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Exploring the Influence of School-Based Sexuality Education Settings on LGBTQ+ Sexual Identity Development

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EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL-BASED
SEXUALITY EDUCATION SETTINGS ON LGBTQ+
SEXUAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of Graduation with the Degree of
Master of Arts

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College of Humanities and Social Sciences
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ABSTRACT

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Previous research on sexual identity development demonstrates that there are five discernible, non-linear statuses in which individuals may pass through as they develop their sexual identity: compulsory heterosexuality, active exploration, diffusion, deepening and commitment, and synthesis (Dillon, Worthington, and Moradi 2011). Moreover, prior research on school-based sexuality education (SBSE) demonstrates that no matter its formal designation or political perspective, SBSE is exclusionary, inadequate, and habitually reproduces social inequalities (Bay-Cheng 2003; Elia and Eliason 2010b). SBSE programs within the United States are insufficient because they unvaryingly promote a heteronormative discourse and do not address the sexual health needs or experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and/or other (LGBTQ+) individuals (Connell and Elliott 2009; McNeill 2013; Estes 2017). The present study explores the ways in which the processes for sexual identity development among LGBTQ+ individuals are influenced by experiences within SBSE settings. Using data from 18 in-depth, qualitative interviews with LGBTQ+ individuals, between the ages of 18 and 26, this study illustrates the unique ways in which SBSE settings reinforce, encourage, or prolong sexual identity development processes for LGBTQ+ individuals. This study gives empirical support to the unifying model of sexual identity development

(UMSID) (Dillon et al. 2011) and fills the gap in existing literature by examining the experiences of LGBTQ+ identities within SBSE settings. This study also highlights significant ways in which socialization practices are necessary for understanding sexual identity development processes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

At the turn of the twentieth century, as a response to contemporary public health concerns (e.g., teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and sexual deviance), schools were tasked with maintaining the societal status quo, stressing the importance of "family life" and affirming heteronormative ideals (Fields, Gilbert, and Miller 2015). Research has shown that school-based sexuality education (SBSE hereafter) programs can provide an important site of intervention with respect to improving the sexual health of adolescents and young adults (Connell and Elliott 2009). However, previous research also illustrates that no matter its formal designation or political perspective, SBSE is exclusionary, inadequate, and habitually reproduces social inequalities (Bay-Cheng 2003; Elia and Eliason 2010b; Estes 2017). The limitations of SBSE curricula is due, in part, to the way in which contemporary U.S. society has constructed adolescents as sexually innocent and in need of protection from the dangers of sexual experience (Estes 2017; Elliott 2012). Additionally, SBSE programs are "largely inadequate because they do not address the sexual health needs that all youth may face, especially those needs of gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals" (Estes 2017:617). SBSE programs in the United States unvaryingly promote a heteronormative discourse and fail to represent the experiences of LGBTQ+ identities (Connell and Elliott 2009; McNeill 2013).

Much of the literature that currently examines SBSE reviews its history, discusses the construction of adolescent sexuality, examines how SBSE is exclusive and

perpetuates inequalities, and proposes new avenues in which to address its limitations. A few studies have gathered information from LGBTQ+ individuals or racial/ethnic minorities regarding their experiences within SBSE programs (Fields 2008; Estes 2017; Hobaica and Kwon 2017), yet previous research has not explored the intersection of these identities or the marginalization associated with these overlaps (Elia and Eliason 2010b). Moreover, previous research has not examined how the lack of representation of LGBTQ+ identities within SBSE curricula impacts the ways in which these individuals develop and experience their identity.

In the United States, the 1970s marked a new era in research regarding sexual identity development (Bilodeau and Renn 2005). Foundational theory building and exploratory research on the sexual identities of lesbians and gay men illustrates what we now know as the "coming out" process for these individuals (Cass 1979). Since then, theoretical and empirical advancements on sexual identity development pays attention to the *commonalities* in sexual identity development across sexuality subgroups (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual) to offer a perspective that captures shared experiences as well as differences between subgroups (Dillon, Worthington, and Moradi 2011). For example, the unifying model of sexual identity development (UMSID hereafter) (Dillon et al. 2011) is innovative in its applicability across sexual orientation identities and inclusion of a wide range of possible developmental trajectories. Although this model was proposed hypothetically (without testing its assumptions), there is a rich body of empirical literature that supports the processes within the model (McCarn and Fassinger 1996; Worthington et al. 2002; Rosario, Schrimshaw, and Hunter 2011; Savin-Williams 2011). More effort needs to focus on research designs to validate the UMSID (Patton et

al. 2016). This model, and the research that underlies its assumptions and concepts,

suggests several applications in sociological practice in that it positions sexual identity

development in social environments, such as within educational settings.

The present study provides evidence that validates the UMSID and fills the gap in

existing literature by examining LGBTQ+ experiences within SBSE settings. For this

research, I examined the ways in which the sexual identity development process (SIDP

hereafter) was influenced by SBSE settings for LGBTQ+ individuals (see Table 1 for the

full list of acronyms used throughout this paper).

Table 1. List of Acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and others (+)
SBSE	School-based sexuality education
SIDP	Sexual identity development process
UMSID	Unifying model of sexual identity development
STIs	Sexually transmitted infections

BACKGROUND

The background presented here provides an overview of the existing research related to sexuality education, including its history, the limitations and inadequacies of SBSE programs and curriculum, and researchers' recommendations for improvement. Additionally, I provide contextual knowledge on how sexuality is defined and constructed within the United States.

History of Sexuality Education

At the turn of the twentieth century, policy makers and educators came to believe that public health would be well-served by "social hygiene" and "family life" education, which tasked schools with educating adolescents about sexual deviance, while simultaneously affirming heteronormative values (Moran 2000; Kendall 2008; Fields et al. 2015). As it exists today, SBSE curricula and programs are caught in a conflict of "culture wars" (Luker 2006:68) regarding what is believed to be the most appropriate sexual knowledge for young people. This conflict pits conservative advocates of abstinence-only sex education against liberal supporters of comprehensive sex education (Lesko 2010; Jones 2011; Fields et al. 2015; Zimmerman 2015). Social conservatives are likely to argue that, "the only way to keep young people safe from the physical, social, and emotional consequences of sex is to insist that they abstain from having sex beyond the confines of heterosexual marriage" (Fields et al. 2015:373). For this group, abstinence-only education provides a logical response to concerns regarding teen pregnancy, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) or acquired immunodeficiency

syndrome (AIDS), and other STIs, while also promoting conventional understandings of gender, family, and sexual expression (Fields et al. 2015). Social liberals, on the other hand, have responded to arguments from abstinence-only advocates by promoting comprehensive sexuality education, which emphasizes abstinence as one strategy among many (e.g., contraceptives and condoms) that students can adopt to protect their health and well-being (Fields et al. 2015). For example, comprehensive sexuality education supporters tend to argue that, "when equipped with proper and correct knowledge about sexuality, young people will make better sexual decisions, including decisions to postpone sexual behavior and to practice safe sex" (Fields et al. 2015:374). Contemporary approaches to sex education, as they exist within the United States, are placed within a binary, antagonistic opposition. However, no matter its formal designation or political perspective, nor whether it is comprehensive or abstinence only, researchers argue that sexuality education is exclusionary, limited, and inadequate (Moran 2000; Elia and Eliason 2010a; Elia and Eliason 2010b; Estes 2017).

Limitations and Inadequacies

Estes' (2017) qualitative study revealed a gap in the information that adolescents want and need versus what they are provided by their parents and SBSE programs. Estes (2017) argues that SBSE programs are "largely inadequate because they do not address the sexual health needs that all youth may face, especially those needs of gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals" (p. 617). This limitation occurs because SBSE programs in the U.S. unvaryingly promote a heteronormative discourse (McNeill 2013; Hobaica and Kwon 2017). Heteronormativity, whereby heterosexuality is constructed as the norm that dominates all other forms of sexuality (Estes 2017), is the reproduction of heterosexuality

through representation of bipolarized oppositions of sex, gender, and sexuality (Elia and Eliason 2010b; Jones 2011). Connell and Elliott (2009) argue, "heterosexist ideologies are deeply embedded in the organization of classrooms, class materials, and interactions" (p. 89). Consequently, it is not surprising that because of these prescribed norms and the ways in which adolescent sexuality has been constructed, SBSE curricula habitually reproduces social inequalities and perpetuates the marginalization, stigmatization, and oppression of non-normative individuals (Bay-Cheng 2003; Fields 2008; Connell and Elliott 2009; Elia and Eliason 2010b; Fields et al. 2015; Estes 2017). In other words, SBSE, as it is currently organized, teaches adolescents ideologies of inequality, thereby socializing them into systems of privilege and oppression.

Fields and colleagues' (2015) research demonstrates that, "sexuality education, from all political perspectives, routinely affirms oppressive values and norms about gender, race, and sexuality, even when presenting what appears to be rational, medically accurate information" (p. 376). SBSE programs do so by including both implicit and explicit messages that reinforce hegemonic sexuality (Bay-Cheng 2003; Connell and Elliott 2009; McNeill 2013), which disenfranchises those who are sexually non-normative (Elia and Eliason 2010b). Bay-Cheng (2003) argues, "SBSE fails to address the interplay among gender, race, class, and sexuality, while simultaneously propagating sexist, racist, and classist notions of sexuality" (p. 64).

Constructing Adolescent Sexuality

Sexuality is historically intertwined with gender, class, and race (Bay-Cheng 2003). Therefore, experiences of sexuality education are informed by and alter larger discourses of race, class, gender, ability, sexual orientation, religion, and other social

differences (Fields et al. 2015). Jones (2011) explains that the term sexuality includes "anything obliquely related to constructions of sexed and gendered bodies, identities, and behaviors; sexual feelings, desires, and acts; and sexual knowledge, skills, and information" (p. 134). The term "sexuality education" is used as an umbrella term under which various subtypes of sexuality discourse fall, such as sex education, reproductive health education, and relationship education (Jones 2011). Several researchers utilize definitions of sexuality education that recognize all lessons that young people receive about bodies, relationships, desires, and sex (Jones 2011). It is important to note that sexuality education occurs in both formal and informal instruction, as well as in and out of school settings (Fields et al. 2015).

Previous research illustrates that SBSE plays a significant role in guiding teen sexual behavior, and it is a fundamental force in the construction and definition of adolescent sexuality (Moran 2000; Kirby 2002; Bay-Cheng 2003; Schalet 2004; Elliott 2012). In our culture, adolescents are fashioned as "innocent, vulnerable, and in need of protection from adult sexual knowledge and practice (Thorne and Luria 1986:177), because sex is postulated as a "dangerous and corrupting influence" (Connell and Elliott 2009:86). Elliott (2012) refers to this cultural conversation of teenage sexual activity as the "danger discourse" (p. 34). Bay-Cheng (2003) contends that, within American culture, there is a strong apprehension concerning the negative outcomes and consequences associated with sex (e.g., pregnancy and STIs), to the extent that discussion of the positive aspects of sex and adolescents' capability to manage their sexuality is excluded from discourse.

