population which posits that development of a lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity occurs in specific stages.

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope and Delimitations

It was assumed that those who chose to participate in this study had achieved a solid identity as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. While it was difficult to measure this to an extent which is verifiable, it can only be determined by using qualifying questions contained in Appendix B prior to engaging in the full interview. It was further assumed that participants would have an appropriate level of recall as questions will be retrospective in nature and require participants to have a reasonably adequate level of recall. Unfortunately this limitation could only be controlled by conducting a longitudinal study which was beyond the scope of this thesis. A final assumption was that participants will have achieved ethnic identity synthesis.

A limited number of ethnic minorities were represented. Also to be considered was the impact of region on the sample. Given that the participants were recruited in the southeastern United States, their experiences may differ from participants living in other parts of the United States. The results of this study, though not generalizable to other populations, may be used to form the foundation of future research endeavors purposely tailored to specific ethnic minorities and women.

Significance

Knowledge Generation

As stated previously this study was intended to sharply focus the research lens on specific differential developmental trajectories of individuals who identify as lesbian,

gay, or bisexual. Programmatic as well as practice recommendations will be offered to begin to better prepare students and practitioners to serve this population. Therefore, by adding to the knowledge base, it is hoped that not only will clinicians be more informed regarding therapeutic work with this population, but they will also have a paradigm to work from. This paradigm would include the fundamental impacts that ethnicity and gender have on the sexual identity development process which should be included in existing stage models.

Professional Application

There is a paucity of studies which specifically address the impact that ethnicity and gender have on the progression of individuals through the stage models of development. As counseling clients who identify as LGB increase in numbers, clinicians and academic programs must be afforded more holistic ways in which to conceptualize the entire population—not only Caucasian males. Given that research has attempted to address LGB identity development in general, it has left out key components which impact the manner in which individual's come to endorse their identity.

Social Change

Current studies indicate that the age at which an LGB identity is espoused has become younger and younger over time which places both parents and school counselors at a disadvantage (Calzo, Antonucci, Mays & Cochran, 2011; Rust, 2008). Therefore, the relevance of this study is both timely and necessary as counselors will begin to work with a population that has been stigmatized and often ignored. As more focus begins to be placed on the experience of the LGB population, the development of their identity will

begin to move from the fringe and enter the mainstream conversation as a matter of routine instead of an afterthought.

Conclusion

This study is meant to begin filling a gap in the research literature regarding the impact of ethnicity and gender on the sexual identity process of those that identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. This inquiry brings to question the validity of the stage models currently offered for their lack of focus on the bearing ethnicity and gender have on the developmental process. A grounded theory approach was used to answer the following question: How do ethnic minority men and women come to endorse a lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity and are there between- and within-group differences?

The study is intended to both inform and provide the foundational basis of a larger focus of inquiry related to the impact of ethnicity and gender on the sexual identity process of lesbian, gays, and bisexuals. Chapter 2 will review the relevant literature as it relates to the lack of current research on the topic as well as the noted impacts of minority statuses. Chapter 3 will introduce the method by which the study will be conducted, followed by Chapters 4 and 5 which will reveal the results and discuss their implications for practice, future research, and the development of a comprehensive theory of LGB identity development.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

Introduction

This review of the literature regarding the stage of models of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) identity development focuses on providing support for further inquiry into the impact that ethnicity and gender have on the progression of individuals through the stages as prescribed. The stage models posited by Cass (1979), Troiden (1979), Coleman (1982), and Lipkin (1999) will be summarized and critiqued. These four models served as foundational research for many stage models that have subsequently evolved. A review of the models will be followed by an overview of the deficiencies in the models including methodological shortfalls. Literature regarding the impact of ethnicity and gender on LGB identity development will then be reviewed and alternative models will be presented. The chapter will conclude with a summary which will provide the rationale for the validity of the study.

Literature for this review was located primarily by utilizing article databases such as Academic Search Complete and PsycINFO. Sources included which did not originate from the article databases were located by references included in the reviewed articles. Common keywords used in the searches, either as single keywords or combinations, included but were not limited to the following: LGBT identity, coming-out, stage models

of sexual minority development, ethnic minorities, two-spirit sexual minorities, sexuality development, gender, female, gay, lesbian, and bisexual.

Stage Models

The specific stage models offered by Cass (1979), Troiden (1979), Coleman (1982), and Lipkin (1999) are examined in this section. These models were selected because they have provided the basis for many stage models since. The model provided by Cass is given the most credence in this section as it has been the subject of almost all of the research to date. Endemic within stage models is an assumption that specific tasks are included in each specified stage which must be completed or experienced before moving forward to the next stage. Common to the stage models is also the assumption of an orderly linear progression with little deviation or the re-visitation of previous stages.

Cass' Model

Cass (1979) provided a linear six-stage framework by which to conceptualize members of the lesbian and gay population:

1) Identity Confusion

- This stage is characterized as confusion in that behavior could be defined as homosexual. Three possible paths are identified. The individual could consider the possibility of the identity and develop either a positive outlook, a negative outlook, or reject the identity entirely.

2) Identity Comparison

- The acceptance of a potential identity is espoused in this stage. Feelings of alienation are postulated to be present along with a consideration of initiating contact with others who identify as lesbian or gay. Four possible paths for negotiation are considered based on the individual's desirability of self-perception and behavior.
 - i. Grieving for the loss of their heterosexual identity and the benefits of that identity.
 - ii. Compartmentalization of their sexuality.
 - iii. Acceptance of lesbian/gay definition of behavior while maintaining a heterosexual identity.
 - iv. Consideration that this is temporary.

3) Identity Tolerance

- In this stage an increasing acceptance of a potential homosexual self-image is present. The individual is assumed to be selectively seeking out the company of other homosexuals for social, sexual, and emotional needs. While disclosure of the identity to heterosexuals is limited, two paths exist which are still grounded in desirability of the identity. These paths are framed by the quality of interactions with others who have espoused such an identity.

4) Identity Acceptance

- An increased contact with the lesbian and gay culture leading to a network of others is postulated in this stage. A passing strategy is

perceived to be endemic coupled with selective self-disclosure. The possibility of foreclosure is predicted dependent on whether the individual is able to avoid the negative impact of identifying as homosexual.

5) Identity Pride

- Loyalty to the lesbian and gay population is proposed to be fundamental to this stage as the individual discredits those who identify as heterosexual. In addition, anger based on the societal stigmatization of the identity is assumed to lead to disclosure in an effort to prove the validity of the emerging identity. Foreclosure of the identity or movement to the following stage is predicated on the degree of incongruency related to confrontation of the identity (positive vs. negative).

6) Identity Synthesis

- The homosexual-exclusive identity is transcended as inaccuracy of labeling those who appear to be homosexual is discovered.

In developing her model, Cass (1979) perceived identity as a cognitive construct formed by interaction with society and Eurocentric expectations of behavior. She tested her model by matching individuals on aspects of certain stages at the exclusion of considering other stages (Cass, 1984). While the results obtained supported her model, it should be noted that her sample size was small, there was no consideration for ethnicity, and the analysis did not indicate differences related to gender. It was found though that Stages 1 and 2, and Stages 5 and 6 were blurred as some participants could not be placed

firmly in one or the other. There is, however, support for the theory which will be covered in the section on Affirmation of the Stage Models.

Diversions from Cass

In attempting to validate Cass' model Kahn (1991) found that some individuals appear to experience courses of development which are fundamentally at odds with the model. In this study, 81 lesbians were administered measures which would explore their identity development. The sample used was described in terms of education level with no reference to ethnicity. It was found that contrary to the notion of an expected universal linear progression of identity development, the participants instead espoused varied courses. Of note, five distinct patterns of differential development were actually discovered.

In an additional study consisting of 12 Caucasian lesbians, Degges-White, Rice & Myers (2000) found that the order, progression through the six stages, and the existence of all stages was inconsistent with Cass' model. They continued by stating that Identity Acceptance could be placed before Identity Tolerance which provides support for a nonlinear process. Caution is similarly encouraged in the interpretation of their results given the small homogenous sample size.

Investigating the validity of the Cass model further with a somewhat diverse sample of 143 adults, it was found by Van de Meerendonk & Probst (2004), that individuals experience simply two phases in the development of their identity, either fully integrated or unintegrated. Differentiation among the stages also was not present in their results as individuals conceptualized development on a continuum.

With a relatively diverse (25% identifying as an ethnic minority) sample of 855 participants of whom 49.6% self-identified as male and 43.5% self-identified as women, Greene & Britton (2012) sought to determine what the impact of shame, internalized homophobia, emotional ambivalence (difficulty choosing an emotion to express), and personal mastery (firm knowledge of self) had on the development of a homosexual identity by utilizing an anonymous online survey. Partial support for Cass' model was found in that the developmental challenges posited by Cass were also espoused by their sample. The researchers also contend that internalized homophobia and emotional ambivalence form a foundation for the model. Affective variables were also suggested in conceptualizing homosexual individuals as these are absent in the Cass model as proposed.

Olive (2012) in a qualitative study of gays and lesbians, found a complete absence of the Identity Pride phase with progression to a foreclosure of identity similar to the Identity Synthesis stage of the Cass model. This finding indicates that progression/experiencing in all stages was not consistent with the sample studied. While the sample utilized in this study equally represented with three males and three females, it was nonetheless lacking a diversity component in that four of the six participants identified as Caucasian.

In considering ethnicity with a small ($n = 6$), gender balanced sample of Native Americans, Adams & Phillips (2009) also found support for skipping stages and absence of the Identity Pride stage by utilizing a modified grounded theory methodology. It was similarly found that Native Americans did not experience alienation in their own community; passing behaviors ascribed in the Identity Acceptance phase also were not

present. Racism present in the LGB community also appeared to impact the ability for individuals to progress past Stage 2 in an effort to begin developing contacts with others who identify as LGB. Their results suggest the existence of two paths. One which follows the Cass model and one in which many of the key experiences indicated by Cass are absent. Similar results were found in two studies of male Asian Pacific Islanders conducted by Chung & Syzmanski (2006). In the first study, 32 Asian American gay men were assessed for racial and sexual identity attitudes. Results of this study indicated that sexual identity differed more based on their level of assimilation to the U.S. The second study was based on interviews with 10 of the participants from the first study. Indications from this study indicated more focus on parallel developmental processes which were at odds with stage models of development. Both studies encourage caution in the interpretation of their results as the social placement of Native Americans and the level of acculturation of Asian Pacific Islanders are important confounds to consider.

Troiden's Model

Troiden (1979), built on Cass' (1979) model and relying on other previous models (see Plummer, 1975 & Ponce, 1978), proposed a four-stage model to understand LGB identity development:

- 1) Sensitization (Borrowed primarily from Plummer, 1978)
 - Occurring before puberty, this stage is characterized with an operating assumption that the individual is heterosexual. A feeling of marginality and being different from peers is realized, based on social experiences, but it is nonetheless non-definitional. The significance of the meanings attached to experience, instead of the experience itself.

It should be noted that Troiden bases his hypotheses of this stage on references to Anglo-American society and the expectations contained therein.

2) Identity Confusion (Also borrowed from Plummer, 1978, as well as postulations on Troiden's earlier conceptualizations of identity development.)

- In this stage the individual is assumed to begin to personalize feelings and/or behaviors based on their reflection of feelings related to the potential identity. A dissonance is also present as altered perceptions of the self, dualistic arousal patterns, stigma, and inaccurate knowledge pervade their experience. While it is proposed that the confusion is based on Anglo-American societal expectations, it is exacerbated by gender roles and the privatization of sexuality. Responses to the individual's experience of this stage are proposed to include: denial, repair (help seeking behaviors based on the Cass model), avoidance (also based on the Cass model), redefinition (temporal identity or the possibility of a bisexual identity also based on Cass), and/or acceptance (to diminish isolation based on an additional Cass foundation).

3) Identity Assumption (Based on Cass' hypothesized stages of Identity Tolerance and Identity Acceptance.)

- The timeline for the enacting of this stage is estimated to be during or after late adolescence. In this stage the identity becomes both a self- and presented identity to others who identify as homosexual.

Indicators present in this stage are assumed to include: self-definition, identity tolerance & acceptance, association with others, experimentation, and exploration of the homosexual culture. Troiden did note that definition for women would be earlier than for men due to sex-role socialization. In addition, the identity at this stage is tolerated instead of accepted. To compensate, stigma management/evasion activities are employed to include: capitulation (avoidance), minstrelization (stereotypical expression), passing, and/or group alignment (as cited in Troiden, 1989).

4) Commitment

- Identity disclosure is an option in this stage as well as an external indicator of a way of life. Adoption and self-acceptance of the homosexual identity is proposed to be endemic in this final stage. A distinction is made between internal and external dimensions at this point. Internal dimensions (those relevant to the self) include: the fusion of sexuality and emotionality, a shift in the meaning which is attached to homosexual identities, a perception of the identity as valid, an expressed satisfaction with the identity, and an increased level of overall happiness. The external dimensions (those displayed/evident to others) include: same-sex relationships, disclosure to heterosexuals, shifting stigma management strategies (covering and blending replace passing and group alignment), conversion (recognition of minority status, a virtuous sense of pride, and a drive to eliminate oppression).

In the development of this model, as with Cass', a Eurocentric approach was taken. While Troiden tried to describe general patterns, he broke from Cass' assumption that an endpoint will be reached, that a linear progression will ensue as postulated, and that progress can occur in a back-and-forth manner (Troiden, 1979; Troiden 1989). Also of note in this model, bisexuals were not considered in its conceptualization and the sample was primarily male.