By and large, adolescents are socially constructed as sexual innocents, however previous research also suggests that there are exceptions with regard to race and class (Fields 2008; Connell and Elliott 2009; Kendall 2012). For instance, Connell and Elliott's (2009) research shows that the perspective of child innocence is applied typically to white, middle-class children. Connell and Elliott (2009) explain, "children without this race and class privilege are constructed as hypersexual, dangerous, and a corrupting influence on those 'innocent' children" (Connell and Elliott 2009:87). Fields (2008) highlights that in lower-income public schools, students are more likely to encounter restrictive sexuality instruction and are subject to greater surveillance and intervention. Fields and colleagues' (2015) study highlights how public school students are excluded from the sexuality education that mentions sexual pleasure, agency, and knowledge, that is taught within private schools. Instead, public school students are taught to "mute their desires and equip themselves for the sexual world routinely imagined by abstinence-only instruction—a world marked by violence, risk, and consequence" (Fields et al. 2015:377). Furthermore, Fields and colleagues (2015) discuss the ways in which sexuality education is racialized by policy makers and educators who indicate that the sexuality of people of color is "conflictual and antagonistic." For example, "while white children and youth are often taken to be sexually innocent in risk-based discourses, African American girls and boys are routinely 'adultified' – cast as sinister…and stripped of any element of childish naiveté" (Fields et al. 2015:377). Understanding the ways in which our society constructs adolescent sexuality is important for analyzing sexuality education policy and curricula, how adolescents experience sexuality education, and how parents and educators think about and deliver sexuality education.

Recommendations

Researchers provide an abundance of suggestions to rectify SBSE's biases and shortcomings. For example, advocates who are sensitized to the problematic assumptions built into SBSE curricula are calling for sexuality education that is rooted in a holistic and inclusive understandings of sexuality that takes into account race, gender, class, and sexual inequalities (Fields 2008; Connell and Elliott 2009; Corinna 2009; Fields et al. 2015). In addition, other researchers stress the importance of teaching adolescents sexual agency coupled with an inclusive, social justice-informed perspective alongside medically accurate and scientifically based curricula (Connell and Elliott 2009; Dessel 2010; Lamb 2010).

Many researchers explain how improving sexuality education with regard to sexual minorities is necessary and beneficial for all students because doing so fosters the development of equitable and safe learning environments (Kumashiro 2001; Fisher 2009; Elia and Eliason 2010a; Elia and Eliason 2010b; McCarty-Caplan 2013; Estes 2017). McCarty-Caplan (2013) argues, "for sex education to reach its full potential in maintaining positive health of all students it is imperative schools overcome barriers to education that includes and affirms lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth" (p. 248). Bay-Cheng (2003) contends that accurate, inclusive sexuality education has the potential to empower adolescents to navigate and challenge sexual and social inequalities.

Several sexuality education activists are promoting the sexual literacy model, which offers a third way of thinking about sexuality education–one that counteracts the limitations of abstinence-only and comprehensive curricula. The National Sexuality Resource Center is one of the first organizations to formally define sexual literacy as a

model of sexuality education as an:

> integrated and holistic view of sexuality from a social justice perspective. We believe that every person should have the knowledge, skills, and resources to support healthy and pleasurable sexuality – and that these resources should be based on accurate research and facts. We examine how race, gender, culture, ability, faith, and age intersect with and shape our sexual beliefs. We know that sexuality education and learning should be lifelong. We call this sexual literacy (Connell and Elliott 2009:97).

Researchers widely believe that the sexual literacy model might positively shape adolescents' experiences in ways that challenge the dynamics of racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism.

Not only have researchers provided suggestions for improving SBSE programs, but they also discuss ways in which we, as a culture, need to reconstruct our definition and understanding of adolescent sexuality. Fine and McClelland (2006) introduce a theory of "thick desire" which does not equate adolescent sexuality with danger, but instead understands that "young people are entitled to a broad range of desires for meaningful intellectual, political, and social engagement" (p. 300), as well as the possibility of sexual and reproductive freedom, with protection from racialized and sexualized violence. Researchers argue that in order to make adolescent sexuality "less dangerous" requires addressing the pervasive social inequalities that structure young people's relationships and protecting their rights to an education, self-expression, and healthy futures (Schaffner 2005; Gilbert 2010; Fields et al. 2015).

As policy makers, educators, and researchers begin to reimagine adolescent sexuality and SBSE curricula they should consider the "shifting, contradictory, dynamic, and constructed" components of sexuality (Jones 2011:164) so that sexuality education is never "cast as a simple field. Like any subject (such as math or science) learning in this

field should aim towards increasingly complex and varied learning rather than repetitive or exclusionary content" (Jones 2011:167). The present study takes this insight into consideration; understanding that sexual identity development is fluid and ever evolving, and that sexuality education settings are just one of many sites in which sexual identity development is influenced.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Throughout the past two decades, numerous theoretical and empirical advancements have been made in understanding sexual identity development as applied to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual identities. Earlier advances provided conceptual models and measurements for sexual identity development for specific sexual identity subgroups (e.g., lesbians and gay men), while limited progress was achieved in the construction of models and measures for bisexual or heterosexual identities (Cass 1979; Klein 1993; Fox 1995; Savin-Williams 2011). Most recently, Dillon and colleagues (2011) proposed a UMSID that offers a complementary perspective on existing group-specific sexual identity models. This unifying model pays attention to the commonalities in sexual identity development across sexuality subgroups to offer a more global perspective that captures shared experiences as well as differences between subgroups.

Firstly, it is important to define key identity concepts. *Identity* is "the stable sense of one's goals, beliefs, values, and life roles" (Dillon et al. 2011:649). Identity includes, but is not limited to, an individual's race, ethnicity, gender, social class, spirituality, and sexual orientation. *Identity development* is "the dynamic process of assessing and exploring one's identity, and making commitments to an integrated set of identity elements" (Dillon et al. 2011:649-650). Identity development is a life-long process as individual's identities may shift and change over time. A number of scholars have argued that *sexual identity* would be more reliably assessed, and validly represented if it were disentangled from *sexual orientation* (Dillon et al. 2011). *Sexual orientation* refers to "an

individual's patterns of sexual, romantic, and affectional arousal and desire for other persons based on those persons' gender and sex characteristics" (Dillon et al. 2011:650). In other words, sexual orientation encompasses physiological drives that are beyond conscious choice and are linked with strong emotional feelings. *Sexual orientation identity*, then, is what Dillon and colleagues (2011) term as an "individual's conscious acknowledgement and internalization of sexual orientation" (p. 650). Sexual orientation identity is linked with relational factors that may shape an individual's community, social supports, friendships, and partner(s). Sexual orientation identity is just one of many dimensions of sexual identity. Dillon and colleagues (2011) conceptualize *sexual identity* as including other components of human sexuality (e.g., sexual needs, sexual values, modes of sexual expression, preferred characteristics of sexual partners, preferred sexual activities and behaviors) as well as group membership identity (e.g., a sexual orientation identity, or considering oneself as a member of sexuality-related social groups) and attitudes toward sexual minority individuals. The distinctions among sexual orientation, sexual orientation identity, and sexual identity capture and acknowledge both the fluid and stable aspects of sexual identity. Recent scholarship has examined that some dimensions of sexual identity (e.g., relationships, emotions, behaviors, values, group affiliation, and norms) appear to be relatively fluid; by contrast, sexual orientation (i.e., patterns of sexual, romantic, and affectional arousal and desire) remain stable for a majority of people throughout their lifespan (Rosario et al. 2011; Savin-Williams 2011). Models of *sexual identity development* provide additional perspective on the nature and variety of sexual orientation identities over time.

History

Cass (1979) pioneered much of the theory building and exploratory research on the sexual identities of lesbians and gay men. In this work, Cass (1979) described a multi-stage process in which individuals pass through various milestones of identity awareness and formation (Dillon et al. 2011). This work describes what scholars now consider as the coming out process for LGBTQ+ individuals, rather than an inclusive model of sexual identity, because it only considers a single aspect of sexual identity development—the disclosure and acceptance of one's sexual orientation (Dillon et al. 2011). Similar stage models are critiqued for neglecting individual differences in race, ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic class and they're limited in their generalizability to other sexual identities (e.g., bisexuality and heterosexuality) (Dillon et al. 2011; Savin-Williams 2011).

Fassinger and Miller (1996) produced a distinct model of lesbian and gay identity development that incorporates four phases of formation: awareness, exploration, deepening/commitment, and internalization/synthesis (Dillon et al. 2011). This model is unique in its conceptualization of phases of both individual and group membership identity; however it is limited in that participants must identify as gay or lesbian in order to complete the instrument associated with the model (Dillon et al. 2011). As a result, research that utilizes this instrument is likely to only sample participants who are already in the deepening/commitment or internalization/synthesis phase. This model is also limited in that it does not apply to bisexual or heterosexual individuals.

According to sexual identity scholars, bisexual identity development has been acknowledged as a unique and often misunderstood phenomenon because it involves the rejection of not one but two recognized categories of sexual identity (Klein 1993;

Weinberg, Williams, and Pryor 1994; Dillon et al. 2011). Previous research highlights within-group differences among bisexuals as identifying several different "types" of bisexuality (e.g., pure, mid, heterosexual leaning, and homosexual leaning, among others) (Weinberg et al. 1994). Some scholars deem Weinberg and colleagues' (1994) research as groundbreaking and relevant because it challenges and counters the stereotypes that are associated with bisexuality (Dillon et al. 2011). For example, this research demonstrates that: (a) bisexuality is a legitimate identity and (b) these identities experience social pressures to conform to the gay-straight dichotomy (not experienced by other sexual identities), which can cause considerable confusion and uncertainty (Dillon et al. 2011). Scholars argue that additional empirical research on bisexual identity development is needed.

Interestingly, heterosexual identity development is understudied in the area of sexual identity theory and research (Dillon et al. 2011). Building on previous work, Worthington and colleagues (2002) advanced a heterosexual identity model that conceptualizes sexual orientation identity as one of six dimensions of a larger construct of individual sexual identity: (1) perceived sexual needs, (2) preferred sexual activities, (3) preferred characteristics of sexual partners, (4) sexual values, (5) recognition and identification of sexual orientation, and (6) preferred modes of sexual expression (Dillon et al. 2011). Furthermore, multiple biological, psychological and social factors are posited as interrelated and influence one's progression through heterosexual identity development statuses (Dillon et al. 2011). In attempts to integrate previous research and theories on sexual identity formation, Dillon and colleagues (2011) have introduced one inclusive, unifying model of sexual identity development (UMSID).

The Unifying Model

Dillon and colleagues (2011) define sexual identity development as "the individual and social processes by which persons acknowledge and define their sexual needs, values, sexual orientation, preferences for sexual activities, modes of sexual expression, and characteristics of sexual partners" (p. 657). In addition, they argue that the SIDP encompasses an implicit or explicit understanding of one's membership to either a privileged, dominant group or a marginalized, minority group, "with a corresponding set of attitudes, beliefs, and values with respect to members of other sexual identity groups" (Dillon et al. 2011:657). Building upon previous work by McCarn and Fassinger (1996) and Worthington and colleagues (2002), the UMSID describes two parallel, reciprocal developmental determinants: (a) an individual SIDP and (b) a social SIDP (see Figure 1) (Dillon et al. 2011). These two processes are hypothesized to occur within five discernible sexual identity development statuses: (a) compulsory heterosexuality, (b) active exploration, (c) diffusion, (d) deepening and commitment, and (e) synthesis (see Figure 2). Dillon and colleagues (2011) stress that within this model, "there are opportunities for circularity and revisiting of statuses throughout the lifespan" (p. 658) and that this model should thought of as non-linear, flexible, and fluid. Figure 2 illustrates multiple hypothesized processes and trajectories underlying sexual identity development.
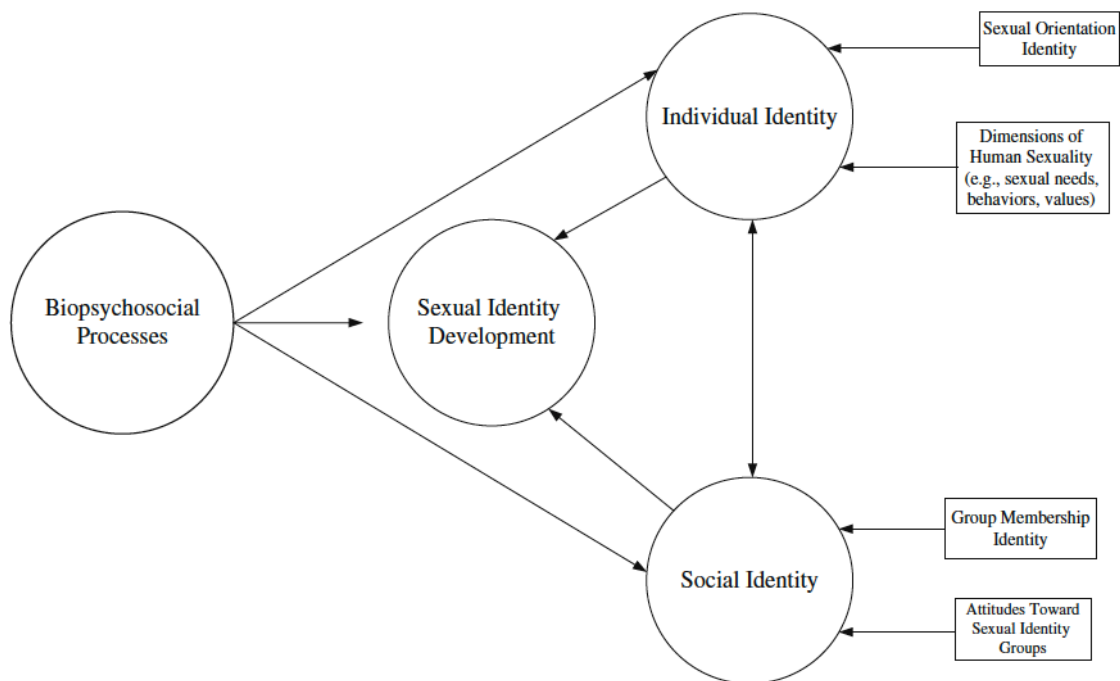
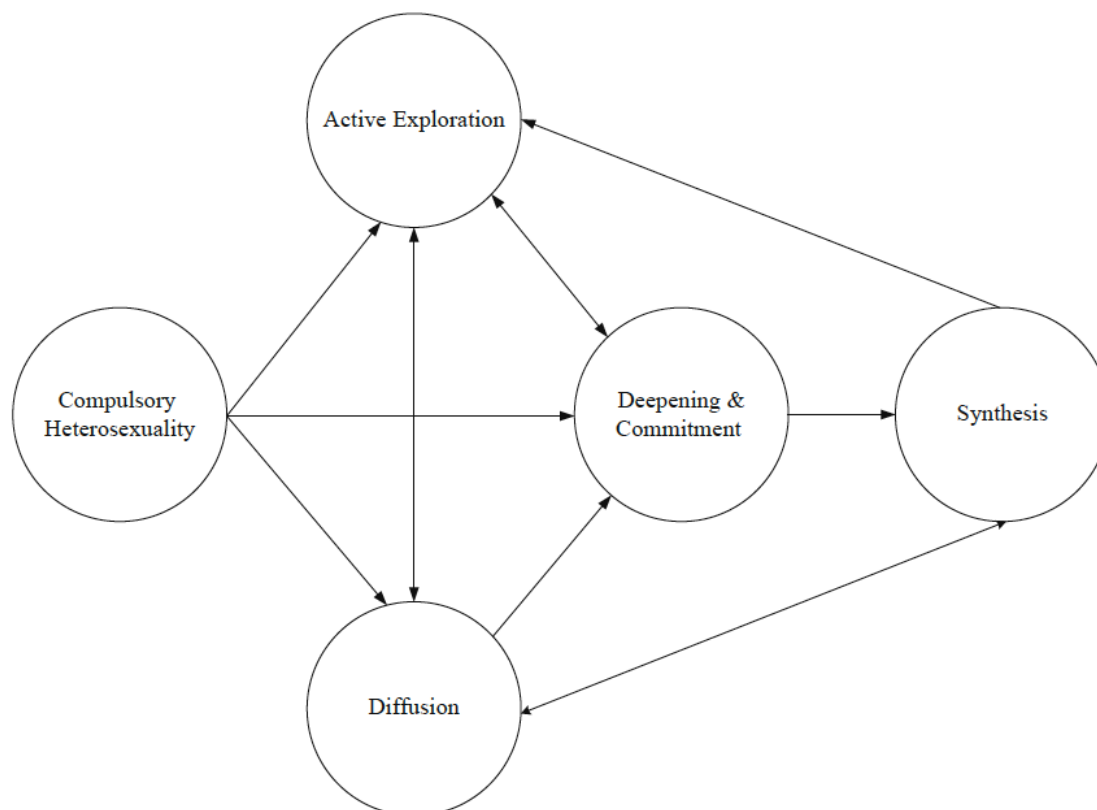Figure 1. Determinants of Sexual Identity Development

Figure 2. Processes of Sexual Identity Development

As previously discussed, *individual* sexual identity includes: sexual orientation identity and other domains of human sexuality (e.g., sexual needs and values as well as preferred sexual activities, characteristics of sexual partners, and modes of sexual expression) (see Figure 1). *Social* sexual identity, on the other hand, includes: group membership identity, and attitudes toward sexual minority individuals (see Figure 1). Dillon and colleagues (2011) contend that regardless of whether an individual is sexually active or not, sexual identity development may occur consciously and subconsciously throughout all statuses of the model.

Statuses of the Unifying Model

Compulsory Heterosexuality

Compulsory heterosexuality refers to the presumption across social systems that heterosexuality is the universal sexuality and that women and men are innately attracted to each other emotionally and sexually (Dillon et al. 2011). Compulsory heterosexuality also reflects micro and macro social mandates for "appropriate" gender roles and sexual behavior and/or avoidance of sexual self-exploration (Dillon et al. 2011). Dillon and colleagues (2011) argue that because most cultures, including the United States, are heteronormative, most individuals begin their SIDP in the compulsory heterosexuality status, even if they later identify as LGBTQ+. With regards to group membership identity, "individuals of any sexual orientation in compulsory heterosexuality tend to operate within culturally prescribed norms for heterosexist assumptions about normative behavior on the part of others" (Dillon et al. 2011:659). According to Dillon and colleagues (2011), awareness that heterosexuals are a privileged, dominant majority group is either denied or repressed from awareness, and individuals in this status are

likely to assume that everyone in their microsocial contexts (e.g., family, work, and other immediate social circles) are also heterosexual. Moreover, among individuals in the compulsory heterosexuality status, attitudes toward heterosexuals are "group appreciating", while attitudes toward sexual minorities are "group depreciating" (Dillon et al. 2011).

Active Exploration

Active exploration is the "purposeful exploration, evaluation, or experimentation of one's sexual needs, values, orientation, and/or preferences for activities, partner characteristics, or modes of sexual expression" (Dillon et al. 2011:660). Active exploration is distinguished in three important ways: (1) exploration can be cognitive or behavioral, (2) exploration is purposeful and tends to be goal directed, and (3) socially mandated aspects of heterosexuality are thought to be questioned or abandoned by individuals of any sexual orientation when active exploration occurs (Dillon et al. 2011). According to Dillon and colleagues (2011), group membership identity is hypothesized to be more salient for individuals in the active exploration status than in the compulsory heterosexuality status. They also posit that individuals in the active exploration status are likely to correspond with more positive, affirmative attitudes toward sexual minorities.

Diffusion

Diffusion is defined as "the absence of commitment and of systematic exploration" (Dillon et al. 2011:662). In other words, the diffusion status reflects someone who is content and unconcerned with not having strong commitments or having actively explored. Dillon and colleagues (2011) argue that, "individuals in diffusion may be more likely to ignore or reject social and cultural prescriptions for sexual values,

behavior, and identity" (p. 662), however they lack goal directed intentions and are likely to have identity confusion in other aspects of their lives.

Deepening and Commitment

Dillon and colleagues (2011) suggest that, individuals of any sexual orientation identity in the deepening and commitment status "exhibit a movement toward greater commitment to their identified sexual needs, values, sexual orientation, and/or preferences for activities, partner characteristics, and modes of sexual expression" (p. 663). They also hypothesize that deepening and commitment is possible (or even likely) without engaging in active exploration. For example, individuals may move directly from compulsory heterosexuality into deepening and commitment if maturational changes in life experiences do not meet the criteria for active exploration (Dillon et al. 2011). Deepening and commitment following active exploration is thought to be the most common identity development process for lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals, specifically (Dillon et al. 2011). Dillon and colleagues (2011) hypothesize that a heightened sense of self-understanding leads to higher levels of clarity and choices regarding one's sexuality. They propose that this process is also linked to higher levels of acceptance and willingness to further evaluate one's sexual identity (Dillon et al. 2011). Dillon and colleagues (2011) suggest that for LGBTQ+ individuals and committed heterosexuals in this status, their attitudes and beliefs toward sexual identity groups and group membership begin to deepen and mature into "conscious, coherent perspectives on dominant/non-dominant group relations, privilege or loss of privilege, and oppression or marginalization" (p. 664).