Diversions from Troiden

In proposing a model for Asian Pacific Islanders (APIs) Hahm & Adkins (2009) postulate that Troiden's model is problematic. While Sensitization is what we'll assume to be the beginning of the process, for APIs this process is hypothesized to be difficult given that it is normal for them to suppress their individual desires and wants in favor of being "obedient sons or daughters." The acculturation process that APIs typically go through is also ignored in Troiden's model as those who are more acculturated to Western culture tend to progress differently than prescribed.

Coleman's Model

Coleman (1982) presents a five-stage model in an effort to characterize the development of a homosexual identity:

1) Pre-Coming Out

- In this initial stage the individual is assumed to engage in a rejection of the possible identity which may also include denial, suppression, and repression. While an awareness of the stigma that such an identity entails, difficulty exists in even considering the identity.

2) Coming Out

- Acceptance and the process of reconciliation of the identity are endemic in this stage. At this point the individual begins to disclose the identity and, based on the responses received, will continue to disclose or regress back to the previous stage.

3) Exploration

- Experimentation with the identity is posited in this stage as is initial and increased contact with the homosexual community. Negative experiences in this stage are predicted to cause the individual to possibly try to escape the identity.

4) First Relationships

- Attractiveness and sexual competence are perceived to lead an individual to crave more intense relationships.

5) Integration

- A synthesis of the public and private identities is expected at this point. The increase in self-acceptance is also predicted to enhance confidence.

Lipkin's Model

Offering an amalgamation of the three previous models, Lipkin (1999) offers a five-stage model:

1) Pre-Sexuality

- Feelings of 'differentness' pervade this stage. Stage of 1 of Troiden's model forms the basis.

2) Identity Questioning

- Stigma avoidance is active in this stage as feelings of ambiguity, repression, and same-gender feelings are experienced. The combination of Coleman's Stage 1, Stages 1 and 2 of Cass, and Stage 2 of Troiden provide the foundation here.

3) Coming Out

- Built upon Stages 2, 3, and 4 from Coleman; 3 and 4 from Cass; and 3 from Troiden; through the initiation of, and continuing contact with, the homosexual population, tolerance and acceptance of the identity is achieved. Measured disclosure and sexual exploration also ensue.

4) Pride

- By combining Stage 5 of Coleman and Cass; and 4 of Troiden, sexuality integration commences. Disclosure to others increases as well as the ability to manage the stigma of the identity.

5) Post-Sexuality

- Using Stage 6 of the Cass model, less importance is placed on the identity itself.

Overall, the models suggested by Cass (1979), Troiden (1979), Coleman (1982), and Lipkin (1999) assume a mostly linear, stage-exclusive course of development for those who identify as LGB. While Lipkin attempted to provide a model based on the three models prior, it is nonetheless an under-researched model as are Coleman's and Troiden's. With respect to the literature reviewed regarding these four models, it can be

seen that the Cass model is the most researched and critiqued model as her model was the foundation upon which the models that followed were based.

Common to all the models is an assumption that an individual progresses through a linear stage-specific process in the development of an LGB identity. It should be noted though that Troiden took a somewhat less regimented approach as he considered that individuals may regress and revisit previous stages. The stage models further make the assumption that the progression through the offered stages is universal with little deviation. While models can be a helpful addition to conceptualizing clients who identify as LGB, they are nonetheless incomplete with regard to the impact of gender and ethnicity.

Noted Deficiencies of Stage Models

Given that stage models are quite ubiquitous in the research body of knowledge, there have been many researchers who have pointed to their shortcomings. Endemic in their conceptualization, it is assumed that individuals will have a linear progression through the proposed stages (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Conversely though, in a diverse (37% Latino, 35% African American, 22% Caucasian, 7% Asian/other) longitudinal study of 156 lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths it was found that no typical pattern of progression exists for individuals (see Rosario, Schrimshaw & Hunter, 2008) and that differential patterns are almost certain to emerge upon further investigation as indicated by numerous studies. Using a largely homogenous sample (93.5% Caucasian) of 81 women Kahn (1991) found that cultural norms were critical in assessing African American lesbians as cultural norms are not considered in the stage

models. Using data from two previous research endeavors on ethnic minority males Dube & Savin-Williams (1999) contend that the stage models should be modified to include the impact that ethnicity has on LGB identity development as the patterns revealed did not coincide with what was proposed. Their findings further suggest that the timing, disclosure, and internalized homophobia differ based on ethnicity. In a largely racially homogenous (79% Caucasian) yet gender-balanced study of 72 gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth conducted by Floyd & Stein (2002), limited support was found for the stage models as multiple paths to identity development emerged. Five developmental paths were identified which were differentiated on timing with those who had early trajectories being more comfortable with their identity. In a study of 346 lesbians and 60 bisexual women, Rust (2008) found that the impact of social context is key in conceptualizing lesbians and a fundamental omission in the stage models as they focused on Eurocentric expectations of behavior in absence of the larger culture. It was further found that bisexual women "come out" later in life and that changes in sexual identity could be expected in more mature women. Rosario, Schrimshaw & Hunter (2008) and Savin-Williams (2001) also note differential trajectories with some individuals indicating that their development actually began at a stage which was assumed would be reached only after achieving resolution in a previous one. Moreover the sequence with which individuals come to espouse an LGB identity also differed (Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999; Rust, 2008).

Some studies have also found that individuals may in fact transition in a back-and-forth manner as they revisit previous stages (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Rust, 2008; Van de Meerendonk & Probst, 2004). While a rationale for this phenomenon was not

provided by the researchers, it can be assumed that individuals not only take a nonlinear path but they have an inclination to revisit previous stages perhaps to resolve some of the tasks indicated within them. Further, the implication of an endpoint is assumed in the stage models which take further exploration, modification, or clarification of an identity as LGB out of the realm of consideration once individuals have reached identity foreclosure or the acceptance of the newly formed identity (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Cass, 1984; Fassinger, 1991; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Savin-Williams, 1988; Troiden, 1989). Also absent from many of the earlier stage models is the lack of consideration for the potential impact ethnicity and gender have on the progression, non-progression, or varied progression of individuals through the models (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Cass, 1984; Fassinger, 1991; Savin-Williams, 1988; Troiden, 1989).

Lack of Research on the Impact Gender & Ethnicity

While research on the stage models of LGB identity formation are present in the current body of knowledge, very little of this research has been focused specifically on the impact that ethnicity and gender have on the development of this identity (Bates, 2010; Grov, Bimbi, Nanin & Parsons, 2006; Chung & Syzmanski, 2006; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993). As such clinicians, endeavoring to conceptualize their LGB clients, may be inclined to utilize a model which is not entirely appropriate with female and ethnic minority members of this population. The propensity for this occurring is further indicated by graduates of counseling programs which do not focus on developing competencies with the LGB population (Dillon, Worthington, Savoy, Rooney, Becker-Schutte & Guerra, 2004; Farmer, 2011; Matthews, 2005; Robinson-Wood, 2009).

Numerous researchers have concluded that ethnicity has a marked impact on LGB identity development and should be given more attention in research efforts as it relates to competing identities (Chun & Singh, 2010; Chung & Syzmanski, 2006; Grov, Bimbi, Nanin & Parsons, 2006; Loicano, 1986). Other factors which need to be considered in those competing identities are families of origin (Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999), and the experience of women (Calzo, Antonucci, Mays & Cochran, 2011; Floyd & Bakeman, 2006). With regard to gender specifically, empirical support has been indicated for the impact of gender in the formation of an LGB identity (Bates, 2010; Brown, 2002; Calzo, Antonucci, Mays & Cochran, 2011; Floyd & Bakeman, 2006). These studies will be detailed further when the specific impact of gender and ethnicity are considered.

It is noted that research on the impact of competing identities (gender vs. ethnicity vs. sexuality) is lacking as more focus should be placed on this phenomenon (Chung & Syzmanski, 2006; Grov, Bimbi, Nanin & Parsons, 2006; Loicano, 1986). In addition, the relative paucity of research pertaining to how ethnicity in and of itself hinders or assists in the development of a positive LGB identity requires much more exploration (Grov, Bimbi, Nanin & Parsons, 2006; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993). For example, the resultant impact of being an African American lesbian, as it pertains to sexuality development, has been indicated in research conducted by Bates (2010). In her qualitative study using grounded theory with 12 African American lesbians and bisexuals Bates found that the women's inability to explore their sexuality based on cultural norms significantly impeded the development of a positive lesbian identity. Also found were additional societal and cultural expectations which placed the individual in a 'this or that paradox.' Women had to choose either what was expected of them or risk alienation to

pursue an identity which is not in-line with the cultural expectations. Further, the study found that many of the women were taught to fear sex and regard it as an unapproachable topic, which was found to be opposite in their Caucasian counterparts (as cited in Bates, 2010). It could therefore be assumed that while recognition of same-sex feelings would be apparent, progression through stages as indicated by the stage models would be extremely difficult or even impossible without risking a vital support network (Bates 2010).

Stage models continue to be questioned for their validity on a wide range of tenets (Diamond, 1998; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993) as new models are called for (Floyd & Bakeman, 2006; Glover, Galliher & Trenton, 2009). The current models are increasingly being deemed insufficient for practitioners to properly comprehend the process of LGB identity development (Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999; Olive, 2012; Van de Meerendonk & Probst, 2004).

Impact of Ethnicity

While research with regard to the impact that ethnicity has on LGB identity development is sparse, studies do exist that indicate that this is an area in need of further inquiry. In a study conducted by Maguen, Floyd, Bakeman & Armistead (2002) consisting of 117 individuals (63 males, 54 females) who identified as LGB it was found that African Americans (11%) tended to be more selective in disclosure which stunted continued progression through the stages of the models detailed earlier. In a diverse (37% Latino, 35% African American, 22% Caucasian, 5% Asian, 2% Other) study of youths (80 male, 76 female) aged 14-21, Rosario, Hunter, Maguen, Gwadz, & Smith

(2001) noted that while specific indicators related to the impact of ethnicity were absent, it could not be ignored that ethnicity can have a fundamental impact on identity development. Within group differences are also noted in a large somewhat diverse (24.4% ethnic minorities), gender-balanced sample ($n= 2,732$), which indicated the absence of a linear predictive model and instead lends credence to one that is multidimensional in nature as referenced previously (Worthington & Reynolds, 2009). In conceptualizing this population it has also been considered essential to use ethnicity as a significant context to frame their development (Bates, 2010; Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999; Lipkin, 1999; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993) and to further consider this as a unique stressor absent in the majority culture (Lipkin, 1999; Tremble, Schneider & Appathurai, 1989).

To illustrate these points further, let us first consider the African American subpopulation of the larger LGB population. It has been found that with regard to women in this subpopulation the lack of sexual education, heterosexual expectations, the impact of religion, and conflicting identities have the ability to stymie development altogether (Bates, 2010). Late onset of exploration and/or an endorsement of an LGB identity has also been seen since the code of silence that surrounds sexual issues, an obligation for males to carry on the family name, and the assumption that any activities which remotely resemble those engaged in by the larger sexual minority culture would lead others to an automatic assumption of this identity prior to the individual actually foreclosing on this identity (as cited in-Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999; Miller, 2011). Moreover, African Americans have also been found to engage in sexual activities prior to labeling and engage in a longer period of questioning or denial (Dube & Savin-Williams,

1999). In comparison to the stage models presented earlier, these issues were neither considered nor included as tasks in the stages proposed. Finally, these models, like many others, were developed within a Eurocentric paradigm.

Research on Asian Pacific Islanders has also yielded contradictory results with regard to stage models. In a previously detailed study conducted by Chung & Syzmanski (2006), it was found that the parallel process of racial and sexual identity development played a large role as individuals felt torn between dueling development processes. Further complicating and in some instances acting as a catalyst, the level of this population's acculturation was also found to be a force to consider as those still undifferentiated within traditional families will have a much more delayed process than those adopting a more westernized point of view. Contrary to the African American tendency to be sexually active prior to labeling, this population has been found to instead identify as LGB prior to engaging in sexual activity (Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999).

As a final ethnic comparison, Native Americans had a vastly different experience than their majority counterparts. Adams & Phillips (2009) found that social differences provided the main context for deviation from the models. Initial socialization and the expectation of a heterosexual identity, an assumption present in the stage models, was absent in this subpopulation. Alienation, discontinuation of passing behaviors, and the presence of the Identity Confusion and Identity Comparison Stages (Cass, 1979) also was not seen. Overall the researchers found the possibility of two pathways, Cass and Not Cass. Given that little has been written considering sexual identity development in this population, results of this study are accepted with caution as the sample used was small ($n = 6$) and not generalizable to all Native American tribes.

In returning to the concept of competing identities, Loicano (1986) appeared to have provided seminal inquiry as it relates to ethnicity and an LGB identity. In his gender-balanced study consisting of six participants it was found that individuals yearned for validation not only within their own community but within the larger LGB community as well. This is similar to what Miller & Parker (2009) indicated in their analysis of the level of influence that African American mothers have on the daughters' decision to identify as lesbian. Loicano (1986) also notes a need for individuals to integrate their identities while facing the stress of competing identities as African American and/or LGB. This phenomenon was also seen in further studies discussed previously (Chung & Syzmanski, 2006; Grov, Bimbi, Nanin & Parsons, 2006; Miller 2011). Granted that a small amount of studies have found that developing an LGB identity is not impacted by ethnicity, one can hardly ignore how those separate from the majority culture experience this process (see Bimbi, Nanin & Parsons, 2006; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993). Finally, it should be noted that these same studies call for more research into the impact that ethnicity has on the development of an LGB identity.

Impact of Gender

It has been stated that the stage models were typically developed using a Eurocentric paradigm. It should also be noted that these models were also created using a sample of mostly males. Given that being an ethnic minority is already a fundamental frame of consideration, the added frame of being female is now contemplated.