Synthesis

Synthesis status is characterized by a state of congruence between the individual and social identity processes of sexual identity development. According to Dillon and colleagues (2011), in the synthesis status, "people come to an understanding of sexual identity that fulfills their self-definitions and carries over to their attitudes and behaviors toward both LGB-identified and heterosexually identified individuals" (p. 664). In this status, all of the determinants of sexual identity merge into an overall sexual self-concept that is conscious, congruent, and volitional (Dillon et al. 2011).

To summarize, the UMSID is innovative in its applicability across sexual orientation identities and inclusion of a wide range of possible developmental trajectories. Although Dillon and colleagues (2011) proposed this model as hypothetical without testing its assumptions, they reference and credit a rich body of empirical literature that supports the processes and statuses in the model (McCarn and Fassinger 1996; Worthington et al. 2002; Rosario et al. 2011; Savin-Williams 2011). Additional efforts should focus on research designs to validate the UMSID (Patton et al. 2016). However, Dillon and colleagues (2011) contend that this model should inform interventions and future research regarding human sexuality that is not constricted to gay-straight dichotomies and/or restricted by other theoretical and methodological limitations of the past. Patton and colleagues (2016) argue that the UMSID "represents the most ambitious attempt to date to provide a framework for understanding parallel processes of individual and social identities, with flexibility across statuses, incorporating personal and environmental determinants, and applicable to any sexual identity" (p. 159-160).

As I have previously mentioned, the UMSID, and the research that underlies its assumptions and concepts, suggests several applications in sociological practice. This model incorporates research that positions sexual identity development in social environments, for example, within educational settings.

Socialization

In addition to relying on the assumptions set forth by the UMSID, the notion of socialization poses important theoretical considerations when examining the ways in which the SIDP is influenced by SBSE experiences for LGBTQ+ individuals. Socialization refers to the "ongoing, interactive process through which individuals develop identities and learn the ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that characterize their society" (Sandstrom et al. 2014:85). Socialization is the process through which we learn cultural beliefs and social rules in order to successfully navigate the social world and become members of society (O'Brien 2011). Socialization occurs within interactions with others and is a reciprocal process, meaning that individuals are both the socializee and the socializer, simultaneously (Sandstrom et al. 2014). People who are influential to the socialization of another are referred to as agents of socialization, and these people may include: parents, siblings, teachers, peers, and mass media (Sandstrom et al. 2014).

The concept of identity is also thought to develop through social interaction, therefore, identity, and the construction of identity, is an essential component to the socialization process (Charon 2008). According to O'Brien (2011),

> through the process of socialization, social norms become integrated into the individual as a perspective, or set of perspectives. These perspectives form the basis of self and social evaluation – we make sense of and judge our own feelings and behavior, as well as that of other, in accordance with these socially learned perspectives (p. 184-185).

One of the objectives of socialization is to produce meaningful identities (Sandstrom et al. 2014). For example, gender is an identity that is acquired through socialization (Corrado 2009). According to Sandstrom and colleagues (2014), "children do not inherent a "natural" understanding of how to act masculine or feminine or how to classify themselves in terms of these categories. They acquire this understanding through their interactions" (p. 96). Other essential components to the socialization process are turning points and epiphanies. Turning points and epiphanies are characterized as "moments of crisis or revelation that disrupt and alter a person's fundamental understandings, outlooks, and self-images" (Sandstrom et al. 2014:111). In other words, individuals experience turning points or epiphanies when socially or culturally learned aspects of their perspectives or identity are questioned or changed.

Theoretical considerations set forth by socialization are relevant to this study because our cultural beliefs surrounding sexual and gender identity favor those who are heterosexual and cisgender. Various agents of socialization teach us that heterosexuality is natural and normal (LaMarre 2009), and that biological sex determines gender identity (Corrado 2009). These cultural beliefs lead members of our society to form attitudes around the idea that LGBTQ+ identities do not fit what is considered socially or culturally appropriate. Therefore, the SIDP can be much more difficult for LGBTQ+ individuals. It may take these individuals longer to reach the synthesis status as they must rethink perspectives taught to them through early socialization processes.

METHODOLOGY

Data for this project were gathered through qualitative methods in order to garner rich, descriptive information about dynamic, complex processes. Qualitative research methods are appropriate for centering the voices of marginalized identities whose views or experiences are often dismissed or misrepresented (Sprague 2016). More specifically, in-depth interviews enable researchers to illuminate the interpretation of experience or thought processes on the participants own terms and in the context of their particular situation. Moreover, qualitative research methods are appropriate for conducting initial explorations of theoretical assumptions that have not yet been tested (Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault 2015). As previously mentioned, the hypotheses of the UMSID have not been formally tested through sociological research design. Therefore, qualitative methods serve as the most appropriate approach for addressing the objectives of this project.

A brief note on my identities as the researcher: I am a White, non-Hispanic, heterosexual, cisgender female. I recognize the power and privilege awarded to me due to the intersection of these identities and that this advantage positions me as an ally to the individuals and experiences in which I am exploring. I do not have prior understandings of how marginalized sexual identities are influenced by SBSE settings from lived experience.

Methods

In-depth, qualitative interviews were conducted with 18 adults, between the ages of 18 – 26, who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning,

pansexual, or asexual. All interviews were conducted over the phone and then fully transcribed. The data were coded and analyzed using Dedoose software whereby various codes and sub-codes, described in detail below, contribute to the final themes reported in the findings. All participants signed the Institutional Review Board approved informed consent document (see Appendix B) and all participant names have been changed for confidentiality.

Obtaining the Sample

Interview participants were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling techniques. To begin, I sought out participants through personal contacts, who then provided references for other qualifying individuals. I gained seven participants through this technique. Next, I utilized my personal Facebook account in which I posted information about the study and how to contact me if they, or anyone they knew, would be interested in participating. I gained three more participants through social media. Lastly, I sent an email (again, introducing the study with my contact information) to a university club asking for participants. I gained eight additional participants through this technique.

Participant Demographics

Of the 18 participants, 5 (27.8%) identify as female, 7 (38.9%) identify as male, 2 (11.1%) identify as non-binary, 2 (11.1%) identify as transgender female, and 2 (11.1%) identify as transgender male. Of the 18 participants, 2 (11.1%) identify as lesbian, 6 (33.3%) identify as gay, 1 (5.6%) identifies as bisexual, 1 (5.6%) identifies as queer, 1 (5.6%) identifies as questioning, 4 (22.2%) identify as pansexual, 2 (11.1%) identify as asexual, and 1 (5.6%) identifies as heterosexual. The sample for this study is

predominately White, non-Hispanic (66.7%), while 4 (22.2%) participants identify as

Hispanic/Latinx and 2 (11.1%) participants identify as Black. The participants ages range

from 18 – 26 with the average age being 22 years. Of the 18 participants, 7 (38.9%)

report having abstinence-only-type SBSE experiences, while 9 (50.0%) report having

comprehensive-type SBSE experiences. Two (11.1%) participants report that they were

opted-out of SBSE settings by their parents. Avery was opted-out of an abstinence-only-

type SBSE setting and received supplementary material from his parents. Jordan was

opted-out of a comprehensive-type SBSE setting and did not receive supplementary

material from his parents (see Table 2 for detailed demographic information).

Table 2. Participant Demographics

Name	Age	Sexual Identity	Gender Identity	Racial/Ethnic Identity	SBSE Type
Alex	25	Lesbian	Female	White	Abstinence-only
Anne	21	Queer	Female	White, Hispanic	Abstinence-only
Avery	18	Gay	Transgender Male	White	Opted-out, family taught
Blake	22	Asexual	Male	Black	Comprehensive
Chris*	21	Pansexual	Non-binary	White	Comprehensive
Cody	25	Asexual	Male	White	Abstinence-only
Corey	22	Gay	Male	White	Comprehensive
Dakota	23	Heterosexual	Transgender Male	White, Hispanic	Comprehensive
Hannah	19	Lesbian	Female	White	Abstinence-only
Jake	19	Gay	Male	White, Hispanic	Comprehensive
Jordan*	20	Bisexual	Non-binary	White	Opted-out, family taught
Kyle	24	Gay	Male	Black	Comprehensive
Lucas	25	Gay	Male	Hispanic	Comprehensive
Rachel	21	Pansexual	Female	White	Comprehensive
Riley	19	Pansexual	Transgender Female	White	Comprehensive
Spencer	24	Pansexual	Transgender Female	White	Abstinence-only
Taylor	25	Gay	Male	White	Abstinence-only
Toni	19	Questioning	Female	White	Abstinence-only

* Prefers they/their/them pronouns

Qualitative Interviews

I asked participants to share their demographic information (e.g., age, sexual

identity, gender identity, racial/ethnic identity, highest level of education completed, and

the region within the United States in which they reside). Then, I asked participants to tell

me how they came to understand their sexual identity and/or sexual orientation. Next, I

asked participants to share their experiences within SBSE settings. Lastly, I asked

participants about how they felt their SIDP was influenced by (if at all) their experiences

with SBSE settings and what they wish they would have learned in those settings (see

Appendix C for full interview guide).

Coding Schemes

The initial set of codes included all five statuses of the UMSID (compulsory

heterosexuality, active exploration, diffusion, deepening and commitment, and synthesis).

I paid particular attention to whether or not the participants' experience reflected their

individual SIDP (i.e., their sexual needs, values, orientation, and/or preferences for

activities, partner characteristics, or modes of sexual expression) or a social sexuality

identity development process (i.e., group membership identity, attitudes toward sexual

identity groups), which became two sub-codes within the five original codes. I then

coded participants responses regarding their experiences within SBSE settings as it

related to the five statuses of the UMSID. This process led to the collection of a third set

of sub-codes within the five original codes that illustrate the unique ways in which SBSE

settings reinforce, encourage, or prolong each of the five statuses of sexual identity

development. The final list of codes includes five top-level codes, or main themes,

followed by three sets of sub-codes (see Table 3).

Table 3. Outline of Final Codes

TOP-LEVEL CODES	Compulsory Heterosexuality	Active Exploration	Diffusion	Deepening & Commitment	Synthesis
SUB-CODES	Individual	Individual	Individual	Individual	Individual
	Social	Social	Social	Social	Social
	SBSE Influence	SBSE Influence	SBSE Influence	SBSE Influence	SBSE Influence

FINDINGS

The findings for this study focus on the five discernible sexual identity development statuses of the UMSID: compulsory heterosexuality, active exploration, diffusion, deepening and commitment, and synthesis (see Figure 2) (Dillon et al. 2011). The data illustrate the ways in which each of the two developmental determinants of the unifying model—the individual and the social identity development process (see Figure 1)—occur within the five statuses and how these processes are influenced by SBSE experiences within each status for LGTBQ+ individuals.

Compulsory Heterosexuality

The first theme, "compulsory heterosexuality," refers to the process where individuals assume themselves and others to be heterosexual because heterosexuality is the cultural norm and expectation. Most individuals begin their SIDP within the compulsory heterosexuality status because they have been socialized to operate within a culturally prescribed, heterosexist social script that rewards "normative" behavior. Moreover, compulsory heterosexuality reflects social mandates for "appropriate" gender roles and sexual behavior.

Cody (asexual male, abstinence-only) describes how heterosexuality stands as the cultural norm when he says, "everybody assumes in a heteronormative society that you're gonna end up being straight when you're a kid. But that wasn't the case at all." Cody demonstrates how, before exploring or evaluating his orientation, he had assumed himself to be heterosexual because that is the cultural expectation. Similarly, Lucas (gay male,

comprehensive) illustrates how heterosexuality is ever-present within American culture when he says:

> That is what we're super exposed [to] when we're small, like there's no deviation…. And like [it's] just in everything, in all the movies, TV, all the people around you. It's kind of, I think there's a level of like assumed, like oh yeah… people are straight, that's generally what it's going to be.

Both Cody and Lucas acknowledge the cultural assumptions surrounding sexuality – that heterosexuality is expected and promoted by agents of socialization.

Rachel (pansexual female, comprehensive) shares that, while in the process of developing her sexuality identity, she felt constrained by the social script regarding gender roles and expectations. She said:

> I was still fairly stuck in the mindset that there has to be a masculine and a feminine person in the relationship. And in my head [I] caught myself deciding these roles, like who's going to hold the door open, who pays, and stuff like that.

Rachel's struggle gives support to how compulsory heterosexuality reflects social mandates for appropriate gender roles and infiltrates thought processes regarding sexuality. Similarly, Toni (questioning female, abstinence-only) explains how she did not understand that romantic relationships were possible outside of the male-female dichotomy. She said:

> Ever since I was a little kid… I was always really drawn to the idea of romance and I always assumed that it was necessary to have a man involved to be able to have a romantic relationship. It never really crossed my mind that you could be gay, I didn't think that was an option.

Toni is suggesting that due to heteronormative assumptions and expectations surrounding partnerships and sexuality, she believed that finding a male partner (because she identifies as female) would be the only way for her to fulfill her romantic desires. Both Rachel and Toni illustrate the ways in which they have been socialized to rely on

gendered, heterosexist social scripts regarding normative and appropriate behavior regarding sexuality and romance.

Some participants indicated they felt social pressure to conform to gendered, heterosexist social scripts even before having the chance to begin developing their sexual identity. For example, Anne (queer female, abstinence-only) explained:

> I think that's ridiculous. Like constantly, "oh [do] you have a boyfriend?" Like, "no and I don't want one at all." So, it's like I'm always put in a box before I can even like show… who I am, I guess. And then it's like awkward to correct someone, always be[ing] like "actually no," and turn your hangout into a lesson. It's exhausting. And they don't even believe you.

Here, Anne is describing her frustration with the social pressure that she has received from others, pushing her to signify that she is in fact heterosexual and advised to display appropriate social indicators associated with this expectation, like having a boyfriend. Another participant shared his familiarity of feeling pressured by gendered, heterosexist stereotypes, which indicate implicit attitudes and beliefs about sexual identity groups. Cody (asexual male, abstinence-only) says: "I was bullied a lot growing up. I was told that I had very feminine mannerisms, I crossed my legs, things like that. Things that weren't seen as socially normal for a man." Through his experiences of being bullied, Cody was socialized to learn the cultural mandates for appropriate gender behavior.

The preceding anecdotes illustrate various ways in which the individual and the social identity developmental processes are influenced by components of compulsory heterosexuality as well as the cultural assumptions surrounding gender and sexuality enforced by socialization practices. Cody and Lucas tell of how heteronormative assumptions regarding sexual orientation identity persuaded their individual SIDP. Rachel, Toni, and Anne discuss various ways in which practices of gender socialization

using heterosexist social scripts influenced their social SIDP. The following section highlights ways in which SBSE settings are responsible for perpetuating gendered and heteronormative assumptions regarding gender and sexuality.

Influence

Participants show various ways in which SBSE settings reinforce the components of compulsory heterosexuality. Rachel (pansexual female, comprehensive) explains how heteronormative assumptions are cultivated within SBSE settings when she says: "[sex ed] was basically assuming everyone was cisgender [and] heterosexual." In other words, the curriculum that Rachel was taught was rooted in the presumption that all students (currently or eventually) identify as heterosexual. Chris (pansexual non-binary, comprehensive) shares how the curriculum presented to them was exclusive to heterosexuality and that "the topics of gender and sexuality were never, ever brought up. It was always really focused on straight people… Anything that wasn't heterosexual was never mentioned, ever." Likewise, Jordan (bisexual non-binary, opted-out/family taught) mentions that it felt "weird that non-heterosexual identities and relationships… weren't even acknowledged at all" within their SBSE setting.

Some participants illustrate various long-term impacts that they feel the heteronormative curriculum had on their SIDP, particularly navigating sexual experiences. For example, Jake (gay male, comprehensive) says, "it [made] people uncomfortable [to] talk about anything other than heterosexuality. [So] it made me feel uncomfortable [and now] I don't know anything about my potential sexual intercourse experience." Jake explains that he has not yet experienced sex but feels ill-equipped with important information on how to navigate that experience when it comes because the

SBSE he was given did not address considerations or precautions when engaging in

sexual behavior outside of a heterosexual partnership. Similarly, Chris (pansexual non-

binary, comprehensive) says:

> I was always really nervous… about having sexual encounters with women because I feel like when it comes to men, it's like pretty straight forward. It's like, you know, largely penetrative, it's kind of easy to think about because you grow up being taught that's the way you have sex. And [so] I was nervous about sexual interactions with women because I didn't know what it was supposed to look like… I had no base line, or guide that wasn't from porn and that's not really realistic. And I think that that kind of, to some extent, [didn't necessarily] stop me from exploring that part of my sexual identity but it definitely inhibited it and it made me more reluctant to date or be interested in women more than casually because I was like I don't know what I'm supposed to do.

Both Jake and Chris demonstrate how the SBSE curriculum that they received was

inadequate in addressing the needs and concerns of non-heterosexual identities. The lack

of attention paid to LGBTQ+ identities has influenced the ways in which Jake and Chris

think about and approach sexual encounters – with confusion, angst, and fear.

For most of the participants, they were first introduced to SBSE between 5th and

7th grade. In these initial settings, the majority of participants indicate being split up into

two separate groups according to binary gender categories. Participants explain that they

were introduced to information on puberty, including how they can expect their bodies to

start changing. Lucas (gay male, comprehensive) said:

> I think the first time we had like a puberty thing was in 6th grade. And they divided the boys and the girls into separate classes. We watched one of those like infographic movies, like to show the body, and it was like "oh, your body's gonna start getting hair in places" and stuff.

Jake (gay male, comprehensive) shares a similar experience saying, "in 5th grade, we had

to watch the puberty videos and we were all separated from guys and girls." Other

participants elaborate that they were only taught the specifics of their gender category.

For example, the girls learned about menses and menstruation, while the boys learned about nocturnal emissions and voice changes. Hannah (lesbian female, abstinence-only) said:

> The first time we were introduced to anything was, I think, 5th grade and they split up the boys and the girls and it was just a bit of a talk. I think we were introduced to the idea of getting periods and developing bodies.

Participants who report having these sets of experiences note that they never learned about what was taught to the other group. In other words, the boys were not shown female anatomy, were not versed on the meaning and implications of menstruation, or advised to understand how their female peers bodies would be maturing. Chris (pansexual non-binary, comprehensive) says:

> In 6th grade they pulled all the girls in one room and all the boys in one room… I have no idea what they taught the boys. But we didn't learn anything about puberty for the opposite sex, they exclusively were telling us about our reproductive system.

Blake (asexual male, comprehensive) tells a similar story. He says:

> One thing they did do was they split the class down the middle between women and men. So, guys only got to learn about themselves and women only got to learn about themselves… So, there was a whole lot of stuff that I still had no idea about with female anatomy.

These stories highlight how SBSE settings reinforce the notion that gender categories are dichotomous and mutually exclusive.

The preceding narratives demonstrate the ways in which SBSE settings promote and reinforce heteronormative assumptions about sexuality, which show to have a negative impact on LGBTQ+ individuals. Jake and Chris voice feelings of anxiety and discomfort when thinking about or approaching sexual encounters due to the lack of knowledge provided to them by SBSE. The previous stories also exemplify how SBSE

settings are responsible for gender socialization processes, in which they endorse cultural

beliefs regarding gender identity as only two, mutually exclusive categories. Students are

segregated into groups based on presumed reproductive organs, marked by gender

performance and expression, and are then taught select information specific to that group.

Active Exploration

The second theme, "active exploration," refers to the process where individuals

begin to explore, evaluate, or experiment with one's sexual needs, values, orientation,

and/or preferences for activities, partner characteristics, or modes of sexual expression.

Active exploration is purposeful, can occur cognitively or behaviorally, and is

characterized by an individual's questioning or abandonment of socially mandated

aspects of heterosexuality. Individuals within the active exploration status tend to agree

with more positive, affirmative attitudes toward other sexual identity groups.

All 18 participants describe active exploration as being a critical part of their

SIDP. Participants describe their experience within the active exploration status in many

ways. Some participants mentioned that active exploration began as a cognitive process

of evaluation, which then led to behavioral processes of exploration and experimentation.

For instance, Rachel (pansexual female, comprehensive) says:

> It had kind of been something I was thinking about for a while. And then it just
> kind of happened. One day over spring break I was like this is something I
> actually want to pursue because I think I like women.

Alex (lesbian female, abstinence-only) tells a similar story when she says:

> I'd kind of taken time to talk to myself about it and I [thought] like, why doesn't
> being bisexual feel right? Why doesn't being straight feel right? And I [I thought]
> okay, well maybe I actually am a lesbian. And that felt right. Like within my
> person, it felt right… And then of course, figuring out where I felt the most
> comfortable. I mean, I obviously did not feel comfortable in a heterosexual
> relationship. It was not something that appealed to me. So that was a huge thing,

was just researching, not necessarily researching, but looking into myself and my feelings and really getting connected with how I felt about me.

Both Rachel and Alex support the notion that active exploration occurs cognitively and purposefully. For Taylor (gay male, abstinence-only), behavioral experimentation was a key component for his SIDP. He says, "when I was little, one of my best friends and I, we experimented together… We began masturbating together and that's when I realized, I was like, oh, dudes are a thing that you can be into, I like that." The preceding stories from Rachel, Alex, and Taylor support the notion whether active exploration occurs cognitively or behaviorally, the evaluation and/or exploration of one's own sexual needs, values, and preferences is essential to sexual identity development processes.