It has been found that gender differences play a key role in the pace of LGB identity development (Bates, 2010; Bimbi, Nanin & Parsons, 2006; Brown, 2002; Calzo,

Antonucci, Mays & Cochran, 2011; Floyd & Bakeman, 2006). In addition, the varying patterns referenced earlier were also present in samples with a large representation of women (Kahn, 1991; Rust, 2008). Not only were patterns in identification varied, it has also been found in a predominantly Caucasian sample ($n = 406$) of 346 lesbian-identified and 60 bisexual-identified women that the initial awareness of differentness occurred earlier (Rust, 2008) even though developmental milestones occurred later than men and they typically came out earlier in life than men (Calzo, Antonucci, Mays & Cochran, 2011). This differential developmental process has been validated by numerous studies which have found a more divergent process than what has been noted with men (Bates, 2010; Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Brown, 2002; D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998; Langridge, 2008; Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000). Moreover, the process tended to be more fluid for women (Glover, Galliher & Trenton, 2009).

Literature is sparse in this domain, which prompts more research to elucidate the experience of females who come to espouse a lesbian or bisexual identity. As historically marginalized members of society, it is of no surprise that research related to the female experience is lacking.

Other Contributing Factors

Factors other than gender and ethnicity have also been found to further complicate the LGB identity development process. For instance it has been noted that family values and religiosity are also a significant indicator in the progression towards and the endorsement of an identity as LGB. Utilizing a small sample of gay males ($n = 27$) of which 56% reported ethnic minority identities, Newman & Muzzonigro (1999) found that

family values and degree of religiosity can be a significant impediment to the development of an LGB identity. While the sample used in their study was small and consisted of only men, it was nonetheless ethnically diverse. This notion was also found in a previously discussed study conducted later with a small sample of African American lesbians (Bates, 2010). Hahm & Adkins (2009) also lend credence to this phenomenon as they proposed a model to capture the developmental process of Asian and Pacific Islander men using acculturation as an explanatory factor. Also as discussed earlier, Rust (2008) found that identity could be influenced by the fluctuating nature of the social context at a particular time for a particular reason. For example, in his study of mainly Caucasian lesbians and bisexual women, Rust found that identity was fluid and dictated by both time and a situational-based purpose for disclosure.

Some factors can also be considered to be key elements which assist in the healthy development of an LGB identity. Societal norms have been cited by Kahn (1991) as a facilitating force in identity development in her mostly homogenous (93.5% Caucasian) sample ($n = 81$) of lesbians. Rosario, Schrimshaw & Hunter (2008) also noted that supportive elements in society have been shown to have a positive expeditious effect on the development of an LGB identity in their research using a large ethnically diverse sample sourced in an urban area.

Finally, as our society has become more pluralistic, popular media has had a positive impact on LGB identity formation (Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011). In their study consisting of two stages, one using a survey approach and the other utilizing an in-depth approach, Gomillion & Giuliano (2011) found that positive LGB role models in popular media supported the participants' sense of pride and contributed to changes in both their

self-concept and self-worth. While these factors are somewhat out of the scope of this study, it is important to note that they were not considered in the models conceptualized by Coleman (1982), Cass (1984), Troiden (1989), and Lipkin (1999).

Methodological Issues

Stage models are often wrought with concerns as it relates to how they have been developed. Most commonly noted are the small homogenous sample sizes (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Johns, 2004; Kahn, 1991; Floyd & Stein, 2002; Mohr & Kendra, 2011; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Rust 2008). It has been recommended that larger sample sizes be utilized in validating these models (Adams & Phillips, 2009; Fisher, 2001) as researchers are perceived to have generalized a phenomenon without both a sample large enough or diverse enough (gender and ethnicity) to do so (Floyd & Bakeman, 2006; Floyd & Stein, 2002; Kahn, 1991; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Rust, 2008; Tremble, Schneider & Appathurai, 1989; Van de Meerendonk & Probst, 2004).

Also of concern is the method of data collection. Given that conducting a longitudinal study would be extremely complicated, most researchers rely on the use of retrospective recall. What becomes problematic with this data collection method, which also considered a limitation of the current study, is the potential for information degradation and false recall of pertinent events (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Calzo, Antonucci, Mays & Cochran, 2011; Floyd & Bakeman, 2006; Kahn, 1991; Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000; Rosario, Schrimshaw & Hunter, 2008). Additionally, the cohort effect of those who participated in such studies has been indicated to be problematic (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007; Kahn, 1991) as well as the region from which participants have been

recruited as some regions are notably much more free with sexual exploration (Calzo, Antonucci, Mays & Cochran, 2011).

Affirmation of Stage Models

Granted much has been stated regarding the gaps in the stage models, there also exists some support for their validity. For example, in a gender-balanced qualitative multiple-case study consisting of six participants of whom two were ethnic minorities, Olive (2012) found that espousing a specific identity label, such as LGB, was less of a concern for individuals so they therefore progressed without any stigma-related concerns and instead experienced a process very similar to the stage models albeit less publicly. It should be noted though that a small sample size was used in this study and readers were cautioned not to generalize the findings. Moderate support for the models was also found by Newman & Muzzingro (1993) in their study of the impact of family values discussed earlier; however, their sample consisted solely of males. Troiden's model has also found support in a mostly gender-balanced (47% female, 53% male) relatively diverse (24% ethnic minorities) sample ($n = 767$) of individuals who progressed through the stages only after entering adulthood (Floyd & Bakeman, 2006). Supporting research conducted by Grov, Bimbi, Nanin & Parsons (2006), using a large ($n = 2,733$) somewhat diverse (47.8% ethnic minority females) sample of primarily men (85%), found that minority status had no discernible bearing on the development of an LGB identity. While the data obtained in their study failed to support a noticeable impact of minority status on the formation of an LGB identity, the authors add that the presence of multiple identities cannot be ignored and that disclosure to parents was still problematic for the participants.

The lack of impact that ethnicity has on development was also found in a study with a diverse sample conducted by Rosario, Schrimshaw & Hunter (2008).

Suggested Alternatives and Direction for Future Research

In an attempt to compensate for what is missing in the current stage models, researchers are refocusing their lens of inquiry with the intent to develop a more comprehensive model. In responding to the need for models specifically addressing the bisexual population, Brown (2002) posited such a model. Building on previous research and using the stage models as a basis, a linear model for use with bisexuals which provides for a more holistic understanding of the experience of identity development was provided. Additionally, Chun & Singh (2010) proposed a model not only focused on bisexuals but bisexuals of color in an attempt fill gaps in the literature. In their model, identity is constructed in a sociopolitical context with consideration for multiple developmental processes which overlap providing what they consider to be a more holistic model of sexual identity development as they worked within all of the parallel processes to form an overall conceptualization of identity. This is similar to the interactionist tradition which Kaufman & Johnson (2004) considered to be a more appropriate method in working with the LGB population. In considering this notion further, it has also been proposed that identity development occurs on multiple dimensions (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Chun & Singh, 2010; Lipkin, 1999) and therefore, a multidimensional model, as proposed by Von de Meerendonk & Probst (2004) would be more appropriate. Affirmation of this model has been provided by some researchers as this model posits differential phases of development rather than linear stages (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). More comprehensive models which have a

life course approach (Floyd & Bakeman, 2006) or lifespan (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; D'Augelli, 1994) have also been suggested in order to compensate for the implied endpoint of many models.

Summary

The preceding literature review has not only evinced a need for further research as it pertains to what impact ethnicity and gender have on the development of an LGB identity, it has also pointed out methodological concerns in the construction of the stage models of development. In utilizing the models posited by Cass (1979), Troiden (1979), Coleman (1982), and Lipkin (1999) as a frame of reference in considering stage models, comparison to these models with the presented areas of opportunity for further inquiry were offered. While only three ethnicities were elaborated upon, these three were used simply to elucidate a need for further inquiry into how being a part of these groups can impact development of an LGB identity. As stated previously, research on LGB identity development has been largely focused on the Caucasian male experience with little regard for impact of ethnic minority status.

It is hoped that as a result of this study more will be discovered in an effort to form the foundation of further research. Overall this review has highlighted the need for further inquiry, problems associated with stage models, the impact that ethnicity can have on sexual identity development, and the finally the impact that gender imposes on sexual identity development.

Chapter 3 will discuss the research design as well as the methodology by which this study was conducted. It is then followed by Chapter 4 wherein the data obtained as a

result of the study is reported. Finally, Chapter 5 will provide a discussion of the implications that these results will have on the current understanding of LGB identity development, the proposal of a grounded theory approach to LGB identity formation, and directions for further research.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

In this chapter, the manner in which the researcher will identify the course of the development of a lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity (LGB) and the impact that gender and ethnicity has on that process is discussed. It was noted in the previous chapter that the predominant stage models posited by Cass (1979), Troiden (1979), Coleman (1981), and Lipkin (1999) used to conceptualize ethnic minorities and women who identify as LGB are insufficient. Further, the stage models assume that a specific linear progression through the predefined stages exists (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1981; Lipkin, 1999; Troiden, 1979). While there has been a lack of focus on the resultant impact of ethnicity and gender on the development of an LGB identity, other factors are also presented as possible variables to consider in the development of such an identity (i.e. family values, social context, societal influence, and popular media) (see Bates, 2010; Grov, Bimbi, Nanin & Parsons, 2006; Chung & Syzmanski, 2006; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993). Methodological issues have plagued previous research endeavors as well. Conclusions have often been drawn from small homogenous samples consisting of primarily Caucasian males which therefore cannot be generalizable to Caucasian women or individuals of color (see Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Johns, 2004; Kahn, 1991; Floyd & Stein, 2002; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Rust 2008). As such a new theoretical framework to conceptualize the LGB population is needed.

A qualitative approach framed by grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) provides the methodological basis for this study which focuses on the development of a theory to better understand the process of sexual identity development of ethnic minority men and women. The design of the study is therefore, presented. It is then followed by a description of the participants, the measure to be used, the process of data collection, coding, analysis, as well as the subjectivity/positionality of the researcher.

Study Design

Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) will be used to generate a new model for LGB identity development. In utilizing this approach, specific research focus is placed on how individuals have come to develop their sexual identity by exploring their experiences. The emerging theory will be grounded firmly in the data obtained during the study rather than from a priori assumptions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 3). Further, Glaser & Strauss posit that the main focus of the researcher's endeavor is to generate theory instead of validating or invalidating that which has already been proposed by use of comparative analysis (p. 28).

At its core, grounded theory seeks to “demonstrate relations between conceptual categories and to specify the conditions under which theoretical relationships emerge, change, or are maintained” (Charmaz, 2002, p. 675). With regard to the current study, Creswell (1998) has provided several main tenets of grounded theory of which the following were selected to frame this study: the aim is to generate or discover a theory; theory is derived from data acquired through interviews; theory asserts a plausible relation between concepts and sets of concepts; data analysis proceeds through identifying categories and connecting them; concepts based on data collection are

developed through constant comparison with additional data; data analysis proceeds from open coding through axial coding to selective coding around an emerging storyline; the emerging theory is then reported as a narrative or set of propositions. Of particular note with the use of this approach is that the theory which is produced through coding and analysis is 'grounded' in the data collected (Maxwell, 2005, p. 42-43). Grounded theory is based upon an emic approach instead of an a priori theoretical approach which was developed conceptually and then tested. As Glaser & Strauss (1967) state it:

Whether or not there is a previous speculative theory, discovery gives us a theory that 'fits' or 'works' in a substantive or formal area (though further testing, classification, or reformulation is still necessary), since the theory has been derived from data, not deduced from logical assumptions. (p. 30)

The research questions therefore will drive coding and analysis of the study. Data-based theoretical concepts will be discovered through the process of coding and analysis. The research questions which guided this inquiry include:

- 1) How do ethnic minority minorities and females come to identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual?
- 2) What common developmental trajectories exist both between- and within-groups?
- 3) How are the experiences of ethnic minority males divergent from the stage models?
- 4) How is the progression of ethnic minority females divergent from the stage models?
- 5) Is the progression of females divergent from stage models?

Participants

The sample consisted of two ethnic minority men (Japanese American and Native American) who identified as gay and one Caucasian woman who identified as lesbian. An equal number of both men and women were sought as purposeful (criterion-based) sampling was employed (see LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 69). Participants were recruited with the intention of achieving a level of saturation in analysis, however this was not accomplished. Saturation of data is indicated when the collection of new data does not shed any further light on the issue under investigation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For example, if responses to the interview questions begin to become relatively consistent, saturation would be said to have been achieved. Glaser and Strauss (1967) would consider this theoretical sampling as participants are sought in an effort to uncover, define, and further elaborate upon the boundaries and category relevance.

Prior to being selected for inclusion in the study, participants were pre-screened using the following questions which also served as demographic identifiers during data analysis:

- 1) How would you describe your sexual identity?
 - a. The individual must have a firm sexual identity which is classified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. The participant should not still be in search of or “questioning” this identity.
- 2) What is your ethnicity?
 - a. The individual must identify as an ethnic minority (i.e. African American, Asian American/Pacific Islander, Latin American/Hispanic, Biracial, etc.) or female.

- 3) Where did you grow up?
- a. The individual must have developed his or her identity while residing in the southern United States as defined by the U.S. Bureau. States included in this boundary consist of: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia (U.S. Census). A specific region is chosen in an effort to control for the impact of potential regional differences in identity development. Given that different regions of the United States have different levels of acceptance as it pertains to the LGB community, region was cited as a possible confounding variable by Calzo, Antonucci, Mays & Cochran (2011) and Rust (2008).

- 4) What is your age?
- a. Individuals must have reached the age of majority (18) to participate in this study. The age of majority is selected to eliminate the need for parental consent to participate in the study.

- 5) What is your gender?
- a. This is asked for purposeful sampling and demographics.