For Cody (asexual male, abstinence-only), active exploration began when he noticed his peers were exploring their sexual interests, which encouraged him to do the same. He explains:

> So, what really started it for me was when [my friends] would start talking about their sexual interests and artwork and videos or whatever they might have found on the Internet, and it was something that I couldn't relate to. I thought I was a late bloomer at that point in time because, it wasn't that I was disinterested, I just didn't understand why I wasn't nearly as interested as they were. And that led to a lot of personal conflict for me and a lot of introspection, something I'd never really done up until that point in my life. You know? Little kids don't necessarily have the social awareness to really introspect much, but it can happen early on when there's an immediate difference from yourself and the people around you.

Here, Cody is demonstrating how agents of socialization influence identity development processes. It was through his friends that Cody learned the social significance of exploring sexuality as a component of his identity.

All 18 participants mention the Internet and the use of online information as tools for active exploration. This is, in part, due to the lack of education they received in school or from their parents about non-heterosexual identities or other gender identity groups,

which is discussed further in the following section. Some participants mention that active

exploration, for them, began with asking questions through Internet search engines. For

example, Alex (lesbian female, abstinence-only) shares:

> It was a lot of online research of [asking], "what does being gay mean?" You know, just the google research, like "why do I not feel this way when I'm with this person, but I feel this way when I'm with this person and they're the same gender?" type of thing.

Similarly, another participant used online journals and magazines to explore their feelings

and questions regarding sexuality. Avery (gay transgender male, opted-out/family taught)

says:

> I started looking for more information on sexual orientation… I'm super interested in psychology and so I read about the psychology related to it a lot. And I read articles with just general information off of psychological newsletters basically, online magazines. And I joined a forum for a couple of years and I got information from the people on the forum, too. Like just more experiential information, as opposed to, you know, just definitions.

Both Alex and Avery demonstrate that curiosity regarding sexual identity is prevalent

among LGBTQ+ individuals and that they desire accurate knowledge about their feelings

and experiences. Therefore, if individuals feel they are not receiving proper education

within SBSE settings, they will explore other accessible avenues in order to acquire this

information.

Chris (pansexual non-binary, comprehensive) presents a notable finding when

reflecting upon their experience within the active exploration status. They said:

> Privilege allowed me to internally explore a little bit before I [came] out because I knew that nothing bad was gonna happen when I did. And I think that shaped it a lot. I've never had to deal with anything negative because of my race and I think that definitely set into me being comfortable with my identity because I didn't have to worry about like being gay and also a person of color.

Here, Chris' acknowledges the unearned, ascribed privilege that is awarded to dominant social groups, like heterosexual and White identities, and how this privilege may enable some and disable others when exploring or evaluating their sexual identity.

The preceding anecdotes illustrate various ways in which the individual and the social identity developmental processes are influenced by components of active exploration and that the evaluation of one's sexual identity is induced by agents of socialization. Rachel and Alex give evidence that shows how cognitive evaluation of one's own sexual needs, values, and preferences is significant to the individual SIDP. Moreover, Taylor tells of how behavioral experimentation is valuable to the individual SIDP. Cody's experience highlights the ways in which agents of socialization can play a role in both the individual and the social SIDP. Additionally, all participants referenced the Internet and the use of information available online as vital resources when evaluating or exploring their sexual identity. The following section depicts how SBSE settings serve to simultaneously discourage and encourage active exploration.

Influence

Participants demonstrate various ways in which SBSE curriculum has been designed to portray non-heterosexual identities as deviant or abnormal, inferring that exploration with regards to non-heteronormative sexual behavior is wrong or immoral. Anne (queer female, abstinence-only) mentions that, when she was younger, if she were to evaluate or explore her sexual needs, values, or preferences, she "felt guilty or weird because it's unheard of." Blake (asexual male, comprehensive) further stresses Anne's point when he says:

> [Sex education] presented so many things as so dangerous and evil that, you know, even when you are seeking things out on your own, you're checking over

your shoulder, terrified that anybody else is going to find out. Even though it's normal questions.

Both Anne and Blake demonstrate how the their SBSE atmosphere instilled feelings of embarrassment, shame, and fear when it came to explore components of their sexuality. Moreover, Taylor (gay male, abstinence-only) talks about being made to feel like he was abnormal or like a sexual deviant within his SBSE setting. He says:

> I felt like my sexual identity wasn't really sexual in the way that they would talk about it. Like it didn't count as normal or like every day sex. It felt like they were talking about normal sex and it made me feel like my sexual identity was deviant because I wasn't having sex with a woman. I wasn't having sex with someone with a vagina.

Similarly, Chris (pansexual non-binary, comprehensive) explains that they felt an implicit bias within the SBSE curriculum when it came to learning about contraception and STIs. They said:

> It was that if you have anal sex, you're going to permanently ruin your body and never be able to poop properly again and you're gonna get AIDS. And it didn't address gay people specifically, but I think [it's] pretty obviously aimed towards gay men.

Here, Chris is discussing the ways in which anal penetration, as a form of sexual activity among gay men, is depicted as permanently harmful, risky, and irresponsible, which implies that those who choose to participate in this kind of sexual behavior are deviant or immoral for doing so.

From these stories, it's obvious that, in this capacity, SBSE plays a role in discouraging LGBTQ+ individuals to explore and evaluate their sexual identity. Non-heterosexual identities portrayed as abnormal or at risk for greater consequences and therefore should not be explored or experimented with. However, this data shows that,

ironically, this disregard for and misrepresentation of LGBTQ+ identities is the very

factor that pushes individuals to explore their sexual identities outside of SBSE settings.

As mentioned previously, all 18 participants mentioned that, due to the lack of

education regarding non-heterosexual or cisgender identity groups within SBSE settings,

they sought out information elsewhere, on their own. When I asked Hannah (lesbian

female, abstinence-only) what SBSE was like for her, she answered, "[I was] frustrated

with how inadequate [it was]. It just felt like a waste of time for me… Anything I learned

about [sex] or the community, I definitely did on my own time and interactions." The two

main sources of education that participants discussed were Internet/online-based or

anecdotal information from other similarly-identifying individuals. Cody (asexual male,

abstinence-only) says, "the emotional aspects were never explored [in school], so that

was [the] kind of thing that I pretty much came to terms with entirely on my own,

through social experiences with other people, especially through the Internet." Taylor

(gay male, abstinence-only) reiterates this point as he continues his story about how

SBSE made him feel like his "sexual identity was deviant because [he] wasn't having sex

with a woman." He says:

> So, in order to learn about [gay sex] I had to find another way to learn about it and
> that was a more deviant way because they [didn't] really have sex ed on the
> Internet in 2008 like they do now. So, I had to go through some deviant ways to
> learn about it, whereas my straight peers did not. They just learned [in school] and
> were like, cool.

So, in this capacity, SBSE plays a role in encouraging LGBTQ+ individuals to explore

and evaluate their sexual identities by not offering substantive information regarding their

identities within these settings. Therefore, LGBTQ+ individuals are using online and

social media platforms like YouTube, Tumblr, and online pornography to educate

themselves about identity-specific practices and concerns. Participants demonstrate that LGBTQ+ individuals are desperate for information regarding sexuality (and gender identity), therefore they will explore any and all avenues to get this information.

Diffusion

The third theme, "diffusion," refers to the process where individuals are unconcerned and content with not having strong commitments or having actively explored their sexual identity. Individuals within the diffusion status are likely to ignore or reject social and cultural scripts for "normative" sexual values, behavior, and/or identity.

The data supports Dillon and colleagues' (2011) hypothesis that deepening and commitment following active exploration is the most common identity development process for lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals, specifically. With the exception of two participants, most participants in this study did not express experiencing the diffusion status as part of their SIDP. Most of the participants shared moving directly from the active exploration status to the deepening and commitment status. When I asked Anne (queer female, abstinence-only) how she came to understand her sexual needs, values, or preferences, she answered: "I just kind of denied it and didn't think about it until probably college again. [But] I just always knew I wasn't straight, completely." Similarly, when I asked Riley (pansexual transgender female, comprehensive) how she came to understand her sexual identity, she replied that she thought, "eh, something's weird. I'm going to just focus all my energy on Dungeons and Dragons and call it good." Both Anne and Riley expressed being temporarily unconcerned with not having strong commitments to their sexual identity.

Influence

Although there is not enough data to state conclusively whether SBSE settings influence the diffusion status of sexual identity development, Dakota (heterosexual transgender male, comprehensive) indicates that his experience within SBSE settings was an uncomfortable environment that pushed him into a state of not wanting to evaluate his sexuality or gender identity. He says:

> I think it was something that I didn't really care about… It made me uncomfortable… I kind of saw it as, you know, again, like I don't really want any of this. Could somebody else have it and I would switch. It was kind of a weird situation for me.

Other than the previously mentioned anecdotes from Anne, Riley, and Dakota, diffusion was not an apparent component of the SIDP for study participants.

Deepening and Commitment

The fourth theme, "deepening and commitment," refers to the process where individuals exhibit movement toward greater commitment to their identified sexual needs, values, orientation, and/or preferences for activities, partner characteristics, or modes of sexual expression. Deepening and commitment can occur without engaging in active exploration, however Dillon and colleagues (2011) hypothesize that active exploration followed by deepening and commitment is the most common SIDP for lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals, specifically. For individuals within the deepening and commitment status, group membership identity processes as well as attitudes toward other sexual identity groups begin to grow and mature into conscious, coherent perspectives on dominant/non-dominant group relations. In other words, individuals begin to understand social and structural privileges awarded to dominant identity groups

(e.g., heterosexuality) and begin to experience the loss of this privilege through oppressive practices that disadvantage minority identity groups (e.g., LGBTQ+).

The current data illustrates that the deepening and commitment status cooccurs with the development of the social identity process (i.e., acknowledging membership to a marginalized minority group) more so than with the development of the individual identity. However, for one participant, finding a label that "fit" was an important step for them as they entered the deepening and commitment status. Cody (asexual male, abstinence-only) explains:

> It was like, once I finally found the asexual identity, it was finally like I had, [I] didn't need to question it anymore because the things I'd been feeling and asking all along were already a thing out there, in asexuality.

For Cody, discovering an identity category that characterized what he had identified as his sexual needs, values, and preferences helped solidify his commitment to asexuality. In other words, recognizing asexuality as a quality or characteristic of having no sexual feelings or desires enabled Cody to move toward holding stronger commitments to his sexual identity group.

Riley (pansexual transgender female, comprehensive) provides an excellent explanation that captures the ways in which individuals may interpret group membership identity with regards to recognizing privilege within the deepening and commitment status. When I asked about her attitudes and beliefs regarding heterosexual and cisgender individuals, she answered:

> I think that it's more of, we have grown up in an oppressive system that favors those individuals… I think what's more accurate is yes, minority communities, specifically queer communities and people of color… are definitely oppressed. But the oppressors are not necessarily the people who have the privilege, they are the people who are giving those people the privilege. So, it's more of a top down kind of thing. So personally, I have nothing against cisgender, white men or any

of those other dominant groups. What I have a problem with is the system that created the situation in which I am currently living.

Here, Riley demonstrates how, for individuals in the deepening and commitment status, group membership identity processes as well as attitudes toward other sexual identity groups begin to grow and mature into conscious, coherent perspectives on dominant/non-dominant group relations. Riley acknowledges that her sexual identity is part of a marginalized group in which she receives less cultural advantage than heterosexual and cisgender identities, which are privileged within the larger social system.

The preceding narratives illustrate various ways in which both the individual and the social identity developmental processes are strengthened by engaging in deepening and commitment practices. Cody tells of how finding a sexual orientation label that best characterized his sexual needs, values, and preferences is crucial to the individual SIDP. Riley provides insight into how the saliency of group membership identity as well as maturation of attitudes and beliefs regarding other sexual identity groups are significant to the social SIDP. The following section highlights ways in which SBSE settings are responsible for prolonging the maturation of and commitment to sexual identity for LGBTQ+ individuals.

Influence

Participants highlight how the SIDP is influenced by SBSE settings in that, for many participants, reaching the deepening and commitment or synthesis status was prolonged by experiences within these settings. Most participants report that if they had been introduced to information regarding sexual identities other than heterosexual and/or gender identities other than cisgender, they would have reacted the synthesis status or moved into the deepening and commitment status much earlier in their lives. For

instance, Rachel (pansexual female, comprehensive) says, "education, especially at a young age, is super, super important for [identity]. Because if we had had that then, I mean the whole idea of coming out would like have less importance. Because it would be more normalized." More specifically, some participants mentioned that the invisibility and lack of representation of their identity within SBSE curriculum made the SIDP more difficult. For example, Jordan (bisexual non-binary, opted-out/family taught) shares:

> So, I guess, like when you're a kid and you're sort of wrestling with that piece of your identity… to have it like… sort of like, the invisibility of non-heterosexual identities and relationships in the education made it harder for me to like come to terms with the fact that I am that.

Both Rachel and Jordan demonstrate that a more inclusive and comprehensive sexuality education curriculum would better serve all students in developing their sexual identity.

Other participants mentioned that SBSE prohibited them from moving into the deepening and commitment status. For instance, Rachel (pansexual female, comprehensive) explains:

> Constantly being taught that it's only like one man, one woman, kind of takes away the other options. So, you're made to feel like if you were to be attracted to the same gender or be transgender that it's wrong and it's like against the norm. So, I think in itself causes a lot of psychological conflict and familial conflict and all of this conflict.

Spencer (pansexual transgender female, abstinence-only) shares a similar story when she says:

> If I didn't always have, you know, even school telling me that I was a guy, even though I knew deep down I wasn't, then maybe I could have come to that realization sooner. Because that's definitely one of the things trans people always wish, is that they could have started sooner.

Finally, Riley (pansexual transgender female, comprehensive) reiterates Rachel and Spencer's point when she shares:

> I think it's why it took me so damn long to figure it out. I mean religious parts aside, there was definitely a subtle but present gay people are weird, this isn't normal, and why would you be like that… It was all this stuff that was like no this isn't normal, don't do that, don't look at that. And it really did help push me in the closet for a really long time. And it still has effects on me in that I have a hard time imagining a relationship past my current one just because I'm not sure that anybody would have me. And that's bullshit and I know that but it's definitely a level of like what if.

Rachel, Spencer, and Riley demonstrate the ways in which experiences within SBSE settings can be injuring to LGTBQ+ individuals as they go through the process of developing their sexual (and gender) identities.

The preceding stories reflect the ways in which messages of immorality as well as the invisibility and misrepresentation of non-heterosexual identities within SBSE settings prolong individuals from reaching or moving beyond the deepening and commitment status. Rachel and Jordan contend that if LGBTQ+ identities were normalized and made visible within SBSE curriculum, development processes would be easier and less injuring. Other participants felt prohibited by the available options of sexual and/or gender identities and speak of wishing that SBSE curriculum address the possibilities of identifying as a non-heterosexual and/or cisgender individual.

Synthesis

The fifth and final theme, "synthesis," refers to individuals who acknowledge complete congruence between their individual and social developmental determinants of sexual identity development. Individuals within the synthesis status hold an understanding of their sexual identity that fulfills their self-definitions and carries over to their attitudes and behaviors toward other sexual identity groups.

A majority of participants indicated that they are still in the process of developing and establishing congruency between their individual and social sexual identity

determinants. When asking participants about how they came to understand their sexual identity or sexual orientation, some of them demonstrate still being in the process of figuring that out for themselves. For example, Jordan (bisexual non-binary, opted-out/family taught) says:

> So, it's still kind of a process, I guess… I came out as gay, like at the very end of high school, before I left for college. And then I started dating my partner and everything… Gender stuff is like, I haven't really talked to most people about that. It's sort of something I'm still barely experimenting with.

For Dakota (heterosexual transgender male), he described how he is having to reevaluate his sexual needs, values, and preferences since beginning hormone replacement therapy:

> **Lauren:** Once you transitioned, how did you come to understand your sexual needs and your sexual values and preference in partners and things like that?

> **Dakota:** So that's kind of a no-go right now. When you start testosterone, I was reading a bunch of blogs from online groups I'm in, and people have said that your sex drive goes up. So, something that's been weird.

> **Lauren:** So, you're still in the process of figuring that out and navigating that?

> **Dakota:** Yeah. Like I'm not attracted to guys at all.

Both Jordan and Dakota support the notion that sexual identity development is an on-going process in which there are "opportunities for circularity and revisiting of statuses throughout the lifespan" (Dillon et al. 2011:658).

Some participants report having a hard time finding an identity label that "fits." For instance, Rachel (pansexual female, comprehensive) says, "so I first came out as bi. And then my first girlfriend was shortly after that. And then since then I've kind of gone between bi and gay and pansexual." Similarly, Riley (pansexual transgender female, comprehensive) explains:

> So [my partner] and I started dating and that's kind of why I sometimes say I'm pansexual-lesbian because I've only ever dated women. I do recognize the

potential that I could date a man in the future but that hasn't happened yet. And if things keep going the way they are, it probably won't happen. But it's kind of, it's a process. It's just kind of like oh hey, would you look at that, that actually kind of fits.

For Rachel and Riley, their sexual identities have shifted based on the gender and sexual identity of their current partners, rather than having a concrete and congruent understanding of their sexual identity that fulfills their self-definitions.

Data from this study demonstrates that "coming out" is not indicative of having reached the synthesis status. Instead, for many participants, "coming out" signifies beginning the process of sexual identity development, many of which are still within the compulsory heterosexuality or active exploration status. For example, Cody (asexual male, abstinence-only) says, "there were a few times, I think I told my mother when I was 15 that I thought I was bisexual, I still didn't really know at that point, to be honest. I hadn't explored those feelings enough." Many participants report that they "came out" as another sexual identity, different from what they identify with now. For instance, Alex (lesbian female, abstinence-only) says, "I actually started coming out to my friends [as] bisexual because I didn't want to just be like hey, I'm gay." Hannah (lesbian female, abstinence-only) tells a similar story when she says, "at first I thought I was probably bi and I feel like a lot of that was just society being very heteronormative." Both Alex and Hannah's experience are parallel to Dakota's (heterosexual transgender male) when he says:

> I guess for my entire life I knew I was attracted to women. But like, I didn't really understand it. And so, I first came out as bisexual… It was kind of weird, not everybody was okay with full on [lesbian].

Moreover, Avery (gay transgender male, opted-out/family taught) tells a similar story when he says, "Well I originally came out as a lesbian… and just like six months ago I

finally told my mom that I'm trans." The preceding stories illustrate how, for some

participants, disrupting heteronormative assumptions by "coming out" (i.e., identifying as

a non-heterosexual identity) sparked a willingness to further explore, evaluate, and

commit to another sexual (or gender) identity.

Influence

It is difficult to note whether or not SBSE settings influence the synthesis status of

sexual identity development, having few participants report reaching this status.

However, I hypothesize that similar conclusions can be drawn from the ways in which

SBSE settings influence the deepening and commitment status – by prolonging the

process of sexual identity development for LGBTQ+ individuals.

DISCUSSION

The findings in this study support three of the five statuses of sexual identity development within the UMSID: compulsory heterosexuality, active exploration, and deepening and commitment (Dillon et al. 2011). The findings in this study also illustrate various ways in which SBSE settings influence four of the five statuses of sexual identity development within the UMSID: compulsory heterosexuality, active exploration, diffusion, and deepening and commitment (Dillon et al. 2011).

Data from this study support Dillon and colleagues' (2011) notion that the process of sexual identity development occurs, and often begins, within the compulsory heterosexuality status. Individuals within the compulsory heterosexuality status hold assumptions that women and men are innately attracted to one another, both sexually and emotionally. Additionally, individuals within the compulsory heterosexuality status operate in accordance with culturally prescribed norms and heterosexist assumptions regarding normative sexual and gendered behavior. This is made evident by participants' former heterosexual presumptions of themselves and others. Socialization plays a significant role in instructing individuals that heterosexuality is the cultural norm and societal expectation through interactions with others (Sandstrom et al. 2014). Gender socialization practices are influenced by heterosexist scripts regarding normative behavior (Corrado 2009). This is made obvious by the social pressures placed upon participants by various agents of socialization to establish heterosexual interests and relationships with others.

Findings of this study suggest that SBSE settings reinforce the components of compulsory heterosexuality. SBSE curriculum is rooted in heteronormative assumptions that inadequately address the sexual needs and concerns of non-heterosexual identities (Estes 2017). This is made distinct by the lack of discussion and/or education participants received on topics to address the specific needs and concerns of LGBTQ+ identities. Moreover, the invisibility of LGBTQ+ identities within SBSE curriculum influences the ways in which individuals think about and approach sexual encounters. For example, individuals feel ill-equipped to navigate situations that do not follow heteronormative social scripts of behavior. This is made apparent by participants' feelings of angst, confusion, and fear when thinking about or behaving within non-heterosexual encounters. Additionally, SBSE settings are responsible for perpetuating the cultural understanding that gender identity is dichotomous and mutually exclusive (Corrado 2009). This is made clear by the lack of collective and gender-inclusive education presented early on to young adolescents.