Interview Protocol

A semi-structured interview protocol was selected to permit a fair amount of flexibility as the interviews became more of a conversation during its course in an effort to build rapport. While progression through all of the questions was the goal, follow-up questions to permit further analysis and clarification were also used as necessary, which

is a noted advantage of a semi-structured interview protocol. All of the interviews lasted less than hour and all questions were answered.

In his endeavor to further understand the LGB identity development process of African Americans, Loicano (1989) developed a series of open-ended questions with the guiding hypothesis that progression through the developmental tasks posited by Cass (1979), Troiden (1979), and Coleman (1982), is not only complicated by an individual's status as African American, but is more than likely different for other people of color as well. This measure, based on the models mentioned previously, was slightly modified to meet the research objectives of this study. As such, the following questions guided the participant interview process:

- 1) When were you first aware of your same-sex feelings, or the sense that your sexual identity might be different from heterosexuals?
- 2) What was your first experience of "coming out" to yourself?
- 3) What has been your experience of "coming out" to others?
- 4) If there were barriers to you celebrating yourself as lesbian/gay/ /bisexual what were they?
- 5) What barriers do you believe existed for others celebrating you a lesbian/gay/bisexual?
- 6) What, if any, information seeking activities did you engage in during the process of "coming out"?
- 7) How would you describe your relationship to the gay/lesbian/bisexual communities over time?

- 8) What cultural norms do you think either helped or hindered your “coming out” process?
- 9) How do you believe your gender impacted your “coming out”?
- 10) Is there any aspect of your identity that you consider central at present?
- 11) If someone was to ask you how you identify, and you were comfortable enough to be open with them, what would you say?

Data Collection

Participants were first recruited via announcements mailed to community organizations in the southeastern United States which provide support to the LGB population. The announcement invited potential participants to engage in the interview process in an effort to help the LGB community. In an effort to recruit additional participants, an announcement was sent to campus-based LGB support programs in the southeastern United States as indicated by Campus Pride. To achieve a ‘snowball’ sampling effect, participants were also encouraged to refer others to participate if they meet selection criteria.

All interviews were conducted by phone with the data collection process beginning with informed consent from January to April 2014. Informed consent, information regarding confidentiality, the purpose of the interview, as well as IRB information were provided to participants prior to engaging in the interview process through email. Participants were then pre-screened utilizing the protocol contained in Appendix B. All participants who choose to participate met pre-screening criteria and chose not provide a pseudonym to protect their identity. The only other identifying information which was collected consisted of age, gender, ethnicity, and where they

currently live. All interviews were recorded for sound only and transcribed directly afterward. All sound files of the interviews were disposed of appropriately with only the transcripts being retained.

In an effort to reduce reactivity to the interview process and establish an open non-judgmental space, it was made known that the researcher is a part of the LGB community at the beginning of the participant selection process. The rationale for conducting the study was also disclosed as rapport was established.

Ethical Considerations

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the University of South Carolina for studies with human subjects was obtained by submitting the Human Subjects Application (HSA) prior to collecting data in December of 2013. Approval was obtained as an exempt study. As such participants were provided with the informed consent document so that a decision could be made on whether to participate or not, they were able to withdraw at any time, potential risks which were unnecessary were eliminated, the study was of benefit to the participant as well as society, and the study was conducted by a researcher who is versed in research methodology. Potential risks that may have been associated with participation in this study may have involved the resurfacing of bad memories related to a variety of events which may have occurred during sexual identity development (i.e. bullying, physical harm, etc.). While these situations did not arise, referrals to counselors who are able to assist participants in processing the experience were not necessary. Further, every effort was taken to protect participants' identities and ensure the confidentiality of their responses. For example, pseudonyms could have been used in data collection/reporting and only transcripts were retained.

Subjectivity/Positionality

Relation to Study

Being both a member of the LGB community as well as biracial, I embarked on my own unique process of identity development. I realize that identity development is a personalized and unique process for each individual; however, it is my belief that a general course of development which accounts for the impact of ethnicity and gender is possible. While I am under no false assumption that I will produce a 'one size fits all' theory from the experiences of ethnic minorities, I do believe that a foundational model for conceptualizing them can be generated. My own 'coming out' experience and path of identity development did not fit the stage models and I argue that support for ethnic minorities is sorely needed. This study will begin to lay the groundwork for my future research agenda with the LGB community.

Relation to Participants

The participants in this study are considered to be 'family' in that as an often marginalized, demonized, and misunderstood community we are all aware of our shared position in U.S. culture. As a biracial individual, I have experienced the combined societal impact of being judged as a person of color as well as a gay man. Given this, I am acutely aware of how being conceptualized by models and/or theories developed by Caucasian males using entirely Caucasian male participants has the potential to breed both misunderstanding and misdiagnosis. In taking into account positioning with the participants, I consider myself to be an 'insider' capable of understanding and empathizing with a dual developmental process (sexual identity & ethnic identity) which the literature has indicated occurs for LGB persons of color.

Implications of Positioning

While an identity as an ethnic minority is often more visually apparent than an identity of LGB, I was aware that it was necessary to sufficiently separate my own process of identity development from that of participants. For example, in being a biracial male, I have often been able to ‘pass’ as a member of the racial majority and culture and avoid much of the racism that is present in U.S. culture as well as the LGB community. Therefore, it was assumed that there would be many times where I would be unfamiliar with certain nuances of the unique experience of some of the participants. In considering this special care was taken in clarifying responses and in order to not fall into the error of making assumptions or oversimplifying what the participants considered salient and highly impactful experiences along the course of sexual identity development.

Subjective I’s

Peshkin (1988) introduced the concept of subjectivity by considering the various “I’s” that have the ability to shape research processes and outcomes. Considering my own I’s, I was aware that there a number of them of which to be aware. First, the “Counselor I” may have an impact on the data collected as they could be heard through a therapeutic filter as I may attempt to fix internalized narratives or provide my own vocabulary in place of their own. Further, I may have run the risk of framing the responses by using my own theoretical orientation which may result in aspects of the responses receiving more attention than others. Second, the “Biracial I” may have assumed that I experienced a process of cultural fusion similar to that of the respondents and mistakenly compare their process to my own instead of attending to the uniqueness of their responses. Third, the “Individualistic I” may not have appropriately explore the

impact that a more collectivistic culture places on maintaining norms or risk being distanced from the family of origin. While my family of origin was highly individualistic, this had the possibility of not viewing the participants' responses through the appropriate lens of 'family first.' Fourth, it is possible that the "Male I" may have assumed that I know the impact of gender. It was extremely important for me to approach this aspect with the same level of inquiry as any other aspect of the study. Fifth, the "Gay I" had the potential to overlook the complexity endemic in the development of a bisexual identity as the dichotomous societal view of the existence of a simply gay or lesbian label had the potential to influence my interaction with these participants. This however was not an issue as there were no individuals who identified themselves as bisexual who responded to recruitment requests. Finally, the "Researcher I" provided the balance over the course of the study as a keen eye was placed on the process. It was this final "I" which acted as the mitigating factor to the "I's" discussed as well as any other potential "I's" which had the possibility of emerging during the study.

Strengths and Limitations of Subjectivity Positionality

It is believed that my shared position as a person of color and a member of the LGB community were of benefit in that I could not only be a participant but I share the same concerns, fears, and hopes of those who were interviewed. In the somewhat toxic rhetoric which currently exists surrounding the LGB community, it was hoped that I was viewed simply as someone trying to help instead of someone trying to identify some maladaptive process. A considered limitation was my relative closeness with the population of interest. As such, care was taken to maintain a sufficient amount of distance while still focusing on rapport building during the interview process and

objectivity during data collection. With this in mind, I monitored my own subjective experiences vis-à-vis a personal reflection journal which was completed at the conclusion of each interview as well as during coding and analysis. In doing so, the data collected were referenced with my own subjective experience analyzing the narratives uncovered. There was no overly negative or positive personal experience with any of the participants. The quality, depth, and scope of the data gathered could have been cross-referenced with what was going on within myself during the data collection process had any of these experiences occurred. Therefore, by attending to determinants which didn't provide the most in-the-moment insight, I would have been able to be more aware of my reactions and how they impacted the process.

Data Analysis & Coding

All interviews were transcribed, verbatim, at the conclusion of each interaction. Prior to beginning data analysis, member checking ensued as the transcript of each individual's interview, as well as my field notes, were sent for verification to the individual via email in an effort to accurately capture what was communicated. Participants also were given the opportunity to offer comments on the accuracy of the interview and the notes. No discrepancies were noted and therefore clarification and corrections based on the feedback of the participant was not necessary. Analysis of the data was conducted using a process identified by Strauss & Corbin (1990). In this process, the data was first coded during the open coding phase in an effort to identify emerging categories. In this initial phase of coding, the codes produced were provisional as other codes emerged which better fit the data collected and highlighted gaps in the data (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Straus, 1967). Axial coding was then be utilized to connect

the categories as the researcher attempted to derive a course for the emergence of an LGB sexual identity. This phase of coding generated the categories specific to the phenomenon of interest, LGB identity development (LaRossa, 2005). The final phase was selective coding in an effort to identify the course of identity development. Over the course of data analysis memos were written to assist in the development of the emerging theory (Glesne, 2006). At the conclusion of coding, a theory on the course of sexual identity development and the impact of gender and ethnicity were offered.

Summary

This chapter presented the manner in which the course of development of an LGB sexual identity as well as the impact of gender and ethnicity has on this process will be derived. The grounded theory qualitative design of the study was discussed, followed by a description of the sample and recruiting methods, a presentation of the research instrument, data collection, and finally data analysis. Chapter 4 will detail the results obtained as a result of conducting the study while Chapter 5 will detail a proposed theoretical model and implications for practice as well as future research.

CHAPTER 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to discover how women and ethnic minority men develop a lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity. Of specific interest was the potential impact that gender and ethnicity have on the development of an LGB identity. This chapter will detail how the data were collected, the demographics of the sample, data analysis, as well as the dominant patterns which emerged. The description of patterns was chosen as the method of data synthesis as saturation was not able to be attained during data collection.

Data Collection

A total of 39 LGBT community centers were identified in ten out of 14 southeastern states by utilizing CenterLink: The Community of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) Centers (www.lgbtcenters.org). Each center was then mailed a packet of information containing an introduction letter and 20 color flyers to post or distribute in January of 2014. One center contacted the researcher back to obtain a digital text-only copy for distribution in their newsletter. This initial effort yielded two participants who were encouraged to communicate this opportunity to their peer group in hopes of attaining a snowball sample. A follow-up email was sent to the same 39 identified community centers in February of 2014 with both a text-only and a full-color flyer for digital distribution or duplication attached. In an effort to recruit more participants, this email process was duplicated in March of 2014 by identifying 37 college campus-based LGBT resource centers and student groups in 11 of 14

Southeastern states by utilizing Campus Pride (www.campuspride.org). This second effort yielded one additional participant. Data collection ended in April of 2014.

Sample Demographics

All participants who expressed interest in engaging in the study were deemed eligible based on the pre-screening criteria presented in chapter three and detailed in Appendix B. The sample consisted of three individuals who ranged in age from twenty-two to thirty-seven. Included in this sample were: one Caucasian female who identified as lesbian (Megan), one Native American male who identified as gay (John), and one Japanese American male who also identified as gay (Nick). The names presented are pseudonyms assigned by the researcher.

Data Analysis

All interviews were conducted by phone and recorded for sound only. The interviews were then transcribed by the researcher verbatim. Member checking then ensued as the transcripts were emailed to each participant for verification of content. After review by the participants, no discrepancies were noted and the data were ready for analysis as the researcher achieved face validity (Lather, 1986). The researcher produced both in vivo and descriptive codes during initial line-by-line coding of the first interview (Holloway, 2008). Protocol coding also occurred as the researcher also derived codes as a direct result of the utilized interview protocol presented in chapter 3 and contained in Appendix C. A personal journal and field notes related to each individual interview were maintained and referred to as necessary. At the conclusion of coding the first interview, a code book was established. These initial codes then guided the coding of the second interview which followed the same process as the first. Codes which emerged as a result

of the second interview were tracked and added to the code book established after the first interview was coded. This second iteration of codes was then used to code the third interview. As with the codes which emerged from the second interview, new codes from this interview were also tracked and added to the code book.

All of the codes which were derived from the interviews were reviewed and condensed with sub-codes then emerging. Codes were then grouped by common patterns, most of which were directly related to the interview protocol used during data collection. The major categories for these codes included the following: Awareness, Barriers, Community Engagement, Disclosure, Dissonance, Emotional Attachment, Facilitators, Identity, Information Search, Reaction, and Relationships, which are detailed in Appendix D. The revised code book was then used to recode the interviews for further analysis.

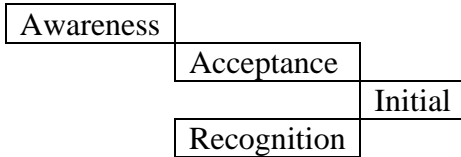
Dominant Patterns

Three main patterns emerged as a result of data analysis: Recognition and Progression of Identity Endorsement, which is defined as the participants becoming aware of their same-sex attraction and their course of coming to identify as LBG; Barriers to Identity Endorsement, defined as anything that prohibited or delayed the endorsement of an LGB identity; and Rejection of Categorical Labels, defined as the participants' apprehension with identifying with a certain label which characterized them.

Recognition and Progression of Identity Endorsement

Initial Awareness

Associated Codes:



The recognition of same-sex feelings was endorsed by two participants during the time of attending middle school. Identity dissonance was common among these participants as Megan commented:

"My best friend and I fell in love at 14 and I was like, well this is strange because she's a woman..."

John echoed a similar sentiment:

"...I realized that Shawn was my friend (and he) was also someone who I was attracted to (referring to a friend in middle school)."

The universality of this dissonance was normalized by both participants:

"I went through all the usual confusion I guess that everybody goes through..."

(Megan)

"I think that's when everyone starts feeling things." (Megan)

"... it seemed completely natural and normal to me..." (Megan)

Nick stated that he was aware of his same-sex attraction much earlier:

"...as a kid I guess, maybe around third or fourth grade."

General dissonance was also noted as Nick commented:

"...I remember liking, well not really liking but being attracted to girl(s) and a guy(s). So at that point I guess I was interested in both, but that was just more of the friendship thing 'cause at that age you don't really know about sex or attraction or anything."

"... you learn very quickly that you're deviating from the norm."

He disclosed later in the interview a more definitive awareness endorsement and normalized his dissonance around the age which was found in the other two participants:

"...maybe around middle school to high school, I would say that I started liking guys, not girls at all."

"I felt the emotions I had were normal."

There was an immediacy noted in the acceptance and endorsement of a gay identity with Nick:

"...as far as accepting it though, I mean, I feel like I accepted myself (middle school-aged)."

Initiation and engagement in an exclusively same-sex relationship was only found with Megan as she expressed:

"...we dated through high school and college..."

However, John Nick experimented with same-sex sexual activity and John engaged in same-sex dating.

Researcher: Did you ever experiment with anybody over the course of this time?

Nick: Uh, yeah.

"So she was dating a girl and I was dating a guy..." (John)

John recalled a more circuitous path as he first endorsed an identity which was heterosexual and then chose to express a bisexual identity which was more acceptable to his peer group:

"... I played the role of heterosexual, so I dated females..."

"I didn't realize that there was a line of bisexual which was socially acceptable. So I was like, hmm let's play with this idea because I obviously know I'm not into females. Like that's just not ok, for me. And I was like well, it's socially acceptable. Bi is ok for girls and socially acceptable. I was like, hmm seems ok for guys."

John also endorsed repression of his sexuality which was unique among the sample:

"I repressed being homosexual and I thought I was just bisexual, it was like a fleeting feeling. Like maybe I wasn't homosexual and this was just (an) experience phase.

"...but I don't think I acknowledged it for a while."

"So I tried not to act on feelings, I tried not to think about guys. Any time like the guy walked by and I'm like, oh he's hot. I'm like no, don't don't think about it.

Focus. School. Work. Like anything that reminded me that I was gay or drew my attention...you know on that, I was like nope, stop, put it away, box it."

While repression is notable with John, his feeling of his emerging identity as fleeting in his mind is something which could have been elaborated upon. This feeling appears to have continued as he stated that he didn't acknowledge it for some time. The actual manifestation of his repression is apparent in his final statement.

In contrast, full endorsement of John's gay identity occurred about two years later in his junior year of high school:

"...I was out and proud and didn't give a shit who knew or who cared."

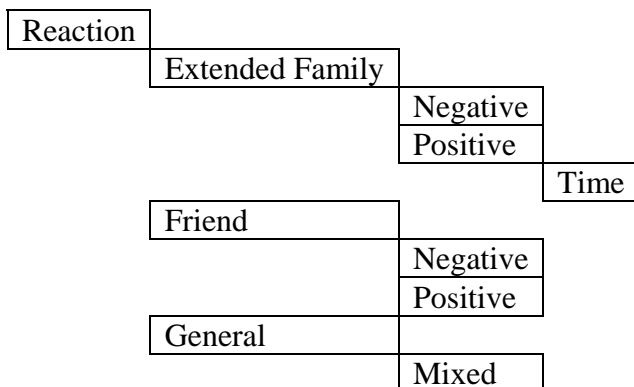
Of note, Megan's progression was quite unique in the sample as she initiated and maintained a married heterosexual relationship while still maintaining a connection to her initial same-sex interest:

"... we dated through high school and college, um after that we kind of, we stayed best friends but we kinda went our separate ways. She's, she will tell you she is exclusively lesbian. Um, I didn't really date people for a long time and maybe that was due to some like confusion. I don't know the therapist is still trying to pull all that out of out of my head. Um, ended up marrying a nice guy who um I was married to for seven years and stayed best friends with my best friend and finally two years ago we were like listen this is stupid we're still in love with each other. So, ditched the husband, back with the girlfriend."

Similar to John, this appears to be a type of repression while still maintaining an internal identity as lesbian.

Reaction

Associated Codes:



	Positive
Husband	
	Positive
Parental	
	Negative
	Positive
Peer Group	
	Bullying
	Positive
Sibling System	
	Mixed
	Negative
	Positive

Progression over the course of the sample developing their sexual identity was not without some turmoil. Megan recalled negative reactions from her peers which adversely impacted the relationship she was trying to maintain:

"...bullying of...bullying of sweaty little 14 year olds."

"...which caused a big strain in the relationship. It pushed us apart a little because it was like, ok you're ruining my life. Look at me ya know, I can't sit and eat (at) recess...can't sit and eat lunch at in peace and quiet."

Initial negative peer reactions were also noted by John which caused fear and repression:

"I was scared 'cause I I mean those feelings were there and I was like, I don't know what to do with those. So you bottle them up and you tuck them away and you try to be quote unquote 'normal.'"

Negative family reactions were also found with John and Megan. For John these primarily manifested with his extended family whom he was living with at the time of his emerging sexual identity:

"... we (Aunt and Uncle) got into this huge argument about how I wasn't willing to change..."

This reaction is indicative of the false assumption that sexual orientation can be changed.

This manifested in the parental dyad for Megan:

" My parents busted us at 14, which didn't help matters..."

"...my mother had no...I mean she had no clue about anything at that time and she was just like, 'You're gonna get AIDS. You're gonna die.'"

Religion appeared to be the basis of these negative reactions for both Megan and John:

"... I'm a sinner, I'm gonna go to hell. Umm...whatever God hates us."

"... religiously growing up Southern Baptist it was (a) major conviction to be gay, 'cause you're going to hell, fire and brimstone, you can't be gay."

This concept will be expanded on further in the following section which will detail the barriers to identity endorsement.

Positive reactions were also noted. These reactions came from parents:

"... my mom was fine with it..." (mother of John)

siblings:

"... my little sister's been very supportive..." (Megan)

"... are ok with it (and they) told me they love me and all that so..." (Megan)

"...my youngest sister seemed to wholeheartedly accept it." (Megan)

friends:

"... most of them already knew and they're like, 'Well I'm glad you're finally telling me.'" (Nick)

"... she was great about it." (John)

Facilitators

Associated Codes:

Facilitator	
Age	
Event	
Gender-Acceptance	
Self	
Societal	
Support	General
	Parent
	Sibling

Facilitators of identity development were also discovered. These came in the way of positive self-talk, recent social events (state-based legalization of gay marriage, Supreme Court rulings, etc.), and sibling support. Absent among these facilitators was a connection with the LGB community as it was found that the sample generally maintained their distance which counter to the stage models reviewed in chapter 2:

"... I don't associate with very many (LGB people).

I didn't associate with very many of them because they were too much for me.

Too much drama." (John)

"... as far as organizations go I've never been associated with any of them." (Nick)

"... haven't gone out and done (a) whole lot of things with 'ya know people that I don't know." (Megan)

This is notable as recruitment was conducted via LGBT community centers and LBGT support groups on college campuses.

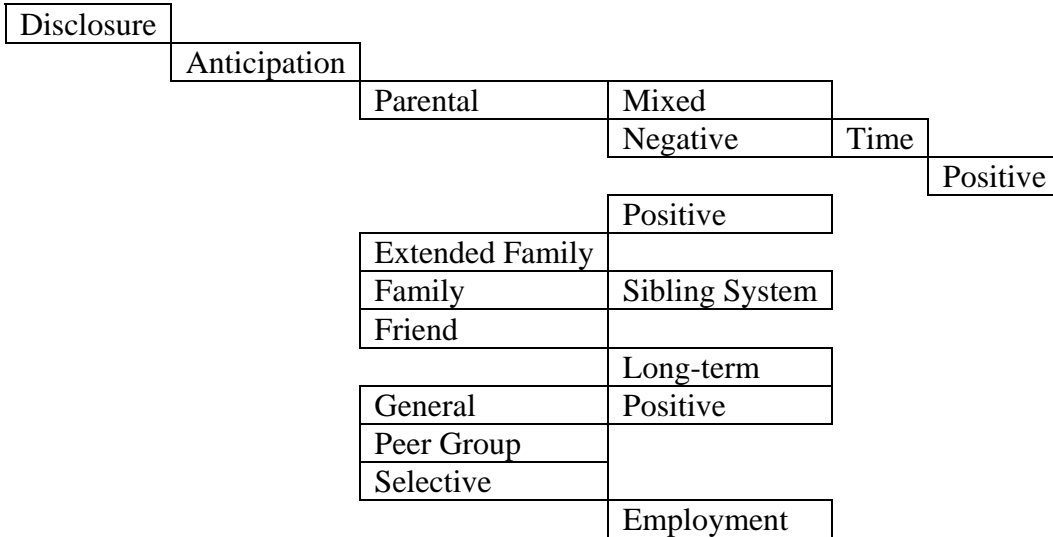
Conversely, the participants expressed their desire to become engaged with the community in the future:

"I'd like to do a lot of volunteering." (Megan)

"I would like to though, but I mean never been to any (events)." (Nick)

Course of Disclosure

Associated Codes:



All of the participants indicated that the first people they disclosed their identities to was a sibling or a friend. A specific ordinal arrangement of who was told when was not discovered. However, the parental dyad appeared to be the one disclosed to last. Nick disclosed to an extended family member, but has yet to disclose to his parents.

Gender

In considering gender as either facilitating or hindering the participants' coming out process, all three agreed that being female was much more advantageous than being male. The rationale given was that it is more socially acceptable for women to be gay than men. Giving the female perspective, Megan commented as such:

"I think it's much more acceptable umm...at least with...so far with my experience, I think it's much more acceptable for women to be gay still than men to be gay.

Lesbianism still has that, 'Oh they're lesbians. That's hot.' kinda of thing attached to it."

From the male perspective, John stated:

"I think it's easier for girls to be gay, because it's socially accepted, because...I'm guessing just the porn industry makes it easier for girls to be gay than men."

Nick echoed a similar sentiment:

"...as far (as) um this culture goes, being a lesbian or exhibiting lesbian behaviors is much more accepted than gay male behavior."

He also recognized that it's difficult to determine if being female is an advantage:

"Um, like I said I haven't had the female experience. I don't want to say that it's easier or harder or better or worse."

Culture

Associated Codes:

Barrier			
	Culture		
		Family	
	Religion		
	Social		
Disclosure			
	Anticipation	Parental	
			Mixed
			Positive
Dissonance	Identity		
Facilitator			
	Self		
	Societal		
	Support	Parent	
Identity	Dual		

With regard to culture, Nick offered his perspective as an Japanese American male:

"I think that the whole big stereotype about Asian guys being like very feminine and like impotent but like... I don't want to like you know represent that just 'cause I'm gay so like part of me wants to kind of like, I don't want to be too masculine and give, I mean feminine and give um gay Japanese guys like a bad name or anything."

Megan noted that cultural norms of her family:

"...my family's pretty... I mean we're...we're close, but we don't talk about the big issues and we certainly don't talk about the big issues that could be controversial."

While it is known that Native American culture has a much more accepting view of homosexuality (Adams & Phillips, 2009), this was not found to be the case with John's family:

"If I was living on a, you know reservation, I would be one, I would be greater than a warrior would be, but because I'm living in Tampa, Florida and consumeristic (sic) society, I was less than basically a second class citizen."

Information Search

Associated Codes:

Community Engagement	Nonexistent	
	Planned	
Information Search	Absence	
	Counseling	
	Friends	
	Internet	
	Literature	
Reaction	Extended Family	Negative

The search for information regarding the participants' emerging identities was varied with one John noting that it was expressly forbidden:

"...I couldn't read books or magazines, 'cause any time I went to the mall, umm my aunt would always scan my purchases and I remember I got um a book one time from a friend of mine that she gave it... some magazine... It was some gay magazine or a logo, something magazine. She gave me just the page of it and I remember my aunt found it and I came home one day and she's like, 'What is this?' and I was like... I just remember like my...it was a horrible horrible experience..."

For others, the internet was the main source of information, followed by friends who also identified as LGB, gay literature, and finally counseling:

"I googled. I googled everything and I read. I read a lot of other people's stories about how to come out. Umm, thankfully I was growing up in the age of the internet. So, I'm very thankful that we had [www.google](http://www.google.com) how to come out. Um, I couldn't read books or magazines, 'cause any time I went to the mall, umm my aunt would always scan my purchases and I remember I got um a book one time from a friend of mine that she gave it... some magazine... It was some gay magazine or a logo, something magazine." (John)

"Um let's see I have some friends in Greenville where I came from before I came to Columbia and they would tell me a lot of information because they would have um relationships and what not, but I just asked them about stuff I wouldn't really go out to places such as clubs or like bars or anything because it just never

happened I guess. Um I did look up a lot I mean I look up a lot of things online but I mean I guess I don't really search much for information." (Nick)

"Umm...I started talking with the counselor that I'm going to now." (Megan)

"Umm...I did read some novels of ya know girls dating girls. Umm...but novels aren't necessarily information, it was just um...just fiction." (Megan)

Current Expression

Associated Codes:

Identity	Expression	Gender
		Genuine

While each participant had a unique course of development, the endorsement of a genuine identity as lesbian or gay was universal. Their rejection of categorical labels did emerge as a source of dissonance. This will be detailed further in a separate section.

Barriers to Identity Endorsement

Religion

As alluded to previously, religion, in this case Southern Baptist, emerged as a formidable barrier to identity development and expression. John stated that his biggest perceived barrier was his extremely devout Southern Baptist extended family whom he lived with during the initial phase of his development. He comments on this and how he made a decision which helped facilitate his process of development:

"...I think that's probably the only thing that ever held me back from celebrating who I was, but then I became Lutheran. Lutheran(s) accepts gays..."

Megan continues with this point:

"...definitely their religious and cultural beliefs."

"... I went through the whole according to God this is wrong..."

"They just have...warped beliefs in my opinion."

Nick did not experience religion as a barrier as his experience was much different:

"...I looked it up and it says that pretty much it's not like a taboo 'cause

Christianity is not a big thing in Japan..."

Region

Associated Code:

Barrier	Religion
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As a condition of participation in this study, all participants must have developed their identity in the southern United States as defined in chapter three. As such, a pattern related to this regionally-bound sample was found:

"... definitely growing up being in a very southern environment..." (Megan)

"... for example, I'm in South Carolina and I don't want to blame it (barrier) on geography or anything..." (Nick)

"... I guess I would like to celebrate it, but I don't know many outlets..." (Nick)

Family of Origin

Associated Codes:

Barrier	Culture	Extended Family	
	Family Structure		
Disclosure	Anticipation		
		Parental	Negative
	Selective		
Reaction	Extended Family	Negative	
	Sibling System	Mixed	

As noted previously, familial reactions to the development and endorsement of a lesbian or gay identity were found to be varied. The majority of sibling reactions were mostly positive and supportive. Only one negative sibling reaction was expressed with Megan noting that her middle sister was:

"...hesitant to embrace it."

The reaction of parental dyads was mostly absent in that Nick (age 22) and Megan (age 37) had not disclosed their sexual identity to their parents at the time of their interviews. Given their age at the time of the interview, this is counter to what the models posit. While there were positive sibling reactions, only one of the participants had disclosed to his parental dyad and the other two had not out of fear of negative parental reactions. Granted that Megan expects a negative response she was hopeful that her parents would transcend this:

"I think that in time they're gonna overcome that and say, 'Ok, well whatever, you're still my kid, I love you.'"

Nonetheless, she was also aware of what they're concerns might be:

"I think that they're also gonna be very concerned about what...what are the neighbors gonna say? What is society gonna say? What are my friends gonna say? How do I explain this to people that I know?"

John reported a positive parental reaction, but offered little anecdotal evidence. Of note Nick expressed the limiting factor of his family structure as a function of perpetuating the family:

"... I'm the only guy in the siblings so that is kinda stressful."

He also expressed the uncertainty of disclosure to his father:

"I don't want to say that me coming out to my dad to be a horrible experience or that he'd judge me or anything like that because you know that's just based on my assumptions growing up, so like I don't want to be like, oh well if I say this then it'll affect us in this way and he'll freak out because I don't know anything about what it's like to come out to my dad."

His mother, whom he held in a more privileged capacity, was also a concern:

"...so I don't know how to break it to my extended family and if that would cause some kind of discomfort for my Mom which I'm definitely not going to do."

Culture

Associated Codes:

Barrier	Culture		
		Family	
	Religion		
	Social		
Disclosure	Anticipation	Parental	
			Mixed
			Positive
Dissonance	Identity		
Identity	Dual		

Although not found to be a pattern among all of the respondents, the notion of a dual identity emerged in the interview with John. The manifestation of this duality resulted in a fair amount of confusion for him:

"...I'm not only gay, but I'm also Japanese so I'm like on the tangent of like lots of cusps, 'ya know. So I'm just kinda like, you know, am I this, am I that? So, I guess as far as identity goes, that was a big problem for me, because I'm not only with my racial and cultural side, I'm also dealing with my sexuality. So that was a problem."

He also contrasted his own culture with that of mainstream America:

"... maybe American dads might seem more um accepting when their sons and daughter(s) come out, but it's not really talked about in Japanese culture so I guess, the lack of information (as it pertains to parental reaction) is daunting."

He continued by further elaborating on the cultural norms which continue to present barriers for him:

"... like conforming and being like part of the group and because it's a collectivist culture I guess like and they say that the nail that sticks out is the one that gets hammered."

"I don't know if like my dad has that mentality and he just doesn't want to acknowledge that I'd be gay or what not, but like I said it's not gonna come up in conversation..."

John expressed that it was the limitations of the cultures of others which presented a barrier for him. He made specific reference to a friend whose family was Muslim. In expanding on this, he stated that he was able to do things with his female friend that other males could not, but he was unable to express his sexual identity in an authentic way:

"We were best friends but, um whenever I go to her house I was allowed in her room and I could see her hair, because I was not straight. So like her brother couldn't see her with her hijab off. Her dad, like I could go out with her 'cause she has to have a male escort even though she's in America, which I never understood 'cause I thought they were trying to be liberated from all that, but I always thought that was interesting, but she could never um...like we couldn't talk about me being gay. I had to remain quote unquote straight, but I it was like a

loophole though, because I was gay I could see her hair, we could hang out 'cause they knew nothing was going to come of it, but it was like I could also maintain the male role and she can go out with me, but I don't know. So she could like say, "Oh, I'm going out with John." I don't know, it was just weird. So, I think that's ways culturally, she couldn't celebrate me being gay 'cause gay is not allowed in their culture. You're supposed stone someone if they're gay."

Religious and cultural beliefs were also indicated as barriers by Megan:

"...my parents were are Southern Baptists so they raised us in a pretty conventional, pretty religious you know conservative household, so I went through the whole according to God this is wrong, according to my parents this is wrong, according to me this is right."

"I don't know my family's pretty... I mean we're...we're close, but we don't talk about the big issues and we certainly don't talk about the big issues that could be controversial. So, that's one of the things that's hindered the conversation from even happening up until now."

Rejection of Categorical Labels

Associated Codes:

Identity	Dissonance	Label/Categorization
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The concept of a definitive label by which to identify with was a notion which emerged as problematic:

"... I don't know I still kinda grapple with the...with the labeling." (Megan)

"... labels are very black and white to me and it makes me feel like I have to say well I'm a lesbian, but, or (laughter) you know I'm married to this man, however, umm...so ya...more gray area, less black and white." (Megan)

"...I guess if you don't have to put yourself in a box, you have to think about it less. I mean I guess I think about it anyways, but like it wouldn't be any pressure to like identify yourself. Yeah so I mean I guess I I'm not really in any box and honestly there isn't a label for me that's out there and even well I'm looking for labels that fit me closely, there really isn't anything that fits me closely." (John)

John offered a label which he felt was more acceptable and controls for the stigma of being gay:

"I'm a guy who likes guys is typically how I identify myself. Only because I feel like homosexual has a negative connotation to it."

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine how women and ethnic minority males developed a lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity. The method of data collection, a demographic description of the sample, the method of data analysis, and the dominant patterns which emerged were presented. While a protracted course of development did not emerge during data analysis, a shorter more immediate path seemed to be common. Identity dissonance resulting in delaying the espousal of an LGB identity also did not emerge. Of particular salience was the impact that religion had on the participants' course of identity development. However, religion did not seem to halt development and it instead just impacted the course of disclosure given that none of the participants saw themselves as deviant with regard to their faith. Particularly notable was the rejection of

categorical labels to which the participants did not feel they belonged to and brought with them a certain amount negative connotations as well as limitations. A discussion of the findings in relation to the literature reviewed in chapter two as well as their implications will be presented in chapter five.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact that ethnicity and gender have on the development of a lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity. While stage models of sexual identity development currently exist, their applicability to women and ethnic minority men was called into question. More specifically, this inquiry was guided by the following: How do ethnic minority males and females come to endorse an identity as lesbian, gay, or bisexual?; What are common developmental trajectories between and within-groups?; Is the progression of ethnic minority males divergent from the stage models?; Is the progression of females divergent from stage models?

In an effort to answer these questions, grounded theory was used to conceptualize the study. Data collection ensued over the course of three months in the spring of 2014 and resulted in three participants engaging in the study. Participants were interviewed by phone and the interaction was recorded for sound only. Member checking then ensued as the interviews were transcribed verbatim and emailed to participants for verification. Each interview was coded in the order in which they were conducted and a code book was established after the initial interview. Codes were added as necessary after each interview. The codes were then collapsed and each interview was coded a second time with the complete code book. The categories which emerged fell into 13 categories and included the following: Awareness, Barriers, Community Engagement, Disclosure, Dissonance, Emotional Attachment, Facilitators, Identity, Information Search, Reaction,

and Relationships, which are detailed in Appendix D. Three main patterns emerged as a result of data analysis: Recognition and Progression of Identity Endorsement; Barriers to Identity Endorsement; and Rejection of Categorical Labels, all of which were defined in chapter 4.

This chapter discusses how the data collected and the patterns which emerged impact both the conceptualization of clients who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual as well as counselor education programs whose responsibility it is to present this information to practitioners who are expected to have a familiarity with this population. As such a discussion related to the patterns which emerged; a foundational iteration of the development of an LGB sexual identity; limitations of the study; implications for counselor education programs and practitioners; and finally the course of future research are offered. Of note, the following discussion of patterns is presented with the recognition that saturation was not achieved, as was hoped for, and this study, therefore, provides the basis for a research agenda which will be continued in the future.

Discussion of Patterns

Cass (1979), Troiden (1979), Coleman (1982), and Lipkin (1999) have posited a course of which individuals who identify as LGB come to endorse these identities. These theories are largely focused on a stage model, which assumes that individuals progress through proscribed stages in a very linear fashion. As a result of data collection and interpretation, this progression is called into question with this research in which the interview data support a course that is not as simplistic as offered by these pioneers. Again, this interpretation is based on patterns rather than common themes and should be viewed as only the first iteration in this process of data collection and interpretation given

that this line of inquiry will continue in an effort to inform a research agenda firmly focused on the development of an LGB identity.

Recognition and Progression of Identity Endorsement

The recognition/awareness of an LGB identity appeared to be somewhat varied with this sample as two participants (Megan and John) reported awareness occurring during middle school, which is consistent with what Troiden (1989) postulates in the Identity Assumption stage. One participant (Nick) is considered an outlier as he reported awareness in elementary school which was consistent with what Kahn (1991) and Rust (2008) noted in similar studies of lesbians but contrary to what is indicated by Cass (1979) and Coleman (1982). The general dissonance which occurred as a result of this recognition/awareness appeared to be universal which was also indicated by Troiden (1979) and otherwise noted by Cass (1979) in the Identity Confusion Stage. While only one participant (Megan) actively engaged in an exclusively same-sex relationship, she would be considered as an outlier in this particular analysis as no other participant endorsed a similar course during similar ages of development.

In an initial opposite fashion John endorsed a bisexual identity, which was more acceptable to his peer group, but was nonetheless a non-genuine expression of his sexual identity. This 'keeping up of appearances' mentality is directly contrasted to Megan's choice to actively engage in a same-sex relationship and Nick's relative absence of any type of relationship either heterosexual or homosexual. Nick's expression/decision seems more a result of a lack of opportunities to do so coupled with an absence of extant knowledge of what a gay identity expression 'looks' like. With regard Nick, the question must be asked if his identification and course of development would have been different

in a much more facilitating environment? This concept will be discussed further in the sections which focus on barriers to endorsement and the direction of future research.

The reaction to the disclosure of an LGB identity was varied based on the audience. While parental dyads were expected to be negative and peer group reactions were generally experienced as negative, siblings were found to be generally positive. Nick presented as an outlier in which a member of his extended family reacted positively during his visit to his native Japan, yet he was fearful of parental reactions in this culture and therefore has not come out to his parents. Most negative reactions were found to be rooted in Christian religious dogma which presented a fundamental barrier to identity progression as offered by Bates (2010). This concept will be covered further in the proceeding section of Barriers to Identity Development.

The facilitators to identity development, which consisted of positive self-talk and sibling support, which was more indicative of acceptance/endorsement of an LGB identity, were unexpected. These facilitators are absent from the stage models previously discussed. Although Gomillion & Giuliano (2011) and Rust (2008) posit increased public awareness of the LGB population as well as participation in social events supporting LGBs, the participants in this study did not endorse this behavior.

The intent of each of the participants to engage with the community-at-large was also found. Granted that John actively engages with the community, while keeping a self-defined safe distance, Megan and Nick had an expressed intention to actively engage with the larger community in the future. This result is in contrast to the Identity Tolerance and Identity Acceptance stages posited by Cass (1979), Identity Assumption proposed by Troiden (1979), Exploration as indicated by Coleman (1982), and the

Coming Out stage identified by Lipkin (1999) all of which predict initial and increased interaction with the LGB community. This was not surprising given that this study was conducted in the southeastern United States where disclosure and interaction with the community-at-large becomes problematic given the overall negativity towards the LGB community.

The course of disclosure was consistent in that the respondents reported first disclosing to a sibling or friend before anyone else. This choice for early disclosure is also absent from the stage models and the reviewed literature. In considering this, it would be interesting to note how having and confiding in peers who accept this population as they are without regard to their sexual orientation facilitates identity development. Based on what has been reported, assumptions to support or negate this concept are absent.

The impact of gender was an important line of inquiry in this study. While there is an absence in the research literature on such a focus (see Bates, 2010; Grov, Bimbi, Nanin & Parsons, 2006; Chung & Syzmanski, 2006; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993) there is nonetheless a need to determine the effect of gender on the development of an LGB identity. In considering the current population, gender was never endorsed as a specific facilitating factor, but was indicated as something which eased the process of identity development. The rationale for this belief was primarily attributed to the participants' perception that it is more acceptable to express and endorse female same-sex behavior rather than male same-sex behavior. The continued paternalistic nature of American culture, which places an emphasis on the satisfaction of the male libido at the expense of recognizing differential sexual propensities or identities, supports this kind of

response. Further, participants perceiving that being male complicates the coming out process, speaks to the sexist nature of the United States.

Although several authors recommended that attention be paid to competing identities (Chung & Syzmanski, 2006; Grov, Bimbi, Nanin & Parsons, 2006; Loicano, 1986;, and Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993), there was no pattern of this issue in the present study. The notion of competing identities was only found with Nick who endorsed confusion with identifying as both Japanese American and gay. It was interesting to note that this was not a similar concern endorsed by John who culturally identifies as Native American. By nature the Native American population is much more accepting of individuals who are attracted to same-sex partners (Adams & Phillips, 2009). These individuals are considered to be 'two-spirit' and are regarded no less than those who endorse opposite sex attraction. Of note with this participant was that his culture of origin had the exact opposite reaction. While a study completed by Adams & Phillips (2009) provides evidence of positive support to individuals who endorse a same-sex identity, this negative reaction was rationalized by John given his family's assimilation by way of identifying as Southern Baptist rather than as Native American in which culture his identity would be accepted and celebrated. The impact of cultural assimilation as a barrier to identity development was also found by Hahn & Adkins (2009) for Asian American and Pacific Islander men and cited by Nick during his interview.

The need to find out more or research their emerging identities was varied in this sample. Megan, who was the oldest (37), expressed having limited resources but was the only one to actively engage in an open same-sex relationship exclusively, which was

surprising. This is contrasted with John and Nick who had the resources provided by the internet. Granted John faced the limiting factor of the supervision of his extended family with which he was living with at the time, it remains problematic that Nick did not utilize the internet as a resource to further his understanding or engagement with the LBG population at-large.

Regardless of the course by which each participant progressed, they all endorsed a relatively open identity as gay or lesbian. This concept of 'relatively open' should be viewed with caution as each participant was aware of the appropriate and/or safe time and place for the disclosure and endorsement of their identity. With this though, they also rejected the categorical labels which exist in compartmentalizing and developing an understanding of their experience in the larger culture. This will be discussed further in a later section.

Barriers to Identity Endorsement

Religion, specifically Christian-based (Southern Baptist), appeared to be the dominant barrier to identity development of the participants in this study which is consistent with the current backlash to gay rights in the United States and was also endorsed as a limiting factor by Rust (2008). More often than not, those who staunchly oppose legislation which protects the LGB population are firmly rooted in religious justification and endorsement as again God's will. John had the most significant experience with this barrier as he described events which had a marked impact on his identity development which was consistent to what was found by Newman & Muzzonigro (1999) and Bates (2010). He eventually compensated for this by finding a more accepting religion (Lutheran) which was further indicative of research conducted by

Newman & Muzzonigro (1999), who found that upon family members endorsing an LGB identity, families more often than not sought out other denominations which were more accepting.

While religion as a self-limiting factor in which the participants had to make sense of their own dissonance, it was also found to be a fundamental problem for their family of origin. Nick's experience is unique with regard to this factor as the dominant religious identification as Christian was not endorsed in his family of origin. It should be noted though, that Nick had not yet come out fully to his family at the time of participating in this study, so the resultant impact that religion while absent at the moment, could prove to be problematic after disclosure. John had a very enlightened view on the impact of religion as he recognized that he could have easily been one of the individuals whom he encountered who were protesting at his first Pride event, "... I wonder how many of them have the same feelings that I do (but) they just are repressed by their religious experience."

Granted that this sample was recruited in the southern United States, which is known for having rigid conservative religious beliefs, one has to wonder if this barrier would manifest differently in other regions of this country? Regional specific reactions were also cited as a confound by Calzo et al. (2011) in previous studies and which is what led to the region-limited focus of this study. Given that the researcher currently resides in and developed his gay identity in this region, the experiences described by the participants were not unexpected. Further, the limitations experienced based on the region in which the sample developed their identity was cited as a barrier experienced by all of the participants which again begs the question of how the results could potentially

vary with samples taken from other geographical regions. This will be discussed further in the section detailing the direction of future research.

The family of origin also presented a barrier, but it was interesting to note that the siblings and extended family of the both Megan and Nick were mostly accepting and supportive of their identities with little add by way of negative reactions. The formidable barriers mostly consisted to the anticipated reactions of parental dyads. While John had a positive experience, Megan expected a negative reaction and Nick was conflicted on the reaction which he might receive but was prepared for a similarly negative reaction. Delving further into this area proved difficult as only the anticipated reactions could be considered as neither Megan nor Nick had disclosed their identities to their parents. This could have been a rich source of information from the Caucasian religious southern culture of Megan and the reportedly less-assimilated Japanese American culture of Nick. It is therefore hypothesized that while disclosure is selective, endorsement is nevertheless a foregone conclusion. Granted what it means to have a solid identity is subjective, a universally congruent identity is less so and considered to be more protective rather than maladaptive.

In continuing the discussion of culture, the concept of dual and competing identities appeared with John and Nick, but not to an extent which developed a discernable pattern in the data. Focus on this concept has been recommended by numerous researchers (see Chun & Singh, 2010; Chung & Syzmanski, 2006; Grov et al., 2006 & Loicano, 1986), however, it did not emerge as a pattern of significance in this sample. While it was previously mentioned, specific focus on dual identities was not a major area of discussion for these participants and instead was more fleeting ruminations.

Granted there was dissonance experienced by John who felt that his culture should not have been a barrier, Nick merely questioned how to focus on the development of his identity as a gay man and his already established identity as Japanese man. This also could have been an area of rich information, but I think this is best reserved for a separate endeavor of inquiry as the focus of this study was on the development of a sexual identity.

Rejection of Categorical Labels

One of the more intriguing patterns in this study was the unanimous rejection of the categories by which we in the research community, statisticians, and demographers at large attempt to classify populations. This 'box,' as participants referred to the labels, was considered to be limiting and not indicative of how they would prefer to be identified. Instead they preferred more nebulous forms of identification which could also reduce the stigma of their identities. Some merely wanted to be known by their names without the need to be categorized or labeled at all. While this was not endorsed nor was it interpreted as a way of separating themselves from the community, the limiting nature of these labels didn't make much sense to the participants. Further, when responding to the final question: 'If someone was to ask you how you identify and you were comfortable enough to be open with them, what would you say?' each chose to use the categorical label of gay or lesbian. However, each quickly followed with how they would prefer to be classified, with John preferring, "...a guy who likes guys," Megan preferring, "...I'm Megan and I'm currently in love with a woman, and Nick preferring just his first name.

Of particular note with concern to identity espousal, a particularly interesting data point emerged during Megan's interview. Given that she's secure in her present identity,

it is nonetheless rooted in her current relationship which gave the impression of an identity which is transitory. It would have been particularly interesting to explore the fluidity of this identity and how it would have been impacted by the termination of this relationship its persistence as a single woman. More specifically, her situation begs the question of whether her identity would persist should her relationship end. In other words, would she still espouse a lesbian identity outside of being engaged in a same-sex relationship?

Proposed Process of LGB Identity Development

The proposed course of identity development is offered here with the caution that it is based on the patterns which emerged with the current sample. Overall themes could not be determined, as is called for in grounded theory, given the small sample size and lack of achieving saturation. A small sample size related to this type of inquiry has been cited by numerous other researchers, which tends to limit interpretation of the data (see Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Johns, 2004; Kahn, 1991; Floyd & Stein, 2002; Mohr & Kendra, 2011; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Rust 2008).

The generalized pattern of LG development based on the current sample seems to begin with an awareness of differentness usually experienced during the middle school years. Dissonance typically accompanies this awareness, but is normalized by an assumed universality during personal development. Confusion-related dissonance is also normalized by the individual. Very shortly after this awareness of differentness, usually within one year, and the resolution of dissonance, two distinct directions are possible. The first is to act on the assumed identity by experimenting with others or to engage in a same-sex relationship. Engaging in a heterosexual relationship after engaging in this first

path is possible with a return to homosexual relationships over time. The second is to repress this identity by either continuing to present oneself as heterosexual or endorse a sexual identity which is more acceptable by the peer group. This second direction eventually gives way to an endorsement of the originally recognized identity. A formalized "coming out" is unique to each individual and typically occurs in a very selective fashion. This process is stymied by religious-based condemnation by the family of origin either anticipated or directly experienced, cultural norms, or the resources and socialization opportunities available to the individual. Interaction with the LGB community at-large is limited over the course of development and socialization with others who identify similarly typically consists of a small intimate group. Positive self-talk, the support of siblings and in some cases other family members, as well as current social events can serve a facilitating factors. The search for information about their emerging identities can vary generationally. Those who are of a younger generation may rely on resources available on the internet with older generations typically having relied on printed literature.

As the Cass (1979) model has formed the foundation for models which emerged after her seminal research, I will compare my proposed model to hers. The Identity Confusion stage did not seem to manifest as would be expected. Megan and Nick appeared to have accepted their identities while processing the dissonance which accompanied their emerging identities. Granted Cass posited that individuals could develop a positive outlook as one of the three paths during this stage, the participants seemed to take this a step further and simply accepted their identity. While John delayed his identity endorsement, he did appear to endorse the positive outlook of differentness.

However, Cass doesn't mention social desirability or the impact of the peer group. The acceptance of a potential identity, characterized in the Identity Comparison stage, did not emerge in the data. Instead the potential identity seemed to be accepted by Megan and Nick. John conversely did not grieve for the loss of his heterosexual identity nor did he accept his behavior while maintaining a heterosexual identity or consider that his identity was temporary. However, he did engage in the compartmentalization of his identity and chose one which was more acceptable to his peer group. The Identity Tolerance stage did not appear to be present in the sample as increased contact with others who espoused a similar identity was absent. Selective disclosure by both John and Nick was evidenced, and coupled by John with the passing strategy suggested by Cass. Identity Pride also seemed to be absent. None of the participants indicated a staunch loyalty to the LGB community, nor did they discredit those who identify as heterosexual. Identity synthesis seemed to be achieved by each of the participants in that they appear to want to transcend inaccurate labeling. This is also questionable as the participants endorsed a proclivity to reject labels in their entirety.

Limitations

The participants who chose to participate in this study each identified as either gay or lesbian. It can only be assumed that these identities were stable and not in transition to a more non-categorical nebulous form of sexual identity as was alluded to in their rejection of labels. This could have led to a re-conceptualization of the study in which the population of interest was non-heterosexual instead of endorsing a more specific label.

The small sample size represented in this research has been noted as a limitation in many other studies of the same nature. This appears to be a fundamental component of studies of this population and one that is difficult to control for. Given the sample size these results are not considered generalizable and merely lay the foundation of future inquiry.

Retrospective recall has been cited as problematic as well given that we must rely on information which may be an inaccurate representation of the individual's experience during the time of inquiry (see Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Calzo, Antonucci, Mays & Cochran, 2011; Floyd & Bakeman, 2006; Kahn, 1991; Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000; Rosario, Schrimshaw & Hunter, 2008). Related to this is the cohort effect in that two of the participants were relatively close in age with one participant being more than ten years their senior (see Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007; Kahn, 1991).

Since this study was limited by region, these results are bound by the identified states which comprise the southern United States. As such the subjective experience of the participants is viewed as unique to this area.

Implications for Counselor Education Programs

Counselor education programs are encouraged to refocus their CACREP-specified multicultural development components in an effort to place a renewed emphasis on this population as suggested by Troutman & Packer-Williams (2014). The ways in which we have educated emerging practitioners to serve this population must be updated with a focus on current research trends and the emerging, albeit some in its infancy, empirical evidence which exists as we move away from theoretical models which are no longer valid or do not consider the richness of the 'whole person.' Further, the identification and

processing of Christian-based biases, found to be a major barrier in this study, must not be avoided. Instead these biases should be explored further as we prepare our students to serve a more pluralistic American public in times which are changing rapidly.

Implications for Practitioners

Conceptualizing those who identify as sexual minorities and present for counseling should be a highly individualized endeavor free of many assumptions as they relate to this population. While the stage models have been the foundational basis of many interventions, they are encouraged to be referenced with caution with respect to this initial proposed iteration of sexual identity development. Space for a more fluid progression impacted by a variety client-specific elements or challenges which limit and facilitate development must be considered.

Gender as a specific facilitating or limiting factor of development should be conceptualized as a societal construct and not something which is psychologically endemic. As such, being female has the potential to remove the societal stigma which exists for males who identify as gay. The removal of this stigma allows females to develop without the marked resistance which is endemic for males and therefore seen as being more of a complicated process. This should be considered with caution as cultural norms may override the lessened societal stigma. Further, it cannot be assumed that being female necessarily makes identity development easier. In essence this assumption actually just speaks to the mindset of being male makes it more difficult which perpetuates the notion of the male being more important in U.S. culture.

Ethnicity has the potential to either facilitate or severely limit the progression of a lesbian or gay identity. The degree to which individuals and their families have been

assimilated into the dominant culture should be a primary emphasis when conceptualizing individuals who present as lesbian or gay.

Future Research

Future research will build upon the foundational data presented and inform an ongoing research agenda. Regionally-bound data will continue to be collected in an effort to achieve saturation. As such intentional sampling should be employed in an effort to capture a regional, gender, and ethnic influence on sexual identity development. Other regions will eventually be incorporated with the intention of discovering regional-specific differences in LGB identity development. As such it is entirely plausible that a theory could emerge that is not only regionally-specific but also ethnically and gender specific. Competing/dual identities emerged, but were not expanded upon by the participants or the researcher. An increased focus on competing and dual identities will hopefully add to scope of future inquiry and provide an additional way forward in conceptualizing this population. Additionally, there were no participants who identified as bisexual. Intentionally recruiting members of this population will no doubt add to the emerging inquiry and provide yet another path of discovery.

Researcher Reflection

Engaging in this study was a labor of love. I sought not only to begin to fundamentally change how clinicians conceptualize their lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients, but also to eventually improve the experience that this population has in counseling as well as the manner in which counselor education programs prepare their students to address their concerns. In addition, my curiosity of how others came to endorse their identity was a major driving force. Granted my process was relatively

different than the individuals who participated in the study, I did notice events and realizations which were very similar to my own. In recognizing our similarities, there were some instances in which I had to remind myself to maintain the role of researcher instead of friend or confidant.

The interview with Nick was particularly impactful for me. Over the course of our interaction, I could begin to feel that despite his endorsed identity this was an individual very much in pain. In speaking with him further, I began to feel the disconnectedness and sadness he was experiencing. In that situation, I felt it necessary to break with my role as researcher and instead I was able to offer a comforting view of what the future could hold for him and that the disconnectedness is something that we all feel at one point or another. I was also able to provide him with area resources to begin to become more connected with the community in whatever capacity was comfortable for him. This interview was difficult in the end, but I felt as if I was able to give him hope and some guidance going forward.

Overall my experience with this study also forced me to reconsider my own development. Was it as simple as I believe it was or was there turmoil that somehow got locked away? Is there turmoil with which I'm still coping? How did my progression make me the person I am today? How has/does my own dual identity as a biracial gay man manifest? While I can see how the stage models could be useful in some situations, it remains my strong belief that they are nonetheless inapplicable to women and ethnic minority men. My task now then is to develop one which is.

Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine to the course sexual identity development for women and ethnic minority men who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Of particular interest was the impact that gender and ethnicity have on this development. Discovering a progression which is counter to the stage models posited by Cass (1979), Troiden (1979), Coleman (1981, and Lipkin (1999) was hypothesized. The relevance of these models were called into question as they were considered to not address how gender and ethnicity impact the development of a lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity. Their development was also called into question as the manner in which they were derived relied on data from small homogenous samples collected over 30 years ago.

Dominant patterns which emerged in this study related to the: Recognition and Progression of Identity Endorsement, Barriers to Identity Endorsement, and Rejection of Categorical Labels. Gender was found to be more of a facilitating societal construct which had the ability to remove much of the stigma related to a lesbian identity and not something which actually influenced development. This is a finding to be confirmed with future data collection. The impact of ethnicity was more varied. As one may assume that individuals who identify as Native American would have a less problematic progression of sexual identity development, this was found to be the exact opposite given that the family of origin was highly assimilated and endorsed a dominant highly-conservative religious belief. With regard to the Japanese American participant, his unfamiliarity with how his family would react in general prohibited his disclosure, but did not prohibit his identity endorsement.

This line of inquiry will continue as even though the sample size was small, the patterns which emerged leave much to be researched and many different paths to take. These results both in their current form as well as the results going forward have marked implications for practitioners and counselor education programs as developing competency and clinical practice acumen are critical to serving this population.

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APPENDIX A: Consent

Introduction and Purpose

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Omar Troutman. I am a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education & Supervision Department at the University of South Carolina. The purpose of the study is to determine the course of developing an identity as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB). This form explains what you will be asked to do if you decide to participate in this study. Please read it carefully and feel free to ask any questions you like before you make a decision about participating.

Description of Study Procedures

The data collection process will begin with a scheduled interview either in-person, by telephone, or video conferencing lasting approximately one hour. You will be pre-screened to ensure that you are a good fit for the study. If you are eligible to participate you may provide a pseudonym of your choosing for identification purposes. The only other identifying information to be collected will consist of age, gender, ethnicity, and where you live. All interviews will be recorded for sound only and be transcribed directly afterward. Interviews conducted by means of video conferencing will also be recorded with sound only so as to not have any other identifying information retained by the researcher.

The questions to be asked are open-ended and intended for you to be able to provide as much information as you'd like. Questions to be asked include: 1) When were you first aware of your same-sex feelings, or the sense that your sexual identity might be different from heterosexuals? 2) What was your first experience of “coming out” to yourself? 3) What has been your experience of “coming out” to others? You are free to decline answering any questions presented during the interview.

At the conclusion of the study, all copies of all interviews will be disposed of appropriately. In an effort to ensure accuracy and prior to beginning data analysis, a transcript of your interview, as well as my field notes, will be sent to you for verification. You will also be given the opportunity to offer comments on the accuracy of the interview and the notes. Any discrepancies will be clarified and corrected based on your feedback.

Risks of Participation

There are no known risks associated with participating in this research except a slight breach of confidentiality, which remains despite steps that will be taken to protect your privacy.

Benefits of Participation

Taking part in this study is not likely to benefit you personally. However, this research may help us understand how those who identify as LGB develop their identity.

Confidentiality of Records

Participation will be confidential. The pseudonym you provided will be assigned to your interview and will be used on project records instead of your name. No one other than the researchers will be able to link your information with your name. Study records/data will be stored in encrypted files at the University of South Carolina. The results of this may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed.

Contact Persons

For more information concerning this research, or if you believe you may have suffered a research related injury, you should contact Omar Troutman at 803-240-8310 or troutman@mailbox.sc.edu or Kathy Evans at 803-777-1937 or kevas@mailbox.sc.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact: Thomas Coggins, Director, Office of Research Compliance, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208, Phone – 803-777-7095, Fax – 803-576-5589, E-Mail – tcoggins@mailbox.sc.edu.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free not to participate or to withdraw at any time, for whatever reason, without negative consequences. In the event that you do withdraw from this study, the information you have already provided will be kept in a confidential manner.

APPENDIX B: Pre-Screening Questions

- 1) How would you describe your sexual identity?
- 2) What is your ethnicity?
- 3) Where did you grow up?
- 4) What is your age?
- 5) What is your gender?

APPENDIX C: Interview Protocol

- 1) When were you first aware of your same-sex feelings, or the sense that your sexual identity might be different from heterosexuals?
- 2) What was your first experience of “coming out” to yourself?
- 3) What has been your experience of “coming out” to others?
- 4) If there were barriers to you celebrating yourself as lesbian/gay/ /bisexual what were they?
- 5) What barriers do you believe existed for others celebrating you a lesbian/gay/bisexual?
- 6) What, if any, information seeking activities did you engage in during the process of “coming out”?
- 7) How would you describe your relationship to the gay/lesbian/bisexual communities over time?
- 8) What cultural norms do you think either helped or hindered your “coming out” process?
- 9) How do you believe your gender impacted your “coming out”?
- 10) Is there any aspect of your identity that you consider central at present?
- 11) If someone was to ask you how you identify, and you were comfortable enough to be open with them, what would you say?

APPENDIX D: Codes

Awareness: Acceptance
Awareness: Acceptance: Initial
Awareness: Definition
Awareness: Family
Awareness: Family: Parental Dyad
Awareness: Peers
Awareness: Extended Family
Awareness: Family: Unknown
Awareness: Recognition

Barrier: Culture
Barrier: Culture: Extended Family
Barrier: Culture: Family
Barrier: Culture: General
Barrier: Culture: Religion
Barrier: Education
Barrier: Employment
Barrier: Environment
Barrier: Environment: Home
Barrier: Environment: Region
Barrier: Extended Family: Religion
Barrier: Family Structure
Barrier: Gender
Barrier: Interpersonal
Barrier: Parent
Barrier: Parent: Religion
Barrier: Regional
Barrier: Religion
Barrier: School
Barrier: Social
Barrier: Social: Interpersonal
Barrier: Societal
Barrier: Environmental-Parental/Social
Barrier: Religion

Community Engagement: Developing Ties
Community Engagement: Intermittent
Community Engagement: Limited

Community Engagement: Negative
Community Engagement: Nonexistent
Community Engagement: Perception
Community Engagement: Planned
Community Engagement: Positive
Disclosure: Anticipation
Disclosure: Anticipation: Employment
Disclosure: Anticipation: Extended Family
Disclosure: Anticipation: Parental
Disclosure: Anticipation: Parental: Mixed
Disclosure: Anticipation: Parental: Negative
Disclosure: Anticipation: Parental: Negative: Time: Positive
Disclosure: Anticipation: Parental: Positive
Disclosure: Extended Family
Disclosure: Family
Disclosure: Family: Intent
Disclosure: Family: Sibling System
Disclosure: Friend
Disclosure: Friend: Long-term
Disclosure: Friend: Short-term
Disclosure: General: Positive
Disclosure: Parental Dyad
Disclosure: Peer Group
Disclosure: Relationship-based
Disclosure: Selective
Disclosure: Selective: Employment
Disclosure: Selective: Extended Family
Disclosure: Selective: Secret

Dissonance: Confusion
Dissonance: Fear
Dissonance: Dual Identity: Ethnic
Dissonance: Gender
Dissonance: Identity

Dissonance: Label/Categorization
Dissonance: Normative
Dissonance: Repression
Dissonance: Religious
Dissonance: Societal
Dissonance: Universality

Emotional Attachment: Homosexual
Emotional Attachment: Homosexual:
Delayed
Emotional Attachment: Initial:
Homosexual

Facilitator: Gender-Acceptance
Facilitator: Age
Facilitator: Disclosure
Facilitator: Event
Facilitator: Religion
Facilitator: Self
Facilitator: Social
Facilitator: Social: Interpersonal
Facilitator: Societal
Facilitator: Support: General
Facilitator: Support: Friend
Facilitator: Support: Parent
Facilitator: Support: Sibling

Identity: Assumption: Others
Identity: Definition
Identity: Definition: Self
Identity: Definition: Self: Non-
categorical
Identity: Defined-Relationship
Identity: Dual
Identity: Environmental
Identity: Environmental: Interaction
Identity: Experimentation: Same-sex
Identity: Experimentation: Same-sex:
Time
Identity: Expression: Delayed
Identity: Dissonance: Identity
Identity: Dissonance:
Label/Categorization
Identity: Expression: Genuine
Identity: Expression: Not Genuine
Identity: Expression: Gender

Identity: Expression: Recent
Identity: Transitional

Information Search: Absence
Information Search: Counseling
Information Search: Counseling:
Rationale
Information Search: Internet
Information Search: Friends
Information Search: Literature

Reaction: General: Mixed
Reaction: General: Positive
Reaction: General: Negative
Reaction: Peer Group: Bullying
Reaction: Peer Group: Positive
Reaction: Extended Family: Positive
Reaction: Extended Family: Negative
Reaction: Extended Family: Positive:
Time
Reaction: Friend: Positive
Reaction: Friend: Negative
Reaction: Husband: Positive
Reaction: Parental: Negative
Reaction: Parental: Positive
Reaction: Sibling System: Positive
Reaction: Sibling System: Mixed
Reaction: Sibling System: Negative

Relationship: Bisexual
Relationship: Close
Relationship: Family
Relationship: Heterosexual
Relationship: Heterosexual: Length
Relationship: Homosexual
Relationship: Homosexual: Length
Relationship: Hiatus
Relationship: Initiation
Relationship: Initiation: Heterosexual
Relationship: Initiation: Heterosexual:
Multiple
Relationship: Initiation: Homosexual
Relationship: Interpersonal
Relationship: Interpersonal: Intermittent
Relationship: Maintenance
Relationship: Maintenance: Homosexual

Relationship: Maintenance: Non-romantic
Relationship: Nonexistent
Relationship: Re-engagement
Relationship: Re-engagement: Homosexual
Relationship: Pressure
Relationship: Pressure: Homosexual
Partner/Barrier-Environment
Relationship: Termination
Relationship: Termination: Heterosexual
Relationship: Termination: Homosexual

APPENDIX E: Field Notes

Megan

While Megan currently espouses a lesbian identity, she seems like she has a long way to go until she completely accepts and operationalizes that identity. As she currently anchors her identity within her current same-sex relationship, she seemed almost transient in that identification if her partner were absent. Over the course of her development of a lesbian identity common barriers to identification were expressed (religiosity, environmental, social, etc.). Very little was disclosed on the emergence of her identity and it seemed as if it just occurred and she sought to act on it. While the relationship which began to initiate this identity was transitory over time, it did seem to be the only one to be explored in-depth other than her husband. In retrospect, more information related to the initiation of both the heterosexual and homosexual relationships would have been beneficial. With regard to the course of identity development, Megan seemed to waiver in espousal while maintaining some sort of continual relationship with her initial love interest. The notion of rejecting common categorizations for sexual minority identities was interesting and I'm curious to see if that appears in future interviews.

Overall, I felt extremely anxious during this interview. More than likely because it was the first one and I was excited about getting underway. While I don't think that that impacted the quality of the information gathered, I do think that it may have hindered the exploring of some themes further.

Nick

I experienced Nick as an individual who appears to have a firm identity expression, but experiences some uncertainty given that he has little to no connection with the community. Over the course of interviewing him, it felt as if he had an inclination to explore the transgender identity but didn't think that he fit that definition. This interview was much more conversational than the first interview and I thought it flowed much better. His recognition and acceptance of a gay in elementary school was interesting, but I'm curious to know more about why he doesn't engage in any type of same-sex romantic interaction now. I got the impression that time was an issue, but I felt like there was something more. Nick definitely feels disconnected and I can understand that. He did say that this region isn't exactly the best place to explore his identity to which I agreed. We discussed his intention to move to California and I was able to offer hope in that I also live in California.

This interaction really made me recognize the necessity for some type of mentoring. I'm not sure how this would work, but I'd like to explore this more. I'd actually like to follow-up with this participant in future data collection.

John

This interview felt strange to me for some reason. Overall I felt like I just didn't connect with him. Our personalities were markedly different and they didn't mix well. The interview wasn't negative in any way, but I'm curious to see how this impacted the interview during transcription. Some of his perceptions and statements caught me a little off-guard, so I wonder if that contributed to the distance I felt. It was curious to hear that his family identifies as Native American, but chooses not to respect the two-spirit aspect of that culture and instead is firmly indoctrinated in the Southern Baptist faith. I wonder if I should have asked more about his journey of faith. I also wonder if he's actually ever experienced acceptance from the Native American community.