The data from this study support Dillon and colleagues' (2011) notion that active exploration is a crucial component of sexual identity development processes. Individuals within the active exploration status exhibit purposeful, cognitive and/or behavioral processes of exploring, evaluating, or experimenting with their sexual needs, values, orientation, and/or preferences for activities, partner characteristics, or modes of sexual expression (Dillon et al. 2011). Moreover, individuals within the active exploration status demonstrate questioning or abandoning social and cultural mandates surrounding heterosexuality. This is made evident by participants' evaluation of what felt most

comfortable to them. For some participants, this means recognizing that social scripts for normative behavior do not characterize their sexual needs, values, or preferences.

When utilizing socialization as a theoretical perspective, we see that the components of active exploration can be characterized as turning points or epiphanies, in which an individual's understanding of sexual identity is disrupted, questioned, or changed. Agents of socialization and interacting with others (especially those that are of similar identities) are particularly influential to how and when active exploration occurs (Sandstrom et al. 2014). This is made clear when participants learn the social significance of developing a sexual identity and how this identity will further influence their interactions with others. In addition, we see that the Internet and use of online information plays a huge role in active exploration for LGBTQ+ individuals. This is made obvious by the fact that all participants used the Internet or online platforms to find answers to their questions regarding their sexual and/or gender identity.

Notably, the findings from this study indicate that it is imperative to have an intersectional perspective when analyzing the active exploration status (Crenshaw 1991). There is limited freedom and flexibility allowed for experimenting with and evaluating one's sexual and gender identities depending on overlap and conjunction of other social identities. Race and racial privilege plays a role in individuals' accessibility to exploring their sexual identity. Individuals who identity as White, have more privilege to explore their sexuality because they do not experience additional oppression on account of their race. Likewise, for individuals who are of multiple marginalized identities (e.g., poor or working class, having a physical or intellectual disability, or age), accessibility to active

exploration of their sexual identity is limited by the lack of structural privilege credited to them by their other social identities.

Findings from this study show that one manifest function of SBSE settings is to discourage active exploration, especially for LGBTQ+ individuals, through shameful and fear-based tactics (Bay-Cheng 2003; Elliott 2012). This is made apparent by the ways in which LGBTQ+ identities are portrayed as deviant or abnormal within SBSE curriculum and educator bias. However, by not addressing LGBTQ+ identities within SBSE settings, these settings provide a latent function in which they encourage LGBTQ+ individuals to explore their sexual identities outside of these settings. The invisibility and misrepresentation of LGBTQ+ identities within SBSE settings leads these individuals toward other avenues of obtaining knowledge regarding their specific needs and concerns. It is obvious that LGBTQ+ individuals desire information about their sexuality (and gender identity), regardless of whether or not they are receiving it through SBSE settings.

Data from this study support Dillon and colleagues' (2011) notion that the process of sexual identity development occurs within the deepening and commitment status, in which individuals exhibit movement toward greater commitment to their identified sexual needs, values, orientation, and/or preferences for activities, partner characteristics, or modes of sexual expression. The findings from this study also support Dillon and colleagues' (2011) hypothesis that deepening and commitment following active exploration is the most common identity development process for LGBTQ+ individuals. This is made distinct by the fact that few participants discussed having experienced characteristics of the diffusion status. Additionally, within the deepening and

commitment status, group membership identity processes as well as attitudes toward other sexual identity groups begin to mature into conscious, coherent perspectives on dominant/non-dominant group relations. This is made clear as participants report an acknowledgment of the marginalized status of their sexual identity and they recognize the ways in which marginalized identities are awarded less social and structural privilege than dominant identity groups. Moreover, the deepening and commitment status can be further understood as means of achieving the goal of socialization, which is to develop meaningful identities (Sandstrom et al. 2014).

Findings from this study suggest that SBSE settings prolong the SIDP for LGBTQ+ individuals. Participants argue that if LGBTQ+ identities were to be normalized within SBSE settings and curriculum, individuals would reach the deepening and commitment status much sooner and with greater ease. Additionally, more inclusive and comprehensive sexuality education curriculum would better serve all students (Kumashiro 2001; Fisher 2009; Elia and Eliason 2010a; Elia and Eliason 2010b; McCarty-Caplan 2013; Estes 2017) in reaching the deepening and commitment and/or synthesis status. As it currently exists, SBSE setting and curriculum are prohibiting to LGBTQ+ individuals attempting to move into the deepening and commitment status.

Having a focused scope of examination, that being SBSE settings, and using a theoretical lens informed by the UMSID and socialization processes, enables this project to speak to two important sites of sociological significance. This study contributes to the existing discourse surrounding identity development processes as well as institutional inequalities. By applying assumptions posited by socialization processes in conjunction

with the UMSID to SBSE settings, this project enriches contemporary understandings of the SIDP and how it is influenced by various settings or institutions.

Conclusion

In summary, this study gives empirical support to the UMSID (Dillon et al. 2011) and fills the gap in existing literature by examining the experiences of LGBTQ+ identities within SBSE settings. This study highlights how, for LGBTQ+ individuals, the SIDP occurs most evidently within the compulsory heterosexuality status, the active exploration status, and the deepening and commitment status. SBSE settings influence sexual identity development processes for LGBTQ+ individuals in three significant ways. First, SBSE settings reinforce the components that characterize compulsory heterosexuality. Second, SBSE settings encourage active exploration due to the lack of content regarding LGBTQ+ identities in its curriculum. Third, SBSE settings prolong deepening and commitment.

This study, in alignment with others, demonstrates that: a) SBSE is exclusionary and reproduces social inequalities by promoting heteronormative discourse (Bay-Cheng 2003; Connell and Elliott 2009; Elia and Eliason 2010b; McNeill 2013; Estes 2017) and b) that SBSE limited and inadequate in addressing the sexual health needs of all students (Estes 2017). This study also highlights significant ways in which socialization practices are necessary for understanding sexual identity development processes. Gender socialization practices are often informed by heterosexist scripts of normative behavior (Corrado 2009; LaMarre 2009). Meanwhile, agents of socialization play a role in teaching individuals the social significance of identity (Sandstrom et al. 2014).

As I have previously mentioned, Dillon and colleagues' (2011) hypothesize that deepening and commitment following active exploration is the most common identity development process for LGBTQ+ individuals. Therefore, it is not surprising that the present study lacks conclusive evidence to support the diffusion status as an apparent component of the SIDP. However, this study is limited in this regard. An additional limitation of the present study exists in the way that I discuss varying experiences of sexual identity development under one, all-encompassing category (LGBTQ+). I acknowledge the potential of overgeneralizing experience when grouping identities together in this way, however, I did not want to limit this study by further excluding experiences not apparent in existing literature or neglecting those who might have been misrepresented in previous work.

Future research is needed to better examine the synthesis status of sexual identity development. Future research endeavors should also examine heterosexual identity development processes for cisgender individuals using the UMSID. Although this study focuses primarily on sexual identity development, I argue that the UMSID can and should be applied to further investigations of gender identity development processes for transgender individuals. Additionally, future research efforts using the UMSID and assumptions posited by socialization processes should assess the ways in which sexual identity development processes are influenced by other social institutions, such as religious, political, and/or family structures.

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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD LETTER OF APPROVAL

DATE: June 5, 2018

TO: Lauren Guyer, B.A.

FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1232055-2] "Exploring the Influence of School-Based Sexuality Education Settings on Sexual Minority Identity Development"

SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVAL/VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: June 5, 2018

EXPIRATION DATE: June 5, 2022

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB approves this project and verifies its status as EXEMPT according to federal IRB regulations.

Lauren –

Thank you for addressing all requested points of amendment/modification. Please be sure to update the UNC logo on the letterhead of your consent form and then use the amended and additional materials and protocols in your participant recruitment and data collection. Best wishes with your research and don't hesitate to contact me with any IRB questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Dr. Megan Stellino, UNC IRB Co-Chair

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records for a duration of 4 years. If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu . Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FOR INTERVIEWS

UNIVERSITY *of*
NORTHERN COLORADO

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: "Exploring the Influence of School-Based Sexuality Education Settings on LGBTQ+ Sexual Identity Development"

Researcher: Lauren Guyer, M. A. Student in Sociology
E-mail: lauren.guyer@unco.edu

Research Advisor: Harmony Newman, Ph.D., Department of Sociology
Email: harmony.newman@unco.edu

Purpose and Description: The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which the process of sexual identity development is influenced by SBSE settings.

You will be asked a variety of questions pertaining to your sexual identity and your experiences within school-based sexuality education programs. The interview will take place either over the phone or in a private, secluded office or conference room on the UNC campus and will last approximately one hour. With your permission, this interview will be audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Only myself and the research advisor will have access to this information.

Precautions have been put in place to maximize confidentiality. You will be assigned a pseudonym name that only the primary researcher will know. All data, including your contact information and this consent form, will be stored in the research advisor's private, locked office on the UNC campus. All data will be destroyed after three years.

Potential benefits for participation include: enriching empirical evidence regarding sexual identity development and improving educational programs to be more inclusive and resourceful for all sexual identities. There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study outside of those experienced in every day conversations with peers.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study. If you begin participation, you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference.

If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; (970)351-1910.

_____
Participant's Signature   Date

_____
Researcher's Signature   Date

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Demographic information: age, sexual identity, gender identity, racial and/or ethnic identity, highest level of education completed, state of residence.

1. Tell me about your sexual identity development.
    a. How did you come to understand your sexual orientation?
    b. How did you come to understand your sexual needs, sexual values, preferred modes of sexual expression, preferred characteristics of sexual partners, preferred sexual activities and behaviors?
    c. How did you come to understand your group membership as a sexual minority?
    d. What are your attitudes and beliefs about other sexual minority identities?
    e. What are you attitudes and beliefs about heterosexuals?
    f. How has your sexual identity been shaped by your other social identities (race, ethnicity, gender, class)?
    g. How does your sexual identity shape your other social identities (race, ethnicity, gender, class)?
    h. How have family or friends influenced your sexual identity development?

2. Tell me about your experience(s) with school-based sexuality education.
    a. How old were you/what grade were you in when you first had a class, heard a lecture, or interacted with course material regarding reproductive anatomy, puberty, pregnancy, etc.?
    b. Was it comprehensive or focused on abstinence?
    c. What was that experience like for you?
    d. What were your impressions?
    e. What kinds of information did you learn?
    f. What do you believe was the most or least influential piece of information given to you during this experience? Why?
    g. What do you wish you had learned, but didn't? Why?

3. In what ways has your sex education experience(s) impacted you? What, if any, influence has it had on your understanding of sexual identity?
    a. How did your experience with sex education aid or injure you in this understanding?

4. Other than school-based programs or curriculum, what sources of information did you use to educate yourself about sex and sexuality?
    a. How were these sources more or less effective than your experience with school-based sex education?

5. What advice would you give to another LGB+ individual who is about to enroll in the sex education class you took?

6. If you could write a completely new sex education curriculum, what might it look like? Why?

7. Other comments: