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Abstract

Four youth who identified as sexual or gender minorities were recruited from a high school in Upstate New York for a study designed to investigate the experiences that facilitate or hinder their ability to fully question and explore their identities between and across relationships and contexts. This current investigation utilized Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory as a means with which to structure both the interviews with the informants as well as the findings. I utilized Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis as the means of gathering, interpreting, and presenting the data in a meaningful way. The participants engaged in a range of interpersonal and context dependent strategies in an effort to manage the real, perceived, or anticipated reactions to their identities. Careful disclosure of their identities appears to have minimized rejection, as well as incidents of bullying, and was implemented with the goal of maintaining a sense of connectedness to the relationships and contexts most relevant to their development. A positive experience following the disclosure of their sexual or gender identities was associated with a sense of connectedness and a reduction in incidents of self-harm or social isolation particularly for the informants for whom the latter points were of concern.

A Qualitative Approach to Studying the Lived Experiences of
High School Aged Sexual Minority and Gender Nonconforming
Youth Across Relationships and Contexts.

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirement for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in
Counseling and Counselor Education

Syracuse University

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Although my name will forever be associated with the thoughts and words generated as part of this dissertation, this journey is not one that I have traveled alone. I pushed through this challenging process just so that I could have the opportunity to write this acknowledgment. I want to begin by extending my sense of gratitude to several people whose guidance and support were invaluable at every stage of the dissertation process.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Background

Adolescence is a period that is marked by biological, physiological, psychological, and sociological changes (Bowlby, 1973, 1982, 1988; Fonagy, 2001; Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2004; Smart 2012). It is also a period, in Western cultures, where friendships are forged, core beliefs challenged, sexuality and gender expression may be explored and independence is encouraged (Morgan, Mancl, Kaffar, & Ferreira, 2011). With few exceptions, most children achieve all of the milestones that are associated with this developmental stage (Smart, 2012); yet, the process appears to put additional burdens on sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth (see Gipson, 2002; Payne & Smith, 2010). In addition to contending with the events that are said to be a part of normal development, sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth must also deal with issues of (internalized) homophobia, racism, sexism, ableism, intolerance, and ostracism (Dane & MacDonald, 2009). More often than not, sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth are raised in environments where one or both parents identify as heterosexual and where heterosexuality is an expected part of identity development (see Martin, 2009; Sullivan, Sommer, & Moff, 2001). Sullivan et al. (2001) have noted that ‘generally’ speaking sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth may not:

grow up in families and cultural communities sharing their minority status that can act as buffers against stigmatization and present affirming role models. As they struggle with feelings of worthlessness and confront prejudice against their sexual orientations, these youth often cannot turn to their families for support. (p. 13-14)

Sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth, unlike those who come from families who are marginalized based on their race or culture, often lack a social support network of families who share their identities that can act as a buffer against the internalization of the structural

stigmatization of their identities. Researchers have found an association between the lack of support and a range of intrapsychic consequences (Dane et al., 2009; Kus & Saunders, 1985). These youth must, then, consider the risks that are (potentially) associated with violating traditional norms (dating, prom, and discursive presentation of gender see Savin-Williams, 2001) often without the support of families that help guide them through this terrain leading to what some have called a self-managed socialization (Dane et al., 2009).

Sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth may also develop a desire to explore their gender or sexual identity (Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2009) or explore the strengths and potential risks associated with coming out (Kus et al., 1985; Payne et al., 2010; Telingator & Woyewodzic, 2011). Sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth are a heterogeneous group. Therefore, experiences of acceptance and marginalization and the experiences regarding the integration of one's identity for this cohort are varied, in part, based on their gender identity and performance (Aravosis, 2007; Skidmore, 2008), race (Buttaro, & Battle, 2012; France, 1982; Griffin, 2000), (dis)ability (Elman, 2010), sexual identity (Carter, 2007; Chauncey, 1994, 2004; Lopez, 2012 a, b, 2013), socioeconomic standing (Gipson, 2002), geographic location, citizenship standing, and nationality (Daniel, 1980; Robinson, 1999). Gender variant youth navigate all of these concerns in addition to dealing with harassment based on their non-conformity to conventional norms (McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010) with some along the variant continuum of identities also considering medical interventions that would assist with gender reassignment (Marston, 2015; Norton & Herek, 2013; Schindel, 2008).

Although the coming out process has taken on a meaning that is synonymous with isolation, vulnerability, invisibility, and secrecy (Chauncey, 1994, 2004; McCune, 2008; Walters, 2014), social scientists, like Orne (2011), challenge their readers to resist ahistorical,

theoretically loaded assumptions by embracing a broader understanding of the range of meanings potentially held by gender and sexual minorities as it relates to the self-disclosure and gender and sexual identity exploration processes (Kus et al., 1985). The coming out process, as Orne (2011) notes, may likely be a life-long process rather than a single event disclosure (Dane et al., 2009; Walters, 2014) that likely begins with a recognition of one's sexual orientation or gender identity (Gladding, 2013; Pearson, 2003) with many youth strategically sharing their status with others (Cohn et al., 2010; Chauncey, 1994; Moore, 2010; Orne, 2011). A bioecological approach requires an exploration of both the internal workings of the individual alongside the interpersonal and social contexts that potentially have an impact on the self-disclosure and one's gender and sexual exploration over the lifespan. This study is a cross section analysis that utilizes Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986, 1994a, 1995; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994b; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2005; Christensen, 2010; Darling, 2007) as a framework for gaining some insight into the bidirectional influences that guide the development of and reciprocally shape interactions that sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth have across contexts.

Conceptual Context of the Coming Out Process

Twenty or more years ago, the coming out process occurred primarily in one's mid to late twenties and was more likely to happen after moving out on one's own (Quintana, Rosenthal, & Krehely, 2010). As Quintana et al. (2010) noted, most were over the age of 20 and were very likely already living on their own, thereby greatly reducing the risks of alienation often associated with self-disclosure and exploration (Rosario et al., 2009). However, the extant literature on sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth reveals that teens are acknowledging their gender identity and or sexual orientation much earlier than in years past,

and in many instances, they are initiating conversations about their status with peers and adults (Cohn et al., 2010; Dane et al., 2009; D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks 2008; Grossman et al., 2009; Majd, Marksamer, & Reyes, 2009; Walters, 2014) and experimenting much sooner (Morgan et al., 2011).

Coming out at earlier stages may result in continued connectedness to one's family, peers, and their community. In far too many instances, however, self-disclosure is associated with familial rejection, abuse (physical, emotional, and sexual, see Rosario et al., 2009), and the abandonment (person in need of supervision {PINS} see Gipson, 2002) of parental responsibilities (homelessness and overrepresentation in juvenile justice and child welfare settings, see Mabry, 2005; Majd, Marksamer, & Reyes, 2009; Quintana et al., 2010; Rosario et al., 2009; Sullivan et al., 2001). There is also the potential that sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth to be alienated in school contexts (Quintana et al., 2010; Singh, 2013) and ostracism across community-based contexts (Broz, 1998; BWW News Desk, 2010; Lugosiabile, 2011; Nabozny v. Podlesny, 1996). Thus, sexual minority youth, as Maguen, Bakeman, and Armistead (2002) and Orne (2011) have noted, may engage in a range of identity management strategies that may be differentially deployed based on race and cultural background across interpersonal relationships and social contexts in an effort to minimize risks to their safety or loss of connectedness to support networks (also see Gipson, 2002; Lasser & Tharinger, 2003; Miller, Forte, & Greene, 2006; Moore, 2010; Rosenfeld, 2009; Sullivan et al., 2001).

Disclosure as an Identity Management Strategy

Disclosure of one's sexual minority or gender nonconforming status, as a number of scholars have noted, tends to be a lifelong process that often begins with the recognition, acceptance, and integration of a non-heterosexual identity and/or a nontraditional performance of

gender ((Chauncey, 1994, 2004; Cohn et al., 2010; Dane et al., 2009; Gladding, 2013; Kosciw, Palmer, & Kull, 2015; McCune, 2008; Pearson, 2003; Walters, 2014). According to Kosciw et al. (2015), “youth typically disclose their LGBT identities first to another LGBT person, then to close friends who may or may not be LGBT, then to other peers, adults, and finally to family members” (p. 170). The latter point was supported, in part, in the study completed by Roe (2013), discussed in more detail in Chapter II, which found that youth often look for cues about peers, their family, and the auxiliary staff in contexts like schools, that signify the level of connectedness and support they might receive if disclosure occurs. The Roe (2013) study focused on disclosure to school counselors. He found that some of the participants were more likely to tell a close peer before telling their families or the adults in the contexts they spent the vast majority of their time. Despite who was told and in what sequence, there were a number of factors which shaped their thoughts about and approach to sharing that part of their identity with others. Highest among them, though, was the sense of safety in the relationship and the desire that they not be judged or experience a rupture after making the disclosure.

Self-disclosure, as Kosciw et al. (2015) note, is associated with increased vulnerability for bullying and victimization particularly in school contexts. Yet, it “has [also] been found to relate to better psychological well-being, including higher self-esteem and lower depression [and] has been found to increase satisfaction with the support that sexual minority youth receive from their social networks” (p. 169). In short, supportive environments, family, and peers often act as a buffer that mitigates feelings of alienation or marginalization particularly in contexts that may be perceived or experienced as hostile to one’s identity (Kosciw et al., 2015; Roe, 2013). Disclosure, then, is a strategy that aides one’s sense of autonomy and mastery over how one’s identity is presented, performed, and perhaps understood in the contexts and relationships most

relevant to identity development. In many instances, youth can make the disclosure in the timeframe and the manner of their own choosing, and there is a growing body of literature which attempts to shed a light on this phenomenon (Lasser et al., 2003; Maguen, 2002; Orne, 2011).

Lasser et al. (2003) conducted a Grounded Theory study in an effort to fill an important gap in the literature with specific focus given to the ways that sexual minority youth manage their identities in school-based contexts. However, as the data poured in, the authors quickly realized that there are a number of factors beyond the experiences in school settings that potentially impact identity development. So the scope of the study, as they note, was broadened to account for the nuanced data they were able to gather from their informants. Lasser et al. (2003) found that there are a “constellation of family, school, and cultural environments that exert pressures on the adolescent with respect to their sexual orientation” (p. 237) that impacted their informants’ decisions to disclose. Visibility management, a theoretical construct generated from their data, appears to involve a bidirectional process in which both internal (observations) and external factors (real or perceived acceptance or hostility) shape one’s sense of safety in and connectedness to the contexts and relationships most relevant to identity development. As the informants assessed the environments and the people with whom they spent time, they appear to have also taken time to map out the broader implications for making a disclosure. Disclosure, in this study, was not limited to direct conversation about one’s identity; it included references to pop culture (i.e. movies with sexual minority characters), or heteronormative jokes (i.e. that’s so gay), just to see how people would react. Lasser et al. (2003) described this dynamic relationship between the idiosyncratic characteristics of their informants and their relationship with the contexts, family, and peers most important to their identity as one of meaning-making. The informants were continuously making meaning of their identities, often in silence to

minimize disruptions in relationships, in a world that often struggles to tolerate and support those who hold non-heterosexual identities.

I also reviewed Orne's (2011) Strategic Outness Perspective (theory) as a secondary way of processing the proverbial wisdom regarding the "coming out process." Like Lasser et al. (2003), Orne (2011) critiqued the use of "coming out" in the extant literature as either too broad in scope or too narrow and imprecise to be of much value to the field of social science particularly as it relates to addressing the needs of sexual and gender minority youth. Orne (2011) expressed concern with the predominant focus on intrapsychic phenomenon such as the "internal qualities and dialogues of gay men...rather than [on the] social interaction of these members within their environments" (p. 685). Orne (2011) also noted the socio-political imbrication of the Gay Liberation Movement which "would rest its political strategy on the public visibility of queer people, tying individual public revelations to the larger political project of securing gay rights" (p. 685) to the micro-cultural experience of coming out. Using a purposeful sampling and a snowball approach, Orne (2011) recruited 13 sexual and gender minority and sexual nonconforming informants who were between the age of 18 to 25 to participate in his study. They were asked to submit anonymous essays which detailed their experiences with coming out. The essays were constructed and edited in an online format which allowed the informants an opportunity to reflect on and modify the narratives in ways that helped them make meaning of their own experiences. I should note the Orne (2011) also submitted an essay of his own. However, he does recognize the complicated role that he played as both informant and researcher for the study. At least two of the informants described the coming out process as an ongoing relational context-driven phenomenon that is continuously negotiated. One of the implications is that people often assume that one is heterosexual, so sexual and

gender minorities may likely consider the cost and benefits of disclosing their identities. Like the informants in the study by Lasser et al. (2003), the participants in Orne's (2011) study used a range of passive and active approaches to making the disclosure of their gender or sexuality. Both theories share a disposition which views the coming out process as fluid and evolving rather than linear as past models might otherwise suggest.

In this current investigation, I rely on Orne's (2011) framework to help guide my understanding of my informant's experiences with coming out. I approached my inquiry from a stand point of curiosity as to how each of the informants have navigated the coming out process with specific focus given to relationships and contexts that reciprocally shape their strategic approaches to making the disclosures. We will revisit this topic in a little more detail in the analytic sections (Chapter IV).

Methodological Shifts in Research

Research over the last several decades on the experiences of gender and sexual minority youth, as Wells (2009) and DeBlaere, Brewster, Sarkees, and Moradi (2010) note, has tended to utilize a deficit model or a diseased-focus, positioning sexual and gender minority youth as at risk for exposure to disease and a profound threat for developing maladaptive or self-destructive responses to environmental stimuli. Sexual and gender minority youth are noted to be at increased risk for substance abuse, depression (Wilkinson & Pearson, 2009), eating disorders (Austin, Ziyadch, Corliss, Rosario et al., 2009), suicide (O'Donnell, & Meyer, 2006; Walls, Potter, & Van Leeuwen, 2009), and for exposure to STDs (specifically HIV/AIDS; Goodenow, Szalacha, Robin, & Westheimer, 2008). There have been extensive debates about the use of social science research to shape, and in some instances, to justify the extension of rights and privileges (Amato, 2012) particularly as it relates to sexual minority populations (Clark, 2005;

Hernandez, 2005; Mabry, 2005; Rekers, 2005; Shumm, 2005; Strasser, 2005; Wardle, 2005; Wilkins, Christensen, & Selden, 2005; Williams, 2005). In some instances, Friend of the Court briefs have been submitted and testimony has also been given by social scientists citing narrowly crafted research as a means with which to reinforce constitutional bans on sexual minority adults adopting youth (*Lofton v. Secretary of Children and Family Services*, 2004; Rekers, 2005; Rublin, 2011; Scott, 2005; Shumm, 2005; Wardle, 2005; Wilkins et al., 2005), and for making problematic claims for the continuation of state sanctioned animus towards broader definitions of marriage for gender and sexual minorities (*Bostic v. Schaefer*, 2014; *Perry v. Schwarzenegger*, 2010; *United States v. Windsor*, 2013).

As methodological approaches have improved regarding studies with sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth, there has also been a reconceptualization of how ‘risk’ is defined (Marston, 2015; Quintana et al., 2010; Shumm, 2005; Slesnick, Bartle-Haring, & Dashora, 2008; Surtees & Gunn, 2010; Wardle, 2005) as well as the way in which the experiences of this cohort of youth are conceptualized. This evolution has contributed to a shift from ubiquitous focus on intrapsychic-related consequences to increased interest in learning more about the concomitant relationship between environmental stimuli and the idiosyncratic responses that are noted to disproportionately impact sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth (Diaz, Kosciw, Greylak, 2010; Freidman et al., 2006; Goodenow et al., 2006; Hong & Garbarino, 2012; Horn et al., 2010; Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2009; Sandfort, Bakker, Schellevis, & Vanwesenbeeck, 2009; Seidman et al., 1999; Telingator et al., 2011; Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012; Watson et al., 2010).

Researchers have begun the process of bridging the gap by exploring the nuanced relationship between general discomfort with adolescent sexuality (see Sullivan et al. 2001), access to and funding for HIV/AIDS related education, and the risk potentially associated with exposure to HIV/AIDS (Goodenow et al., 2008; Singh, 2013). There has also been an upsurge in publications that address sexual and gender minority youth over-representation in the homeless shelter system (Quintana et al., 2010), the juvenile justice system (Gipson, 2002; Majd et al., 2009; Meiners, 2011; Mogul & Ritchie, 2011), and child welfare populations (Gipson, 2002; Sullivan et al., 2001).

The research on having supportive families, teachers and positive experiences in the contexts where development occurs appears to show an amelioration of some of the negative factors that have been discussed above (Birkett et al., 2009; Currie, Mayberry, & Chenneville, 2012; D'Augelli et al., 2008; Friedman et al., 2009; Goodenow et al., 2006; Kuvalanka et al., 2009; McGuire et al., 2010; Russell et al., 2009; Ryan et al., 2010; Telingator et al., 2011; Toomey et al., 2012; Valenti & Campbell, 2009). However, gender and sexual minority youth often live with morally conservative parents (Martin, 2009; Savage et al., 2009) and care takers who appear to internalize prevailing norms (including some of the lesbian mothers in the study by Kuvalanka et al., 2009). These youth often attend schools that have abstinence only policies (Berkley, 2004; Mayo, 2008; Singh, 2013) which often conflict with the formation of Gay Straight Alliances or inclusive policies (Savage et al., 2009). Furthermore, they often attend schools where there is a continued use of heteronormative terms (McGuire et al., 2010; Pascoe, 2007; Peters, 2003) most notably in settings where students are encouraged to engage in critical consciousness (Franck, 2002). The role of different systems on youth development is critical for

counselors to understand because of the level of impact such systems have on individual student experience.

Thus, there is a need for more studies that look at the interaction between ecosystems. There could certainly be more studies that explore the home and community-based phenomena that help or hinder the formation of safe spaces in school-based contexts. Particular attention could be given to the relationship that heteronormativity may have on the self-disclosure process in multiple settings (the timing of the self-disclosure, whether or not disclosure takes place at all, the individuals with whom sexual minority youth choose to disclose, the emergence and internalization of normativities among same sex parents). Researchers could also explore some of the ways that sexual prejudice may impact perceptions of safety (i.e. with family, peers, in their community), and the extent to which race, socioeconomic status, and disability approach significance in the lives of sexual minority youth. Singular focus on parents, peers, or interpersonal relationships potentially obscures the ways that medical, legal, cultural, and other ecological factors have either helped or hindered the developmental needs of sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth. A system approach to exploring the unique needs and experiences of sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth may allow researchers to bridge that understanding. The purpose of this current study is to generate new knowledge regarding the experiences that encourage or hinder identity development and the self-disclosure process for sexual and gender minority youth.

Thus, Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986) and the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1994; Bronfenbrenner et al., 2005) will be used as the organizing structure of this study. Particular attention will be given to the ways that sexual minority youth explore their gender and sexual identities across

contexts in an effort to learn more about strategies that they deploy in an effort to maintain a sense of connectedness to themselves, their family and peers, and the social settings that influence their development. The PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1994; Bronfenbrenner et al., 2005) will also be used as a framework for gaining a better understanding of the proximal and distal phenomena that sexual minority youth perceive as having an impact on their identity development and the ways that they interact with and ultimately make sense of the world.

Bioecological Theory as an Organizing Framework

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory, otherwise referred to as the Process-Person-Context-Time model, will be used as the framework for this study as it situates sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth in a complex set of interlocking bidirectional subsystems (micro, meso, exo, macro, & chrono). All of these subsystems have varying levels of influence on emergent idiosyncratic characteristics with the more proximal settings, interactions, and relationships (micro and meso level experiences) holding the most direct and lasting impact on identity development (Bowlby, 1973, 1982, 1988; Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986; D'Augelli et al., 2008; D'Augelli et al., 2010; Franck, 2002; Hackford-Peer, 2010; Henklin, 2012; Higdon, 2008; Hong et al., 2012; Mayo, 2008; Morrin, 1977; Pascoe, 2007; Fonagy, 2001; Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, and Target, 2004; Slesnick et al., 2008; Smart 2012) with the more distal (exo and macro) factors shaping development in broad and profound ways.

To that end, one of the goals of this research is to attend to each of the elements of the Process-Person-Context-Time model (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1994; Bronfenbrenner et al., 2005). This theory is invaluable to a study of this type as it requires an exploration of the phenomenological experience of development across multiple contexts. Further, it serves as a reminder that interpersonal interactions fuel development and help shape our understanding of

the external world (Wallin, 2007). The PPCT model acknowledges the reciprocal interface between the beliefs of significant others and the ways that these function to structure and shape internal processes regarding one's own relationship to the world, and it requires an awareness of the dynamic relationship between culture and its influence on the individual across proximal and distal milieu. Additionally, this approach offers a unique opportunity to gather data on developmental changes that may occur over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1995).

Research Problem Statement

Based on my utilization of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986), I argue that there are multiple factors that influence sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth identity development. In this study, sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth share their insights into interpersonal, contextual, and personal dynamics that encourage or hinder the self-disclosure process. I ask them to explore in greater detail the settings and the interpersonal relationships that served as the first settings from which they could explore their identities and the extent to which these have acted as a foundation from which to explore and disclose their identities in other relationships and contexts. I also encourage participants to describe the extent to which their gender and sexual identities are of relevance in their lives and the ways that this status interacts with and is potentially shaped by their socioeconomic status, race, cultural background and other factors of relevance to this study. Lastly, I ask the participants to describe how they view 'safety' and I encourage them to share their perspectives regarding the ways that they make sense of this construct as well as the ways that they contextualize its presence in their day- to-day activities.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is multifold. On the one hand, I am interested in using Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986) as a way of bridging gaps in the field regarding the needs and experiences of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth. I am interested in using a theory that is sensitive enough to capture a broad range of experiences that shape the identity development of sexual and gender minority youth. To that end, I have opted to use a qualitative approach to this work as this will afford me the opportunity to explore a range of interpersonal and experiential interactions that sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth perceive as having an impact on their identity development. On the other hand, the narratives that I am able to gather can be utilized as a tool for training counselors to work competently, compassionately, and comprehensively with sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth. A study of this type will give voice to the experiences and perceptions of sexual and gender minorities and provide a wealth of knowledge with which to train future counselors.

Definition of Relevant Terms

There are a range of concepts that have been used in the literature to describe youth whose identities differ from the heterosexual norm. I made the decision to use the terms sexual minority and gender nonconforming and sexual and gender minority youth so I explain my rationale in the section to follow. I also discuss compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity as these terms are used quite frequently in the extant literature as well as in this current study; however, I also integrate a discussion of homonormativity as this, too, is a concept that has been utilized to interrogate the range of experiences that gender and sexual minority youth may have across contexts.

Compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity are two of the constructs that emerged as a way of explaining the interlocking bidirectional systems of oppression and privilege that have had an impact on sexual and gender minorities as well as a way of exploring the bifurcated role that gender rules have had on hetero identified youth (and adults) and those who may remain uncertain about their sexuality (see Espelage et al., 2008). So I will process these in brief. There is also an emergent concern, particularly in sexual and gender minority communities, regarding the horizontal and vertical distribution of and access to visibility and the extent to which policy efforts address the needs of the least privileged. To that end, I plan to discuss homonormativity and the potential relevance of this construct to this study. Lastly, the research on the experiences of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth indicates that school-based interventions are useful towards the goal of reducing incidences of harassment in schools. Of the interventions, Gay Straight Alliances (GSA) and inclusive policies are the most discussed. Thus, I'll also discuss these in this section as well.

Sexual and Gender Minorities. Sexual and gender minorities have been described as youth (and adults) who may have same sex attractions, they may have desires for or may engage in sexual relations with members of the same sex, (Elze, 2007; SavinWilliams, 2001), their gender performance may be read as a discursive violation of socio-cultural mores (Freidman, Koeske, Silvestre, Korr, & Sites, 2006), and they may also hold identities that, as Telingator et al. (2011) note “are not exclusively heterosexual” (p, 39). This is also a group who are often marginalized, alienated, harassed, and bullied due to their gender presentation or as a result of perceptions regarding violations of gender norms (Diaz et al., 2010; Freidman et al., 2006; Goodenow et al., 2006; Seidman et al., 1999; Watson et al., 2010). This nomenclature will be utilized in this study in recognition of the fluidity with which gender and sexuality may be

experienced (see Schindel, 2008). This terminology is also preferable to the use of words like Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender as these terms, often, connote a stable, fixed, rigid compulsory identity potentially unrecognized or seldom endorsed by adolescents (see Elze, 2007; Savin-Williams, 2001) and it potentially obscures the experiences of those who resist these labels as well as those who are still questioning or coming to terms with that part of their development (see DeBlaere et al., 2010; Schindel, 2008). My use of the term sexual and gender minorities also recognizes some of the ways that normative values are often policed, across (real or perceived) sexual identities via violations of gender roles (see Cole & Cate, 2008; Stryker, 2008).

Compulsory Heterosexuality. Adrienne Rich (1980, 2003, 2004) utilized Compulsory heterosexuality as a tool with which to critique the ways that heterosexuality had come to be seen as natural, normative, and exemplary (Bem, 1995; Fergusson, Zita, & Addelson, 1981; Rich, 1980; Richardson, 2003; Seidman, 2009; Thompson, 1981; Vavrus, 2009). This concept has also been used as a way to describe the way that heterosexuality is normalized through school contexts (Vavrus, 2009) and to destabilize the positioning of disability as unintelligible (see Appleby, 1992; Elman, 2010; Morgan, Mancl, Kaffar, & Ferreira, 2011; Kafer, 2003).

Compulsory heterosexuality has also been utilized as a way of deconstructing performative, albeit, compulsory bisexuality (Fahs, 2009). This theory could also be used to address the ways that proheterosexual bias emerges in research (see Morrin, 1977), the ways that bias may influence how race is conceptualized particularly as it relates to its intersectionality with one's real or perceived gender and sexual identity (see Thompson, 1981; Wu, 2003; Yep and Elia, 2012), and as a way of outlining the ways that heterosexual bias is concretized into law (see Munt et al., 2007). I utilize this term as a means of interrogating the extent to which

sexuality is differentially experienced by gender and sexual minority youth. I also use this construct as a way of investigating the extent to which sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth perceive environmental factors as having an impact on their identity development.

Heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is a construct that emerged as a way to rehabilitate the usefulness of homophobia and (hetero)sexism. The term homophobia became the default way of disrupting personally held views which were often associated with harassment, marginalization, and maltreatment of sexual and gender minorities and tended to obscure institutional, social, and cultural practices that reify and sanction quotidian violence towards and systematic ostracization of sexual and gender minorities (O'Brien, 2008; Herek, 2000, 2002c, 2004; Herek et al., 1995; Herek et al., 2007; Herek et al., 2013; Horn et al., 2010). According to Berlant and Warner (1998), heterosexuality is compulsory and normalized through discourse and practices that, as Surtees et al. (2010) note, “silences and oppresses other narratives and identities” as “perverse, dangerous”, haughty, and “risky” (p, 42-43 also see Carter, 2007). It codifies the marginalization of sexual and gender non-conforming identities via a triumvirate of forces which include juridical (Allender, 2009; Be'rube', 1990; Boag, 2003; Burrelli, 2009; Canaday, 2009; Chauncey, 1994, 2004; Curtis & Gilreath, 2008; Edgar, 1981; Eskridge, 1999; Ford, 2012; Higdon, 2008; Joslin, 1996; Lawrence v. Texas, 2003; Lund, & McGinis, 2004; Majd, et al., 2009; Mayo, 2008; Mogul et al., 2011; Nabozny v. Podlesny, 1996; Puar, 2006; Rekers, 2005; Spindelman, 2013; Tribe, 2004; United States Senate, 1961, 1966; Vitulli, 2010; Wardinski, 2005), religious (for nuances see Bruff v. North Mississippi Health Services, Inc, 2001; Dahl, & Galliher, 2012; Herek et al., 1995; Herek et al., 2013; Hutchinson, 2000; Walden v. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010, 2012; *Ward v. Wilbanks*,

2010, 2012), and medical and psychological based and sanctioned oppression (Anastas, 2013; Bryant, 2008; Bullough, 1998; Davenport, 1972; Erickson, 1961; Hadden, 1976; Hamill, 1999; Hamilton, 1987; Herek, 1990; Kaiser, 2002; Pillard, 2009; Reichard, 2010; Rekers, 1978; Rekers, Amaro-Plotldn, & Low, 1977; Williams, & Weinberg, 1970). These forces are all too often discursively sutured to hegemony centered around the protection of gender and sexual minority youth (framing of resilience see Cohn et al., 2010; Mayberry et al., 2011; Regnerus, 2012b; Savin-Williams, 2001; Singh et al., 2014; Surtees et al., 2010; Wexler, DiFluvio, & Burke, 2009), then, reified as a part of the socialization process (Berlant et al., 1998; Broz, 1998; BWW News Desk, 2010; Chesir-teran, 2003; Chevrette, 2013; Ehrensaft, 2012; Gates, 2000; Lugosiab, 2011; Martin, 2009; Pascoe, 2007; Peters, 2013; Toomey et al., 2012; Roy, 2012; Sharma, 2009; Wilkinson et al., 2009) concretizing the presumption that “heterosexuality is universal” (Sullivan et al., 2001, p 11).

A few of the ways in which heteronormativity has been used that are of relevance to this study include its utilization as a tool to destabilize the normalization and privileging of heterosexuality in educational practices (Toomey et al., 2012); it has also been used to articulate the tension between the invisibility and hypersexualization of sexual minorities of color in media (Roy, 2012; Yep et al., 2012); and it has also been used as a tool to critique the ‘construction of the good transsexual’ (Skidmore, 2008). In this study heteronormativity will be used as a means of exploring the extent to which sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth perceive external forces as having an impact on their identity development. This term will also be used as a way of exploring their awareness of normative values and the extent to which they internalize or disrupt those norms.

Homonormativity. Homonormativity is mostly theoretical; however, it offers a critique of heteronormativity, the hyper-aestheticizing of American sexual exceptionalism and the suturing of patriotism & nationalism with the discursive war on terrorism (homonationalism: see Bucar, & Enke, 2011; Puar, 2006). In describing these processes Puar (2006) wrote:

in homonormative narratives of nation, there is a dual movement: US patriotism momentarily sanctions some homosexualities, often through gendered, racial, and class sanitizing, in order to produce ‘monsterterrorist-fags’ (Puar & Rai, 2002); homosexuals embrace the ‘us-versus-them’ rhetoric of US patriotism and thus align themselves with this racist-homophobic production. Aspects of ‘homosexuality’ have come within the purview of normative patriotism after September 11, incorporating aspects of queer subjectivity into the body of the normalized nation; and, on the other hand, the quarantining of the terrorists through equating them with the bodies and practices of failed heterosexuality, emasculation, and queered others. This dual process of incorporation and quarantining involves the articulation of race with nation.... Thus the US nation not only allows for homosexual bodies, but also actually disciplines and normalizes them—suggesting, in fact, the need to attend to theorizations of the nation as not only heteronormative, but also homonormative. (p. 71-72)

Homonormativity, then, provides a useful means with which to process neoliberalism and its imbrication to strategic amnesiac consumption and loyalty to companies that claim to be LGBTQ friendly in light of their support of policies that are unfavorable and incongruent with the disruption of privilege (Duggan, 2008; Richardson, 2006; Rosenfeld, 2009; Yep, 2002; Yep et al., 2012). This theory is also used as a critique of the substructures that subsequently suture

impression management (see Rosenfeld, 2009) to the privilege and hypervisibility of able-bodied, middle class, gender-normative gays and lesbians (Aravosis, 2007; Clarke, 2008). It has been used as a means of interrogating the removal of homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), and the subsequent emergence of mental health criteria that seemingly police gender variance (see Bryant, 2008). This theory, then, is useful towards learning more about the lives and livelihoods of sexual minority individuals and communities that may be marginalized, invisible, or viewed through a narrow lens that obscure their variance from and similarity to larger societal norms (see Bryant, 2008; Bucar et al., 2011; Rosenfeld, 2009; Roy, 2012; Yep et al., 2012). According to Richardson (2006), the “neoliberal politics of normalization that, although it too deploys ‘sameness’ with heterosexuals as a central aspect of its argument (p. 516)” obviates an explication of the ways that this strategy may prove to be oppressive to marginalized groups (see Van Eeden-Moorefield et al., 2011). Among the marginalized are those with identities along the Transgender spectrum as well as other non-gender conforming gays and lesbians (and to some degree heterosexuals who transgress the norms), folk of color, the poor and those individuals and groups with multiethnic backgrounds that intersect with marginalized identities (see Barker & Langdrige, 2010; Bucar et al., 2011; Bryant, 2008; Cole et al., 2008; Loiacano, 1989; Singh, 2013; Stryker, 1998, 2004, 2007, 2008; Stryker et al., 2010; Van Eeden-Moorefield et al., 2011; Vitulli, 2010).

This theory will be used as a basis for interrogating the extent to which participants view school-based policies as useful towards the goal of disrupting harassment in schools. This theory will be used as a way of gaining some insight into the extent to which normative values impact one’s sense of being welcomed into and safe within school-based spaces for sexual and gender minorities. Lastly, this theory will also be utilized, most notably in interviews with first or

second generation immigrants, to learn about any perceptions that the informants have about interpersonal and context specific experiences where racilized stereotypes have an impact on their ability to explore gender or sexuality

Gay Straight Alliances and Inclusive Policies. In 1980, the first Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) groups were formed in California and Massachusetts (Currie, et al., 2012; Schindel, 2008; Watson et al., 2010). GSA are groups that have formed in a number of school settings in order to support the needs of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth (and their allies). These are student run and faculty supported groups that are implemented in an effort to disrupt institutional privileging of heterosexuality and strive to provide safe spaces for sexual and gender minority youth and their allies. Currie et al. (2012) list the four roles that GSA fulfill as:

offering counseling and support to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (lgbt) students; providing safe spaces for lgbt students and their friends to socialize and share interest; serving as the school's primary vehicle for increasing educational efforts and awareness about lgbtq safety issues in schools; and being a part of broader school efforts to make schools safer for lgbt student. (p. 56)

However, there have been a number of road blocks to developing GSA, or inclusive policies, or alternative interventions which protect gender and sexual minorities. Schools that are opposed to the development of GSA appear to have support from the Courts to limit the free speech rights of groups via the language found in the Federal Equal Access Act (Davis, 1999; Fetner et al., 2007). The FEAA allows schools to bar the formation of groups if they “would cause material interference” (Caudillo v. Lubbock, 2004, p. 20). In Caudillo v. Lubbock (2004), the District judge positioned youth in general and sexual and gender non-conforming youth in particular as ‘vulnerable’ and too immature to process certain material without the aid and assistance of

parents and other adults. In that instance and several since then, the Courts have favored steps that have profoundly limited if not outright barred the development of GSA in schools.

Additional barriers are abstinence only and parental and community-based resistance to interventions that address the needs of gender and sexual minority youth in schools (Caudillo v. Lubbock, 2004).

The Gay Straight Alliance, as noted in the brief review of the extent literature cited above, is among the most prolifically discussed interventions to address anti-LGBT stigma and prejudice in school-based contexts. As Marston (2015) demonstrates, “although there are no determinative studies, such as randomized clinical trials, of the efficacy and effectiveness of school-based interventions to reduce anti-LGBT stigma and prejudice, evidence that such interventions are promising is quite robust” (p. 1765). That said, I would be remiss in my review of the literature regarding the establishment of school-based interventions that address animus towards sexual and gender minority youth if I did not point out there are, however, additional interventions, like Project 10 in California (Kosciw, Bartkiewicz & Greytak, 2012; Marston, 2015; Marston, 2015; Meyer & Bayer, 2013), or the less familiar responses to stigma like the “gay liberation school groups” that, according to Cohen (2004), were noted to have emerged in “New York City, suburban Maryland, Detroit, and Los Angeles” (p. 21). These youth groups, as Cohen (2004) documents, predate the Gay Straight Alliance and Project 10 by nearly two decades (Cohen, 2005; Johnson, 2007).

The Gay International Youth Society, one of the foci of Cohen’s (2004) dissertation thesis, was a student-run, faculty supported group, that emerged at George Washington High School in New York City (Blackburn & McCready, 2014). With the support of Gay Youth, a group that Cohen (2004) described as a cluster of “informal underground networks” which

“brought together adolescents in a variety of locales during the 1950s and 1960s” (p. 5), as well as from “Adult groups such as Gay Liberation Front and the Gay Activists Alliance” which as Cohen notes (2004) “helped catalyze youth activism” (p. 8), the Gay International Youth Society called for significant changes that included a desire to for more autonomy to create a group that addressed the needs of sexual and gender minority youth in school contexts. Like the Student Homophile Leagues that emerged at Cornell and Columbia (Beemyn, 2003), The Gay International Youth Society, which Cohen described as one that was noted to have been comprised of a “disproportionate number of Spanish-speaking” (p. 262) sexual minority, gender nonconforming youth, and their straight allies: It was among the first student run organizations with expressed ties to the more prominent Gay Liberation Movements that were occurring in the late 20th century (Johnson, 2007). Among their goals, noted by Cohen (2004), was “the broad-based overthrow or transformation of sexist, racist, and economically oppressive institutions” (p. 6). As we begin the process of closing the critical gap in the literature regarding the efficacy and effectiveness of school-based groups that address the needs of sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth in school contexts, it is of particular importance that we ask why the historicization of the experiences of sexual and gender minoritized youth is often disarticulated from the broader movement for civil rights among sexual and gender minority communities? Moreover, as we historicize the emergence of school-based interventions that address the needs of youth, how might youth of color and others with intersectional identities benefit from a broader contextualization of the interventions for use more broadly? That withstanding, the Gay Straight Alliance was discussed in this section because it is an intervention utilized in the context from which the informants were drawn for this study.

Summary

In this section, I provided a brief overview of the extant literature that has explored both the lived experiences of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth and their relationship to research which sets out to shed a light on their experiences. As I point out, early research on the experiences of this group has been diseased-focused and has tended to operate from a deficit model; however, research, of late, has made a methodological course shift by broadening our understanding of the risks that these youth potentially face by looking at systemic, social, cultural, and institutional factors that may shape identity development. In the definition of key terms section, I provided an overview of compulsory heterosexuality, heteronormativity, and the newly emerging construct, homonormativity, with the goal of examining their potential usefulness towards examining the lives of sexual and gender minority youth and the importance of these concepts in the current investigation. These concepts may help in our efforts to understand the experiences of sexual and gender minority youth across multiple context particularly their day to day experiences in school settings. The latter concepts may help us explore the needs for GSA and or inclusive policies and the usefulness for creating safe spaces with particular attention given to the individuals who utilize them. The objective is to increase the visibility of the needs of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth in counseling related journals. This study may help to bridge our understanding of the needs of sexual and gender non-conforming youth in schools and help to prepare pre-service counselors for exploring the roles that they may fill in school-based contexts particularly as it relates to disrupting harassment and abuse of students for whom they will provide support.

Overview of Chapters

I utilized Chapter I as a means with which to introduce the reader to some of the nuances associated with adolescent development in general and sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth in particular. This section was written, in part, as a way to impress upon the reader the value of conducting research on youth populations and as a way of discussing the purpose of using Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986) as the guiding framework for this study. I also described sexual and gender minorities as well as compulsory heterosexuality, heteronormativity, homonormativity, and I explored the goals and purposes of Gay Straight Alliances in brief, as each of the latter theories and intervention tools are often utilized extensively in research on gender and sexual minorities. In addition to discussing the purpose of this study, I provided a brief overview of the gap that I intend to fill and its relevance to counseling.

In Chapter II, I provide a brief overview of some of the literature which has explored the needs and experiences of gender and sexual minorities. The review of the literature is intended to strengthen the goal of utilizing Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986) as the organizing framework for this study and its usefulness towards the goal of exploring the interpersonal and context related phenomenon that have an impact on sexual and gender minority youth identity development. I also review some of the juridical and legislative actions that have either helped or hindered the development of institutional based interventions that disrupt patterns of violence and quotidian isolation that sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth are noted to experience. I situate professional counselors within the bioecological system in an effort to lay out the relevance of this study to the profession with specific attention given to several court cases that have involved lawsuits that were filed by pre-service trainees and professional counselors regarding moral based conflicts to working with

sexual and gender minority clients. This section is of particular importance to this study as both of the pre-service trainees intended to gain the necessary credentials for work in school-based contexts. Among the themes that emerged in each of the lawsuits was some tension between constitutional rights for professional counselors and the professional ethical codes regarding work with minoritized clients. I review each of the four lawsuits with particular focus given to problematizing how tolerance may be imbricated in each of the cases. I present an argument for further empirical work around how tolerance is internalized and the ways that this concept may frustrate one's ability to utilize multicultural approaches that unsettle the quotidian safety that heteronormativity might otherwise enjoy particularly in school-based contexts involving counselors and the students that they serve. I close this chapter with a brief discussion of the gap that I intend to fill.

In the third Chapter, I discuss, in more detail, the Bioecological Theory and the ways that I to utilize the Process, Person, Context, Time model to organize this study (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986). I also discuss the rationale for integrating Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis and its usefulness towards the goal of bracketing assumptions and processing the qualitative interviews (Singh, 2013). I also provide an explanation of the research question that guides this study, and I provide an explication of the participant selection and recruitment process, my positionality as a researcher, and the elements that I plan to include in order to achieve a level of trustworthiness as a researcher.

Using Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory (1977, 1979, 198), I present the emergent themes most relevant to the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem domains in Chapters IV, V, VI, & VII. In Chapter IV, I provide an overview of how I integrated Bronfenbrenner's theory and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. I discuss the recruitment

process followed by an introduction of the informants and the themes more relevant to the microsystem domain. In Chapter V, I review the themes most relevant to the mesosystem domain, focusing on the interaction between the relationships and contexts that were noted to have an impact at this systemic level. Chapter VI is an overview of the exosystem domain with specific focus given to anti-discrimination policies, school-based interventions like the GSA, and other factors that were noted to have an indirect impact on identity development. Chapter VII includes an overview of the informant's perceptions regarding the macro-political language used to describe their experiences with oppression. Lastly, Chapter VIII includes a final analytic discussion of micro, meso, exo, and macro system domains followed by an exploration of the implications for each of the systemic levels. I then provide a discussion of the limitations of this study and concludes with an exploration of topics for future research.

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a more detailed explication of the literature regarding the experiences of sexual and gender minority youth and the experiences across milieu that are associated with identity development. I will also provide an explanation of the emergent policies at the federal and state level that have an impact on the creation of safety in school settings. As a result, I plan to review, in brief, Title IX, the 14th Amendment Equal Protection Clause, and the Federal Equal Access Act (FEEA). I close this chapter with a brief discussion of New York State's Dignity for All Students Act by discussing the ways that a project of this scope can give some early indicators about the extent to which these legislative actions address the needs of sexual minority and gender non-conforming student's experiences of harassment in schools. This discussion is guided by my use of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986) as it requires an exploration of both the idiosyncratic characteristics of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth (as discussed in Chapter I) alongside the sociocultural factors that may have an impact on alienation from or integration within social contexts.

Bioecological Theory in Counseling Related Journals

In brief, Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979, 1986, 1994, 1994b) developed the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) approach to research with a specific interest in exploring the ways that both internal and external factors have an impact on the family system and as a way of describing the ways that children become alienated from one or more of the social environments in which they find themselves (bioecological theory). According to this theoretical approach, the individual is embedded in at least four culturally concentric bidirectional environmental systems (micro, meso, exo, macro) all having varying levels of influence on emergent idiosyncratic

characteristics with the regularly occurring more proximal settings and relationships with objects, symbols, and attachment figures holding the most direct and lasting impact on identity development (Bowlby, 1973, 1982, 1988; Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986, 1994, 1994b; Christensen, 2010; Darling, 2007; D'Augelli et al., 2008; D'augelli et al., 2010; Franck, 2002; Hackford-Peer, 2010; Henklin, 2012; Higdon, 2008; Hong et al., 2012; Mayo, 2008; Morrin, 1977; Pascoe, 2007; Fonagy, 2001; Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, and Target, 2004; Slesnick, Bartle-Haring, Dashora, 2008; Smart 2012; Tharinger, 2008). Learning and one's sense of connectedness and level of engagement, according to Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986, 1994, 1994b; Christensen, 2010; Darling, 2007), are differentially influenced within interpersonal relationships as well as across context specific milieu (also supported, in part, by Attachment Theory; Bowlby, 1973, 1982, 1988; Fonagy, 2001; Fonagy et al., 2004; Ripley, Anderson, McCormack, & Rockett, 2012) and time (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986, 1994, 1994b; Bronfenbrenner et al., 2005; Christensen, 2010; Darling, 2007) requiring a methodological approach that captures the range of phenomenon that influence identity development.

The last several decades have brought with it an increased level of interest in the phenomenological experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning (LGBTQ) and non-gender conforming youth (Bryant, 2008; Broz, 1998; Currie et al., 2012; D'augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2008; D'augelli, Grossman, Starks, & Sinclair, 2010; Franck, 2002; Hackford-Peer, 2010; Henklin, 2012; Higdon, 2008; Hong, & Garbarino, 2012; Mayo, 2008; Morrin, 1977; Pascoe, 2007; Rekers, 2005; Regnerus {A}, 2012; Sandfort, Bakker, & Vanwesenbeeck, 2007; Singh, 2013; Wardinski, 2005) with particular attention paid to the research written about them (Amato, 2012; Hong et al., 2012; Rekers, 1978; Regnerus {B},

2012; Singh, & Shelton, 2011). The recent decisions regarding the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) and the California proposition 8 cases that were handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court each mark a momentous shift in the continued struggle for LGBT rights; however, a significant amount of work remains in an effort to ensure the equal distribution of rights are extended to those who are the most vulnerable and the least privileged (Alexander, 2012; Allender, 2009; Mogul, Ritchie, & Whitlock, 2011; Woronoff, Estrada, & Sommer, 2006). Another gap, as identified by Sullivan et al. (2001), is the need for policies within child welfare organizations that provide protections against discrimination based on sexual identity or gender presentation. Although increased visibility and advocacy have contributed to sweeping changes, there remains room for ongoing exploration of the extent to which normative values continue to have an impact on the vertical and horizontal distribution of protections and the extent to which policies safeguard the needs of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth particularly as they relate to experiences of harassment and intolerance in school and other social contexts.

A quick search of the available peer reviewed articles revealed several hundred papers which appear to have used Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory as the theoretical framework for grounding scholarship. Although Bronfenbrenner's theory has been utilized as the theoretical frame from which to explore the needs of a number of groups, there is a paucity of articles that address the perspectives, the interpersonal, intrapersonal, and context specific events that are most relevant to the identity development of sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth broadly with fewer studies regarding the needs of this population making explicit use of Bronfenbrenner's Process, Person, Context, Time model (see Birkett et al., 2009; Hong et al., 2012; Horn et al., 2010). The goal of this section of the chapter is to review several of the articles that make explicit use of Bronfenbrenner's theory with additional attention given to

articles that address one or more of the elements of the Process, Person, Context, Time model in order to help the reader understand the gap that I hope to fill by completing this study.

Grounding their work in Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory, Hong et al. (2012) provide a detailed explication of the state of scholarship regarding the experiences of gender and sexual minorities by contextualizing a shift in how research on this population of youth has evolved. Research in this area tended to focus on the idiosyncratic characteristics of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth that placed them at risk for harassment or self-destructive behavior with little attention given to the narrow conceptualization of how risks and protective factors were defined leading to interventions that obscure the need to disrupt structural concerns that potentially emerge in interpersonal relationships across multiple social contexts. One of the goals of using the bioecological model, as Hong et al. (2010) note, is to broaden our understanding of the range of phenomenon that potentially shape the developmental trajectory of sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth. A secondary goal would be the formation of empirically grounded interventions that can be implemented particularly in the socially conscripted settings in which these youth spend the vast majority of their developmental years. As we navigate through the literature in this section, we will find risks and protective factors are differentially defined revealing significant tensions that need to be explicated, deconstructed, and problematized in order to prove useful towards the goal of mitigating adverse outcomes.

Empirical Framework for Sexual Minority and Gender Non-Conforming Youth

Experiences

Birkett et al. (2009) utilized segments of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological theory as a means with which to gain a better understanding of the association between school climate, homophobic bullying, and the emergence of maladaptive outcomes for hetero identified, sexual

minority, and gender variant students in school-based contexts. After parents and school administrators were able to review the assessment tool used to gain additional information about how questions about sexuality were framed, seventy two hundred students enrolled in 27 middle and high school settings in a Midwestern city participated in a modified version of a survey that is conducted in five year intervals that provide school administrators and parents a means of assessing “attitudes, behaviors, and experiences of youth” in an effort to develop appropriate mechanisms for addressing concerns that emerge in school contexts (p. 992). The survey assessed the extent to which students perceived their school as being a positive atmosphere conducive of learning. The participants were also asked to respond to questions about any experiences with being bullied, experiences of depression or suicidality, substance use, truancy from school, or any experiences with homophobic teasing. An additional measure was added to the tool that asked students to respond to an anonymous question about their sexual identity in an effort to gauge perceptions about bullying that may be the result of animus towards violations of gender norms.

Although the vast majority of the youth in this survey identified as White and heterosexual with slightly more female respondents than male, there were a range of non-White and multiethnic student with some 15% of the participants identifying as LGB or questioning. It is worth noting that parents and students were allowed to opt out of taking the survey, in part, due to the revised questions that assessed sexual identity. Another factor worth noting was how the question regarding sexuality was framed. The youth were asked the extent to which they felt that they were never, rarely, sometimes, a lot, always, or never confused about their sexual identity. Although the additional survey question certainly addresses the epistemological erasure of sexuality in scholarly research with middle and high school age youth, the phrasing of the

question highlights the difficulty that scholars experience developing questions that tote the fine line between offending parents with conservative values and potentially reifying the stigmatization of identities that differ from heterosexuality.

On the measure of experiences with homophobic teasing, Birkett et al. (2009) found significantly elevated reports of bullying on this factor among youth who were questioning their sexual identity compared to their LGB and hetero identified peers. Students who were questioning their sexual identity were also more likely to report experiences with depression and suicidality, substance use, and truancy compared to their hetero identified and sexual minority peers except in those settings where peers in each of the groups perceived the setting as positive (see also Espelage et al., 2008). The findings also suggest that teachers and school administrators potentially play a significant role in creating a safe environment by virtue of their addressing homophobic teasing and by engendering perceptions that these staff are genuinely concerned about and empathic towards the needs of sexual minority and questioning youth. What remains unclear in this particular study is whether or not the students perceived the bullying to be a direct result of their sexual identity or some other factor related to their identity development (i.e. - race, disability, social standing). Although the scale regarding perceptions of the school environment did ask students whether they felt that their teachers and school administrators cared about them the measure does little to address the extent to which students use some of the identity management strategies that were discussed in Chapter I in an effort to maintain that sense of connectedness to teachers and school administrators. Lastly, while the author's review of the literature shows an interest in Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological theory, the questionnaires appear singularly focused on the micro level experiences of harassment within the school context and appears to have missed an opportunity to generate questions that might have

addressed the intersectionality between the micro (family, community, and peers), the meso (intersectionality between experiences at home and school), the exo (perceptions regarding the implementation of state and locally sanctioned policies in schools) and macro (societal influences that have an impact on the perceptions about gender normativity, risks, and protection in school contexts) level systems. This concern is not unique to this article; rather, it is also reified in a number of the additional publications that will be reviewed next.

School-based Intervention: The Gay Straight Alliance

McGuire et al. (2010) conducted a two part study in an effort to contextualize the risk and protective factors that are potentially associated with experiences of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth in school contexts. Sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth and straight allies who attended schools with a Gay Straight Alliance in California (and other states) were invited to participate in a paper based or online survey which addressed this groups experiences of harassment in school. The responses of some 2200 informants, 34 percent of whom identified as LGBTQ, were used for the first part of the study. Nearly 80% of the full panel of participants and 60% of the subset of informants who identified as Transgender had heard negative remarks about gender presentation on a near daily basis. A statistically significant portion of the respondents had noted that these remarks seldom activated any reaction from teachers and school administrators and in some instances the teachers were reported to have made the inflammatory remarks.

In part two of the study, McGuire et al. (2010) completed a focus group with 36 Transgender participants many of whom were ethnic minorities. Participants were accessed from several community-based organizations in the Western part of the United States. Informants were asked to share their ideas about the best ways that community-based

organizations that provide supports for sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth could work towards the goal of meeting their needs. These youth were also asked to discuss their experiences in school-based settings and to describe strategies that schools could take that would contribute to a sense of safety and connectedness. Sixty percent of the youth who participated in the focus group portion of this study were Black and were Female to Male transgender identified. Although a number of the youth were noted to dress in ways that were gender normative, a number of the members were atypical in their gender performance choosing styles of dress that were more consistent with their desired gender rather than the one assigned to them at birth. McGuire et al. (2010) noted that the responses about the youth's experiences in school and community-based contexts were about as varied as the performances of gender. Although a number of the youth reported experiences of minoritization in school contexts, some appear to have developed alliances with district and school level teachers and administrators.

The participants in the McGuire et al. (2010) study were aware of harassment and abuse in schools and in some instances they were the targets of abuse but when asked about their perceptions of safety they appeared to equivocate or minimize their experiences in relationship with and in reference to experiences of other youth in their schools. Another nuance that emerged in the McGuire et al (2010) study was the presence of a school district level advocate who was available to assist gender variant youth with finding an appropriate school that could match and support their needs. Although a number of the youth in this study had expressed grave concerns about the ability or interest of teachers to address harassment, there were others who had experiences with teachers who were 'intolerant' of abuse (p. 1183). A few of the students in this study appear to have utilized aggression as a strategy for minimizing risks to safety. This was accomplished by either responding violently to harassment or by virtue of well-

established relationships with students or groups known for targeting and harassing vulnerable youth. Lastly, although not all of the youth were aware of the presence of GSAs in the schools, those who neither attended the schools nor participated in the activities wished that they had. Toomey et al. (2012) wrote a follow up article on this topic, in part, to determine the extent to which students perceived the implementation of policies and interventions as having had any effect on the disruption of school-based policing of gender nonconformity. As expected, there were of range of responses regarding the extent to which the participants had felt the efforts to address heteronormativity had been effective. The exploration regarding the steps that community-based organization can take to assist transgender youth tended to focus on the strategies that community-based coalitions could take to address context specific harassment and alienation in schools; however, there was no assessment regarding concerns that Trans identified youth face within organizations that provide supports to sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth. Nuanced experiences within school and community-based contexts across intersecting marginalized identities remain a fruitful area ripe for future exploration (Beemyn, 2003; Davis et al., 2009).

In this two part study, McGuire et al. (2010) appear interested in exploring the phenomenological experiences of the youth in their study across school and community-based contexts. Here, we learn about some of the idiosyncratic responses that some of the youth appear to employ as a means with which to minimize their risks in school-based context but we are not told anything about the emergence of those strategies. To say this another way, aggression, for instance, can be viewed as an idiosyncratic response to harassment in one or more contexts. However, we remains unclear is the rationale that some youth utilized for using aggression why others had not used this strategy. Again, there appears to be some interaction between the youth

(micro level idiosyncratic response) and the environment (meso level interaction between the youth and one or more contexts) that is not accounted for. While the experiences of the youth regarding their experiences of harassment across contexts are invaluable as are their thoughts about the ways to disrupt these phenomena, it is not clear what processes they believe sustain and reify these experiences of marginalization across contexts.

Toomey et al. (2012) utilized the surveys that were gathered in the earlier study (see McGuire et al., 2010) with the twenty-two hundred middle and high school students to address a few details that emerged in the data. The participants' ages ranged from 11 to 19 and identified as LGBQ or straight allies with fewer than 2% of the informants reporting transgender identities. Fifteen percent of the participants reported that they had been harassed or bullied as a result of their gender non-conformity. Gender non-conformity was defined as the extent to which one's gender presentation violated the masculine-feminine dichotomy. Two questions were used to address perceptions about bullying and both required the informants to express a concern about the extent to which males and female youth in their schools are bullied not as a result of their sexual identity, but rather as a result of them not maintaining the appropriate amounts of masculinity and femininity (Pascoe, 2007).

The straight allies in this study were more likely to perceive the school as safe compared to their sexual minority peers. Males, particularly those with identities along the transgender spectrum, expressed fewer concerns for the safety of males or other transgender youth for violations of the gender norms; however, these participants accounted for less than 2% of the respondents so this data should be interpreted with caution. Sexual minority youth and a subset of bisexual and Latino/a students who had been harassed and bullied experienced their school as less safe than their hetero identified gender conforming peers. Reports of gender based

harassment appear to have been greatly diminished in those settings that had a GSA or inclusive policies that specifically addressed the experiences of sexual and gender minoritized youth (Goodenow et al., 2006); however, perceptions of safety around gender normativity remained a concern in those settings that did not have a policy that specifically addressed harassment based on gender normativity.

These findings lend support to the Toomey et al (2012) findings that “gender regulation is a critical component of heteronormativity that structures norms and student interactions, placing students at risk for victimization who violate gender norms” (p. 188). The findings also suggest that harassment may continue in those settings whose policies only address bullying based on sexual orientation without fully addressing the problematic policing of gender normativity. However, having a policy in place appears to serve as a source for students to begin the role of disrupting normative assumptions about safety and may empower sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth, and others, to become more aware of the disruptive forces that are tied to harassment especially in those settings that have inclusive policies which may account for the counterintuitive finding regarding the subset of students who attended schools with inclusive policies feeling unsafe in school. In other words, having the policy may help students to become more aware of and take steps towards confronting issues of intolerance (also see Valenti et al., 2009). Inclusive policies may also be invaluable by virtue of their having a formal process with which students can report incidents of intolerance and harassment. The policies, then, also provide a set of guidelines for faculty and the administrative team to help with its goal of creating ‘safe spaces’; however, it was not enough that the schools had a policy. Demonstrative steps towards implementing them (Diaz et al., 2010; Watson et al., 2010), access to supportive staff, and the presence of a GSA, as Diaz et al. (2010) also noted, were indirectly associated with

greater connectedness to school and lower rates of suicidality (Goodenow et al., 2006). The presence of a GSA both lowered the rates of victimization but participation in the groups was associated, in the Diaz et al. (2010) study, with greater victimization.

This study appears to focus on the micro level experiences of harassment in school-based contexts and the extent to which the development of inclusive policies and strategies like GSA disrupt quotidian violence and experiences of marginalization in school-based contexts. However, what remains unclear is the extent to which parental (micro and meso system levels), peer (micro and meso system levels), community (micro, meso, and exo system levels), and societal (exo and macro system levels) expectations help or hinder the process of making schools safe for youth. The focus on the micro level experiences in schools also missed an opportunity to explore marginalization in settings beyond the school context or the ways that the youth, perhaps, view their experiences in schools as having an impact on their experiences and relationships in other contexts.

Schools are by far one of the contexts in which youth spend a great deal of their developmental years but this certainly is not the only setting that has an impact on identity development. An extensive amount of research has involved this setting, in part, as a way to develop interventions that address emergent concerns like bullying, heteronormativity, and the maladaptive outcomes discussed in Chapter I. Because heteronormativity is thought to be a construct that permeates most aspects of daily living including but certainly not limited to experiences in school settings, Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory appears quite useful towards the goal of aggregating data across contexts, disciplines, and institutions in order to provide a complex accounting of the phenomenon that are most likely to shape and be impacted by the developmental trajectories of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth. In the

first part of this chapter we discussed some of the ways that heteronormativity can emerge in interpersonal relationships in school contexts and while we will not exactly abandon this scholarship it is important to review some of the seemingly innocuous ways that heteronormative microaggressions present themselves starting in school settings and expanding this thought process out to additional contexts. Microaggressions is a construct that emerged as a means with which to describe what Constantine, Smith, Redington, and Owens (2008) “brief, commonplace, and subtle indignities (whether verbal, behavioral, or environmental) that communicate negative or denigrating messages to people of color” (p. 348). When applied to the experiences of sexual and gender minority populations, microaggressions, as Cheng (2014) notes “denote prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behavior against people who do not conform to socially prescribed sexual norms and gender identity” (p. 422).

While walking the halls amongst his students, Franck (2002), a teacher of color who identifies as gay, happened to have overheard them use heteronormative statements and felt compelled to consider the consequences that ignoring their comments might have. He also had to think about productive ways to challenge his students to consider the parallels that heteronormativity shares with racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression. He also appears to have taken some time to think about the potential back lash that might occur as a result of his self-disclosure regarding his sexual orientation. To be clear, it was not all that long ago that one could be fired or barred from employment working with youth and in some instances, there still remains a significant amount of fear, in some settings, about holding identities that differ from the heterosexual norm or working with sexual minority youth particularly in those settings where animus towards this group is profound (Eaklor, 2008; McCreedy, 1999; Vitulli, 2010).

The terms ‘that’s so gay’ and ‘no homo’ are just a few of the heteronormative words that became popular, in part, due to their use in pop culture and translation into everyday discourse (Hong et al., 2012; mass media influence on sexual prejudice). Some studies indicate that sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth are exposed to microaggressions like this on a near daily basis (Palmer, Kosciw, & Bartkiewicz, 2012; Pascoe, 2007) and in some instances the connotation is not meant to be derogatory; yet, it performs what Moon (2011) might refer to as the gentle violence of misrecognition and dis-location. Microaggressions anesthetize the need to think critically about the gentle violence that may be inflicted on those who hear the terms used in inflammatory ways. These jokes are remarkable because they dis-locate the subjective experiences of the object who is the target of the words assuming that the ‘other’ is just like them seldom taking into consideration that the person or others within ear shot may be ‘so gay’ (Franck, 2002). The terms also perform the work of negating gay subjectivity by creating a hierarchy that assumes that a heterosexual identity is normative and desirable and alternative identities, particularly in multiethnic communities (Franck, 2002; Gates, 2000; Griffin, 2000; Hutchinson, 2000; Loiacano, 1989; Sommerville, 2005; Vavrus, 2009; Yep et al., 2012), do not exist and in the instance they do that they are worthy of symbolic and performative rebuke via seemingly innocuous jokes. As Yep et al. (2012) notes:

the systematic erasure of the experiences of people of color by virtue of the proliferation of images in queer popular culture {...} that are overwhelmingly White and middle class simultaneously reinforces the perception that GLB people are always presumed to be white, able-bodied, and middle class and literally and symbolically erases the lives and subjectivities of GLQ people of color. (p. 894)

When Franck (2002) confronted the female student who called her peer gay she was noted to have responded by saying that the remark was not homophobic because the target of the word was family. More remarkable was her statement that no one was offended by the comment because “there aren’t any homos here” (p. 274). This symbolic erasure was intended to connote a belief that Blacks, particularly those who live in the ‘Hood’, are not gay further dis-locating Black sexuality (Gates, 2000; Griffin, 2000; Loiacano, 1989) making this groups’ marginalization within multiethnic communities exceedingly problematic.

Care should be taken not to assume that Blacks hold more heteronormative beliefs compared to other cultural groups (Herek et al., 1995; Lewis, 2003). There is also the striking parallel to the symbolic erasure of transgender invisibility in Beemyn’s (2003) account of the development of the first University based support groups when the leadership assumed that there were no Transgender members until Paula Layton made her presence known later becoming the Vice President of the Student Homophile League at Columbia. In the summer of 1969, Janis Kelly, a student who also identified as lesbian, became the Present of the second SHL in the nation that sprung up at Cornell University (Beemyn, 2003). The SHL at Columbia and Cornell Universities are important because they are, as noted above, the first institutionally sanctioned groups that supported the needs of sexual and gender minorities to emerge in university based settings (Reichard, 2010) in spite of the Dean of Columbia University having expressed concerns that the groups were “quite unnecessary” (Beemyn, 2003, p. 203) and the objections expressed by the director of counseling service that “the group would promote ‘deviant behavior’ among students” (p. 204). The trajectories of these groups appear to mirror the limitations placed on a number of GSA to become “civil liberties and educational groups rather than a social group in order to prevent possible criticism that they are serving as ‘an agency for personal introductions’

[or] ‘promoting homosexual behavior’” (Beemyn, 2003, p. 213). Lastly, it is also important to point out that during the period when the SHLs emerged in universities across the country that *Bowers v. Hardwick* (Allender, 2009; Chauncey, 1994, 2004; Eaklor, 2008; Eskridge, 1999; Joslin, 1996; Sommerville, 2005; Spindelman, 2013; Tribe, 2004; United States Senate, 1961, 1966) was still the law of the land sanctioning anti-sodomy laws and animus towards sexual minorities and gender nonconformity. Although the U. S. Supreme Courts holding in *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003) overturned their earlier decision in the *Bowers v. Hardwick* (1986) holding, the statements that Justice Kennedy made during the proceedings, which have been dubbed the ‘Minor Exception’ (Wardinski, 2005), have had a profound impact on how protective actions taken on behalf of youth are framed (Higdon, 2008). So we will review the Minor Exception in the latter portion of this chapter.

Then, there is the gentle violence that emerged when John Aravosis (2007) published an article in *Salon Magazine*, concerned about the impact of waiting for more inclusive language for gender variance and the delay it might create for work place protections for gender normative gays and lesbians (Employment Non-Discrimination Act; ENDA). He asked *How did the T get in LGBT?*, forcing Susan Stryker (2007) to publish a swift response in *Salon Magazine* which provided a brief history of the historical contributions of Transgender and Bisexual folk in a number of protest and uprisings from the less visible riots at Compton’s in San Francisco to the better known events that have become a part of the historical record concerning the Stone Wall Riots in New York City.

So to be clear, sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth and adults have experiences that run the gambit of invisibility in some settings and hypervisibility in others with some being quite strategic about their identities in an effort to minimize ostracism and alienation

(Beemyn, 2003; Bryant, 2008; Cohn et al., 2010). In some instances, attempts to thwart sexual prejudice are challenging, in part, because there are assumptions, like in Franck (2002) and John's (2007) accounts, about the presence of minoritized groups or the extent to which the dominant groups should utilize their positions of privilege in order to ensure equal distribution of rights and protections are shared horizontally and vertically across multiethnic communities particularly as it relates to those with intersectional sexual and gender minority status (Aravosis, 2007; Stryker, 2007).

Returning to Franck's (2002) account, he was relatively new to the setting and while he had not shared with the reader his rationale for developing plans to introduce a school-based intervention that would address sexual prejudice ahead of his having heard the student make the heteronormative remarks he appeared to be somewhat reluctant about engaging the students. While one reading of his disposition could be a concern about their reactions due to his relative newness or the risks to his career or safety, an additional concern emerged later in his account when he appeared to relish in the fact that the students appeared to grasp the parallels of heteronormativity to racism and other forms of oppression and that they openly challenged their peers to disrupt the performance of sexual prejudice in the same way that they had other mechanisms of alienation. His remarks, perhaps, reveal an internalization of a belief that communities of color may, perhaps, be reluctant to see the structural parallels of heteronormativity to racism or that folk of color might be resistant if not openly hostile to the idea of seeing heteronormativity as something that warrants direct attention. Such a perspective positions Franck and his internalizations and unknown experiences at the center of the bioecological framework.

If this interpretation of his trepidation is on the mark, it is supported, in part, due to the tension between the relative invisibility and hypersexualization of sexual minorities of color in the mass media and more broadly; there have also been concerns about initial delays in communities of color to respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic due, in part, to the risks that speaking out might pose towards the goal of disrupting respectability narratives and the symbolic positioning of Blacks as similar to the dominant culture (Buttaro et al., 2012; Harris, 2009); and there have also been some frictions and rifts within communities of color about the notion of drawing parallels between racism and sexual and gender minority based systems of oppression (Jakobsen et al., 2003). That withstanding, some of the research carried out by Herek (1995) and Lewis (2003) are useful towards the goal of disrupting quotidian assumptions that Blacks are more homophobic than other identity groups.

Both Herek et al. (1995) and Lewis (2003) found elevated rates of negative attitudes towards sexual minorities among heterosexuals; however, these views were most notable among men no matter their race and were also more robust among Black men (for gender differences among African Americans also see also Battle & Lemelle, 2002) compared to their White male counterparts. On further review, both studies revealed that informants with a higher level of education (Blacks are 2/3 as likely as Whites to be college graduates; Lewis, 2003), those holding a belief that homosexuality was out of one's control (Black informants tended to hold views that homosexuality was a choice; Herek et al., 1995), those with less frequent church attendance (also see Battle et al., 2002), and those who either had a positive experience (Lewis, 2003) or regular contact with a sexual minority tended to hold more positive views of sexual minorities (Herek et al., 1995). Herek et al. (1995) concluded that:

{t}he two groups (Black and White heterosexuals) did not differ significantly in the direction and intensity of their attitudes towards gay men and lesbians, either in the aggregate or when analyzed according to gender. Thus, it does not appear warranted to characterize Black heterosexuals as more or less prejudiced against gay men and lesbians than their White counterparts.” (p. 104).

That withstanding, after giving considerable thought to the pros and cons of getting involved, Franck went ahead with a preplanned intervention that challenged his students to think about the parallels that heteronormativity shares with other forms of oppression.

Franck’s (2002) article invited readers to think about the ways that heteronormative comments go uncontested even in settings which celebrate critical consciousness to issues of dominance and oppression. Although his intervention appears to have been successful, there are a number of counselors, teachers, administrators, and other school staff who are very likely to be confronted with similar circumstances who may either ignore the issue altogether (Nice Counselor Syndrome; Bemak et al., 2008), fear getting involved (Morgan et al., 2011; Valenti et al., 2009; Vavrus, 2009; Vega, Crawford, & Van Pelt, 2012) or simply give up on addressing such concerns due to the risks that speaking up may have on their careers (Nice Counselor Syndrome, see Bemak et al., 2008; Watson, et al., 2010) as a result of having their concerns ignored or by virtue of the lack of parental, administrative, or legal support for addressing such concerns (Broz, 1998; Hong et al., 2012; Nabozny v. Podlesny, 1996; Wardinski, 2005).

However, it is worth noting that in light of some of the concerns that getting involved might bring, there are a number of students, parents, and school administrators who have embraced the risks in an effort to support the needs of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth (Valenti et al., 2009; Vega et al., 2012). It is noteworthy that Franck (2002),

having considered the warnings that the student he confronted gave him about discussing homosexuality in the ‘hood’, he was quite surprised that the students had actually “turned out to be aggressive in their critique of enforced heteronormativity” (p. 275) which suggests that the work of resisting dominant ideologies is ongoing not only in those settings that support the structural dismantling of oppression but may perhaps, also, be an ongoing struggle for those of us who work towards the continuation of that work. In addition to the growing body of literature that explores the emergence of heteronormativity in schools, some researchers have broadened the scope of this scholarship to account for some of the ways that this phenomenon may surface in familial relationships.

Hetero and Homo Normativities and an Ecology of Support and Alienation

Sexual and gender minority youth have numerous interactions which are experienced and/or perceived as supportive or alienating. In this next section, I will review some of the literature which addresses the perceptions that fit within the matrix of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986, 1994, 1994b; Christensen, 2010; Darling, 2007) beginning with an exploration of the perceptions that youth have about relationships and contexts most relevant to identity development. I also explore some of the dominant constructions of gender and sexuality that parents often hold with more general focus given to the impact that thus may have on identity development.

Perceptions of School Safety, Teachers, and School Counselors

Roe (2013) utilized a combination of snowball and purposeful sampling to recruit youth who attended an “It Gets Better community event” for participation in a study that was designed to gain a better understanding of the types of qualities that the participants look for when deciding if counseling staff are supportive. Seven males who identified as gay and one female

who identified as lesbian agreed to participate once the appropriate parental consent was granted. The participants were between 16 and 19 years of age and they were in grades 10-12 and they all lived and attended school in a suburban setting in Central Pennsylvania (Roe, 2013). Roe (2013) utilized Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory as well as Protection Risk Model to aid in his conceptualization of the needs of the youth and as a tool to guide the questions that the informants were asked as part of the overall study. Like this current investigation, he also decided to approach this study qualitatively using the lens of phenomenology to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of his informants and as a way to close a critical gap in the literature regarding empirical work with sexual and gender minority youth and their connectedness to school-based counselors.

Many of the youth were noted to look for both overt and covert signs that their counselor(s) was supportive. Some relied on the experiences that other peers had had with a counselor to assess the level of comfort that they might have disclosing their identity. The informants were noted to ask questions regarding the counselors' political leaning and standing as either liberal or conservative before making a decision whether to make a disclosure or not. Although the youth were more likely to feel safe with those counselors who stated that they were liberal and Democrat, at least one of the informants, having had a past experience with a counselor, decided to make a disclosure in light of the fact that she often made overt references to her faith and, when pressed, she disclosed that she was conservative in her leanings. This informant appears to have developed the impression that the school counselor was able to bracket her conservative views while giving age-appropriate guidance and feedback on a range of topics most important to his developmental needs.

The informants were also noted to pay particular attention to the ways that school counselors interacted with youth and they spent time making observations about the overall setup of the counseling space. Some were noted to have noticed the rainbow flag sticker, symbolic of one's support of sexual and gender minorities, but the purpose or meaning of the image was not immediately clear, for some, until they did an internet search that revealed the meaning. There were, however, some barriers that were noted to emerge in the interviews with the youth.

Some of the informants expressed a sense of security making disclosures to their counselors provided that they had established a level of comfort. However, there were some informants who reported that they utilized their assigned counselor to meet their school-based needs but they sought out the guidance or support of other members of the counseling staff to discuss areas of their identity development that were relevant to their gender or sexuality. Again, these decisions appear to have been reached as a result of observations or were based, in part, on impressions that other youth in the school might have had about experiences with a particular counselor within the school context Roe, (2013). Some of the informants appear to have taken steps to gauge the level of comfort that the counselor had in the session in an attempt to be responsive to outward signs of discomfort regarding their self-disclosures. Some of the youth expressed a concern that the disclosure would jeopardize a relationship that they needed as they prepared to transition to graduation, continuing education, and the possibility of work upon graduation.

Confidentiality was yet another concern raised by a number of the informants. According to Roe (2013) some of the youth felt more comfortable talking with peers than with adults (including parents or school counselors) but there were others who appear to have appreciated having a relationship with their school counselor. They were concerned, however, about the

limits of confidentiality and whether or not disclosing their sexual or gender identity would require the counselor to notify their parents.

The informants also indicated that active listening and the ability of the counselor to ask the pertinent questions rather than wait for them to make the disclosures was most useful. The informant who had an experience with the counselor who identified as conservative said that it would have been easier if his counselor had asked him questions. He appears to have struggled, a little, to broach the conversation, in part, because of assumptions that he had come to associate with a person who holds conservative values. He appears to have been pleasantly surprised that she did not judge him; however, he would have liked for her to resolve her own discomfort asking questions so that he could talk about things related to his identity development.

Lastly, when making the decision whether or not to make a disclosure to their counselor, the informants appear to have given thought to the title and role of their counselor as they prepared to talk about their identities. The title and role was viewed as one of support and was value and judgement free. However, the informants appear to have recognized that ideological thinking, particularly as it relates to personally held views on sexual and gender identity, can play a mediating role in how counselors work with youth. Although the title appears to have played a role in the informant's level of comfort, they looked for relational and context specific cues to support their decision whether or not to make the disclosure (Roe, 2013). In addition to the growing body of literature that explores the emergence of heteronormativity in schools, some researchers have broadened the scope of this scholarship to account for some of the ways that this phenomenon may surface in familial relationships.

Varjas, Mahan, Meyers, Birckbichler, Lopp, and Dew, (2006) utilized a purposeful sampling approach to recruit sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth for participation

in a study aimed at “explor[ing] school climate, bullying experiences, characteristics of the victims and the aggressors, and the consequences of aggression” (p. 54). Fourteen youth ages 15 to 18 were recruited from GSA’s and community-based organizations that provide services and supports for sexual and gender minorities across Atlanta, GA. According to Varjas et al. (2006), “the interview participant group contained slightly more females than males (9 female, 7 male) and half identified as Caucasian (8 Caucasian, 4 African American, 1 Asian, 3 multi-racial)” (p. 55).

The informants provided descriptions of their schools that ranged from completely safe to be “the gayest boys in school” (p. 58), to some indicating that the perception of safety was associated with the level of resources that were available to combat harassment. In some settings, the GSA appears to have minimized experiences of harassment. However, the informants also noted that in those settings that did not have a GSA, other factors contributed to their feelings of safety and connectedness within the school. A number of informants, particularly those who attended schools that did not have a GSA, were noted to have passed out stickers which teachers were asked to affix to their doors. The stickers symbolized support for sexual and gender minorities and appears to have served as a beacon of hope in settings that lacked broader provisions for minimizing harassment and marginalization.

Like the findings in the Birkett et al. (2009) and Espelage et al. (2008), studies which found that youth who had yet to establish their sexual identity reported elevated incidences of bullying, the informants in the Varjas et al. (2006) study who identified as bisexual were noted to have had experiences with being bullied, too. Their bisexual identity was viewed as fluid contributing to what one informant described as a “skewed vision on what is a bisexual and . . . the thought there is that they’re all sluts, and can’t make up their mind” (p. 63). The experiences

of safety within the school context were also noted to have been associated with the responses of and experiences with peers within the school context. One informant expressed being distraught that posters that were hung inviting peers to participate in GSA activities were defaced while another reported that some teachers appear to have been ill-equipped to manage classrooms which got out of control with students overtly harassing sexual and gender minority youth.

Like the students in the Roe (2013) article, the students in Varajas et al. (2006) study looked for overt and less obvious signals that teachers and other staff were supportive of sexual and gender minorities. In one instance, an English teacher served as the mentor for the GSA (any staff within the school can serve in this position). Thus, a number of the informants were noted to have developed a close relationship with this teacher, in part, because of the unique role that she filled within the school-based group. Other informants observed the classroom assignments with particular attention given to the integration of topics that were relevant to sexual and gender minorities as an example of the teacher's disruption of dominant constructions of identity development.

Dominant Constructions of Gender and Sexuality: The Impact within Family Structures

Martin (2009) utilized Survey Sampling International to gain access to the more than 2.6 million participants who were agreeable to completing a web based questionnaires. At the end of the eight day window that the survey was open, she obtained 641 responses to the more than 12,000 emails that had gone out seeking participants. Martin (2009) was interested in learning more about the reproduction of heteronormativity in mother child interactions. Thus, participants in this study were mothers who were, on average, 33 years of age. The women were mostly married and White. Half of the informants had incomes above and below \$50,000 to \$150,000 with half of the participants working 30 or more hours outside of their homes.

Most of the mothers who participated in the study had either assumed that their children would grow up to be heterosexual or had never given much thought to the possibility that their children might later identify as a gender or sexual minority. While the mothers ‘read’ their children’s play as ‘asexual’, they tended to ascribe ‘adult’ meanings to understand their behavior. The dominant discourse that the mothers appear to have utilized as a way to construct their understanding of sexuality appears to have also been used to address their concerns regarding non-gender normative behavior most notably regarding their sons.

Some of the mothers in Martin’s (2009) study were concerned that their son’s gender non-conforming play with dolls and interest in dresses was a sign that their boys might grow up to be gay. Although the majority of the mothers did not discuss sexuality (intercourse) with their children, the vast majority of them had had discussions about monogamous opposite-sex attraction, marriage, and reproduction with someone of the opposite-sex as normative. There was also a subset of the parents who taught their children that God would select a partner for whom the children would fall in love and later exchange rings and later marry. There was also a subset of the mothers in this study who expressed concerns about the possibility of their children being a gender and sexual minority and some stated that they would do whatever they deemed appropriate to prevent their children from becoming gay. Martin’s article addressed several nuances in the ways that heteronormativity may emerge in mother child interactions with a panel of mothers who are mostly heterosexual; however, Kivalanka et al. (2009) were interested in addressing a similar gap regarding the experiences of second generation LGBTQ adults with experiences in homes where one or more parents identified as LGB.

Kivalanka et al. (2009) performed a secondary analysis of data she and the second author had generated from two separate peer reviewed publications. This publication involved all 13 of

the interviews that the first author had completed and five of the participant interviews conducted by the second author with participants whose ages ranged from 18-25 and identified as LGBTQ and had been raised in households with one or more parents who were LGB identified. The purpose of this secondary analysis was to fill a gap in the literature regarding the experiences of children raised in households where one or more of the parents identified as either lesbian or bisexual.

Several of the informants expressed a belief that having a parent who identified as a sexual minority helped them to question and explore their sexuality sooner, perhaps, than they might have had they been raised in a home where compulsory heterosexuality were an expectation. These participants described their development and growth as one where they felt that they were supported in their attempts to understand, disrupt, and challenge the norms that are associated with gender and sexuality. However, some of the participants expressed a concern that they felt the need to delay the coming out process in an effort to project heteronormative values. The informants did not want outsiders to conclude that their gender expression or sexuality was the result of being raised in a household where one or more of their parents identified as lesbian or bisexual. In other words, some of the participants who identified as sexual minority or gender nonconforming delayed disclosure or made attempts to avoid non-normative behaviors in an effort to avoid ‘stereotypes’ about how they came to identify as a sexual minority or gender nonconforming or out of concern that self-disclosure would, perhaps, contribute to stigmatization and additional societal pressure to conform.

Tom, one of the participants in the study, delayed coming out to his heterosexual father and step-mother having heard them make a number of “homophobic comments about his lesbian mother” (p. 911). There were also two informants whose mothers had expressed some reticence

about their coming out as lesbian or gay. Charlie's mother expressed a hope that he would not turn out to be gay while Amy's mother asked her to delay disclosure of her sexuality to peers. These mothers were raised in a different generational period and while their worries were well placed their remarks symbolically violated the participants' sense of safety and connectedness. Lastly, two additional informants expressed concerns about their mothers' response to their atypical gender presentations. The mothers, who identified as lesbian, appeared open to the youth being lesbians; however, once their children dressed in ways that transgressed the gender norms their parents expressed concern. This subset of informants articulated a concern that their mothers had not gone far enough to resist the heteronormative values that had had an impact on their reactions concerning the youth's gender nonconformity. It is, however, worth noting most of the fears and worries that were expressed were not intended to create fissures in the relationships but in a number of instances these reactions were internalized negatively. Although the rejection and disappointment that the informants in Kivalanka et al.'s (2009) study did not lead to abuse or neglect, these types of familial rejection, as we will discover in the next section, are all too common.

Research has shown, as Sadwoski (2010) noted, that sexual minority youth who experience familial rejection are at an increased risk of and particularly vulnerable for suicidality, substance abuse, depression, delinquency, mental and physical health concerns, and risky sexual behavior which may contribute to increased risk of exposure to STDs and HIV/AIDS (Majd et al., 2009; Quintana et al., 2010; Rosario et al., 2009; Sullivan et al., 2001). Studies have also shown that these risks are often exacerbated when familial ties are impaired or irrevocably severed most notably in instances when sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth become and remain homeless as a result of rejection, abuse, or neglect (Alvi et al., 2010;

Corliss et al., 2011; Gipson, 2008; Kidd, 2007; Milburn et al., 2006; Quintana et al., 2009; Ryan, 2002; Slesnick et al., 2008; Sullivan et al., 2001; Walls et al., 2009). The research appears even more nuanced regarding sexual minority youth of color, most notably for those along the Trans spectrum of identities who become homeless (Freeman et al., Hamilton, 2008; Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2002; Ryan, 2002; Singh, 2013). To say this more succinctly, the micro-level concerns that were addressed earlier in the chapter become extraordinarily more problematic when relationships with one's core network of support become strained (see Sullivan et al., 2001). In many instances, rejecting parents believe that they are doing what is in the best interest of their child. These parents often lack the skill with which to address the needs of their children in a way that is less problematic or believe that a hard core stance is the best way to get their children to modify a behavior or interest they find problematic (Mottet et al., 2003; Sadowski, 2010; Woronoff et al., 2006). Emergent research on the experiences of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth has shown an association between heteronormative ideology and one's potential dis-location from one or more interpersonal or context specific settings.

Heteronormativity, Homelessness, & Dis-Location

Research regarding the needs of sexual minority youth has shown that having continued connectedness to a supportive family, the establishment of close peer social support networks, the development of adaptive idiosyncratic responses, the implementation of inclusive policies, and societal and cultural shifts are a few of the protective factors associated with lower rates of depression and isolation, less reports of self-harm, lower rates of risky sexual behaviors, increased engagement in school, academic achievement, and higher self-esteem for sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth (Cohn et al., 2010; Dane et al., 2009; D'Augelli et al.,

2008; Elze, 2007; Friedman et al., 2009; Kuvalanka et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2006; Milburn et al., 2006; Ryan et al., 2010; Savage et al., 2009; Telingator et al., 2011; Vega et al., 2012). However, self-disclosure is often noted to contribute to one's alienation from one or more interpersonal relationships and dis-location from one or more social contexts (Alvi et al., 2010; Amato, 2012; Carragher & Rivers, 2002; Corliss et al., 2011; Freeman et al., 2008; Hein, 2011; Kidd, 2007; Majd et al., 2009; Milburn et al., 2006; Mottet, 2003; Mottet et al., 2003; Walls et al., 2009; Wardenski, 2005). Although not all gender and sexual minorities will experience homelessness, violence, or alienation as a result of their identities (Higdon, 2008), a statistically significant portion of these youth encounter abuse that is differentially experienced across race, cultural background, and gender that may result in displacement from one's home (Hein, 2011; Rosario et al., 2009; Sullivan et al., 2001) and ostracism from cultural support networks and communities (Sullivan et al., 2001). Sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth are noted to engage in a number of approaches whose purpose it is to minimize experiences of marginalization from or alienation within interpersonal and context specific milieu (Carragher et al., 2002; Moradi et al., 2010; Moore, 2010; Orne, 2011). The coming out process, as I have already indicated in Chapter I, is occurring much earlier than in years past and with that sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth are noted to take a number of approaches to keep themselves safe, particularly in settings where animus towards non-heterosexual identities is felt (Carragher et al., 2002).

Carragher et al. (2002) invited gay males in the United States and the United Kingdom to participate in a retrospective study whose goal it was to learn about some of the strategies that informants used to keep themselves safe once they discovered that their identities differed from heterosexuality. The researchers utilized gay support groups and networks and Gay Pride events

as the venues from which to make contact with and ultimately recruit potential informants.

Some two-hundred and three Americans and ninety-three participants from the United Kingdom participated in this study. The participants were overwhelmingly White with an average age of 25. This was a qualitative study that asked the informants to discuss the age at which point they recalled having an identity that was not exclusively heterosexual. The participants were also asked to discuss any experiences with victimization as a youth; they were asked to describe any strategies that they used to keep themselves safe; and they were also asked to describe any gender atypical behaviors that they could recall from their youth.

On average, the participants in both settings said that they were 14 when they came out to themselves; however, in most instances, the participants stated that they waited until after they graduated from high school before telling a peer or member of their family that they were gay or bisexual. Carragher et al. (2002) found that gender conformity was associated with fewer experiences of victimization. One informant, who reportedly attended a Catholic middle school, said that he was “spat upon” and verbally accosted frequently (p. 464). He stated that he went on to high school and “acted straight” in an effort to minimize the risks (p. 464) but he recalled having angry outbursts that were directed at members of his family who he “perceived to be the cause of {his} situation” (p. 464). There was, however, another informant who indicated that he kept his sexual identity a secret until his last year of high school. This informant appeared to garner a lot of support that appeared to help him to cope with the one peer who threatened him as a result of his coming out. The participants were noted to have used a range of techniques that included modifying and editing their “clothing, speech, postures, interests, friends, and demeanours” (p. 460). Delaying the self-disclosure of their sexuality or pretending to be heterosexual were also noted to be a “form of self-preservation” (p. 460); however, a number of

the informants had indicated that the experiences had an emotional toll on them. Some of the maladaptive responses included withdrawal, social isolation, and suicidal thoughts. That withstanding, I do, however, have a few critiques of this study.

First, while I can certainly understand why the authors would have asked questions about the sexual intimacies that these men were able to develop given their past experiences of marginalization, the report on the number of sexual experiences without grounding this understanding in theory, potentially reifies heteronormative tropes that hypersexualize gay men. The absence of a concrete explanation for the exploration of sexuality, the way that it was approached here, obscures the need to deconstruct what Barker et al. (2010) have called an uncritical focus on non-monogamies; monogamous relationships are seen as the norm to which others are compared (Walters, 2014). Lastly, given their interest in learning about the strategies that sexual minorities have taken to preserve their identities, the authors could have said more about the rationale for their having chosen advertisements in gay press, community-based resources for sexual minorities, and Gay Pride events as the venues for recruitment. In other words, the authors failed to provide an explanation of the extent to which this methodological approach was believed to contribute to the recruitment of a diverse range of gay and bisexual men across race, socio-economic status, and cultural backgrounds. Given the difficulty that a number of scholars have experienced recruiting a diverse range of informants, this current investigation, in recognition of the strategies that youth may take to safeguard their identities, involved recruitment from settings that have a Gay Straight Alliance. I made contact with and sought assistance recruiting from the New York State Dignity for All Students Act Liaison. I also met with the McKinney Vento Homeless Act Liaison within the participating school for assistance with recruiting sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth who met the

inclusion criteria for the study. My goal is to bridge the knowledge base by relying on current, rather than retrospective narratives which may be contaminated by recall or passage of time.

Although the school where the informants were recruited had a number of homeless youth, there were none who met the criteria for this study. Inclusion of homeless youth in a study that utilizes an ecological framework can bridge an important gap in the literature regarding the linked experiences in school and other social contexts I will explore some of extant literature next.

According to Boag (2003), the leading cause of youth (male) transience during the turn of the 20th century was the result of a broken home; however, studies of late indicate that 1.7 to 2.8 million children are believed to be homeless, many of whom are as young as 13 (Gwadz et al., 2009; Hein, 2011; Milburn et al., 2006) and whose lives mirror the accounts in Boag's text. Many are unaccompanied or displaced as a result of running away, being forced to leave (Rosario et al., 2009; Sullivan et al. 2001), or following extended periods of abuse (including sexual abuse see Rosario et al., 2009) and neglect (see Gwadz et al., 2009). Studies also indicate that as many as 40 to 60 percent of homeless youth are displaced, in part, as a result of negative experiences that are connected to their gender expression or their real or perceived sexuality (see Alvi et al., 2010; Amato, 2012; Corliss et al., 2011; Freeman et al., 2008; Hein, 2011; Kidd, 2007; Majd et al., 2009; Milburn et al., 2006; Mottet, 2003; Mottet et al., 2003; Walls et al., 2009; Wardenski, 2005) or following their first (or subsequent) same-sex encounter (see Rosario et al., 2009). As Hein (2011) notes, "males [are] more likely to experience violent expulsion...females [are] more likely to be physically and verbally abused but kept at home until graduation from high school (p. 274)." Making matters more challenging for youth is the fact that funding for youth homelessness is scarce as are the placements and child welfare services

most notably for sexual and gender minorities. Some states have stringent parental consent rules further limiting access to timely resources (Hein, 2011). Just as sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth may be strategic about the disclosure of the identities in child welfare settings, so too are potential adoptive parents particularly in those settings, as Maybry (2005) notes, where “state, caseworker, and agency intolerance” activates a desire to “conceal, misrepresent or leave out details about their sexual orientation so that they may adopt a child” (p. 276). The *loco parentis* rules, as Reichard (2010) notes, “reinforce[d] what might be called heteronormative paternalism, as a way to maintain heterosexuality as the only acceptable form of sexual orientation” (p. 634). Thus, homeless youth and those in the child welfare system are noted to engage in a range of survival related behaviors (street economy see Gwadz et al., 2009) which may increase the likelihood of them also being over represented in the juvenile justice complex (see Quintana et al., 2010; Majd et al., 2009).

Acevedo-Polakovich, Gamache, Bell, and Christian (2011) invited adults who work for agencies that provide services for youth to participate in a study which set out to gauge barriers that exist that preclude sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth from connecting to and participating in services. Inclusion criteria for participation included the need to have worked for an agency in Florida and provided services to youth some of whom needed to have been a sexual minority or gender non-conforming and between the ages of 12 to 18 for two or more years in the six years prior to participating in the study. The participants were accessed via direct contact with one or more of the authors and by snow ball measures. Of the 135 providers who were contacted, 49 completed some portion of the screening process and of this group 29 met criteria and agreed to participate in this study.

The authors utilized semi structured interviews or online questionnaires as the means with which to access and analyze the data Acevedo-Polakovich et al. (2011). The authors identified four main themes that act as barriers to sexual minority youth gaining access to services. Among them were societal, provider, youth, and resources related barriers to accessing services. Some of the societal related phenomenon that are believed to limit access to care were negative stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, & social stigma directed at sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth. These factors were noted to diminish the sense of safety among youth particularly for those who may identify as a sexual minority or for whom presented as non-gender conforming. The provider related barriers that were discussed included a lack of awareness regarding the availability of services for sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth; limited knowledge of gay affirming approaches to working with sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth; lack of resources that specifically target and address the needs of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth; lack of services within social organizations that meet the needs of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth; and difficulty identifying sexual minority youth without their need to self-disclose their status. The youth related barriers that the providers were noted to have listed included the sense that fear of rejection; perceptions that services are may not be appropriate; and the challenges inherent in developing a sexual minority or gender non-conforming identity potentially engender a sense of insecurity and a lack of trust in the providers or the settings. Lastly, the resource-related barriers that were discussed included a lack of health services for sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth in high schools; lack of appropriate human sexuality content in public high school settings; lack of transportation to get to services and finance related limitations.

Having had my own experience with homelessness, which I discuss in brief in Chapter III, additional barriers to youth gaining access may be a lack of awareness of the range of services that are available to youth more broadly and a lack of awareness of targeted services for sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth generally. That withstanding, although it is of great importance to gauge the level of awareness that service providers have about the resources that are available to youth, one limitation to this study is that it did not include the perceptions of youth. Youth, particularly those who are sexual minority and gender non-conforming, may have provided additional content that may have helped with the second part of the study whose function it was to address the barriers to accessing services. An additional concern was regarding the exclusion criteria. As a number of the participants in this study had made clear, some youth may not disclose their sexual identity, particularly in settings where disclosure may mean that their parents have to be notified in order to access care or if disclosure may mean additional risk. Some of the providers may very well have worked with youth and simply lacked an awareness of the fact that some of the youth may have been a sexual minority or gender non-conforming. The activation of self-preservation strategies may provide a sense of safety but it also reifies, in the minds of a number of service providers, that sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth are not connected to their programs. Because the methodology included a Delphi approach, inclusion of some or all of the informants who provided services to youth within the target age range may have led to increased participation and facilitated the learning process for those providers who, perhaps, have had encounters with sexual minority youth and simply were not aware of it. The next few studies address some of the findings in the extant literature regarding homeless services and strategies that sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth may take to survive while dis-located from their homes.

Although Miles and Okamoto (2008) neither cite nor fully ground their research in a bioecological approach, they do, however, express an interest in looking at some of the micro, mezzo, and macro-level factors associated with the survival strategies that youth utilize once homeless. Miles et al. (2008) utilized Strain and Social Control theories to guide their research and phenomenology as the means with which to analyze their data. In part one of their study, Miles et al. (2008) reviewed the film *Street Life on Mill* in an effort to generate emergent themes from the narratives of homeless participants in the video. For the interview segment of this study, 14 informants between the ages of 18 to 26 were recruited from community-based organizations in two cities in Arizona. Most of the informants were White and male. Although the purpose of viewing the video was underdeveloped and not fully explicated in the overall discussion of the study, Miles et al. (2008) found several themes that emerged from the narratives of the participants that were described in detail.

The participants reported numerous encounters with police and security guards who disproportionately targeted homeless youth in the area for violations of trespass and loitering laws. The informants indicated that the laws were both disproportionately and arbitrarily enforced with the aim of forcing homeless youth out of tourist, business, and university-based settings. The youth, then, appear to have developed a number of means of adapting to the heavy policing of their visibility by avoiding parks, parking lots, business store fronts, and other places during times when police and security guards make their rounds. Because police enforce trespassing laws in parking lots and other public spaces, the informants reported that they often find places to 'squat' (p. 435). The participants stated that they would share these locations sparingly and often had multiple back up locations that are used to stay out of the direct visibility of police while also having a backup location for those times when the police are either drawn to

the area because of the increased activity or by virtue of the police simply seeking these locations out. In the end, the informants reported that their survival activities (loitering, sleeping in public spaces, camping in urban areas, and squatting) often resulted in arrest requiring (overt) approaches that limit the risks of them violating the law.

This study is a useful first step towards using a bioecological approach to examining homelessness. While Miles et al. (2008) addressed some of the strategies that the participants used to combat their alienation from public spaces, the authors failed to address any of the factors that resulted in the informants becoming homeless (micro level factors). The authors certainly addressed some of macro level phenomena that likely influence the development, implementation, and enforcement of laws that are arbitrarily enforced having the most impact on the homeless; yet, this discussion was limited in scope to the cities under investigation without any connection made to the broader consensus, at the national level, regarding the resources that are available to address homelessness. Once youth become homeless they often have a nuanced and problematic relationship with the communities in which they make attempts to survive that warrant empirical attention. Miles et al. (2009) make meaningful connections between the social construction of laws which police deviancy among a group that has few options once they become homeless, and the strategies that youth often utilize in order to survive while homeless.

Hein (2011) recruited 70 homeless male youth from six metropolitan cities using street-based interactions, social support agencies, and snowball procedures to fill a gap in the literature regarding the strategies that youth take to survive once homeless. Participants needed to be 'biologically' male, able to speak English, between the ages of 14-20, and homeless for more than a week. The participants were between the ages of 16 to 20, primarily hetero identified (47%), and Black (53%). Seventy percent of the participants had neither completed high school

nor the high school equivalency. The purpose of this study was to assess the survival-strategies and to “examine self-esteem and state/trait anxiety among homeless male adolescents (p. 276).”

The hetero identified and sexual minority youth who participated were likely to utilize a range of physical (working, couch surfing, panhandling, stealing, drug work and gang activity, prostitution, access to shelter services) and psychological (drug use) survival based strategies. Access to resources, like work is especially challenging for homeless youth (discriminatory barriers see Gwadz et al., 2009; Milburn et al., 2006; Singh et al., 2014), particularly for those who have a history of incarceration (Gwadz et al., 2009), which, then, necessitates the deployment of multiple alternative strategies that increase one’s odds of survival. Heterosexual youth in this study were more likely to engage in violent survival strategies (making, dealing, and muling drugs, stealing, robberies, & gang activity) and gain access to homeless shelter resources compared to other displaced sexual and gender minority peers (see also Gwadz et al., 2009). Sexual minority youth were likely to use a range of the strategies discussed above; however, several of the youth who identified as gay and all of their peers who identified as transgender, in Hein’s (2011) study, used sex as a strategy for survival. However, in the Gwadz et al. (2009) study, a third or more of the youth across gender and sexual identity strata were noted to have engaged in sex in exchange for food, clothes, a place to stay, and for money.

Staff in school-based settings may be constrained by administrative policy, but in some instances prevailing ideologies are likely to have an impact on addressing the needs of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth (Szalacha, 2003; Vega et al., 2012; Vavrus, 2009). In some instances, personally held animus towards this cohort of youth, as we will see later in this section, has also impacted the extent to which current legislation is utilized to safeguard the needs of sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth (Broz, 1998; Bruff v. North

Mississippi Health Services, Inc, 2001; Nabozny v. Podlesny, 1996; SpeakupUniversity, 2009; Vega et al., 2012; *Ward v. Wilbanks*, 2010 & 2012; Wardinski, 2005). In some instances, parents willingly forfeit their parental obligations and in school-based settings administrators have been noted to overlook quotidian experiences of verbal and physical harassment of sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth as a result of general animus and hostility towards homosexuality generally and gender based deviance more broadly (Broz, 1998; Nabozny v. Podlesny, 1996; Wardinski, 2005). Equally problematic are the extraordinary measures that a number of scholars have taken to limit the access of this cohort of youth to safe spaces in schools (*Caudillo v. Lubbock*, 2004) and foster care settings for youth who are in need of out-of-home placement (Rekers, 2005). But all of these are important parts of an ecological dialog regarding the needs of sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth. Child welfare programs, like foster care services, are designed to be temporary safe havens. These are placements that as Sullivan et al. (2001) note, are designed to “safeguard children from harm and to act in their best interests” (p. 9). Yet, a number of sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth have experiences that often reify the marginalization and alienation in child welfare programs that they experienced at home.

Sullivan et al. (2001) coauthored a report that was funded by the Lambda Legal Defense Fund and supported by a coalition of youth advocates who champion the needs of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth in which they detail some of the experiences that sexual minority and gender minority youth experience in foster care. At the time of the Sullivan et al. (2001) publication, there were an estimated 244,000 children and youth in out-of-home care. Exact figures on the number of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth who are displaced from their families are hard to come by, in part,

because some settings do not ask questions about one's sexual identity and previous experiences with abuse and neglect. When coupled with societal stigmatization of this group and attempts that sexual minority youth may use to be strategic about the disclosure of their identities, concerted efforts to gain a better understanding of the exact numbers are often frustrated. However, studies indicate, as Sullivan et al. (2001) note, that a statistically significant proportion of the youth in out-of-home care are sexual minority and gender non-conforming. According to Sullivan et al. (2001),

LGBT youth in out-of-home care, already coping with shattering family problems and displacement, bear the often overwhelming added burden of hostility toward their sexual orientation or gender identity. They suffer the disapproval by caseworkers, rejection by foster families, harassment and violence at the hands of foster care peers, and prejudice and neglect by group home staff. (p. 15)

Youth who are in foster care placements often show profound resilience in light of the turmoil that resulted in their need for placement (Stein, 2006). Though a great many do well in out-of-home care, there are some who struggle to develop, what John Bowlby (1973, 1982, 1988) has called a secure base (Fonagy, 2001; Fonagy et al., 2004; Ripley et al., 2012; Stein, 2006). The secure base, as defined in Attachment Theory, is the foundation from which a sense of security is built that assists in the exploration and development processes. This theory is particularly interested in identity development across the lifespan (Bowlby 1973, 1982, 1988; Fonagy, 2001; Fonagy et al., 2004; Ripley et al., 2012); however, researchers who are interested in developmental milestones in childhood and the teen years have used this theory for its usefulness towards the goal of exploring some of the

factors that may be associated with disruptions in one's ability to develop a secure base (Stein, 2006).

Although an explication of Attachment theory is beyond the scope of this paper, this theory is particularly useful in this section as we have already established that those youth who build supportive relationships with their parents are likely to develop healthy coping mechanisms for dealing with developmental concerns (Cohn et al., 2010; Kivalanka et al., 2009). Children who lack a connection with a supportive family do not appear to fair as well as those who are able to establish that connection which is one of the reasons why this theory is used to gain a better understanding of the experiences of youth in foster care (Bowlby 1973, 1982, 1988; Cohn et al., 2010; Fonagy, 2001; Fonagy et al., 2004; Ripley et al., 2012; Stein, 2006). Attachment Theory more generally and the Bioecological theory more broadly are also useful for exploring the needs of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth as this group is not only overrepresented in the homeless shelter population they are also disproportionately present in child welfare settings as well (Sullivan et al., 2001).

One bright spot in the Sullivan et al. (2001) report, was the fact that a number of foster care staff are aware of and distressed by the treatment of sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth. While their individual efforts to provide timely, comprehensive, and compassionate care to sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth are well noted, more needs to be done at the national level to ensure that policies are implemented that effect change nationwide that address the needs of sexual minority and gender minority youth in out-of-home care (Sullivan et al., 2001). Although a number of states have moved to extend protections based on one's sexual orientation, Sullivan et al. (2001) found that

state foster care agencies have yet to incorporate anti-discrimination policies which target the abuse or neglect of sexual minorities and gender non-conforming youth in foster care.

This reality highlights how the lived experience of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth are impacted by the microsystem, macrosystem, and exosystem.

Attending to systemic influences is a critical focus of this research study, given the level of impact such policies and issues have on individual experience.

Vestiges of Lawrence v. Texas: The Minor Exception

Lawrence v. Texas (2003) was a case that made its way to the Supreme Court as a result of the arrest of John Geddes Lawrence (Caucasian) and Tyron Garner (African American) on charges that they violated Texas's anti-sodomy laws (Lund & McGinnis, 2004; Sommerville, 2005). There are conflicting accounts of the rationale for the police presence (Ford, 2012; Hamilton, 1987; Sommerville, 2005; Spindleman, 2013; Tribe, 2004; Wardinski, 2005) and whether or not a sexual act actually taken place at the time the two were arrested (Ford, 2012); however, what remains uncontested is that several lower courts upheld the sodomy charges based, in part, on the 1986 Bowers v. Hardwick U. S. Supreme Court ruling which afforded no protections under the United States Constitution for sexual minority and gender non-conforming citizens. Justice Scalia, when presenting one of the Minority Opinions in the Lawrence v. Texas decision, a case which ultimately overturned the anti-sodomy provisions, concluded that the State had no vested interest in extending a *'fundamental right'* to issues of homosexuality (Hamilton, 1987); however, the Supreme Court Justices who wrote the majority opinion found that state anti-sodomy laws were a violation of the 14th Amendment overturning the earlier 1986 Supreme Court decision in the Bowers v. Hardwick (Sommerville, 2005; Tribe, 2004).

According to Walters (2014), the “Lawrence v. Texas decision of 2003, which overturned all statewide anti-sodomy laws and unequivocally chastised the earlier decision in the 1986 case of Bowers v. Harwick, didn’t so much legalize “sodomy” or any other act per se but rather couched it’s ruling in terms of the right to engage in long-term intimate relationships” (p 149). By doing so, the Court, as noted by Tribe (2004), found that the

prohibition's principal vice (anti-sodomy laws upheld by Bowers v. Hardwick) was its stigmatization of intimate personal relationships between people of the same sex: the Court concluded that these relationships deserve to be protected in the same way that nonprocreative intimate relationships between opposite-sex adult couples - whether marital or nonmarital, lifelong or ephemeral- are protected. Focusing on the centrality of the relationship in which intimate conduct occurs rather than on the nature of the intimate conduct itself, the Court emphasized its view that “[t]o say that the issue in Bowers was simply the right to engage in certain sexual conduct demeans the claim the individual put forward, just as it would demean a married couple were it to be said marriage is simply about the right to have sexual intercourse” (p. 1904).

Although the Lawrence decision is widely celebrated for the current and future impact that it will have on legislative and juridical protections for gender and sexual minorities, scholars, politicians, and advocates on both the left and the right are also paying increased attention to a comment that Justice Anthony Kennedy made in the Majority decision; comments that have been dubbed the ‘minor exception’. Because of its implications for sexual minority youth and the impact that it has had on the development of Gay Straight Alliances and Safe Spaces in schools, we will spend a little time reviewing what the comments and their interpretations.

The Minor Exception

Rather than limit his words to the extraordinary events that were before the Court, Justice Kennedy took extraordinary care to explain the types of cases that were not addressed in the Lawrence decision. The first few words have been interpreted to mean an axiomatic precedence that allows the state to establish separate rules that govern and police the sexuality of minors (prostitution, and the continued prosecution of cases involving abuse). Justice Kennedy's remarks in the *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003) holding were that

The present case does not involve minors. It does not involve persons who might be injured or coerced or who are situated in relationships where consent might not easily be refused. It does not involve public conduct or prostitution. It does not involve whether or not the government must give formal recognition to any relationship that homosexual persons seek to enter. The case does involve two adults who, with full and mutual consent from each other, engaged in sexual practices common to a homosexual lifestyle. (*Lawrence v. Texas*, 2003, p. 578).

According to Wardinski (2005), Justice Kennedy's "phrase has been incorrectly interpreted to limit the reach of Lawrence by excluding LGBT youth from the decision's scope" thus "courts are misconstruing this caveat to conclude, quite wrongly, that anti-gay policies against adults can be justified by 'child protection' rationales" (p. 1395). To that end, a number of states have enacted age of consent statutes (i.e. *Romeo and Juliet*) and some continuously exploit existing crimes against nature statutes that effectively establish minimum age requirements for establishing consent and prosecute cases involving sodomy (anal and oral sex as well as bestiality). Some states have established codes that police immoral sexual acts among same and opposite sex youth (i.e. *Limon v. State & State v. Limon*); a number of states enforce rules that forbid same sex couples from adopting children together (i.e. *Lofton v. Secretary of Children and*

Family Services) ostensibly via an erroneous interpretation that the disparate treatment of same sex/gender adoptive couples withstands the rational basis review as interpretations of the Lawrence holding provides a basis from which states can make laws that sanction discrimination of this group not based on the couple's sexual orientation but on their "sexual activity".

The Minor Exception has also been interpreted to mean an axiomatic precedence that allows the state to establish separate rules that govern and police the sexuality of minors. The disarticulation of sexual minority youth protections from legislation that addresses the needs of gender and sexual non-conforming adults has meant differential trajectories for youth and adult populations. A few of the most profound constitutional challenges and legislation that have had an impact on youth will be discussed as a means of connecting the broader macro-level events (constitutional protections, societal norms, legislation) to some of the micro and meso-level contexts that have been discussed thus far.

Fourteenth Amendment: Equal Protection

In 1995, Jamie Nabozny, a student who identified as gay and presented with atypical gender behavior, filed a lawsuit with the District Court in Wisconsin having endured several years of harassment and cruelty in his middle and high school as a result of his sexual identity and non-gender conformity (see Broz, 1998; Nabozny v. Podlesny, 1996; Wardinski, 2005). In his suit he alleged that the teachers and the school and district level administrators failed to uphold and protect his 14th Amendment right to due process and equal protections based on his gender and sexual orientation. The District Court summarily and decisively dismissed the case relying, in part, on precedence established in the Bowers v. Harding (1986) case heard by the U.S. Supreme Court. In brief, the U.S. Supreme Court, in the 1986 Bowers v. Harding holding, settled a long standing question regarding sexual minorities and their right to Due Process

protections when it concluded that that the Constitution failed to see sodomy as a fundamental right (Allender, 2009; Hamill, 1997; Jakobsen et al., 2003; Tribe, 2004; Wardinski, 2005). The Bowers holding would later be overturned in the Lawrence v. Texas case by the U.S. Supreme Court. Although Justice Scalia, in speaking for the dissenting Justices, denied that the state had a vested interest in extending a fundamental right to issues of homosexuality (Hamilton, 1987), the Majority favored the reversal. As Tribe (2004) noted, the Justices had “concluded that these relationships deserve to be protected in the same way that nonprocreative intimate relationships between opposite-sex adult couples- whether marital or nonmarital, lifelong or ephemeral- are protected.” (p. 1904). This relief, in the Court, did not arrive until 2003, some four years after Jamie Nabozny’s case came before the Court. Thus, the Supreme Court’s holding in the Bowers case was the law of the land and appears to have influenced the outcome regarding Nabozny’s lawsuit seeking 14th Amendment relief. In other words, the law of the land when Jamie Nabozny filed his lawsuit was that homosexuality was not a fundamental right which activated 14th Amendment Due Process or Equal Protection under the law (Nabozny v. Podlesny, 1996).

However, on appeal of the District Court’s decision in Jamie’s case (Wardinski, 2005), the 7th Circuit Court upheld the lower court’s ruling that no 14th Amendment Due Process rights had been violated; however, the Appeals Court disagreed with the lower Court’s ruling with regards to the dismissal of the part of the complaint regarding the schools obligation to protect students from abuse based on their gender expression and sexual identity under the 14th Amendment Equal Protection Clause. According to Wardinski (2005), the Appellate Court concluded that “Nabozny stated a valid Fourteenth Amendment Equal Protections claim because the school district officials denied him protections afforded other harassed students based on his sexual orientation” (p. 1388). The Court reached this decision, in part, because evidence was

shared with the court which showed a pattern of response, on the part of the school staff, to other forms of harassment. The school's inability to effectively respond to Jamie's experiences evidenced invidious treatment towards Jamie due to his sexual identity and atypical gender expression.

On remand back to the District Court in Wisconsin for further review, an out of court settlement was reached and Jaime was awarded 1 million dollars as compensation for the years of harassment, abuse, and psychological distress that was compounded by the inaction of a number of the district level and middle and high school staff regarding the need to protect him from the violence that he had endured (Broz, 1998; Nabozny v. Podlesny, 1996; Wardinski, 2005). This was a momentous shift as the Court signaled a willingness to hold schools accountable for protecting students from harassment while in their care. What remained unsettled was the type of actions that constituted abuse and what reasonable steps schools should take to prevent and respond to harassment.

Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was codified, in part, to address discrimination and harassment in the workplace (Grube & Lens, 2003). However, the code offered no relief for discriminatory behavior that arises in educational settings (Grube et al., 2003). As a result, Title IX was enacted in an effort to ensure that institutions that receive federal funding are incentivized to take action to curb discrimination. Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972, as the report prepared by Advocates for Children of New York (2005) notes, "applies to all schools receiving federal funds [and] forbids discrimination on the basis of sex. In 1997, the United States Department of Education explicitly recognized that, since sexual harassment can

be a form of sex discrimination, sexual harassment is covered by Title IX ” (p.12 also see McFarland, & Dupuis, 2001).

Although Title IX could have been asserted in *Nabozny v. Podlesny* (1996), the team decided to seek relief via the more robust protections afforded under the 14th Amendment. The Office of Civil Rights amended Title IX to remedy sexual harassment based on sexual identity, in part, as a result of numerous instances of abuse, in schools, and the experiences of sexual minority youth. The relief, in *Wagner v. Fayetteville* (see McFarland et al., 2001), came as a result of a lawsuit involving criminal charges filed on behalf of a gay teen in a Arkansas public school, as McFarland et al. (2001) stated, following a “gay bashing by a gang caused a broken nose and a bruised kidney (p. 174)”. According to McFarland et al. (2001), the extended protections do not:

forbid discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, they (do) prohibit actions that create a sexually hostile environment. Expressing a dislike for gays and lesbians alone would not violate Title IX. The actions or language must be of a sexual nature to fall under the title. (p. 175)

In *Davis v. Monroe*, the legal team viewed this legislation as the most expedient path towards addressing a complaint that involved the harassment of Lashanda D, a 5th grader, at the time, who had been the target of numerous incidences of sexual harassment in her school. Although two lower Courts had dismissed her case, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear oral arguments. In this case, Lashanda notified her parents and the staff at her school that a male peer had initiated unwanted touching (kissing, simulating sex acts on her person) and had made sexual comments that limited her ability to be productive in school. The school was aware of and took steps to curb the interaction between Lashanda and her peer but the harassment occurred in other

settings. At issue was whether or not the school could be held financially liable for disruptive behavior that has an impact on the learning process most notably (Grube et al., 2003), as McFarland et al. (2001) noted, “when school officials are deliberately indifferent to the sexual harassment (p. 174).”

Ultimately, the Supreme Court decided that schools could, in fact, be held liable for harassment; however, as some legal experts have noted, they raised the bar making complaints of harassment in school more challenging to redress than abuse that occurs in work place settings (Grube et al., 2003). The decision also places the onus on the student to make the faculty aware of the harassment. The language of the decision appears vague and open to a number of interpretations. According to Grube et al. (2003),

the court created no standard for when schoolyard taunts become sexual harassment, instead stressing that a ‘constellation of surrounding circumstances, expectations, and relationships, must be considered, such as the ages of the students, how frequently the behavior occurred, and how much it interfered with the victim’s ability to participate in educational activities. (p. 181)

The Nabozny, Wagner, and Davis cases show the limited reach that legislative and juridical action actually take towards the goal of disrupting gender and sexual based harassment in schools. Although the Office of Civil Rights responded to the lawsuit filed on Wagner’s behalf by broadening protections for sexual minorities, the research on the experiences of this group and the subsequent lawsuit filed on Davis’s behalf suggests that culturally encapsulated views of harassment towards gender and sexual minorities thwart efforts to address pervasive abuse, most notably, in school-based settings that have no policies which specifically address the negative experiences of gender and sexual minorities.

The Office of Civil Rights, as outlined in a press release listed on the Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Alliance [GLSEN] website, issued guidance in April of 2014 that concretizes and extends Title IX protections to the needs of transgender and gender non-conforming youth in schools (GLSEN, 2014). This policy provides a mechanism for holding schools accountable for failure to act particularly in cases involving sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth in schools (GLSEN, 2014). Still, the development of safe spaces of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth appears all but elusive in some settings.

Federal Equal Access Act (FEAA)

In 1984 Congress enacted the Federal Equal Access Act (FEAA) which mirrored and expanded upon protections that the U.S. Supreme Court extended to Christian students who sought relief from prohibitions that limited their ability to form groups in college settings (Berkley, 2004). The FEAA's goal was to settle long standing debates that would extend these same protections to Christians who wanted to form groups in public schools settings who had been barred from doing so based on the conflict with the Establishment Clause found in the U.S. Constitution (Berkley, 2004). According to Berkley (2004), “by the plain language of the statute, however, free speech protection also extends to ‘political, philosophical, or other content’ of speech exercised by different clubs” (p. 1849). After seeing religious groups gain support for allowing faith based clubs to exist in public school settings, a number of groups, then, sought similar protections that would allow sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth to form GSA's in public schools. Thus, supporters followed suit formulating their arguments via the Equal Access Act rather than through the 14th Amendment Equal Protections Clause based on the narrow framing and the strategic success achieved by the Conservative Right (Berkley, 2004).

However, its application towards and ability to protect the 1st amendment rights to free speech and the right to assembly are often limited for sexual and gender minority students who wish to develop GSA's by virtue of court cases where schools move to block the formation of GSA's. A partial listing of the court challenges to establishing GSA's, as outlined by Valenti et al. (2009) have included:

Boyd County High School Gay Straight Alliance, et al. v. Board of Education of Boyd County, 2003; Colin and Gay Straight Alliance of El Modena High School v. Orange Unified School District, 2000; East High Gay/Straight Alliance v. Board of Education, 1999; Franklin Central Gay/Straight Alliance v. Franklin Township Community School, 2002; Gay–Straight Alliance Network v. Visalia Unified School District, 2001. (p. 229)

Although Berkley (2004) provided an excellent description of the ways that schools that are tolerant of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth can circumvent the FEAA by making the GSA's curriculum-related, it is just as likely that that strategic advice is actually used by schools with animus towards these youth and that these settings might take steps to block the formulation of GSA's or to maintain control over the types of groups that are allowed to form on school property do to their conflict with abstinence only policies.

A number of schools have abstinence only policies which appear to conflict with the development of GSA's and or inclusive policies (Mayo, 2008). While identification as a sexual and or gender minority should not be conflated with engagement in sexual activity, this is exactly the message that the Supreme Court sent when it handed down the holding in the Bowers v. Hardwick case (Allender, 2009; Wardinski, 2005). Additionally there are, as Higdon (2008) points out, “those who believe that sexual identity is purely a product of adulthood; thus, ‘adolescent homosexuals’ simply do not exist” ((p. 2). Thus, sexual minority and gender non-

conforming youth often find themselves in settings where their identities are either hypersexualized or in environments where their existence is hegemonically erased (see Savin-Williams, 2001). According to Mayo (2008),

abstinence centralizes heterosexuality without having to address sexuality in detail.

This strategy allows supporters of abstinence to desexualize heterosexuality and oversexualize homosexuality: Any discussion of heterosexuality is necessarily about abstinence and any discussion of homosexuality is necessarily sexual. (p. 46)

Surtees et al. (2010) contextualize this framework further by stating that the “discourses of childhood innocence and developmentalism converge, protecting children requires adults to deny them knowledge about ‘worldly’ and ‘adult’ concepts such as sexualities while at the same time shaping their development towards a fixed and stable gender identity and heterosexual sexuality” (p. 44; also see Singh, 2013).

Thus, the two strategic positions perform the bifurcated labor of privileging a compulsory commitment to traditional gender roles (heteronormativity) and the epistemological silence of (deviant and other forms of) sexuality, all the while promoting a pervasive discourse of perversion (see Lugosiabile, 2011) with regards to the lives and the livelihoods of those who identify as or for whom are perceived to engage in behaviors that exemplify a divergence from the dominant culture (Chesir-Teran, 2003; Horn et al., 2010; Mayo, 2008; Surtees et al., 2010; Savin-Williams, 2001; Wilkinson et al., 2009), making it exceedingly more challenging to establish ‘safe spaces’ in some contexts even with all of the efforts to disrupt harassment both legislatively and juridically.

Legislative Efforts in New York

Legislators in New York, as the report prepared by Advocates for Children of New York (2005) noted, are aware of the numerous studies about and the impact of harassment involving sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth in schools across the state. Partisan efforts had contributed to proposed legislation, in both chambers of the legislator (see Advocates for Children of New York, 2005); however, passage of additional protections had been shelved, in part, due to differences in the conceptualization of the problem and the best path towards reducing incidences of intolerance of and harassment towards sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth. In the wake of those delays, Council Members, in the City of New York, proposed at least one policy which survived a Mayoral Veto, by former Mayor Bloomberg, but ultimately stalled (see Advocates for Children of New York, 2005) leaving room for institutional, structural, and cultural level intervention in addition to the micro level attempts to challenge and disrupt the oppression of and violence which targeted gender and sexual minorities.

New York State: Dignity for all Students Act

The New York State Legislator, then, went on with its work and was able to pass the Dignity for All Students Act in 2010 leaving room for the State Education Department to develop supporting policies and mechanisms to enforce the law which went into effect in 2012 (see New York State Education Department, 2013, 2014). The legislation appears comprehensive and addresses a number of elements that both Title IX and some of the previous 14th Amendment cases brought to the forefront. In recognition of the tremendous amount of research regarding the experiences of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth, the Dignity for All Students Act requires education and training of staff regarding harassment and intolerance and

appropriate responses of interactions that occur on or in route to school groups and interactions that occur at school-sponsored events (see New York State Education Department, 2014).

The Dignity for All Students Act also defines harassment and provides a mechanism for responding to student and teacher initiated behaviors that violate the policies (New York State Education Department, 2014). It requires that the superintendent, the school principal, or his or her designee must respond to and act to disrupt behaviors that create a hostile school environment. The policy, as outlined on the New York State Education Office's website (2014), also requires that at least one staff member be trained in and competently respond to "areas of race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, religious practice, disability, sexual orientation, gender, and sex" (p. 2). Lastly, all new professionals with backgrounds that require licensure to work with children are required by the state to have a working knowledge of trends associated with harassment and intolerance and mechanisms for alleviating those concerns (New York State Education Department, 2014).

The goal of this section was to contextualize some of the ways that macro and meso level phenomenon, like the passage of laws and societal animus towards variance, can have a profound impact on the experiences of sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth. To be clear, this section merely scratched the surface on explaining the broad range of experiences that likely have an impact on the developmental trajectory of youth. However, I felt compelled to move the focus of this exploration from the meso and exo level phenomenon that were discussed in the beginning of the chapter in an effort to make an attempt to bridge the gap between the passage of legislation and the interpretation of constitutional laws and the implementation of interventions in school-based contexts..

Professional Counselors as Part of the Bioecological System

Professional counselors, much like the clients they serve, are embedded in similar familial and context specific social structures which have an impact on identity development (Gladding, 2013). When professional counselors enter the field, they do not abandon their past experiences; rather, their insights and experiential knowledge have an impact on the work that they do with clients (Miller, Miller, & Stull, 2007; Pearson, 2003). Like their clients, the counselor's developmental trajectories are varied and are often influenced by familial relationships, media, religion, and the symbolic inheritance and internalization of societal norms (Whitman & Bidell, 2014). Entering the profession requires the internalization and integration of a new set of norms and expectations which necessitates careful reflection and taking an inventory of personally held views and assumptions which are likely to have an impact on one's work with clients (American Counseling Association {ACA}, 2005; American School Counselor Association {ASCA}, 2014; Whitman et al., 2014).

The developing therapist spends countless hours in classroom settings preparing for real life work with clients. While they go through the motions of testing the waters and coming to terms with theory, ethics, and multicultural skills, they are learning new skills from counselor educators both overtly and in more subtle ways (Miller et al., 2007). The course content, classroom discussions, and assignments are shaped, in part, by the reciprocal interactions that take place within the classroom context (Miller et al., 2007). In subtle ways, instructors signal to their students the material that is most important for identity development and the substantive data one is expected to know in order to gain acceptance within and entry into the counseling profession. In this way, the topics that are covered are of importance as are the manner in which multicultural issues are defined and, in relationship to this project, the extent to which sexual

minority and gender based topics are addressed. Although there is a growing body of literature that addresses the need to address the cultural encapsulated views of students (ACA, 2005; ASCA, 2014; McAuliffe, Grothaus, Jensen, & Michel, 2012; Stadler, Suh, & Cobia, 2006) there is a paucity of research which addresses the ways that those structures are (un)intentionally reified and sustained in classroom settings (Miller et al., 2007; Whitman et al., 2014). However, more work is being done to faithfully fill that gap. Research on this topic as Miller et al. (2007) noted is complicated and requires triangulation of data from multiple sources (i.e. perceptions of students), the utilization of tools that are sensitive enough to gauge emergent biases, and institutional support for research that encourages broad support and participation (Miller et al. 2007).

Counselor educators, much like the students that they train, are also embedded in the institutions in which they teach and the professional organizations that influence how course content is structured (ACA, 2005, 2014; McAuliffe et al., 2012; Stadler et al., 2006). The institution signals, in nuanced ways, their interest in addressing issues of privilege, particularly, in the ways that the faculty show support for broader definitions of culture and the ways that multicultural factors are addressed not only in classroom context but to the extent that these matters are integrated into institutionally sanctioned activities (Miller et al., 2007). Thus interest may also be inferred by the extent to which faculty appear to show support for the disruption of oppression and the way in which leadership handles the distribution of financial and other student based resources (Miller et al., 2007).

The credentialing bodies, also, continue the work of establishing ethics related codes and working out the details of the themes that solidify a shared identity, one that binds the numerous subdivisions in a way that honors the distinctions while also recognizing the areas of

specialization and divergence (ACA, 2005, 2014; ASCA, 2014). The trajectory of development for the therapist, counselor educator, and the institution of counseling are also bound to and impacted by broader concerns. Among the developmental concerns that influence the field of counseling are its disposition relative to other well established professions like Psychiatry, Psychology, and Social Work (Gladding, 2013; Whitman et al., 2014). After many years of advocacy, Counselors finally celebrated wide spread recognition in all 50 states but in many ways the field still lags behind other mental health professions with regards to licensure transportability, rates of reimbursement, and employment opportunities, particularly in the public sector (Gladding, 2013).

In the midst of these shifts, the institution of counseling continues its development much the same as the students that it prepares for work with clients and much like them there are, at times, events that evidence immense challenges requiring nuanced and swift responses (Whitman et al., 2014). In addition to the continued efforts that occur at the institutional level to create a shared identity, there are intense debates about best practices that would facilitate the learning process. Among the goals, of late, are a shared interest in addressing multicultural factors and the establishment of empirically grounded and theoretically supported interventions for addressing competencies (Miller et al., 2007). To get there, the profession requires agreement and while there may be moments where the field appears to grow closer to closing the gaps, debates rage on (Gladding, 2013; Miller et al., 2007). The field is not in as dire a state as this review might make it appear; however, just as unresolved debates in one's close circles can lead to role confusion or inaction the same is likely to also lead to untimely responses that are reactionary and defensive.

Relevance of the Current Study to Counseling

Multiculturalism is one of many foci in Counseling and Counselor Education programs (ACA, 2005; McAuliffe et al., 2012; Stadler et al., 2006) that are having an impact on how courses are taught as well as the way in which work is approached with clients and students. Settings across the country have been working towards the goal of infusing competencies into course content and training; however, the extant literature on this topic reveals that more work needs to be done to define culture (debates still rage regarding this matter) and identify opportunities to incorporate the exploration of privilege into course content and develop research which addresses the needs of minoritized groups (Singh et al., 2011). The Counseling and Counselor Education profession has yet to standardize a shared identity (Burkholder, 2012; Gladding, 2013) and it still appears to struggle with the exploration, identification, and implementation of best practices for ensuring the preparation of trainees for work with diverse populations (Stadler et al., 2006) contributing, in part, to additional struggles that would lead to strategies for addressing values based conflicts (Kocet & Herlihy, 2012).

Pederson (1991) described the goal of multiculturalism in general and the multicultural perspective in particular as one that “seeks to provide a conceptual framework that recognizes the complex diversity of a plural society while, at the same time, suggesting bridges of shared concern that bind culturally different persons to one another (p, 7).” The goal of such a framework would be to encourage the exploration of similarities and differences between and within diverse groups through a cultural relativist lens rather than from a position of cultural encapsulation (Gladding, 2013; Hackney & Cormier, 2013; & McAuliffe et al., 2012).

Cultural encapsulation involves the centering and privileging of one’s own culture as the point of reference from which other cultures are compared (Gladding, 2013; Hackney et al.,

2013; & Pederson, 1991). Such a view makes it difficult to challenge assumptions that one may hold about othered groups and it makes it exceedingly difficult to view the world through the lived experiences of those who differ from the dominant culture (Gladding, 2013; Hackney et al., 2013; McAuliffe et al., 2012). Conversely, cultural relativism, a theory that is not without its critics (Brenda, 2013; Jeffreys, 2011), is described as a de-centering process that allows one to recognize that their social cultural location is but one of many equally valuable and legitimate variations (McAuliffe et al., 2012). This assertion is of great import for counselors so that they avoid the danger of evaluating and subsequently imposing their own values onto the clients with whom they work (ACA, 2005; Hackney et al., 2013; Kocet et al., 2014; McAuliffe et al., 2012; & Pederson, 1991; Whitman, 2014).

Expanding the paucity of research on this topic must also include an exploration of the ways that cultural encapsulation versus cultural relativism are addressed in coursework as well as the lasting impact that these discussions actually have on trainees beyond the classroom (Broz, 1998; Nabozny v. Podlesny, 1996) particularly as it relates to mental health professionals being able to bracket culturally encapsulated beliefs in their work with gender and sexual minorities (Bruff v. North Mississippi Health Services, Inc, 2001; Bryant, 2008; Hadden, 1976; Herlihy, Hermann, & Greden, 2012; Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley, 2001; Kocet et al., 2014; Morrin, 1977; Rekers, 1978, 2003; Walden v. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010, 2012; Ward v. Wilbanks, 2010, 2012). This discussion is also of relevance for a project of this scope as counselors and the spaces that they occupy when performing their work may be one of a few 'safe spaces' for youth particularly in those settings where verbal and physical harassment are pervasive daily occurrences; thus, counselors may need to be equipped with the tools that prepare them to challenge the internalized discourse which may conflict with their ability to

work with or act as an advocate for the needs of gender and sexual minorities. Renewed focus on the needs of gender and sexual minorities may also prepare professional counselors for those instances that they find themselves working in settings where heteronormativity aids in the alienation or marginalization of gender and sexual minority youth (Broz, 1998); or for those times when they work with youth who feel disconnected from their families as a result of their identities; and for interactions with youth who present for services as a result of their engagement in maladaptive behaviors that are the result of or associated with internalizing negative discourse about their identities.

Nevertheless, in light of the goals of preparing trainees for work with diverse cultural groups, there remains a lack of clarity and consistency with regards to how culture is defined (Gladding, 2013; Hackney et al., 2013; D'Andrea, 2000). There are also debates about the appropriateness of utilizing hegemonic similarities and differences, particularly in research on sexual minority and gender nonconforming informants (Caughey, 2006; Chevrette, 2013; Friedman & Morgan, 2009; Hegarty et al., 2006; Hegarty et al., 2001 & 2004; Herek et al., 2007; Hong et al., 2012; Savin-Williams, 2001), with emergent attention given to the vestiges of bias (see Herek, 2002; Morrin, 1977) that concretize the ways that marginalized groups are different (Clarke, 2002; Harley et al., 2002; Horn et al., 2010) or include homogenous conceptualization that overlook within group diversity (DeBlaere et al., 2010; Elze, 2007; Fingerhut et al., 2006; Hudson, 2012; Savin-Williams, 2001; Van Eeden-Moorefield et al., 2011).

Disagreements still rage regarding the appropriateness to refer clients to others particularly in situations where personally held value structures interfere with one's ability or desire to work with clients who have needs that conflict with one's own cultural worldview (Kocet et al., 2014; Whitman et al., 2014). There are, however, a number of researchers who

champion a broadened definition of culture (Pederson, 1991; Miller et al., 2007) to include not just race and ethnicity (Gladding 2013; Hackney et al., 2013) but also issues of class, socioeconomic status, nationality, language, religion, physical and mental ability group, gender, and issues related to gender expression and sexual identity (D'Andrea, 2000).

According to Gladding (2013), “multicultural issues in counseling now account for 12% of the quantitative articles published in the American Counseling Association’s *Journal of Counseling and Development*” (p. 83); however, Singh and Shelton (2011) conducted a content analysis of 4 Counseling and Counseling Psychology journals (*Journal of Counseling & Development, Journal of Counseling Psychology, Journal of LGBTQ Issues in Counseling, and the Counseling Psychologist*) and found 12 empirically based qualitative articles were published between 1998 and 2008 that addressed LGBTQ related content (p. 220). Although Singh et al. (2011) highlight the caution that some researchers may take towards conducting exploratory research with members of the LGBTQ community due in part to the history of pathologizing this group, the trepidation may signal a disinterest in studying the needs of this group and may add to the difficulties that many educators experience as they make attempts to combat cultural encapsulation and the disquieting heteroprivileging that may emerge as a result of not having course content or research that addresses the lived experiences of this population or empirically supported evidenced based practices that meet the needs of both clients and practitioners.

Of particular importance to this project are the recent debates that were spurned, in part, by several lawsuits involving professional counselors and counseling trainees regarding their inability or lack of desire to bracket off their personally held views particularly in settings with clients whose behaviors they find offensive (Whitman et al., 2014). The lawsuits, while settled juridically, appear to have awakened the dragon, challenging the long established view regarding

the level of objectivity that counselors and mental health professions hold in their research, teaching practices, and work with clients who hold stigmatized identities (Nabozny v. Podlesny, 1996).

The American Counseling Association (ACA) and several other credentialing bodies have had to clarify several long standing ethics codes as a result of the most recent in a series of lawsuits that were filed by professional counselors and trainees regarding, among other things, the extent to which the ACA's (2014) *Code of Ethics* sanction the referral of clients in those instances where there is a value based conflict particularly as it relates to the intersection between deeply held religious beliefs and work with sexual minority and gender non-conforming clients (Pearson, 2003; Whitman et al., 2014).

In recognition of the careful steps that sexual minority and gender minority youth may take to build a level of rapport with their therapist before making a self-disclosure, a number of educators have expressed a concern that referral for reasons of incompetence, discomfort with homosexuality, or a general values conflict, frustrates the professional injunction to 'do no harm' (Pearson, 2003, p. 293). Because the desire to refer due to the intersectionality between incompetence and value based judgments appear to be at the center of all four of the recent counseling related court battles, time will be spent reviewing the cases followed by a brief discussion of the ethical implications of referring clients, in part, due to animus or moral objection. At the cross-section of these concerns, however, are tolerance and the idea that affirming clients is in direct conflict with one's religiosity frustrating one's ability to provide appropriate mental health care (Whitman et al., 2014).

The research shows an association between religiosity and sexual prejudice with education, exposure to and positive experiences with sexual and minorities mitigating some of

the negative perceptions about and treatment of this group (see Anastas, 2013; Herek, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; Norton et al., 2013; Whitman et al., 2014). While I cannot say with any amount of certainty that the values based conflicts raised in the cases involving the pre-service trainees and the counselors who were discharged due their inability to bracket their religious views were not entirely a moral one (see *Bruff v. North Mississippi Health Services, Inc*, 2001; Herlihy et al., 2012; *Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley*, 2001; *Walden v. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 2010, 2012; *Ward v. Wilbanks*, 2010, 2012; Whitman et al., 2014), the research suggests a nuanced and complicated association with broader societal discomfort with sexual and gender minorities based, in part, on negative attitudes regarding their perceived violations of prescribed societal norms (see Anastas, 2013; Herek, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; Norton et al., 2013). Thus, we will also visit this terrain, in brief, to gain some insights. We will then take a look at some of the recommendations that address these concerns.

The Provision of Mental Health Care and Values Based Conflicts

There have been a number of court challenges that involved Counselors who have sued claiming that their constitutional right to refuse treatment to sexual minority and gender non-conforming clients had been infringed upon in teaching institutions (see; Herlihy, Hermann, & Greden, 2012; *Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley*, 2001; *Ward v. Wilbanks*, 2010, 2012) and professional settings (*Bruff v. North Mississippi Health Services, Inc*, 2001; *Walden v. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 2010, 2012). At issue in a number of these cases were the interpretations of the professional code of ethics, values based conflicts, and the most appropriate means of ensuring that no harm came to the clients who had sought care (Whitman et al., 2014). There are a number of nuances in the arguments that the professional counselors and the counseling trainees used defending their positions so each of the cases will be discussed, in brief,

followed by a discussion of some of the recommendations that have been offered that may redress these concerns.

Bruff v. North Mississippi Health Services, Inc., (2001). Sandra Bruff, a graduate of the Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson Mississippi, sued her employer, North Mississippi Health Services, Inc, following her termination of employment. In 1996 a client that Bruff had seen in the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) a few months earlier returned seeking assistance with a presenting concern that had not been addressed in their previous work together. The client, who was in a relationship with another woman, requested assistance with improving her relationship (Bruff v. North Mississippi Health Services, Inc., (2001). Bruff was noted to have told the client that she could not help her with that issue but she would be more than willing to help in other areas. Although a follow up visit had been planned so that they could begin the next stages of care, the client was a no-show for the visit reporting the incident, instead, to her employer who in turn contacted her supervisors regarding the encounter (Bruff v. North Mississippi Health Services, Inc, 2001).

Bruff's employer made attempts to accommodate her moral objection to working with sexual minority and gender non-conforming clients. Finding no common ground, Bruff decided against adjusting her accommodation request or seeking employment in a different role. Bruff sued her employer and initially won the District Court level jury trial; however, her employer sought relief in Appeals Court. The Appellate level judge reversed the District Court decision ruling instead for her employer (Bruff v. North Mississippi Health Services, Inc. (2001). The Appellate Division Panel determined that her employer had acted in good faith to accommodate her faith based request concluding that she was entitled to an accommodation not necessarily the one of her choosing. The Appellate Division also dismissed her claim that a coworker was

allowed to make a values based referral noting in that instance the coworker felt that she was best in her work with adults rather than children; however, she remained flexible in those moments when the team could not accommodate her dislike for work with children. It is also worth noting that Bruff raised no concerns about those instances where the team could not accommodate her peers request and the coworker worked with a child. Bruff, on the other hand, was found to be ‘inflexible’ in her request and the court agreed with the employer that this inflexibility would put an undue burden on the team given there were only three counselors one of whom was a supervisor. The Court also found her argument that the her employer required her to work with homosexuals had violated Mississippi’s Sodomy Laws specious concluding instead that she was never asked to affirm sexual acts; instead, she was required to uphold the ethical codes of her professional licensure bodies and the objectives as outlined by her employer to treat client’s with dignity and respect in her day to day work. The Court also concluded that she had an obligation to be an active participant in the accommodation process that would have included a divergence from the approach that she took by refusing to consider taking a test that would gauge her aptitudes or interest and her inflexibility to apply for work in the pastoral division or application to one of the non-clinical roles that were available. (Bruff v. North Mississippi Health Services, Inc, 2001, 2002; Findlaw, 2001).

Walden v. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, (2010, 2012). Marcia Walden, like Sandra Bruff (Bruff v. North Mississippi Health Services, Inc, 2001) was a professional counselor who was employed in an Employee Assistance Program (EAP; Walden v. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010, 2012) and was later terminated from employment when challenges arose regarding the agencies attempts to address her moral objection to working with homosexuals on relational concerns. When all attempts failed,

Walden, with the assistance of the Alliance Defending Freedom, sued her former employer for a violations of her constitution right to free speech and free exercise of her religious beliefs; she claimed that the actions taken in this instance violated the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (FERA); and she claimed that the agencies involved had violated Title VII. In addition to suing CSC and the CDC, she also named several employees who worked for both the CSC and the CDC as litigants (Walden v. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010, 2012).

At some point during her employment with the Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC), the organization contracted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to provide mental health services as an EAP counselor, she disclosed, to a client, that she had a moral conflict working on a relational issue that involved homosexuality but she reportedly told the client that she was willing to assist her with linkage to a therapist for whom the conflict would not exist (Walden v. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010, 2012). The client appears to have met with a coworker as planned however the client informed her supervisor about the visit stating that she sensed judgment in the Walden's body language and in the way that she recommended the referral to a new therapist.

In this instance Walden's employer was prepared to honor her request to refer those clients for whom she felt that she had a morals based conflict with the caveat that she withheld from the client her rationale for the referral. Walden was inflexible about the request claiming that her failure to disclose the reason "would be dishonest" (Walden v. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010 2012, p. 8). By her own account, she "couldn't say that {she} I don't have relationship experience, because {she} I would be lying to the client"; a comment that confirms that she was aware that she was competent to work with the client on the presenting concern. Walden's comments show a disregard for the ACA's *Code of Ethics* (2005) and the

harm that might have been caused by her desire to make the self-disclosure. Although informing the client the rationale for her referral was not necessary as part of her religious beliefs, Walden wanted to tell them because “she wanted to be honest with [her] clients” (Walden v. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012, p. 18).

After numerous attempts to accommodate Walden either in her current role or in other positions within the organization failed she was terminated from her job sparking her lawsuit. According to the Court docket (Walden v. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010, 2012), a Magistrate judge made a recommendation that the District Court honor the Defense’s’ request for a dismissal of the claim. After a review of the report and the case material a District Judge offered a summary judgment in favor of the Defendants (Walden v. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010, 2012).

Like Sandra Bruff (Bruff v. North Mississippi Health Services, Inc., (2001), Julea Ward (Ward v. Wilbanks, 2010, 2012), and Jennifer Keeton (Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley, 2001), Walden appealed to the Appellate Division and provided evidence that supported her position that her supervisors had asked questions about concerns that she would have working with other groups, concretizing her position that her termination was about her religious beliefs more broadly and her request for an accommodation more specifically; however, the Court disagreed with her interpretation (Walden v. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010, 2012). The panel concluded that Walden’s supervisors did not appear to be overly concerned about making the accommodation that would allow her to refer clients as much as they appeared to have some reservation that she might make “judgmental comments to clients in connection with future referrals” (Walden v. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012, p. 22).

The 11th Circuit, having reviewed the abundance of case law and the notes related to the case, upheld the verdict handed down in the District Court. They determined that case law is replete with evidence that supports the government's ability to hold wide desecration to make employment related decisions particularly in instances where it has an established relationship with an independent contractor who provides services for one or more agencies (Walden v. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010, 2012). Interestingly enough, during the early stages of this dispute, Walden had actually met with a Minister to ask if limiting her comments during the referral process presented a faith based dilemma. She appears to have been told, by the Minister, that the recommendation, in and of itself, was not problematic (Walden v. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010, 2012). In fact, he/she provided an additional way of informing the client that did not require that she tell them about the faith based dilemma; however, Walden never disclosed this conversation to the team deciding instead that the views of her employer and the Minister for whom she sought counsel conflicted with her own beliefs. This disposition appears to run dangerously parallel to that of Bruff (Bruff v. North Mississippi Health Services, Inc., 2001) who was offered a position to work in the pastoral counseling division but she refused citing concerns that her more conservative values might have conflicted with the director's more liberal disposition (FindLaw, 2001). In the end, the Appellate Court found in favor of the defendants.

Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley, (2001). Jennifer Keeton, with the support of the Alliance Defending Freedom (formerly known as the Alliance Defense Fund), a coalition of Christian lawyers who purport to take action to defend the abridgements of the 1st Amendment as it relates to religious freedom, filed a lawsuit when she was discharged from her graduate program at Augusta University after she refused to participate in a remediation plan that was required ahead

of her entering a practicum placement when concerns emerged about her inability to work competently with a number of groups including sexual minority clients (Herlihy et al., 2014; Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley, 2001). Keeton asked the Court to bar the university from discharging her from the program because she refused to complete the remediation plan.

Keeton appeared to share her opinions regarding homosexuals, quite openly, in classroom discussions and in private conversations with peers. The Court record (Anderson-Wiley, 2001) notes at least one incident in which Keeton affirmed that if she were working in a high school setting that if she met with a student ‘in crisis’ who was struggling with issues involving his/her sexuality that she would tell him/her that it was not okay to be gay and that homosexual behavior was immoral (Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley, 2001). In other conversations she stated that she would work to change a homosexual to heterosexual and if she failed she would refer a client to someone who practiced conversion therapy (Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley, 2001).

As the Court docket makes clear (Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley, 2001, p. 7), Keeton’s position violated the American Counseling Association’s *Code of Ethics* (2005) specifically: (1) Section A.1.a, (2) Section A.4.b, (3) Section C.2.a, (4) Section C.5, (ACA, 2005) all of which require that professional counselors have an awareness of their own personal values and make attempts to prevent them from interfering with their ability to respect the dignity of the clients with whom they work. The ACA codes also require that counselors work towards gaining the knowledge, skills, and abilities for work with a diverse range of clients and that they take steps to avoid discriminatory actions that reify the marginalization of clients.

In the end, the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals agreed with a lower Court ruling that Keeton was not dismissed from her graduate program due to her religiously held views; rather, she ultimately withdrew from the program because she claimed that she would be unable to complete

the remediation plan which was initiated out of concerns that she would violate the ACA's *Code of Ethics* (2014) by imposing her personally held beliefs about homosexuality onto her clients (Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley, 2001). The Court also noted that the university was not merely concerned about Keeton's ability to work with sexual minority clients, but there also appeared to have been long standing concerns about her multicultural competence particularly during and after a course that is specifically designed to broaden pre-service counselors awareness of the diverse range of clients that they may work with in community and school-based contexts (Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley, 2001). Although burdensome in some respects, the Court found the university's request that Keeton participate in the remediation plan to be a reasonable part of the pedagogical process which would facilitate the appropriate means of working with clients within the bounds of the ACA's (2014) *Code of Ethics* (Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley, 2001).

Just as the court had concluded in *Bruff v. North Mississippi Health Services, Inc.* (2001) and in *Walden v. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* (2010, 2012) that the imposition of the remediation plans or the accommodations were not imposed due to retaliation in reference to Keeton's religious beliefs; rather, in this instance the plan was designed as a pedagogical tool that would ensure that she was knowledgeable of empirically supported and theoretically sound approaches to working with a diverse range of clients in keeping with the ACA's *Code of Ethics* (Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley, 2001). In the end, the 5th Circuit upheld the District level court finding in favor of the university.

Ward v. Wilbanks, (2010, 2012). Lastly, Julea Ward, a high school teacher and former trainee in a Master's in Counseling program at Eastern Michigan University, was discharged from her program following concerns that became more pronounced once she had gotten to her practicum/internship placement site (Herlihy et al., 2014; *Ward v. Wilbanks*, 2010, 2012). Until

that point, Julea appeared, by all accounts, to be an outstanding student as evidenced by her grades in her coursework; however, there were increasing concerns about her culturally encapsulated views regarding the types of clients she felt that she could not provide adequate counseling due to her strict adherence to her Christian Orthodox beliefs and the conflict that would be created by working with certain groups based on her faith (Herhily et al., 2014; Ward v. Wilbanks, 2010, 2012).

At the Formal Meeting, which was held on March 10th, 2009, the faculty challenged her to think about her constructivist position and whether or not it was just for her to privilege her understanding of the world over that of the clients with whom she may be assigned to work. Although it was clear that Julea could see that sexual identity and engagement in sexual activity are two separate but often conflated issues, she remained steadfast that she could not reasonably work with a client whose ‘behavior’ was religiously objectionable. She was then asked whether her culturally centered religious views should be held superior to that of others (highlighting the chance that she may actually work with a LGBTQ client whose identity intersects with religion or a hetero identified person whose religious preference differed from her own) and although she stated that her view was not superior, it was clear to the committee that Julea was adamant about not working with LGBTQ clients and a host of other groups whose behavior conflicted with her belief system (Ward, 2010). Later, she received the decision of the team and was informed that she was being terminated from the program due to the concerns that were raised both before and during the hearing. The committee’s decision was appealed to the Dean of students and was affirmed leaving her with one other option; she selected to sue the university (Ward v. Wilbanks, 2010).

On April 2nd 2009, with the assistance of the Alliance Defending Freedom, a conservative coalition of lawyers that have lead the fight to block the extension of rights to sexual and gender minorities, Julea filed a law suit with the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan in which she claimed that her 1st Amendment right to free expression of Constitutionally protected religious beliefs, her 14th Amendment Right to Due Process, and her 14th Amendment Right to Equal Protections had been violated (Ward v. Wilbanks, 2010, 2012). Although the District Court in the Ward case issued a summary judgment in favor of EMU, Julea and her team of lawyers filed an Appeal at which point the Appellate Panel reversed the lower court's decision based, in part, on the a perception that the university allowed values based particularly in those instances where trainees were allowed to request to work with particular groups without a rationale for their being selective about or simply open to work with those groups. The panel was also concerned about the seemingly contemptuous questions that Julea was asked to respond to during the formal hearing, and the broad definition of culture which all appeared to favor, in the view of the judicial panel, additional review (Ward v. Wilbanks, 2010, 2012). Upon remand back to the lower court for a jury trial both sides eventually reached an out of court settlement which awarded Julea \$75,000 and a transcript that indicated that she left the university of her own volition and not as a result of being asked to withdraw (Ward v. Wilbanks, 2012).

Unlike the Appellate Division judges in the Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley (2001) and Walden v. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2010, 2012) the 6th Circuit panel of judged failed to take into account the additional burden a training site may face if one's peers are forced to manage a higher client load due to one or more peers refusal to meet with clients based on moral dilemmas (also see Herlihy et al., 2014). Next, the Appellate Court in Ward v.

Wilbanks (2010, 2012) appear to have conflated values based referrals where a counselor appears open to additional work with a client with particular cultural backgrounds with morals based referrals where a therapist is agreeable to working with certain cultural groups provided that the conversation does not veer towards topics that are uncomfortable for the therapist or those instances where the therapist wishes to make a referral in an attempt to reduce counselor induced conflicts whose only resolution is the complete avoidance of work with certain clients. This conflation is dangerous and fails to take into account the added discriminatory dimension infused in the latter positionality. This, too, was a point of contention that was addressed more favorably to the profession in *Walden v. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* (2010, 2012) when the court deconstructed the essentialist claims which attempted to suggest that the therapist who believes that they are more skilled with one population and remains open to working even in those instances where they are less skilled, is demonstratively similar to total avoidance of work with certain groups because of animus towards them.

Julea's lawsuit led to the passage of Bill HB 5040 also known as the Julea Ward Freedom of Conscience Act in Michigan in 2012 sparking cross disciplinary concerns that may have far reaching implications (Anastas, 2013). The bill which bears her name ostensibly prevents certificate and degree granting social work, psychology, and counseling programs from disciplining or discriminating against a "student {who} refuses to counsel or serve a client as to goals, outcomes, or behaviors that conflict with a sincerely held religious belief" (as cited in Anastas, 2013, p. 304). The legal battles are indicative of the need to situate both sexual minority youth, and as best one can, the professional counselors who work in adolescent mental health treatment settings, in multiple interlocking bidirectionally influenced systems in an attempt to explore the complicated and nuanced ways that the identity development of sexual

minority youth and professional counselors are both shaped in profound ways. Because youth may engage in identity management strategies in order to develop and maintain social support, appropriate steps should be taken to gain an understanding of problematic conceptualizations of tolerance that may have an impact on the provision of care extended to sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth.

An Exploration of Tolerance in Clinical Practice

Tolerance is a construct that is often thought to provide a basis from which relationships can be forged most notably in situations where divergent ideals can have an impact on the extension of rights and the recognition of shared vulnerability (Tønder, 2013). Although a review of the nuances involved in the explication and discursive positioning of this concept is well beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth noting that a number of scholars have debated the active (Horn et al., 2010) and passive (Tønder, 2013) elements that are a emergent part of this concept's underpinnings. The discussions that involve the use of this construct often obscure the concept's historical connections to religion and obfuscate the need to reflect on the power dynamics that are an inherent and ever-present part of the use of this term (Almond, 1997; Horn et al., 2010; Jakobsen, & Pellegrini, 2003). The earlier meanings have survived the passage of time; however, it has taken on a meaning that signifies an aversion to the object that engenders a sense of tolerance (Walters, 2014). Active tolerance would "insist [that] we truly recognize and respect others for their differences" rather than falling back on the default passive portions of tolerance that tend to "accept them in spite of perceived or real differences" (Walters, 2014, p. 12). My review of the literature reveals the need for more scholarship regarding the use of tolerance in counseling practice and the extent to which tolerance limits attempts to critically

deconstruct the ways that this term leaves intact power differentials that have a profound impact on the ways that counselors work with clients.

Horn et al. (2010) when describing the bioecological processes that potentially thwart the discursive and paradigmatic quotidian invisibility of sexual minority and gender non-conforming experiences of marginalization from and alienation within socio-cultural contexts point to the importance of recognizing the role that tolerance plays in the reification and minoritization of youth. When describing this phenomenon Horn et al. (2010) wrote that:

tolerance translates as an inability to differentiate between claims because active tolerance demands supporting ‘both sides of an issue’ rather than taking a stand. In short, tolerance takes the focus off of hateful and violent structures and systems and locates the problem (intolerance) and remedy (change of attitude) among individuals. Through this tolerance framing, perpetrators of hate become obscured and audiences are asked not to acknowledge and notice hate but, instead, to ‘tolerate both sides of a conflict’. (p. 69)

Bowers et al. (2005), armed with an interest in learning more about the pathways that engender homophobia in mental health practice, invited sexual minority and gender non-conforming adults 18 and older who had seen a professional counselor to participate in a study which explored their experiences. They also invited therapists who had worked with sexual minority and gender nonconforming clients with additional allowances given to the inclusion of those who had themselves been through personal counseling and perhaps hold identities as a sexual or gender minority to talk about their work and intersectional identities. Although much of their findings are useful for supporting a number of points that I have made thus far, I want to focus, for a moment, on the comments made by one of the therapists in response to her work with a sexual minority client.

Edwina, one of the therapists whose narrative was described in the Bowers et al. (2005) study, appears to have evidenced a desire to symbolically dis-locate deeply held feelings of angst about her client's sexual minority and gender non-conforming identities while strategically deploying interventions that project a sense of empathy towards and a true respect regarding the phenomenological experiences of her clients. Although the methodological design of the Bowers et al. (2005) study does not allow for causal inferences about the impact that Edwina's approach has had on her ability to connect with her clients in a manner that is congruent with a Rogerian or Phenomenological Theories, the interviews with the clients who had had experiences with therapists who lacked training or an interest in grounding their work with sexual minority clients in the abundance of empirically sound and evidence based practices is, perhaps, indicative of emergent power dynamics that are worthy of further empirical investigation.

The literature as Bowers et al. (2005) note is replete with theories on the processes that influence the activation of negative attitudes with two of the main positions offering some probative value here. According to Bowers et al. (2005), some people are likely to develop cognitive maps to stereotypes and general negatives attitudes about sexual and gender minorities that are preserved, bracketed, and tucked out of one's conscious awareness. These structures are believed to be reified and resistant to challenge; however, as Bowers et al. (2005) note, there are some who disagree with this disposition positing instead that it is not the 'bracketing' process, per se, that protects these intractable negative attitudes from ongoing critique; rather, the socio-cultural stigmatization of sexual and gender minorities likely engenders a sense that these feelings are justified, in part, because the animus towards gender based violations are socially, culturally, and institutionally, sanctioned by and concretized within the legal apparatus. Animus,

then, becomes so commonplace that alternative views are believed to be “rendered invisible to the counsellor’s analysis” making its modification and alteration exceedingly more challenging (Bowers et al., 2005, p. 472). The assumptions that morals based conflicts arise solely as a part of religious beliefs are problematic particularly in those instances where religion and morality are conflated or in cases where religion’s noted relationship towards the objective which “supply the rationale for the state regulation of sexuality” (Jakobsen et al., 2003, p. 11) are ultimately obscured.

The interview that Bowers et al. (2005) conducted with Edwina, a seasoned therapist who had several years of working in the field, reveal an intricate and comprehensive awareness of phenomenological theory as well as client centered approaches to work; however, the implementation reveals a nuanced approach in its execution with clients. When describing her work, Edwina, pointed to her awareness of the Rogerian approaches like genuineness and unconditional positive regard as the mechanisms that fuel her work. These theoretical approaches, by her account, allow her to bracket strong opinions so that the work could remain client centered. However, when pressed, she stated that she did have strong opinions about homosexuality which she made every attempt to keep ‘in abeyance’ (p. 482). When describing her positionality on the subject she stated that:

in our society today, I think it’s important to tolerate diversity of gender preference and racial origin or whatever... tolerance is highest on my list... But if I’m upholding values to my children, I will uphold... the value of heterosexual family life. I think that it’s your choice to.. be in a same-sex relationship and sort of have a family life that way, that is okay. But I think we need as a community... I think we need to, not promote it, but to tolerate it...(p. 482-483)

Although Edwina appears well versed in both Rogerian and Phenomenological theories, her narrative account of their usage reveals a problematic execution of both. Not only is her approach lacking in genuineness it also suggests a covert animus towards sexual and gender minority clients that is strengthened, in part, by societal stigmatization of this group. This approach, as both Jakobsen et al. (2003) and Walters (2014) note, is hegemonically sutured to the ‘love the sinner hate the sin’ discourse. Another problem with her disposition is that tolerance performs a symbolic erasure of her feelings of contempt towards her clients. She appears to hold onto the view that she has no ‘strong opinions’ and that she keeps them ‘in abeyance’; however, her own account reveals difficulty navigating those structural belief system during the interview so we will have to leave to the imagination the impact she is truly having in her work with clients. Edwina appears to have enacted passing as a means of concealing her true feelings about her client during her sessions and appeared to engage in covering during the interview in order to anesthetize the need to reflect on her actions.

According to Horn et al. (2010), “passing requires one to actively fake or pretend to be something that he or she is not, while covering requires that one cloak differences that deviate from the normative mantles of the profession” (p. 68). Although passing (Hudson, 2012; Walters, 2014) and covering (Moore, 2010) are constructs that parallel concepts that have been utilized, in part, to describe the ways that minoritized groups, particularly folk of color as well as sexual minorities manage their identities by being selective and strategic about self-disclosure (felt stigma; Herek et al., 2007), future research may wish to further develop these constructs towards the goal of uncovering the extent to which this phenomenon emerges in everyday practices involving counselors, particularly in those instances where tolerance fuels interventions. Since these constructs have meanings that are deeply entrenched in power

dynamics, care should be taken to fully articulate how passing or covering are imbricated to issues of privilege and oppression.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was two-fold: I opened with a brief explication of the extant literature on the experiences of sexual and gender minority youth with particular attention given to studies which have explored a range of interpersonal and socially relevant contexts that have an impact on identity development. Each of the articles that have been cited in this section are important to this study as they speak to the intricate relationships that youth have with the adults, peers, and members of the community and the ways that these interactions can have a profound impact on one's identity development. Aside from the social justice issues that were addressed by Franck's (2009) school-based intervention, whose design it was to disrupt the relative safety that heteronormative jokes enjoyed in a site that celebrates social justice, his article reminds us that sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth, adults, and their allies can be hurt unintentionally by seemingly innocuous jokes (Pascoe, 2007).

On the other hand, the articles by Kuvalanka et al., (2009) and Martin (2009) show some of the ways that proheterosexual and gender normative biases can emerge in close relationships and they inform the reader of a few of the ways that heteronormativity potentially diminishes opportunities to address the needs of youth who are or may later identify as a gender or sexual minority. Such bias forecloses on or at the very minimum hinders true intimacy and has the potential of creating fissures in additional relationships between sexual and gender minority youth and others and may contribute to increased vulnerability to some of the micro level idiosyncratic risk factors discussed in Chapter I (D'Augelli et al., 2010; Orne, 2011).

The sections of the chapter about foster care and youth homelessness are important as are discussions about the geopolitics of addressing the needs of sexual and gender minorities. The articles tell us that the settings where students live may likely have an impact on the resources available to gender and sexual minority youth and may also effect the extent to which policies are developed that recognize and address the developmental needs of this group potentially affecting the interpersonal relationships and bonds and experiences that sexual minority youth have across contexts.

Because schools were chosen as the context from which gender and sexual minorities for this study were chosen, I also included a brief overview of some of the legislation that has an impact on the ability of schools to develop policies which curtail harassment of gender and sexual minorities. The goal, then, was to explore a range of research articles that address the needs of sexual and gender minorities while also integrating a discussion of some of the exo and macro level factors that may have an impact on sexual and gender youth generally and my ability to recruit participants more broadly. To that end, I thought that it was important, for the reader, to have an idea of some local and state level complexities that may help or hinder the process of disrupting quotidian harassment and violence in schools. The section on legislative and judicial action addresses some of the knowledge gaps regarding the intricate relationship between the federal, state, and local government and the actions that each have taken towards the goal of addressing intolerance. I closed this section with a discussion of the Dignity for All Students Act due to the bidirectional way in which this study may be helped or hindered by the presence of this policy and the relationship that this study may have on building the knowledge base regarding the continued experiences of sexual minority and gender non-conforming students. The hope is that the administrators will see this study as a barometer that may help show the

progress that has been made in school contexts by using the narratives of the youth as a means for evaluating the established goals.

Finally, I provided a context of how professional counselors impact the bioecological model of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth. An Overview of the legal cases related to pre-service counselors highlights how multicultural content is currently being taught in counselor preparation programs and how it may reify the marginalization of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth. The current research study focuses on how youth navigate their identities across multiple contexts. It is imperative that professional counselors have a high level of understanding about the lived experience of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth in order to provide efficacious services and to meet the ethical and professional standards of the profession.

Chapter III: Methodology

Due to the paucity of research in counseling related journals regarding the needs and experiences of sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth, I decided to approach this study qualitatively. I opted to use Bronfenbrenner's (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986, 1994a, 1995; Bronfenbrenner et al., 1994; Bronfenbrenner et al., 2005) Theory and the Process, Person, Context, Time (PPCT) model as the framework of this study as it positions sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth at the center of several interlocking culturally-confluent, bidirectionality-influenced proximally and distally related contexts. Each of these contexts holds some degree of influence on and potentially shapes adolescent development in profound ways. My interest in this particular model of research, then, is to discover how this continuum of contexts is navigated and internalized by the youth who agreed to participate. Although the bioecological approach provides a set of guidelines that one can use for both qualitative and quantitative (see Bronfenbrenner, 1977 1979, 1986, 1994a, 1995; Bronfenbrenner et al., 1994b; Bronfenbrenner et al., 2005) studies, it does not necessarily have established procedures for interpreting the data; thus, I utilize Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Finlay, 2011; Smith et al., 2009) as a way of bridging this gap. I see Bioecological Theory and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis as complementary approaches that are ideally structured for this type of study because the theory positions the research subject at the center of a number of contexts that require varying degrees of attention, and the IPA approach provides a means with which to analysis and structure the data. Additionally, both are also interested in the positionality of the researcher and his/her relationship to the project with the latter approach requiring ongoing reflection in an effort to ensure that the subject remains the focus of the study.

This chapter is divided into two sections: in the first, I provide a brief explanation of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986, 1994a, 1995; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994b; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2005). I will also discuss Bronfenbrenner's Theory with specific attention given to the Process, Person, Context, and Time model, followed by an explication of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis and how each will be utilized in this study. In the second half of the chapter, I will discuss my positionality as the researcher for this study, the population of interest, and the methods taken to access and recruit them. I will contextualize the question that guides the study, and I will discuss how the data will be collected and analyzed. There will also be a section on trustworthiness/credibility followed by some concluding thoughts.

Bioecological Theory in Qualitative Research

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), ecological research is bidirectional and takes into consideration the impact that the informant is having on the research as well as the reciprocal impact that the researcher has had on participants. Thus, this approach appears to be as interested in accounting for the phenomenological experiences of the participant as it would be in the ideological thinking that guides research. More importantly, Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979, 1986) developed this approach to research with a specific interest in exploring the ways internal and external factors have an impact on the family system and as a way of describing the ways that children become alienated from one or more of the social environments in which they find themselves. Such an inception may explain the emergent use of the ecological framework in scholarship related to the experiences of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth with particular emphasis on their disconnection at school (Birkett et al., 2009; Hong et al., 2012),

home (Quintana et al., 2010; Ryan, 2002; Slesnick, & Prestopnik, 2009; Singh, 2013), and communities (Mogul et al., 2011).

Bronfenbrenner's (1994, 1995) theory has undergone significant adjustments over the years (also see Darling, 2007; Christensen, 2010). According to Darling (2007), its interest has shifted from what some might have presumed to be mere focus on context related interactions to encompass a broader exploration of a range of "confluent influences" (p. 207) that might have an impact on individual development. According to this theoretical approach, the individual is embedded in at least four culturally concentric bidirectional environmental systems (micro, meso, exo, macro, exo-macro) that are impacted by and each having varying levels of influence on the developing person. As a result of the interconnectedness between the proximal and distal subsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 1995) and regularly occurring reciprocal interactions with objects, symbols, and attachment figures, idiosyncratic characteristics are developed and potentially influence the ways the individual processes and makes sense of their experiences (also supported, in part, by Attachment Theory; Bowlby, 1973, 1982, 1988; Fonagy, 2001; Fonagy et al., 2004; Ripley, Anderson, McCormack, & Rockett, 2012). The responses are shaped by and are varied across contexts (or settings) and the stage in one's development in which experiences occur and may shift as a result of both experience and time (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979; 1986, 1994, 1995; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994b; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2005; Christensen, 2010; Darling, 2007).

Thus, Bronfenbrenner developed the Process-Person-Context-Time model as a way of contextualizing the extent to which experiences fuel development and help shape our understanding of the external world (Bowlby, 1973, 1982, 1988; D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2008; D'Augelli, Grossman, Starks, & Sinclair, 2010; Fonagy, 2001; Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, &

Target, 2004; Franck, 2002; Hackford-Peer, 2010; Henklin, 2012; Higdon, 2008; Hong et al., 2012; Mayo, 2008; Morrin, 1977; Pascoe, 2007; Slesnick, Bartle-Haring, & Dashora, 2008; Smart 2012; Wallin, 2007) and as a way of ensuring that researchers are equipped with a model that may capture the range of phenomena that may have an impact on the lived experience of the subjects who are at the center of research. Bioecological theory in general and the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model in particular, establishes a set of guiding principles that one could consider when constructing and carrying out social science research (Bronfenbrenner, 1977 1979, 1986, 1994a, 1995; Bronfenbrenner et al., 1994b; Bronfenbrenner et al., 2005; Christensen, 2010; Darling, 2007). The PPCT model places the developing person at the center of interpersonal contexts with particular attention given to the ways that regularly occurring experiences have their impact on and are reciprocally impacted by interactions across milieu and time. To further elucidate the focus of PPCT, I will provide an overview of the model and its relevance to this current study.

Process Domain. The process domain includes proximal processes that are described as regularly occurring interactions and experiences at the micro and meso levels that are believed to reciprocally interface with the beliefs of and socialization with significant others, peers, and members of one's community. These function as the mechanisms that structure and shape internal processes regarding one's own relationship to the world (Bronfenbrenner, 1977 1979, 1986, 1994a, 1995; Bronfenbrenner et al., 1994; Bronfenbrenner et al., 2005; Christensen, 2010; Darling, 2007). Generally speaking, the spatiotemporal terms like proximal or distal may be a bit misleading. In many regards, youth, most notably the cohort of sexual minorities of interest to this study, may live in communities and home environments with the adults who elect the politicians who ultimately enact policies that have an impact on relational and community

settings where societal norms (macro and exo system) are ultimately policed. More to the point, sexual minority youth are neither temporally or spatially removed from the communities, policies, or people who set the tone for the experiences that occur across contexts; thus, proximal experiences and idiosyncratic responses can vary widely and require the deployment of a research approach that potentially captures the differential milieu dependent strategies that youth utilize.

Person Domain. Bronfenbrenner's theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977 1979, 1986, 1994a, 1995; Bronfenbrenner et al., 1994; Bronfenbrenner et al., 2005; Christensen, 2010; Darling, 2007) places the developing person at the center of several bidirectionally influenced contexts with specific and additional attention given to idiosyncratic characteristics of the individual that are shaped by and ultimately have an impact on proximal processes. This requires the contextualization of the bifurcated role that one's temperament, race, gender, age, disability status, psychological, cognitive, and behavioral dispositions (Bronfenbrenner et al., 2005), sexual orientation or gender expression, for instance, may play in enhancing or hindering connectedness (see also Relational Cultural Theory; Jordan, Walker, & Hartling, 2004) to and experiences in proximal relationships and settings.

Interest in the 'person at the center of the circle' allows me to include data that honors the fact that informants are not simply objects being acted upon by their social environments; rather, they are viewed as active participants, in some ways, in their own development. I am interested in learning more about the ways that they view their own race, gender, personality style, world view, behavioral dispositions, sexual orientation and gender identities, for instance, and the ways they view these as shaping or being shaped by their experiences in two or more microsystems.

Context Domain. The context domain is said to encompass the bidirectional and culturally enriched settings that have an impact on and are shaped in return by direct and indirect interactions with the developing individual. The four contexts include interactions that occur at the micro, meso, exo, and macro system levels and each will be discussed in briefly. (Bronfenbrenner, 1977 1979, 1986, 1994a, 1995; Bronfenbrenner et al., 1994b; Bronfenbrenner et al., 2005; Christensen, 2010; Darling, 2007).

Microsystem domain. The microsystem includes the interaction that the developing person has with parents, siblings, peers, and experiences in contexts like the home, work, and school environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Hong et al., 2012; Kosciw et al., 2009). That said, the microsystem is a parceling out of the individual level experiences in one of settings where individuals have interpersonal interactions with others. According this theory, individuals are not simply acted upon; rather, they are an active participant in the construction of their environment. According to Hong et al. (2012) “{a} number of researchers have documented that the immediate level risk and protective factors for homophobic bullying occur within peers and school microsystems” (p. 274: see also Broz, 1998; Nabozny, v. Podlesny, 1996). This is also the level at which connectedness with and alienation from parents and peers can occur. This is the level most extensively addressed in the extant literature on this topic (see Alvi, Scott, & Stanyon, 2010; Amato, 2012; Austin, Ziyadeh, Corliss, Rosario et al., 2009; Birkett et al., 2009; Chesir-Teran, 2003; Currie, et al., 2012; Davenport, 1972; Diaz et al., 2010; Friedman & Morgan, 2009; Goodenow et al., 2006; Grossman, Haney, Edwards, Alessi et al., 2009; Hadden, 1976; Kovalanka et al., 2009; Mayberry, 2006, 2013; Mayberry, Chenneville, & Currie, 2011; Morgan et al., 2011; Morrin, 1977; O’Donnell et al., 2011; Regnerus, 2012; Rekers, 1978, 2003;

Russell, Muraco, Subramiam, & Laub, 2009; Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz et al., 2010; Sandfort et al., 2009; Walls, Potter, & Van Leeuwen, 2009).

I explore the ways that gender and sexual minority youth define acceptance and support, the ways that they perceive their families, and peers to externalize these characteristics (How do they show their support and acceptance?; Are there ever any direct conversations about gender identity and or sexual orientation?; Are peers and family responsive to sexual prejudice?). Further, I am interested in learning the extent to which strategic outness (Moore, 2010; Orne, 2011) is utilized as a method of selective contextual (Moradi et al., 2010) disclosure whose purpose it is to maintain social supports and the potential disruption of racism, ableism, sexism, and other institutional, cultural, or social forms of oppression the mechanisms that activate this process.

Mesosystem domain. The mesosystem includes the interactions between the individual and two or more settings that have an impact on behavior and development. This would include all of the ways that one relates to parents and teachers, one's experiences with siblings and with peers, and interactions in the community and home. The mesosystem, then, is a series of microsystems which enhance or hinder one's identity development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1994).

I am interested in learning about the extent to which sexual minority youth self-disclose their identities across interpersonal and social contexts. I want to explore the ways that experiences in one or more contexts are believed to have an impact on identity development and the extent to which sexual and gender minority youth are aware of using divergent strategies related to identity and stigma management.

Exosystem domain. The exosystem includes interactions between two or more of the settings where an individual may find themselves; however, one of the settings does not involve them directly (Barboza, Schiamberg, Oehmke, et al., 2009; Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Hong et al., 2012). The exosystem includes the legal apparatus and the connected systems that structure the concretized societal expectations that ultimately have an impact on school and work place policies and other areas of daily living (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The exosystem also includes the media (commercials, news, radio and televisions shows), medical and psychiatric, religious, and other ideologies that influence the microsystems.

As Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1986) points out, schools are further and further away from the communities where children live; thus, children who attend the same school can come from disparately divergent microsystems each having their own influence on development. Thus, the settings where students live may likely have an impact on the resources that are available to gender and sexual minority youth and may also effect the extent to which policies are developed that recognize and address the developmental needs of this group. Ecological studies (Horn et al., 2010) can be utilized as a tool to problematize identity politics and as a way of exploring the strategies that students may take, most notably youth of color, in urban, rural, and suburban settings where participation in a GSAs may lead to additional supports but also come with the additional risks associated with losing safety nets that combat racism or other forms of culturally encapsulated oppression.

Because the interviews are semi-structured, I am open to learning about the ways that the youth may conceptualize their distal interaction with the exosystem; however, a few of the questions that I prepared that helped guide my exploration included an interest in learning about the ways that their parent's work schedules, school-based zero tolerance of bullying, inclusion,

and abstinence policies, which were enacted at the Federal, State, and local levels and implemented in schools, enhances or hinders connections in multiple contexts. I also asked questions about their perceptions about the implementation of policies that allow for the development of a GSA and the distribution of ‘safety’ across microsystems within the school. For example, each class could be viewed as a microsystem embedded in the broader mesosystem potentially requiring a different set of skills depending on the makeup of the class room with a new set of peers and a different set of rules which guide participation or disconnection.

Macrosystem domain. The macrosystem spells out the formal and informal societal and institutional rules that are an expected part of and emergent force that appears within the micro, meso, and exo levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). Although the microsystem is concerned with the individual level experiences with or expression of sexual prejudice, the macrosystem represents the blueprint that establishes the societal rules like gender norms, compulsory heterosexuality, and hetero and homo normativity (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979; Hong et al., 2012), and whether or not bullying is acceptable (Barboza et al., 2008). The macrosystem reflects societal attitudes about gender roles and is the abstract level at which the established rules are monitored, critiqued, and ultimately policed. The macrosystem is also the level where schools and families take their cues regarding the level of responsibility that they hold for protecting sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth from harassment (Broz, 1998).

I am interested in learning whether or not the participants believe that there are cultural, institutional, or social norms regarding gender identity and/or sexual orientation, and to the extent that they exist, I am also interested in learning more about some of the ways that these have a direct/indirect impact on identity development. I also asked questions regarding the ways

that they view shifts in the policies (or discourse) as it relates to matters like marriage equality or adoption as having a direct or indirect impact on their lives.

Time {Chronosystem} Domain. The bioecological model posits that development occurs, in part, as a result of “progressively more complex reciprocal interaction /.../ {which} must occur on a fairly regular basis” (Bronfenbrenner et al., 2005). These regularly occurring interactions can facilitate a sense of security in and comfort regarding connections to people, objects, and symbols (Bowlby, 1973, 1982, 1988; Fonagy, 2001; Fonagy et al., 2004); however, as Bronfenbrenner et al. note “similarly disruptive characteristics of interconnected microsystems tend to reinforce each other” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 820). To be clearer, the constitutional relationships in any of the microsystems can have profound effects on development in other settings and contexts over the course of time.

I am interested in learning about the participants’ level of awareness regarding and the ways that time may have shaped their understanding of laws that have an impact on gender and sexual minorities. I am particularly interested in gaining an understanding of the participants’ level of awareness regarding the implementation of school-based policies (like the GSA) and the state sanctioned legislation that extends protections to sexual minorities and gender non-conforming youth. I wanted to gain an understanding of the extent to which they perceived the implementation of policies in school-based contexts as having had any impact on their experiences in those settings. I was also curious to discuss the extent to which they have noticed any shifts in global images of sexual minority and gender non-conforming images in media with particular focus given to the ways that any shifts may have influenced their thoughts about or engagement in the coming out process. I was also interested to learn if there were things that had surprised or disappointed them over the years, and I was also interested in exploring the extent to

which there have been things that have occurred that they did not expect or things they hoped or dreaded that have come to fruition.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis is the inductive process of exploring the narratives that individuals construct as a way of reflecting on and representing to others their lived experiences. As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) note, phenomenology is a theory whose design, in part, assists with the goal of “gaining entry into the conceptual world” (p. 26) of informants. Narratives and the lived experiences that they represent are embedded in and are impacted by historical, social, cultural, and psychological events (Buechler & Buechler, 1996; Caughey, 2006). Thus, I used the established set of guidelines which shapes Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis related studies, such as analytic memo writing, the use of semi structured interviews, as well as an explanation of my research goals and my positionality as a research to assist me with bracketing off (Bogdan et al., 2007; Finlay, 2011; Smith et al., 2009) my own experiences as a sexual minority and embedded member of the community so that particular attention is given to the perceptions and insights of the informants who agree to take part in this study. Each of these principles will be discussed in detail.

I wrote brief analytic memos and periodic journal entries as a way of reflecting on the process and my conceptualizations of the experience as this is in keeping with the bioecological and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis research traditions. Bronfenbrenner (1979) certainly viewed the research process as being bidirectional as do researchers who conduct Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis studies (Finlay, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). Thus, the goal is to be aware of the hermeneutics of bracketing one’s own thoughts while also grappling

with the informants coming to terms with their own perceptions about and experiences related to the material under investigation.

In furtherance of the goal of bracketing my assumptions, the members of my committee were granted full access to field notes, analytic memos, transcripts, and any other material that is utilized as part of the analytic process upon request. This ensured greater transparency and afforded multiple opportunities to receive feedback throughout the analytic process. Three peers served as peer debriefers for this study. The debriefers were not selected because of their educational training or interest in the subject matter. Rather, much like Roe (2013), I utilized the debriefers as an additional way of processing my thoughts. The debriefers were utilized at every stage of the development of the project particularly during the data gathering and analysis stages. They assisted me with the goal of bracketing assumptions that may have had an influence on how the informants were recruited and they assisted me in processing the manner in which the data was coded and analyzed.

I conducted three semi-structured interviews because this approach, as Smith et al., (2007) note, guides the directionality of the interview process while also leaving room for the exploration of nuanced views or responses that emerge but perhaps are unexpected, or those points of view that potentially broaden one's understanding of the experiences of sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth and their experiences in multiple contexts. I initiated the process of generating codes within days of completing the interviews. This way, I was able to generate a list of questions to ask in the subsequent interviews. My goal was to have all of the face to face interviews completed within two months of the initial contact with informants followed by the member checks which were accomplished, in part, by allowing the informants to review, edit, and make changes to the transcripts before the final analysis took place.

Triangulation

According to Farmer, Robinson, Elliott, and Eyles (2006), there are four types of triangulation that are used in social science research. The four techniques include methodological, data, theoretical, and investigator triangulation (Bogdan et al., 2007; Farmer et al., 2006). This methodological technique, as Bogdan et al. (2007) have noted, was borrowed from trigonometry and implemented in social science research as a means with which to engender confidence that sufficient steps were taken to verify the facts from multiple sources and that this additional step ensures a “fuller understanding of the phenomena you were studying” (p. 166). In social science research this term, when used in qualitative work, brings with it vestiges from its meaning in the quantitative tradition. Its meaning appears sutured to convergent validity (Farmer et al., 2006), a construct that, as Kazdin (2003) notes, “measures and assesses similar or related constructs” (p. 573) using two or more tools as a means with which to show that the data converge (Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2005). Although this term has been utilized in a number of social science publications, it has been critiqued for being confusing (Bogdan et al., 2006) or simply lacking rigor with regards to explicating what is actually meant when deploying this term (Farmer et al., 2006). Although Bogdan et al. (2007) have expressed some reservation about the use of the construct stating that it is more important to simply say “what you did rather than using the imprecise and abstract term triangulation” (p. 116), I will attempt to explain the role of triangulation in the current study while integrating the imperative offered by these scholars.

Initially, I had planned to triangulate the data gathered for this study by interviewing the youth participants along with one or more parents and a teacher or school administrator; however, I changed direction and opted, instead, to focus on the narratives of the youth heeding the concern voiced by a member of my dissertation committee that inclusion of the parents and

school administrators might dis-locate the positionality of the youth privileging instead the narratives offered by the adults. As a researcher, I have ultimate control over how the narratives are organized, analyzed, and presented, and while I understand the concern I decided that the point of view was well intended because as Farmer et al. (2006) noted, this approach might contribute to “incompatibility between the units of analysis and theoretical paradigms, and [this] process of triangulation might actually amplify sources of error and bias” (p. 379).

I had also given some thought to utilizing focus groups but decided against this due to the caution that Smith et al. (2009) noted regarding the use of focus groups in IPA studies. Although focus groups can elicit a rich amount of data, they may also, as Smith et al. (2009) note, “give rise to direct evaluations and positionings (attitudes and opinions) {and} third person stories” (p. 71). The latter may certainly occur particularly among youth who may feel safer speaking in ‘third person’ due to the real or perceived risks that may be associated with disclosing one’s personal experiences regarding issues of gender and sexuality among peers. As a researcher, I have an obligation to take steps to safeguard my informants and due to the sensitive nature of the material that will be generated I have opted against the use of focus groups and have chosen instead to triangulate the data in other ways.

I argue, then, that the steps that I have taken are congruent with a methodological and theoretical triangulation, which I will explain each approach in kind (Farmer et al., 2006). In addition to the transcripts and the notes that the youth make to them once the interviews are transcribed, I asked that the participants to keep a reflective journal where they could document any thoughts that occurred to them between interview sessions. The journal was be utilized as a means with which to track insights and experiences that occurred to the participants outside of the sessions and could serve as an additional source of data that could be utilized for its

congruence with or dissonance from the material generated during the semi-structured sessions. The journals may be influenced indirectly by the directionality of the sessions; however, like the narrative accounts described by Buechler et al.(1996) in reference to the collection of life narratives, these may also evidence “separate and overlapping interests” (p. xx) that can be an invaluable tool for triangulating data. These additional insights may, then, guide the directionality of subsequent interviews while also providing additional data with which to foreground the analysis of data. The context aided in the process of refining the questions that were asked of each participant and also served as an additional evaluative tool throughout the data and analytical processes. My goal was not to collect “the truth” (Bogdan et al., 2007, p. 26) but to report the “renderings” and the lenses and other factors that influenced the analytic process in a way that “can be evaluated in terms of accuracy” (Bogdan et al., 2007, p. 26). Finlay (2011) described this process more succinctly by stating that “{i}n phenomenology we use it {triangulation} to deepen/broaden and enrich understandings rather than to verify findings” (p. 195). My use of triangulation, then, is meant to deepen my understanding of the worldview of the participants rather than to assert a deterministic overly broad generalization of the data relative to the experiences of sexual minority or gender nonconforming youth beyond this study (Buechler et al., 1996). The narratives could be used as a way to frame future qualitative and quantitative explorations based on the narratives that become a part of the final analysis.

Lastly, I argue that the use of Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Theory and IPA offered a means with which to use what Farmer et al. (2006) have described as using two “alternative or substantive theoretical lenses to view research findings” (p. 379). Although both theories are interested in the phenomenological experiences of the informants, Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological theory offers a basis from which to gather and organize the data in a way that

moves the theoretical lens from mere focus on the overt phenomenon that are detailed in the narratives that are offered by the informants by offering room for the analyst to consider distally related factors that may have an impact on identity development in profound ways. In many ways, some participants lacked the language with which to express a concern and in some circumstances body language or other factors that arose in the session were utilized as a way to gain access to insights during the interviews.

Even the most thought out approach to social science research is bound to have limitations. Although scholars have the option of using coauthors to triangulate their thoughts and their data (Farmer et al., 2006), this is not an option, particularly as it relates to the dissertation process. While some may believe that this approach is ideal, there are some who conduct research and publish solo authored work and appear to make attempts to be transparent about their goals (Marks, 2012), but they find their work critiqued for a variety of reasons. But as Amato (2012) makes clear, neither quantitative nor qualitative traditions are immune to methodological limitations. No one understands this point more than Marks (2012a) who responded to criticisms about his publication (Marks, 2012b) regarding the American Psychological Association's disposition towards scholarship involving children raised with sexual and gender minority parents when he concluded that "there are likely flaws and blind spots that remain" (784) particularly in solo authored scholarship. However, solo authorship is a part of the dissertation process and like the methodological traditions that are utilized, this process, too, is fraught with 'blind spots'. In light of these limitations, I believe that the transparency with which I have articulated my use of theory, the detailed explanation of my approach to this project, and each of the methodological steps that I have carefully described evidence my attempts to engage in sound social science research that is in keeping with the traditions as

discussed thus far. My goal is to present the data in a way that honors the narratives as shared by the informants while also applying appropriate methodological approaches that ground the findings in ways that are congruent with qualitative and the theoretical traditions presented in this section.

Researcher Positionality

I am a person of color who identifies as queer: this brief statement is important because it disrupts assumptions regarding my race and also makes clear that I embrace an identity that is often similar to and in some ways different from the heterosexual norm. Although this study may include a number of critiques involving religion and the government, the reader should know that I am a Veteran who served for a number of years under the Don't Ask Don't Tell and was honorably discharged several years before this policy was repealed. I have also worked in a number of settings providing treatment and advocacy on behalf of Veterans. Additionally, not only was I raised a Christian, the institutions where I completed my elementary, middle, and high school education were all Catholic as was the college where I graduated with a Master's degree in Counseling.

Although I have an interest in a variety of topics that range from issues impacting returning Veterans to the experiences of individuals living with HIV/AIDS, a brief review of the literature regarding the needs of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth reminded me of a period in my late teen years when I was homeless. It seems that over the years I had lost touch with that seldom visited period in my life. Although my status as an unaccompanied youth was not the direct result of my queer identity, my review of the literature reminded me of the resilience that many youth, particularly those who identify as sexual minority and gender non-

conforming, show given some of the institutional, social, and cultural barriers that come to bear on one's identity development.

After I submitted this section for review, I reflected back on a relationship that I had with my Uncle, Kenny. Admittedly, there are times when I remember my fondness for him and my felt kinship with him, as a child; however, there are times, like now, when his name escapes my memory. As a child I seldom had contact with Uncle Kenny and it was not until I became an adult that I learned that he had passed away like so many during the HIV/AIDS crisis. As I reflected a little more on this issue, I wondered if my relationship with my father would have been different if he had known that the psychological, emotional, and physical abuse at his hands made me afraid of him and this part of myself that was so strangely obscure except in those few moments that I got to tag along with my him to visit Uncle Kenny. My father was close with Kenny and I in a fleeting way, as I typed this section, I imagined for a moment that instead of the nightmarish man that he was at times, I wondered if he could have been an advocate rather than the man that I remember. I wondered, if just for a moment, if I needed to feel alone as I explored the integration of my identity as a Black, male, Christian, with my status as someone who was queer in settings that were not so tolerant of my presence or my burgeoning identity. I also wondered if I would have been brave enough to answer yes when my mother asked me, in a disapproving way, if I were gay. I was only sixteen at the time and still needed to navigate how that would impact the rocky relationship that I had with the brothers with whom I still lived.

Given my standing as someone who has overcome a number of obstacles, I feel that it is important to use my privileged position as a scholar to bracket off my personal experiences while remaining actively engaged with and interested in the nuances that will likely be the result of interviewing the informants who agree to participate in this investigation. The utilization of both

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977 1979, 1986, 1994a, 1995; Bronfenbrenner et al., 1994b; Bronfenbrenner et al., 2005; Christensen, 2010; Darling, 2007) and the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Finlay, 2011; Smith et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2009) of the data acts as a reminder that this research is not about me or about my experiences as a person of color who identifies as queer, or my navigation or integration of these identities. However, reflecting on my own experiences helps me to interrogate and reflect on the ways that my own experiences and personal biases may shape the ways that I process and make sense of the varied experiences of the youth with whom I will interview. As Kus et al. (1985) note, "the quest for objectivity" particularly in social science research, "is always ongoing and most challenging" (p. 182). Although I am less concerned that I might use language that my "straight (heterosexual) readers" will not understand (p. 182), I share these authors' frustrations regarding the steps that I have to take, given my background, positionality, and my use of the qualitative tradition, to evidence the cordoning off of bias in this study given the saturation (Morris, 1977; Rekers, 1978, 2003, 2005; Shumm, 2005) of "severely homophobic writings that, although highly nonscientific and unethical, {are} published as 'sociology' or 'psychology' because of academic credentials of the authors" (p. 182).

I do, however, believe that identity development is complex and requires a theoretically sound approach to gathering data while also maintaining sight of and a profound connection with the events that help shape my own trajectory as it relates to the research process. To that end, I wrote journal entries at various times throughout this study in an effort to bracket assumptions that I may have about the youth who agree to participate. I also utilized two post graduate peer debriefers as a secondary means with which to process the material. Finally, I have also taken

steps to ensure that the members of my dissertation committee had access to the material that will be utilized as part of the analytic process.

Research Question

The research question that fuels this study was exploratory: how do sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth navigate their identities across multiple relationships and contexts? Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986, 1994a, 1995; Bronfenbrenner et al., 1994; Bronfenbrenner et al., 2005; Christensen, 2010; Darling, 2007) was used to guide all aspects of the research including, but certainly not limited to, the review of the available literature regarding the needs and experiences of this population. This framework also assisted with the development of the research goals, plans, and the process of recruiting informants. This theory fueled the research question and had an impact on how I framed the questions that I explored in more detail with the youth who agree to participate. The Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Finlay, 2011; Smith et al., 2009), and to some degree the Bioecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986, 1994a, 1995; Bronfenbrenner et al., 1994; Bronfenbrenner et al., 2005; Christensen, 2010; Darling, 2007), served as a reminder that I, too, am situated in the cultural and societal contexts closely shared with the youth who participated in this study. That said, I planned to use both theories as a way to encourage more thorough awareness of the ways that the data are analyzed so that the thoughts and narratives of the youth remain the central focus of this investigation. The strategies that I used will be discussed in more detail in the sections to follow.

Appendix IV details a short list of the questions that guided the initial semi-structured interviews. The participants were asked to tell me a little bit about themselves as a way to engender trust and a sense of safety as we explore subject matter that may, potentially, activate

intrapersonal discomfort. Because the schools that was targeted for inclusion in the study had a GSA, I asked questions about their experiences with this school-based intervention. My hope was that I would be able to establish the groundwork for exploring the informants' experiences in settings that have GSAs. Participants were asked to discuss their familiarity with the institutionally based strategies for dealing with harassment and intolerance and to discuss the extent to which they experience their schools as safe. The informants were also asked to talk about the self-disclosure process and to describe the extent to which they have explored this with their families and peers. Additional probes were utilized during the interviews to broaden my understanding of the informants' experiences with identity development across interpersonal and socially relevant contexts.

Subsequent interviews included questions that are broader in scope with the goal of filling any gaps that were identified during the coding process described above. This way, in addition to gaining additional insights from allowing the informants to review and provide feedback on the transcripts of the interviews, time was also spent deciding on the most appropriate direction to take in subsequent interviews. This process was repeated for the second and third round of interviews allowing multiple opportunities to seek guidance and clarity regarding the material gathered from the informants.

Participants and Recruitment

This study is a bioecological exploration of the experiences of gender non-conforming and sexual minority youth in schools that have a GSA. Therefore, the study involved 3 semi-structured interviews with four sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth in an attempt to gather information about the ways in which they navigate their identities in both the school and home environments. Sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth who attended a

school in Upstate New York were invited to participate in the study. Participants were required to be 17 years of age or older to participate, and those who were under the age of 18 were asked to have one or more parents or guardians sign off on their inclusion. Participants were also required to have been “out” to one or more parents or guardians within a six month period before the beginning of the study in recognition of the fact that not all sexual and gender non-conforming youth who participate in GSA activities are ‘out’ to their parents. This measure was utilized as a step to protect youth from inadvertent or unforeseen “adverse consequences” that could emerge as a result of miscalculating the level of support and connectedness of parents or guardians after a youth requests permission to participate (see Miller et al., 2006).

The minimum age for inclusion in the study was set at 17 because the research (both legal and otherwise) suggests, on the one hand, as Lasser et al. (2003) note, that “[r]etrospective data gathered from older informants are likely to be contaminated by memory loss, memory reconstruction, and selective recall (p. 235)” and on the other end of the continuum, there may be parental or school administrative concerns regarding the use of younger students. The age limit was intended to minimize any resistance; however, I am aware of both the paucity of research with middle school students as well as the barriers to accessing a broader segment of the cohort of youth who may identify as a sexual or gender minority who need to be discrete and strategic with regards to their level of self-disclosure. The scope of this study was to engage in exploration of this important question with youth in a manner that permits my access to the participants while also being mindful of their safety.

After going through the Syracuse University’s IRB process, I contacted 17 Superintendents to ask for their permission to make contact with the GSA and McKinney Vento Act Liaisons as well as the Dignity for All Students Act Coordinator to request assistance with

the recruitment of students who meet the inclusion criteria for this study. The GSA adult liaison were in the best position to assist me with making contact with students who participate in GSA related activities; however, not all of the students who met the criteria for inclusion in this study were “out” at school and some did not participate in the GSA functions. So in addition to utilizing the GSA liaisons, I also asked for permission to make contact with and request support with recruiting from the school-based homeless liaisons. Every school has a McKinney Vento Act Liaison in an effort to assist homeless youth with access to education. Given what we know about homeless youth, access to school, and impression management strategies that sexual minority youth may utilize (Quintana et al., 2010; Singh, 2013), even in settings that have a GSA (McGuire et al., 2010; Toomey et al., 2012), this additional step was taken to broaden my access to sexual and gender minority youth who may be enrolled in school but may not have participated in the GSA. Lastly, I asked the district superintendent for permission to make contact with the Dignity for All Students Act Coordinators in an effort to, again, enhance my access to youth who may be in school who may not be homeless (or connected to the McKinney Vento Act Liaison) or in the GSA in an attempt to broaden the pool of eligible candidates for participation.

I was granted permission to recruit students from one of the 17 school districts, so all four of the informants were referrals from either the GSA mentor or the counseling staff within the school. Aliases were used when transcribing the interviews and in the final write up in an effort to protect the confidentiality of all of the informants in this study. Confidentiality was also extended to the narratives that the youth share. Thus, parental consent was obtained as a matter of law and in keeping with requirements of the IRB; however, assent/consent forms made it clear that the narratives, themselves, would not be shared with parents or guardians in an effort to

protect the participants and as a measure to ensure that the informants felt comfortable sharing information that might otherwise place them at risk.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected via qualitative interviews which were conducted during an open study hall period or after school provided parental and administrative permission to do so had been granted prior to the time of the interview. The interviews were conducted over a span of three meetings which ranged in length from 45 to 90 minutes. Appendix v. details the basic demographic information that was collected in order to screen the informants ahead of the interviews.

Data Analysis

I utilized Saldana's (2010), Smith et al's, (2007) and Smith et al's (2009) recommendations for processing the codes that appear to have emerged in the data. According to Saldana (2010), the coding occurs in at least two cycles and involves a "progressive refinement of codes" (p. 45). As Saldana (2010, p. 46) notes, the first stage is fairly simple and may include the integration of one or more of the methods most appropriate for the type study being completed. He lists the methods as grammatical (descriptive/attributive & magnitude of data), elemental (structural and in vivo coding), affective, literary, and language (inter & intrapersonal and literary), exploratory (excerpts/clusters of data), procedural (standardized/protocol coding), and theming the data (outcome of coding).

Although the use of electronic coding tools (i.e. ATLAS, CAQDAS, MAXDA, or NVivo) were explored as the data set grew, I took the advice of Saldana (2010) by making use of printouts of the transcripts to document the codes in the margins in an effort to become more familiar with the data. Later, the data were primarily maintained in an electronic format in order

to more closely analyze, sort, perform searches, and prioritize the codes and themes. The emergent themes helped guide the development of questions that were asked in the second and third round of interviews. These questions afforded an opportunity to address any insights that occurred to the informants between interviews provided the discussions were mutually beneficial to the current investigation. Themes were aggregated in the final stage of analysis and following the example set by Guardia and Evans (2008) whose research utilized Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological theory to help uncover some of the "*Factors Influencing the Ethnic Identity Development of Latino Fraternity Members at a Hispanic Servicing Institution*", the themes were organized, structured, and presented in congruence with the Process, Person, Context, Time model.

Before I began the process of coding the transcripts, I reviewed the *Student Demographic Screening Tool* in an effort to (re)familiarize myself with the nuanced ways in which my informants internalized issues of gender identity and sexuality (descriptive and attributive method). As I transcribed each of the interviews, the first cycle also included a process in which I conducted a preliminary review of the narratives by assigning a code that best reflected the substance of the conversation. Saldana (2010) defines a code as "most often a word or a short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). According to Saldana (2010), coding is a transitional process; thus, subsequent readings of the interviews took place, and with each reading, the codes were adjusted in an effort to refine the interpretation of the data in preparation for identifying patterns that emerged with regards to the informants "activities and perceptions" (p. 15) that are "close to the participants' explicit meaning" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 83). This also included a process where I added a symbol which noted the frequency and

intensity that a statement or emotional response (magnitude method) occurred within and across the complete data set. I was looking for the number of times a particular theme emerged (either organically or as a result of directive questions) as well as the emergent reaction to the discussion. As I mapped this part of the data, I also arranged those portions of the data so that I had a visual representation of the most and least emotive responses from the informants to the code. I also noted the absence of a reaction as well as alternative views on the themes. I wanted to take an integrative approach to reviewing and presenting the range of response with specific attention given to portions of the narrative both within and across the responses that appear to support the emergent code.

As I reviewed the data set (the full transcript as well as the blocks of coded data), I also analyzed the codes through an affective methods lens. Affective methods, as Saldana (2010) notes, is a process by which researchers “investigate subjective qualities of human experience...by directly acknowledging and naming those experiences” (p. 86). Here, not only was I interested in naming the emotive response, I was also interested in “deep insight into the participants’ perspectives, worldviews, and life conditions” (p. 86). In some instances, I asked additional probing questions so that I could gain a better understanding of some of the factors that appear to have shaped my informants’ understanding of and responses to their lived experiences (values coding).

In addition to looking for the underlying values that help shape my informants’ views regarding their experiences (values coding), I also looked for a pattern that might suggest a “strong conflict[s] within, among, and between the participants” (p. 94). He versus coding process, as Saldana (2010) notes, allows the researcher to be “discerning [regarding] the conflicting power issues among constituents and stakeholders” p. 94). Although I have a cohort

of four informants who identify as a sexual or gender minority, I also needed to treat them as a heterogeneous group whose thoughts about and reflections on the material at hand are shaped by a number of factors that may be influenced by power and privilege.

I transcribed the narratives within two days of the interviews so that the informants could have an opportunity to review, comment on, and make changes to the material. I reviewed the transcripts for any gaps or material that required further exploration with a plan to develop additional questions to that were used to guide follow up interviews. The transcribed interviews were left with the secretary in a sealed envelope in the counseling department for the students to retrieve at their leisure. The informants were asked to review the transcripts and to comment on or to make changes that might clarify information gathered during the interviews. They were given two to three days to submit their adjustments so that sufficient time could be spent coding the data and generating follow up questions for the subsequent sessions.

Between the sessions, I reviewed the transcripts paying particular attention to those sections of the data set where the reactions to a concept were either less clear or failed to emerge. For example, there were two instances during the process where some of the informants talked about their thoughts regarding the term homophobia as well as the extent to which protections exist for sexual and gender minorities. However, the other two informants either did not use the word homophobia or they did not express any thoughts about protections outside of the school context. In those two instances, I asked directive questions of all of the informants so that I could gain a better understanding of this critical gap. Asking additional questions helped me to better understand how my informants made sense of these constructs and it assisted in the overall process of organizing the descriptive data (structural coding). The structural coding process served as an early indicator of the codes that appear to have been the most and least developed.

Here, I am still working with large blocks of data; however, I am coding the data in the margins of the transcripts and, where possible, the moving sections of the transcript so that I could have a visual representation of the codes in a separate document. I also conducted what Saldan (2010) called *in vivo* coding. As the blocks of data were coded and structured based on the factors noted above, an additional layer of analysis was conducted to note “action oriented verbs, evocative words, phrases, or variations” (p. 75). I then began the process of identifying themes that were most relevant within and across the data set based on the structuring of the codes, as outlined above (theming the data).

This process was repeated until all of the interviews were completed and the final comments were received before moving on to the integration of themes and the final coding stages. These measures were taken as a way of adding a layer of transparency to the overall study and afford the participants the opportunity to ensure that their voices and experiences were accurately captured in the emergent transcripts and the overall project.

Themes (i.e. patterns) that emerge in one or more of the narratives were documented and analyzed, by me, for their broader usefulness. This process included the chronological listing of themes as they emerge in each of the narratives, clustering themes that appear related partially, identifying polarizing themes by sorting these spatially, and repeating this process for each of the participant interviews (Saldana, 2010; Smith et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2009). The codes were listed in the borders of the transcripts and were color coded in accordance with its congruence with an emergent theme which will also be recorded on the transcript. Building on the ways in which I utilized Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1977 1979, 1986, 1994a, 1995; Bronfenbrenner et al., 1994; Bronfenbrenner et al., 2005; Christensen, 2010; Darling, 2007), particular attention was given to the sexual minority and gender nonnormforming

youth and their perspectives regarding their personality styles, methods for connectedness and engagement, strategies that they utilize across social context, and their level of insight regarding social and cultural values that have an impact on their experiences across milieu. Next, each of the narratives were then reviewed for emergent themes and patterns that were relevant to the larger study. This process involved the identification of similarities and differences across narratives, the interpretation of themes that were unique yet relevant to the larger study, and sorting and in some cases renaming themes that “helps the analysis to move to a more theoretical level” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 101).

A second analysis of the data was completed in an effort to ensure that themes were fully reflective of the codes that emerged in the data. A secondary analysis of the data, “if needed”, as Saldana (2010) notes, “are advanced ways of reorganizing and reanalyzing the data coded through the first cycle methods” (p. 149). A significant amount of effort was put into developing the codes and clustering the blocks of data that appear to be related to each of the themes. However, the secondary review of the data simply allowed me an opportunity to integrate the thoughts that emerged from the copious notes that I took. This period also allowed me an opportunity to reflect, more deeply, on the (informal) feedback that I received from my debriefer as well as on the guidance that I received from my committee.

During this stage of the analytic process, I also gave a considerable amount of thought to structuring the findings. To that end, the data analytic sections are presented using Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Theory ((Bronfenbrenner, 1977 1979, 1986, 1994a, 1995; Bronfenbrenner et al., 1994; Bronfenbrenner et al., 2005; Christensen, 2010; Darling, 2007) with specific attention given to the PPCT model (Christensen, 2010; Darling, 2007). I also organized and subsequently presented the data in a manner that reflected the relationships and contexts that

appear to have had the most (microsystem and mesosystem) and least (exosystem and macrosystem) influence on the identity development of my informants.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Qualitative studies are said to have achieved rigor, in part, to the extent to which the author has solidified his/her trustworthiness (Finlay, 2011, p. 263; Smith et al., 2009, p. 181). To that end, I utilized several methods with which to achieve this goal. The participants were allowed to review, comment on, and make adjustments to their interview transcripts as a formalized member check. This afforded them an opportunity to reflect on the interviews and the chance to make adjustments and additions ahead of the data analysis stage. The goal was to allow the informants a chance to clarify comments made during the interview and provide an additional opportunity to comment on any thoughts that may have shifted as a result of having a chance to reflect more deeply. Although the informants did review the transcripts, comments were mostly grammatical rather than substantive. I did, however, include direct quotes so that the reader could have direct access to some of the material that was used during the coding and analytic phases of the study. I asked the informants to keep a reflective journal so that subjective shifts in their thinking or additional material that was generated between sessions could also be analyzed for its probative value. Although they all came prepared to talk about the material that was discussed in the previous sessions, none of them submitted any journal entries. I did, however, engage in the reflective/reflexive process by writing field memos at various points throughout the process as a way to ‘bracket off’ any assumptions that may have had an impact on the lens through which the material was processed. I utilized two post graduate counselors as part of the peer review process. These peer debriefers were used as a tool with which to process my thoughts and to gain additional insights that were useful towards the goal of bracketing

assumptions and broadening the scope of the questions that were developed for use during the follow up interviews. These peers were also agreeable to processing the goals of the study, setbacks, and other aspects of relevance to this study.

Conclusion

This study includes a qualitative research design using Bioecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977 1979, 1986, 1994a, 1995; Bronfenbrenner et al., 1994; Bronfenbrenner et al., 2005; Christensen, 2010; Darling, 2007) as the framework and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Saldana, 2010; Smith et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2009) as the means with which to interpret the data. In this section, I described Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory, the Process, Person, Context, Time model and the ways that I explored each in this study. I also explained the use of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis and its confluent use with the Process, Person, Context, Time model and the steps that I plan to take to address each of those domains in this investigation.

Lastly, I provided an explanation of the research question that guides this study along with an explanation of the procedural steps that I took to recruit the informants, I provided an explanation of the age and settings from which recruitment took place, I also reviewed the steps that were taken to code and analyze the data and the methodological steps that I implemented in order to ensure my trustworthiness and credibility as a researcher.

Chapter IV Microsystem Domain

Overview

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986, 1994a, 1995; Bronfenbrenner et al., 1994b; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2005; Christensen, 2010; Darling, 2007) was utilized as a means with which to structure the interviews and as a tool with which for presenting the findings. Thus, Chapters IV, V, VI and VII include an exploration of the themes that emerged as part of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem domains with particular attention given to Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1986, 1994a, 1995) Process, Person, Context, Time (PPCT) model. This is a cross-sectional study that did not afford any significant passage of time, so no significant amount of focus will be spent addressing the Time portion of the model. All other components of the model will be examined with particular focus given to the codes and themes most relevant within and across the majority of the narratives.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979, 1986, 1994a, 1995), identity development is believed to be influenced by and reciprocally shape experiences in each of the above listed domains. Each chapter includes a discussion of the process (i.e. belief systems and experiences across relationships and contexts), an exploration of the person (idiosyncratic characteristics), and a review of the contexts (home, school, religious settings) most relevant to each of the informants as they relate to the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem domains. Although there was a vast amount of data gathered for this study, the material that was most relevant for the majority of the informants has been analyzed and presented here.

Microsystem Domain

This chapter will include a review of the micro level experiences of each of the informants who participated in this study. Here we will explore some of the nuanced

relationships that the informants have had with their families and peers, and we will discuss the extent to which their emergent sexuality or gender identity are shaped and or impacted by the interpersonal relationships or contexts in which they find themselves.

Recruitment

Seventeen superintendents were sent packages via U. S. mail that explained the purpose and goals of my research study. A week or so later, while I awaited full Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I sent an email as a follow up in order to ensure that they had received the packets. Although several schools had declined to allow their students to participate, the superintendent for the setting where the interviews were conducted granted her approval within days of my submitting a formal application.

After acquiring the approval of the superintendent for the district where the interviews were ultimately conducted, I corresponded and later met face to face with the school principal in order to clarify the purpose and goals of the study. I requested permission to make contact with the McKinney Vento Act Homelessness Liaison, the Gay Straight Alliances Coordinators, the Dignity for All Students Act Coordinators, and the school counselors as potential referral sources.

Although concerted efforts were made to recruit participants from the school's McKinney Vento Act and the Dignity for All Student's Act Liaisons, all of the students who participated in this study were referrals from one or more staff in the counseling department. Attempts to find students who had established relationships with the McKinney Vento Act and Dignity for All Students Act Liaisons resulted in no known students who met the age or identity based requirements for the study.

Generally speaking, I met with the informants once weekly over the course of a four week period for three interviews ranging from 45 to 90 minutes in length. My schedule was quite flexible, but based on the needs of the informants and with the permission of the parents and school administrators, the interviews were conducted during an open study hall period so that sufficient focus could be given to the participant's identity development and to better understand how relationships and social contexts are impacted or are shaped by their presence without having any significant impact on the learning environment. All of the interviews were conducted on school grounds in whatever office space was available at the time the meetings were scheduled (i.e. in the nurse's office or the counseling conference room) and steps were taken to safeguard the purpose of the interviews as well as the information gathered in the sessions (i.e. limiting the staff who knew the purpose or goals and the utilization of a sound muffling device). As I began the process of reviewing the parental consent forms for the students and scheduling the initial interviews in this setting, I continued to follow up on the applications that I had submitted in two other districts that had not yet made their decisions.

In preparation for what I had anticipated would be extensive amounts of travel and coordination, I transcribed and began the process of coding the data for the four students that I had recruited within a day of interviewing each of them. I used the transcripts to generate clarifying questions which helped to guide the subsequent interviews. I began each interview session by giving the informants an opportunity to discuss any thoughts they had about the previous interviews. They were afforded an opportunity to take the transcripts home, so that they could review the text to see if there were things that they wanted to amend, adjust, clarify, or expand upon.

Semi-structured interviews were used to get a better sense of the nuanced ways in which the informants came to understand their gender identity and their sexuality. The participants were asked to describe the process of disclosing their sexuality or gender variance to others; they were asked to discuss any experiences of marginalization from or sense of continued connectedness to their families peers and communities; and they were asked to discuss community and societal level forms of oppression and the impacts that each may have had on their own identity development. The questions that were used to guide the semi-structured interviews and the informants were asked to:

1. Characterize and explore some of the ways that they viewed themselves
2. Define and describe their sexuality and gender identity
3. Discuss the coming out process
4. Explore the relationships and contexts they spend the vast majority of their time
5. Additional questions that helped to guide the initial interviews are outlined in the Initial Interview Schedule with Participants (Appendix IV).

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

I utilized Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory (1977, 1979, 1986, 1994a, 1995) as a way to structure the interviews and as a way of learning more about the person (informants), processes, and relationships that may play a role in identity development of those who participated in this study. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Finlay, 2011; Smith et al., 2009), then, was used as a way to better understand how the informants made sense of their experiences. Semi-structured interviews were used as a means with which to gain access to the lived experiences of the informants. I prepared a few questions which served as a guide for the beginning of the sessions but then the follow up questions followed the natural flow of the

conversation. Although I was disappointed that I was not afforded an opportunity to recruit students from other districts, I was quite pleased that the small sample size, in keeping with an IPA (Smith et al., 2009) approach, allowed me a chance to elicit a rich amount of data.

Following the recommendations offered by Smith et al. (2009), the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. I offered the participants an opportunity to review the transcripts, so that they could have a chance to see the document that would be used during the interpretive process. They were given the chance to amend or adjust any portions of the transcript they wanted if doing so would more accurately reflect their thoughts. We agreed upon an alias used both on the transcript and as well in the write up in an effort to ensure their confidentiality. Although none of the participants took me up on the offer, they were asked to journal about their experiences with particular attention given to their level of comfort with participating in the research. I reserved a block of time in the beginning and at the end of each session so that we had an opportunity to process the level of comfort in the room and any reflections that the informants had about their experience. Although most of the informants expressed some reservation about participating, most expressed some level of comfort in the early stages of the interview process. The informants were concerned with some of the questions that I might ask and the meaning that I might make of the experiences they shared. Sexual and gender minorities are often quite strategic regarding the disclosure of their identities (Orne, 2011) so the discussions started with Socratic questions designed to elicit information about how the informants perceived themselves. The intensity and complexity of the questions shifted as the sessions progressed. I often offered my interpretation of what I had heard so that the informant had an opportunity, during the session, to clarify things in a way that helped me to better understand the descriptive accounts of their lived experiences. I also used empathy as a

means with which to engender a sense that I understood the story asking probing questions where necessary to ensure I fully understood the narratives.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, as Finlay (2011) notes, is “iterative, inductive, fluid, and emergent (p. 142).” However, I implemented a few of the suggestions that are consistent with an IPA approach to research. First, I wrote brief memo entries before and after each session with my informants. These entries served as an entryway into the thoughts that shaped the impressions and assumptions that I may have had as a result of prior knowledge and the extensive review of research on the subject matter under review. In an effort to bracket off any assumptions that may have an impact on my work, I had informal conversations with close colleagues and peers about my theoretical approach to the research, and I engaged in extensive discussions about my thoughts about and reactions to my informants. These informal discussions allowed for a safe space with which to process alternative ways of viewing the phenomenon under investigation as well as my overall reactions.

I spent several hours transcribing the interviews verbatim, so that I could get a true sense of some of the nuances in the discussions as well as relational dynamics that might have been worthy of further exploration. I looked for connections within and across the narratives developing questions for the follow up sessions that addressed emergent themes. I then looked for patterns across the narratives, and I asked questions that helped to clarify areas of similarities and differences.

Participant Profiles

Four informants were recruited from a high school located in Central New York. The name of the school is being withheld because the purpose of the study was not necessarily about the setting itself even though this context was the site selected to gain access to the informants.

All of the informants were also given aliases as an additional safeguard for protecting their identities and the information that was processed as part of this study. The data that will be presented in this section was drawn from the demographic forms that the participants completed as part of the recruitment process.

David is an 18 year old Caucasian gender conforming male who identifies as gay. He identifies as deeply religious and reports having had positive experiences once he strategically disclosed his sexual orientation to his family and peers. His coming out experience appears to rest on the view that tolerance of sexual and gender minorities will occur only to the extent that stereotypes about this group are challenged and disrupted. He holds some interesting views about tolerance and we discussed his thoughts about and his reactions towards gender nonconformity and his perception that this perpetuates negative reactions to gender and sexual minorities. David is noted to have made the disclosure regarding his sexual identity to his mom, dad, sister, friends, peers in school, teachers, school counselors, and his religious leaders. He expressed an interest in dating/non-sexual intimacy with a male but also indicated that while he had not yet had any experiences of (sexual) intimacy, he expressed an interest in (sexual) intimacy with another male. He holds a leadership position in the school-based Gay Straight Alliance and appears to enjoy his role. In response to the questions on the demographic form that asked if his school had a policy that addressed harassment based on one's sexual identity of gender presentation David indicated that he was not sure.

Noel is an 18 year old Caucasian gender conforming female who identifies as pansexual. She had disclosed her sexual identity to her mom, dad, extended family, neighbors, friends, peers in school, teachers, and school counselors. She expressed an interest in dating/non-sexual intimacy and indicated that gender was not important. She has a strong connection to her family

but went through a period where she engaged in self-injurious behavior in an effort to deal with her “demons.” We problematized the connection between sexual identity and self-harm and learn that her internalization of religious ideology contributed to her behavior. We also learn that disclosure to her family and peers appears to have strengthened her sense of connectedness to them, her peers, and her community and contributed to the discontinuation of harmful behavior. Noel was aware of the existence of the Gay Straight Alliance. She also indicated that the school has a policy which addresses harassment that is based on sexual identity or one’s gender presentation.

Sarah is a 17 year old Caucasian gender conforming female who identifies as lesbian. Her peers and family had long assumed that she was a lesbian but it was not until she was much older that she finally disclosed her sexuality. When she initiated the discussion, her family and peers seemed relieved to finally have the conversation as they had all assumed that Sarah was a lesbian based on her gender performance and her interests. She recounts experiences where she was strategic in her disclosures regarding her sexuality, in part, because she did not quite understand that part of her identity development. With age and experience, she recalls being less concerned about the reactions that others might have about her identity allowing her space to be more authentic in her expression and navigation of her sexuality. Sarah indicated that she has made the disclosure regarding her sexual identity to her parents, siblings, extended family, neighbors, friends, peers in school, teachers, and school counselors. She expressed an interest in dating/non-sexual intimacy with another female. Sarah was aware of the Gay Straight Alliance. She also indicated that she was “pretty sure” that her school has a policy which addresses harassment that is based on one’s sexual identity or one’s gender performance.

D is a 17 year old Caucasian non-gender conforming female who identifies as lesbian and is currently exploring her transgender identity. Her coming out experience included face to face disclosures with family, a performative expression via her style of dress, and an exploration of her identity via social media websites. D has made the disclosure regarding her sexual (and to a limited degree her transgender) identity to her parents, siblings, extended family, friends, and school counselors. Although she has found a great deal of acceptance and support for her sexuality, her family and peers are less understanding of her transgender identity. Although D identifies herself as a lesbian, she also uses another name in her day to day life that reflects her integration of and resistance towards the dominant constructions of gender. She had a really interesting name and an even more intriguing story of how she selected it and as much as I wanted to utilize that name here I opted against using it to protect her identity. D is the first initial of another name that she discussed having used in the past to connect with peers in social media site so I used it here to honor her emergent, but not fully actualized transgender identity. Social media sites like Facebook provide a space within which D can explore her transgender identity without the judgement she often experiences in her relationships and in some contexts. She is dating and indicated that she received a tremendous amount of support for both her gender and sexual identities in that relationship. D was intimately aware of the existence of the Gay Straight Alliance within her school. She did, however, indicate that was not sure if her school had a policy that addressed harassment that was based on sexual identity or one's gender presentation. As a researcher, I struggled with which pronoun I should use that would honor D's lived experiences. Having consulting with peers and reviewing the student demographic form that was submitted as part of the recruitment process, I feel that my use of the name D along with the pronoun "she" honors her beautifully articulated yet complicated narrative.

Informants

Process Domain: Background. David is an 18 year old gender conforming Caucasian male who identifies as gay. He is quite religious and expressed a strong identification with his faith and a sense of connectedness to the members of his church. He lives with his sister, mother, and father all of whom he appears to be quite close. He's an active member in the Gay Straight Alliance in school and has recently taken on a leadership role within the school-based club. He described himself as a friendly, outgoing, guardian like teddy bear.

Person: Introspection. He recalls becoming aware of his emergent sexual identity around the eighth grade. When his fellow classmates were discussing their interest in girls, he remembered wondering why he did not share their interests. David intimated that he "did not like any girls" and that the "thoughts (about sexuality) just started going and it scared me at first so I, you know, put that thought away. I did not want to think about it probably until about 10th grade."

Initially, he treated these thoughts and feelings as transitory. He did not tell anyone, in part, out of fears related to things that he had heard about sexual minorities. As he became aware of his sexuality and the possibility that he could be gay, he recalled being sensitive to name calling during this timeframe. He had been the target of bullying in the early part of elementary school and throughout much of his middle school as a result of his weight and a speech impediment. He had vivid memories about and expressed particular concern that the bullying would escalate so he isolated himself, in part, as a way to disrupt the patter of marginalization that he'd experienced. He described this period of his life as follows:

A lot of the weight and speech impediment bullying occurred in late elementary early middle school. I sort of went through a period of recession. I didn't want to talk to

anyone. I just was just by myself. At that period in time I didn't get the bullying directed towards me, but I did know that people talked about me because I would hear rumors about myself and stuff like that go through the school. It was actually when I came out to my friends that I sort of gained this confidence to go talk to people and I think it sort of let more stories get out. He does this and he does this. I think that just building that confidence and having that willingness to go out and talk to people sort of forced those bad rumors and the bullying out of my life.

Recession, for David, meant that he retreated from interpersonal interactions with peers in an attempt to avoid the escalation of harassment on the basis of an identity that had not yet been fully processed. This retreat from the world also involved a withdrawal, of sorts, from his family as he spent months, weeks, years processing his new identity at times fearing that if it turned out that he was, in fact, gay that his family and close relationships might be negatively impacted if he disclosed.

Context Domain: Self-Disclosure. David first disclosed his sexual identity to a peer in high school. He'd known his classmate since middle school but felt closer to him in the 10th grade as a result of having classes together and through shared time in after school activities like the drama club. Although David is quite close to his parents and to the members of his church, he decided that telling his friend would be an easy way to "test" the level of acceptance he might expect if he were to tell his family and members of his church. This particular peer was important not only because of the time that they had spent together over the years; he was also important because the peer was quite social and active in a number of communities outside of the drama club. In other words, this peer was quite social in a number of other circles, clubs, and communities. The outcome of the discussion with the peer would guide how David would

ultimately approach the process of self-disclosure. To his surprise, his peer was receptive to the conversation about accepting of his sexuality. When describing the discussion that David had had with his peer regarding his sexual identity he stated:

What it was was- umm- the first friend that I told we were actually in the middle of our winter musical and umm we were in the cosmetology department doing hair and make-up and stuff and umm it was sort of a test really, because I wanted to see how people would react. So I told him that I was gay and he accepted it openly. So it was from then on I went and told my parents and then I went and told some other friends and then....

Orne (2011) described coming out as an ongoing process of relational and context specific disclosures. As Orne (2011, p. 9) notes, this could include the integration of “practices, tools, and strategies on a daily basis to manage not only who knows, but how and why others learn it.” In this instance, David was aware of and had concerns regarding his sexuality long before he told his peer. His strategy was to disclose to a peer with whom he had developed a sense of closeness so that he could, then, make additional disclosures in other relationships and contexts.

After having the discussion with his peer, he then found the courage to tell his family. Because he was closest to his mother, he decided that he would tell her first before telling the other members of his family. Rather than having a face to face discussion with her about it, he wrote a letter which he then left on his mother’s bed. He wanted a way to have the discussion that allowed both parties enough time and space to process the information before talking through it. Later that night, his mother, having read the letter, found him in his room and said the words he needed to hear. By his account, she “did the whole well you know- classic mom- I’ll accept you for what you are blah blah blah and we left it at that.” Now that the conversation with his mother was out of the way, he was still processing how he was going to go about telling

his sister; however, he appeared more nervous about telling his dad. He utilized his mom, much the same way that he had with his friend from high school, as a way to test how others might react to his self-disclosure. Not only had she been accepting of his identity she was quite helpful in broaching this discussion with his father. He appeared relieved that he had made the disclosure and that doing so had not led to a rupture in his relationship with his mom. I also got the sense that he was nervous about talking to his father about his sexual identity. Having his mother present appears to have helped him to initiate the conversation with his father while also serving as a buffer for how her sister and father ultimately reacted to the news. This conversation was uncomfortable, in part, because by making this disclosure David was disrupting notions of compulsory heterosexuality.

According to Adrienne Rich (2003), compulsory heterosexuality performs a systematic erasure of the possibility that alternative expressions of sexuality exist. In many instances, the compulsory belief in essentialist heterosexuality is so pervasive that it often goes unquestioned (Berlant et al., 1998; Chevrette, 2013; Rich, 2004). Children, like David, may need to socially manage their identities, alone, while they first come to better understand their feelings and interests and then plan how to go about addressing them more globally (Hong et al., 2011; Orne, 2011). David took the first step towards the goal of coming out and it appears that the approach he took was slow and progressive.

Consistent with Orne's (2011) framing of the coming out experience, David wrote the letter as a means of creating physical and emotional distance that allowed he and his mother time to process the disclosure. He appears to have managed the self-disclosure by selecting a space and a time when there was little if any risk that other members of the family would find out before he was ready. I got the sense that his father may have been away on travel, and while he

was close to his sister, he was not quite ready to make a broader disclosure choosing instead to tell his mother due to their close relationship and the hope that the experience with his close peer would be replicated in the reaction that his mom would have after reading the note.

Two months after leaving the letter and then having the conversation about his sexuality with his mom, she then helped him to make the disclosure to his father and sister. While the trio was out for dinner, David's father asked him when he was "going to get a girlfriend." After a brief pause and a slight glance at his mother for support, he told his dad that he was gay. His father and sister are both quite loving and accepting of his identity; however, he described that evening as follows:

I know it was probably hard for my dad to hear. Umm my sister was ecstatic about it.

She was like I'm so proud of you. You know. She sort of overheard it. Sort of. Umm and well he doesn't really talk about it. Like he knows and he accepts it but he doesn't talk about at all.

Although his dad was quiet during the dinner and while he still has periods where he is silent on the issue of sexuality, he has, in David's view, shown tremendous growth on the issue. David described one such moment while the two were out for a jog where his dad made a joke that acknowledged his awareness of his sexuality and the difficulty they both have had coming to terms with navigating their relationship since the disclosure. I got the sense that David had feared that his dad would treat him differently so when I asked him to describe his expectations and how he and his father navigate their connectedness David stated that:

I did actually. I did think the worst. I thought that he would start treating me poorly that he would- you know- start saying how you know I'm a disgrace to the family or something like that. Which is why I was sort of relieved that he was so quiet umm and

that was just back then. Nowadays he actually more open about it. Every now and then we'll joke about it. He's become very accepting about it. Because we went to New York City a while ago and we were walking through a park and well just this couple passed by. You know a guy and a girl jogging by or something and and he'll be like hey David and then he'll be like ohhhh wait (laugh) and then start laughing and I'm like dad that's not funny. Stop (laughs). He's he's become more open about it. That goofy father over it.

I had a few interpretations of what this quote represented so I asked if this were a reflection of his father's attempts to process and understand the news while maintaining their relationship and David responded by saying:

Yeah, it depends. Sort of. It was that idea that at first he was sort of like okay what is he talking about (talking about the disclosure of his sexual identity and his interpretation of his father's silence)? Why is he saying this? I'm not really sure how to feel about this. I think that is why he was so quiet at first. I don't think that he knew how to react at first. Then he just sort of had this whole long period of having time to think about like you know- he hasn't changed. He's still my son. I think that's sort of what my parents were afraid of. That I would become that extremely flamboyant gay that would be like a crossdresser and when they figured out that I wasn't- I'm just me- they just sort of became more open to it.

David is an active member of his church. He has formed a close relationship with a religious education teacher in the church and because he considers her a "second mom", he felt compelled to disclose his sexuality to her as well. He acknowledged that:

that was probably one of the hardest [disclosures]. That was as hard as telling my parents. I mean, telling your parents is the hardest things you can do. But when you go tell the church it's such a more sensitive subject to them.

David had reservations about telling the members of his church based, in part, on his understanding of how religious ideology, more broadly, has had an impact on the level of acceptance gender and sexual minorities often experience in religious settings. According to Norton et al. (2013), heterosexuals who hold fundamentalist beliefs as well as the frequency with which one attends church are among some of the factors that have been observed to have an impact on and an association with the levels of intolerance shown sexual and gender minorities. While David had never experienced his church as intolerant of gender and sexual minorities, he feared that telling the members of his faith based community might negatively impact the relationship that he had long come to cherish. When describing that tension, David was noted to have said that he:

wanted to tell her so that I could get her help if I needed it. And when I told her she reacted in a way that surprised me because she didn't react with like disgust. She reacted with a (umm) like you know you are who you are and you can't change it and I would love to help you if you need it. So. That sort of took me by surprised. It sort of made me realize that the church is not what it was before. It's sort of like me- the rumors went around but it's not it's not true. People just thought the worst.

After I analyzed the transcripts, one of the questions that I asked in the second interview was related to the concerns that David had expressed in the quote above regarding rumors in the church. He responded to that questions as follows:

Umm, I guess this is sort of needs clarifying. A lot of the rumors were around the school. They weren't necessarily around the church. Um, the church was something that I decided to do on my own. Umm, the truth is that it's kind of hard to make rumors about me. Umm, (pause) especially regarding the whole gay thing because I don't come off as gay. I come off as extremely straight I guess you could say. You know, I don't adhere to any of those stereotypes that people automatically assume. And a lot of the rumors weren't necessarily about me being gay. They were just you know other rumors. You know. There was one rumor that people spread around saying that I cut myself because you know I was always very distant from people. I don't. I showed people my wrists. I mean I don't cut myself at all. I've never hurt myself. Ever! And It's just- It's just one of those things that as soon as I came out and when I could talk to people you know I was able to get rid of those rumors. Umm, you know. Show people the truth.

Like the process he took in terms of telling the peer in the drama club and the approach that he took by telling his mother, David felt like disclosing to the religious education teacher was a litmus test of sorts. Telling her served as a measure of the level of acceptance he would experience amongst his community of religious peers. To his surprise she was accepting of his disclosure and because of that he felt free to be more open and honest with the members of his congregations. As a result, he reportedly feels much closer to the members of his church because they continue to embrace him as a fully respected member of the faith community. David noted that he was:

sort of expecting (umm) I don't know if I was expecting her to flip out and go all you're gonna go to hell. But I wasn't expecting her to be as open about it. I (pause) she was- I mean I always thought that she would be relatively accepting of it but I did also expect

her to be closed off to it to the point where she didn't want to talk about it. She just sort of would want to know about it and that's it.

Dating. While David is not exactly dating at this time, he did indicate that he has an interest in a guy that he was set up with by a close friend and the two have been communicating with one another ever since. According to David, when he told his mother she was happy for him but cautioned him to be safe. While his friends were “ecstatic” about it, he delayed telling his father, so his mom facilitated that discussion in an effort to ensure there was no rupture in their relationship as a result of the new disclosure. David remarked:

I mean obviously it goes with that idea that I don't think that he knew how to react.

Cause obviously this is new for him. Yeah I understand that this is hard for him. This is not what- I mean I can't just- this probably is not what he expected or wanted this is not what he thought was going to happen. I mean all of this. So to just take this entire idea of me and just flip it upside down on his head is probably frustrating for him.

Once again, David appeared to be strategic about another important part of his identity development by managing the disclosure of his interest in dating. As he navigates the coming out process, he appears to have a sense of empathy towards his father by drawing parallels to his own experience of coming to terms with the fact that he may be gay. Although discussions about his sexuality or issues of intimacy or dating are rare, the two appear to be navigating through this new terrain, slowly and collaboratively.

Noel

Process Domain: Background. Noel is an 18 year old gender normative Caucasian female who identifies as pansexual. She described herself as “a strong independent high school

student trying to work through her life.” She has a total of six siblings four of whom are from a relationship between her (biological) mom and her (step) dad and the remaining two are from a relationship between her (biological) father and his wife. During her middle school years she lived with her family in a small town several miles outside of the city in which she lives currently. Although she has lived in her current location for a number of years in addition to establishing connections with peers in her current home town, she has maintained connections with peers from the town that she grew up in all those years ago. When asked to describe how she integrates her sense of being strong and independent, she remarked that she had “gone through a lot. Not even just the whole coming out and being who I am. I have gone through some hard things that have made me stronger.” In this extended quote, Noel described some of her losses in greater detail:

Before I moved into this district I lived in a very small town right outside of [here]. I went to school and had tons of friends and right before I moved up here I had asked one of my closest friends who I had known since kindergarten how she would feel if I had told her that I liked girls and I wasn’t even 100% if I did or if I didn’t. I was just curious on how she (pause) on her outlook on it. She freaked out and basically said that anybody that liked the same gender whether it was just for sexual purposes or actually having feelings for somebody was going to be sent to hell and that they were a disgrace to the human (pause) population and that they were disgusting so I basically didn’t talk about it ever again. Then when I moved up here me and her still talked a little but we didn’t talk as much and we just kind of drifted apart due to the distance. But then when a few days before I came out I messaged her and I told her how I had felt and how I thought that I was into girls and how I was ready to be who I am and wasn’t going to allow her or

anyone else tell me that I wasn't going to be accepted for who I am and she freaked out and hasn't talked to me since. So I lost her. Around the same time of me coming out my uncle and my mom had gotten into a huge fight and it caused me to stop talking to him because I felt like the fight was because of me because my mom accepted me right away. He was kind of iffy on it and didn't exactly accept me and he wasn't straight forward with me. So when they started fighting, I thought everything was because I caused friction between them and then we just stopped talking. It wasn't until like last week that me and him talked again. It's still kind of rocky between us but it's not as bad as what had been.

Although some of the ruptures, like the one with the peer whom Noel described above, have been irrevocably severed, others, like the connection she had had with her uncle, have been repaired as a result of work and the passage of time.

Person Domain: Introspection. As a young child, Noel appears to have enjoyed activities that are deemed atypical for young girls. She enjoyed sports and rough and tumble play and recounts having had difficulty making friends with other girls. By all accounts, she was "one of the guys." While some of her peers in the 7th grade were dating and expressing interests in boys, Noel was quite uncertain about her sexuality. For her, the idea of dating was not on her radar. She stated that she:

kind of was always questioning whether or not I was going to be that I'm a girl who likes boys or a girl who likes girls or a girl that doesn't care because I did not- I did not really think about anything until like 7th grade.

As she contemplated her sexuality further, she asked a peer from the 7th grade whom she had known since kindergarten how she would react if she found out that she had a friend who liked

someone of the same sex (gender). This peer, whose father was a priest, and who held deeply conservative values “freaked out”

Based on the discussion that she had with her childhood friend it would be another several months before she would make another disclosure. Noel described the process of making the initial disclosure to her peer as follows:

So I told her about that and then we didn't talk from the middle of 7th grade until the middle of 8th grade. Then 8th grade was when I told her that I was questioning (my sexuality) and I wasn't sure and we didn't talk for a long time after that. My sophomore year was when I told her that she wasn't going to be able to judge me- you can't tell me who I am where I am going or anything like that and she hasn't talked to me since then. So...

Noel admits that approaching the conversation with the peer in this way offered her an opportunity to test things out:

I wanted to know if she was going to be the type of person to push me away or if she was going to be the type of person to not care and just be like oh you're just a person. I already know who you are and I know what you're capable of and I am okay with that. Or if she was just going to be the that's fine just don't blah blah blah.

Like David, Noel was curious how others would respond. Although she was quite close to her mom and other members of her family, she decided to tell the peer first, in light of her peer's religious conservative values, out of concern that if she told her family the word would spread rather quickly. Noel was concerned that if she had told a family member and things went wrong, it would have a domino effect with the potential to draw her closer to her family or worst; she feared that her close-knit relationships would be irrevocably severed once she disclosed her

sexuality. So telling the peer was a way for her to selectively manage her self-disclosures in ways that minimized ruptures in relationships. Her strategy was also noteworthy because she did not come right out and make the self-disclosure to the peer. Instead, she asked her friend a global question about how she would react if she knew she had a friend who was a gender or sexual minority. Like the letter that David wrote to his mother, Noel's strategic disclosure afforded some emotional distance just in case her peer responded in a way that reified the type of reaction that she had come to expect based on other conversations on related subject matter.

Noel's middle school years appear to have been a particularly trying period due, in part, to the realization that this peer whom she had known since kindergarten was not as open and accepting as she would have liked. It was also challenging because of her relationship with her father and the transition to a new city once her parents separated. Like her peer from kindergarten, her father was also religiously oriented, and while Noel would often go to church with him during her visits to see him she found that he continued to be verbally and emotionally abusive towards her. She described that period of her life as follows:

He (her father) was physically and emotionally abusive. So when he would feel angry he'd get aggressive and he'd be mad and he never hit me or physically hurt me but he would make me think that he would. So it got to the point where I didn't want to hang around my father anymore. But in the process of me going from my parents living together to not wanting to hang out with him again, a lot had happened and he caused me to feel that I wasn't good enough not only for God and his demons but I wasn't good enough for my family and that caused all of them to have demons because of mine. And I was not okay with being who I was because he made me out to be like a monster. It eventually led to me have an eating disorder and depression and anxiety. I still don't

have the best relationship with him (her father). It's not as bad as it was but it's not as good as it could be either... He went to church all the time and he was trying to make himself clean and God love him again and he would drag me and my brother to church with him every other Sunday that we went to his house. Me and my brother weren't really comfortable there but we would go. But we were never really comfortable in the church because my dad's beliefs and how he was kind of counteracted itself. So we were confused with him along with being confused with the fact that we don't actually believe- we don't know what to believe yet. So we were in that stage of I don't know what you're talking about but I've heard this kind of thing before. So (pause), our relationship got rocky because we thought he was kind of a hypocrite but we were trying to believe in what he was believing to make our relationship less rocky.

She remembers going through a period where she believed, based on her internalization of the religious ideology she had become accustomed to hearing when visiting both her dad and her young peer, that she was possessed by a demon and she recalled doing things, that she now regrets in an effort to exorcise them. She said that she "started talking to older people. I self-harmed for a long time. I did stupid things. I got in trouble in school a lot. I (pause) talked bad to people. I was a very bad kid." All of these were examples of her attempts to rid herself of the demons so that she could be viewed as someone who was acceptable in the eyes of her friends, family, and God. In her mind, she appears to have rationalized that it was better to self-harm or to be viewed as rebellious rather than be something other than heterosexual.

At some point during the early stages of her mother's pregnancy with one of her younger brothers, her mom acknowledged that she had known that Noel was self-harming. Tearfully, her mom had also said that it pained her to see Noel fighting and doing all of the things that she

described above. Her mother expressed an interest in getting Noel the help that she needed to change. Initially, Noel was angry that her mother felt compelled to take away the things that brought her a sense of comfort, but over time, she came to realize that her mom truly loved her and was looking out for her best interest. Noel was in the delivery room the day that her mom gave birth, and while holding her brother in her arms and viewing the scars from her attempts at self-harm, she recalls breaking down in tears. She shared:

[I] made him a promise when he was born that I would not do that anymore for his sake because I did not want him to see me dragging out my demons in a stupid way and hurting myself like that for something that was not even (pause) bad enough to consider hurting myself.

In her freshman year, around the same time that her youngest brother was born, Noel took an elective class in world religions. She recalls feeling conflicted about taking the class. Although her peers had shared positive experiences having completed the course, she was hesitant to take it out of fear that the instructor would reify some of the problematic messages that she had internalized regarding her self-worth. She credits this class with helping her to disrupt some of the things that she had once taken as truth. Instead she:

kind of connected to a little bit of everything in each religion so I don't necessarily believe that there is one person controlling everybody and that he's going to judge you and send you to hell. I kind of believe that you have to live life to the fullest and if you feel like you have done the right thing then you go to heaven. And if you feel like you have done the wrong thing then the guilty conscious will be the thing that sends you to hell. So I kind of don't really set in a religion thing. I kind of believe in a little of everything. So. I just got to the point where I was comfortable with the bits of pieces of

everything that I took from the things that I had learned rather than having one person target me and tell me what I had to be and what I had to do.

Context Domain: Self-disclosure. Several months after the conversation Noel had with her childhood friend, she finally disclosed her fluctuating sexuality, to one of her cousins. She was not quite certain about her sexuality, but she wanted to be able to explore this with someone else. She considered her cousin to be more like a sister or a friend and had the utmost confidence that she would not lose that connection. Once her cousin told her that she had had a friend who came out to her as gay and that she remained close to and respectful of the friend, Noel felt comfortable enough to have a quid pro quo discussion about her own sexuality. Instead of presenting the idea as something more global like she had with her young peer, Noel remembers telling her cousin that she had feelings for girls and the conversation allowed her a safe space with which to process her feelings in greater detail. Although Noel's cousin encouraged her to have a similar conversation with her mom, it would be several more years until her sophomore year in high school before that discussion would actually take place.

Noel's peers eventually learned about her sexuality when the young woman whom she was dating informed peers in school that they were together. Until this point, the two had not really given a title to their relationship, but once her friend told others that they were together, Noel just went with it. By her account, it felt good to have her relationship recognized and respected by others. She was already out to most of her family at this point so this seemed the next progression in their relationship. When people ask her about her sexuality, she explains that she is pansexual and she discussed that part of her identity as follows:

When I first started thinking about what my sexual orientation was I was extremely confused. Cause I did not know if (shifted thought)- what things were. I did not know

that there [were] things besides being straight, lesbian, gay, or bi or anything else. So I did not feel like putting me in bi was good enough for me. I felt like it was enclosing on how I really was and it did not give me enough credit for how I felt I was as a person. So I kind of did a little research on more sexual orientations and it kind of opened up to many different ones. And pan just kind of popped out because it was based on personality and how you treat that person rather than them being attracted to how you look or them liking you because of your outside appearance rather than them not caring how you look or who you appear to be.

Noel's identity development and her desire to resist the essentialization of her experience with labels are consistent with emergent findings in the social science literature (Carragher, 2002; Eleze, 2005). According to Elze (2005) sexual and gender minorities often eschew "labels such as 'gay,' 'lesbian,' and 'bisexual,' preferring to identify themselves as 'queer' or rejecting labels altogether" (p. 74). Having felt that the above listed labels failed to fully capture her way of viewing her sexual and gender identity she did a little research and decided that the term pansexual more accurately reflected her view of herself.

Although Noel described experiences of being harassed based on her gender performance and behavior (hanging out with male peers, engagement and interests in non-gender normative activities), she has not had many experiences where she was marginalized as a result of her sexuality. She appeared to be disappointed that the relationship that she had long counted on with the peer who she had known since kindergarten was terminated. However, she presented the termination of that relationship as empowering. Noel no longer wanted to maintain connections with peers whose love was conditional on her being heterosexual. While that

friendship was painful for her the severance of her connection with one of her uncles was disappointing to her.

[It] took me a long time to be comfortable enough to not care what they (people in general particularly those who had judged her in the past) thought about me and to be open not only with myself but with everybody else. I actually told my cousin before I had told anybody else and I was like I don't feel normal I don't feel like how my friends are explaining their relationships. I don't- I don't feel like that. She asked me if I had ever had a boyfriend or girlfriend and I said no and she asked if I had ever wanted one and I told her that I had talked to people but I never done more than saying that I liked somebody. She asked me if I had ever talked to a female and I said no and she asked if I would ever do that and I said I'm not sure. I had never thought about it. I told her my 8th grade year about all of that and we talked about it from 8th grade until I finally came out to my mom (in her sophomore year). When I did (come out to her mom), she (her cousin) told me that it was probably the best thing that I could ever do for myself because I was finally able to be true to myself and to the people around me and I no longer had to hide and if I did decide to be with a girl I didn't have to hide anything and I was basically was completely okay with it.

When Noel's mother professed her continued love and adoration on Facebook following the disclosure of her sexuality, most of her family and friends were supportive; however, one of Noel's uncles appeared less tolerant of the idea and his disposition contributed to a rupture in several relationships. The rupture occurred several years ago; however, she and her uncle appear to have begun the process of repairing their relationship two weeks before this interview took

place. Noel appears hopeful that the relationship will be as close as it had been before she made the disclosure.

Dating. Around the time when Noel had asked the peer that she had known since kindergarten how she would react if she had learned that she had had a friend who developed an interest in someone of the same sex, the two also had a conversation about heterosexual relationships. Her friend asked if Noel had ever dated, and after learning that she had not, she set her up with a male peer whom she thought might hold her interest. To her peer's surprise, Noel went out on a date and soon after the pair called themselves boyfriend and girlfriend. It was 7th grade, so the pair did age appropriate things like hanging out at each other's homes and they went out all the time. Although they called each other's mothers "mom" and while they spent countless hours chatting, holding hands, and hanging out together, they never said I love you nor was there any true desire for the types of intimacy that her peers had talked about when describing their relationships. Of course Noel's peers were a year or so older than she was at the time but she remembers feeling something was missing. She remembered feeling:

extremely confused because all of my friends were kissing in the hallway and going to the movies and having their parents drop them off here and I'm literally talking to this kid from the time I woke up til the time I went to bed but we did nothing but hold hands and that was only in school from my class to his class. And I was completely ok with that. I was not expecting anything else. But all of them were like have you kissed yet? Have you done this yet? Have you done that? And I would be like- wait- what?

When this relationship ended Noel dated a few other boys; however, she considered the relationship that she had with another male peer when she was 16 as the most serious that she had had at that point in her life.

After a matter of months being in the more serious relationship, her male companion expressed an interest in intimacy. She noted that she had “questioned everything until the serious relationship here where I was already realizing that I was not getting exactly what I wanted. So I was hiding but still trying to get what I was going for.” Although she described her former companion as supportive having helped her to “get through the self-harming” and the process of “getting through [her] demons”, she terminated the year-and- a-half relationship in part because she felt “physically drained.” After several months apart, Noel and her ex-partner were able to redefine their relationship and she reports that they are closer friends now than they were when they were together.

Not long after this relationship ended she entered into her first same sex relationship with a peer whom she had known since her freshman year. Her close friend was there for her throughout the long term relationship, and according to Noel, her peer:

kept telling me that I deserved better and that he (the ex-partner) was an ass. And that (pause) she would treat (shifted thought)- any person would be lucky to have me and that she would treat me like a queen and that I was worth so much more than what he was giving me.

According to Noel, she and her friend “never made it official.” They just sort of hung out and eased into what they had later called a relationship. Noel would go on to describe their relationship as follows:

She was nice to me. She did not treat me like dirt. She had a family thing that I never really got. She had that fatherly relationship that I never got but I had that motherly relationship that she never got. So going over to her house it was like now I have the dad that I wanted. And her coming over to my house she was like now I have the mom that I

wanted. So it kind of worked out with us together everything she got with being with me and everything I wanted I got while being with her.

She and her partner would be together for a year and eight months making this the longest relationship that she had had up to this point. To her surprise, her partner terminated the relationship concluding that she had entered and subsequently remained in it for the wrong reasons, but her partner never quite clarified what those were. Noel felt rejected and filled the void by reaching out to friends more often and by establishing closer bonds with people whom she had known indirectly through other close peers in her life. She also turned to an online social media site that allows members to anonymously post personal things about themselves to vent her frustrations with the recent breakup. It was there that she met the woman who she would date for a matter of weeks before that relationship, too, would come to an end.

On the social media website, Noel talked about her feelings of dejection and her sadness about the loss of the relationship. A reader, the woman she would later date for a matter of weeks, responded to her post and initially offered a sense of comfort in her time of distress:

The way that we met was through this app called the Whisperer. It's an anonymous post your secrets post anything you want kind of thing and I posted saying that I had just got out of a relationship and I felt like I was broken because she had treated me like the queen that everybody likes to feel like and now I don't have that anymore. And then she messaged me off of that post and she said that it gets better and that it would be okay and whatever. And from that point on we had been talking. I didn't know anything else about her besides that fact that she had commented on my post for like three days. I didn't know what she looked like. I didn't know if it was a boy or a girl. And then three days in she asked for my phone number. I told her that I didn't know if I was completely

comfortable with that yet because I didn't even know anything on her. So she was like ok so what do you want to know... She gave me her name. She gave me her age. She gave me (pause) you know the normal.... And she was like oh ok do you want to text and I was like I (dragged-out) I'm not exactly ok with that but we can go to a texting thing called Kik Messenger. So we texted on that for like a week and a half and she was like well you have my name we've texted for a good week and a half. Can I have your number now and I was like ok. So we talked for a week after that. She added me on fb. And then after that she was like is it ok if I come to see you and I was like in person? She was like yeah why not. And I was like because I haven't even told my parents that I talk to anyone yet. Like this is scary. And she was like well I'm already heading down there. And I was like what do you mean and she goes I have a job up there this weekend and I know it's in your area so I was like you know if I'm already down there- and I was like..

Social media, as Szulc & Dhoest (2013) note, is often utilized among sexual and gender minorities, as a method of self-exploration. The internet can be seen as a safe way of exploring one's identity and can be utilized as a space with which to connect with peers (Szulc & Dhoest, 2013). Utilizing the anonymity afforded her by using the internet noted in the account above, Noel used the social media sites as a means with which to express her thoughts and feelings regarding the end of a relationship. Reading the responses that she received from peers on the websites helped her to integrate nuanced views about what the end of her relationship meant. Although she did not post in that space with the purpose of making a new connection, she found herself drawn to the woman who took the time to respond empathically to her post.

The two would ultimately chat online using a second social media site in an effort to maintain their anonymity as a measure of protection that would minimize risk associated with meeting strangers in online forums. After some time passed, and having talked with her mom about it Noel agreed to meet in person and when the two met, her parents were present so that they had an opportunity to get to know the woman she had been getting to know. Not long after meeting Noel's parents, the woman revealed that she was married setting in motion another round of doubt and confusion that would become more significant when the woman ended the relationship abruptly giving few explanations for why things did not work out. Noel then decided to take some time to reestablish a connection with herself and to relearn how to cope with the challenges inherent with being alone. She described this part of her life stating:

Umm, I talked to my best friends a lot more than I ever did. I was just like I really really really (dragged-out) need my best friends right now and if you can't be there for me then I have to go. I can't (breath) have somebody who is going to be there half the time. Because her gf didn't like me. So then I talked to (pause) this kid that was up the road. I used to like him and (pause) and I talked to him so much that it was kind of like we're not best friends but we're not not best friends. Like we knew so much about each other that we could have been best friends but we never hung out in school like at all. We never communicated. Nothing. Like we were invisible to each other in school. But the second we got out of school we instantly walk down to the other one's house. And then I talked to two graduates who were actually friends. I didn't know that they were friends at the time. But (pause) ones my ex's best friends brother (laughs). And the other one is my best friend's ex. So it was kind of- I always knew that they were there. But I never really talked to them before cause there was always an obstacle to go through in order to have

them in my life. But it just got to the point where I didn't care anymore. It just got to the point that I was just going to talk to anybody to get attention and then I was in the relationship with the married person and now I'm back to that well I'm single but I don't like being single I don't like being single but I'm not craving as much attention. I'm more of- I'd like attention but I'm okay with not having it.

Sarah

Process Domain: Background. Sarah is a 17 year old Caucasian gender conforming female who identifies as lesbian. When given an opportunity to choose the five words that would best describe how she views herself, much as she had done throughout much of the interview, she struggled to find the words that accurately reflected herself. I learned that she is rather conservative in her verbal expression of her interests at times; however, she tends to be quite expressive in terms of her gender presentation. She wore a short cropped haircut which she combed over revealing much shorter tapered and edged hair beneath that. She wore tee shirts with the names of musical bands and had earlobes that were pierced with spacers that are used for stretching the lobes.

When asked to describe her look, she said that she had once viewed her presentation as more artsy but struggled to describe what that meant. More importantly, she resisted the idea of narrowly defining herself by categories that may lead others to misinterpret what her presentation may mean to her internally. Rather than have her describe what her current form of self-expression meant to her we explored how she integrated some of her interests into the way that she performed her gender. I learned that she has a strong interest in music of all types, sports, and like her peers David and D, she enjoys video games. Through additional probing, she then described herself as "outgoing" and she did not see herself as being "really shy (dragged the

word)” but as I suspected she did not “talk to people” although “people try (to talk to her)”. In many ways she is well reserved remarking that she “just [doesn't] want to talk.” Of all of the informants I was most nervous that she would not be a good informant. By good, I am referring to that interpersonal experience that occurs in phenomenological research where the interviewer is invited, via descriptions of one’s experiences, to see the world the way that it is experienced by the narrator (Finlay, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, as Smith et al. (2009) note, may include a “double hermeneutic because the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them” (p. 3). Each time that Sarah responded to a question by saying that she “did not know” the answer or how to respond, I felt lost and unable to form an interpretation of the experiences that were processed. However, we were able to navigate through two hour long sessions that helped me to get a better sense of her identity development and some of the factors that have helped to shape it. I used the interview questions as a guide, and each time that she responded by saying that she “did not know” I looked for other ways to ask appropriate questions related to her identity development. Her responses tended to be brief so during the interviews so I relied more heavily on my microskills training with specific focus given to paraphrasing, summarizing, body language and the reflection of feelings. While analyzing the data from the interview with her I tended to be a little more conservative in the ways that I interpret the data. Instead, I have opted to present some of the longer more relevant excerpts from the interviews as a means with which to substantiate some of the ways that I came to understand her experiences.

Sarah is the oldest of three children all of whom live with her biological father and her step mother. When asked to characterize the relationship that she has with her family she remarked:

Like I don't really talk to them about anything. Like I just talk to them like they're kind of like- like I'm close to them but not like parent close. Like they're my friends. I never like talk to them about anything or tell them anything. Like. I just don't really know.

I thought that it was interesting that Sarah described her relationship as a friendship but appeared reluctant, still, to talk with her parents about her thoughts or feelings. I pressed further to get a sense of her rationale and she responded that she viewed her relationship with her parents, and to some degree her siblings, as a process similar to the relationships that one might forge in a classroom with peers who one might:

like talk to here (in school). Like the people in classes that I talk to all the time I don't tell them anything. Like I don't talk to them outside. Stuff like that... Well I tell them (her parents) everything. They know like everything but I'm talking about feelings or stuff like that. Like if I was upset and some people might talk to mom about- like I don't do it. I talk to myself (giggles here). Don't even talk to my siblings. I just keep it in.

She appears to have a hard time describing her feelings and often feels "dumb" as she struggles to explain her thoughts to others. At one point during the session, while talking about how restricted she is in terms of expressing her thoughts and emotions, she became tearful and when I asked what sparked the emotional response she stated that she "didn't know." She did, however, say that when she has an emotional response that it is counterproductive to answer question so I asked her if she wanted to terminate the session but she stated that that would not be helpful. We sat together for a moment while she collected her thoughts and responding to her concern that it felt "weird" to just sit there I asked her to describe what was happening to her in the moment and she replied

I don't know. Just talking about things gets me upset. I get emotional over like everything. Bad or good. Or neither. Someone will be like why are you upset over that. I don't know. I just think too much about what happens or something. I don't know. I get sad or overwhelmed over it.

She later intimated that she cried a little during her interview because in some of her other relationships people may have become accustomed to not asking her how she feels, in part, because of her inability to accurately describe them on request. This session may have been particularly unnerving because she had an emotional reaction, and when called on to describe what was happening, she had a difficult time expressing herself. It also appears to have caught her by surprise that I took the time to inquire. That withstanding, I gave her an assignment and asked her to reflect on and journal about how she had grown accustomed to struggling with and becoming controlling over her thoughts and feelings. Although she gave the assignment a lot of thought, she had a difficult time expressing herself in writing and did not complete the assignment.

Later, she would share that she grew up in a town several miles outside of the current city where she attends school, but at that time, she lived with her mother who had been separated from her biological father for several years at that point. However, she recalls moving abruptly from that small town to her current city to live with her biological father and his wife. At that point she remembers starting the fifth grade in a brand new city and attending school with peers she struggled to get to know. She stated that she:

did not know anyone. I did not want to move. I had like all my friends in like [the other city] and then I like totally like stopped talking to everyone and then I came here and I like- I had nothing. No one. And like no one. So I was in school not talking to anyone

at all. Just kind of over there (pointing to the corner) cause I did not know anyone. By that time everyone had their little friend groups and I'm like- I'm just- No. I don't even know.

We then processed some of the ways that this theme of disconnection, particularly once she transitioned to the new city and school, appear to emerge in other parts of her narrative.

Although she is often reserved in her communication of her thoughts and feelings, I got the sense that over the years she has become more comfortable expressing herself. In our second interview she remarked that in the 9th grade, she:

just got comfortable got more comfortable and I got used to this whole thing and so it was like is not really that bad. And like more people like talked to me and I just felt more I don't know comfortable.

Sarah remembers feeling more free over the years to express her thoughts and to form bonds with peers whom she felt truly had an interest in developing close bonds. Although she describe that pool of friends as quite small, she appeared appreciative of the connections, she's been able to forge. While she might still be reserved in terms of sharing her feelings and emotions with members of her family, she did say that in the last several years that she, her siblings, father and step mother have made a concerted effort to do things of shared interest to one another. This new way of relating also appears to have had an impact on Sarah's sense of connectedness in other settings.

Person Domain: Introspection. Sarah remembers developing a curiosity about a female peer in the 4th grade. When asked to describe the moment when she first discovered or learned that about her sexuality, Sarah remarked:

I did not discover anything about myself. I discovered this girl and I was like this is weird. This is not normal cause this is like fourth grade and I was like what is this and I was like there is this girl and I was like what is going on.

Before this point, she had not noticed much at all about her male or female peers; however, she remembers developing a specific interest in one female peer that she could not explain. Once she moved from the town that she grew up in to the city in which she had lived the last several years, it would be another two years or so before she would have those thoughts or feelings again. In the interim, she did not know what those feelings meant and because they had not emerged again until she was in the sixth grade these thoughts were viewed as transient and unexplainable. She simply moved on until she met another female peer some time later. Sarah remembers that it occurred:

at the end of like the 6th grade. I had these friends who were two years older than me and I would go over to their house and I would go to this one and she would have this friend over. And I was like literally there like every week and weekends and I met this girl there and I was like- like I really liked her and I was like it's happening again and I was like and this time it's really bad and then I was like (shifted thought)- I was getting upset over it and I was like well (stopped thought abruptly but continues to explain after probing)... It was not so much that I liked girls that was upsetting me. It was like her. Cause I like liked her and everything and I was keeping it all in.

Just as Sarah learned to withhold her thoughts and emotions about everyday experiences in her life, she also appears to have learned to be strategic regarding her disclosure of feelings of attraction. Sarah remained close friends with this peer for a number of years. In fact, this peer, at one point in their relationship, disclosed to Sarah that she was bisexual. However, it was

several years into the friendship before Sarah would reveal her attraction to her close friend.

Sarah described her dilemma as follows:

Like I was gonna tell her but then I did not know what the reaction would be. Like I did not know what would happen with it. Like she would like stop talking to me or we wouldn't be friends anymore. Like I did not know. Cause like I did not want to tell her and then have her be like no (no reciprocation of affection or interest). Or totally shut down and that would be even worst than just keeping it in.

Two years ago, Sarah disclosed her romantic interest to her peer, but to her dismay her friend thought that her interest was “cute”. This was a big deal for Sarah because she had been holding on to those feelings since the sixth grade. Although the pair had remained close friends for years, Sarah's companion abruptly moved away without a call or notice, and then out of the blue one day she made contact to let Sarah know how proud of her she was and how much she had missed their connection. It was then that Sarah took the opportunity to make the disclosure but her peer's response reified all of the things that she feared. Her peer's response also reawakened a similar concern that Sarah had once she lost contact with the first peer whom she had those feelings about before moving to her current school. Stated briefly, Sarah, once again, assumed that her romantic interests were specific to one person and for a second time wondered what this meant about her sexuality.

In generations past, sexuality was overwhelmingly viewed as something that was fixed, stable (Martin, 2009), and in many instances, compulsory (Cole & Cate, 2008; Rich, 1980, 2003, 2003). However, sexual and gender minority youth, as Tellingier et al. (2012) point out, are “growing up in a culture that embraces diversity in sexual expression in a manner foreign to their parents' generation” (p. 39). Sexual and gender minority youth are also questioning their

identities at much earlier ages than they had in years past (Cohn et al., 2010; Dane et al., 2009; D'Augelli, Grossman et al., 2008; Grossman et al., 2009; Majd et al., 2009; Morgan et al., 2011; Walters, 2014). However, embedded in the excerpt above is a fear that disclosure, even to a peer who has already made a disclosure regarding her own sexuality, may be viewed, by some youth, as risky. The extant literature indicates that a number of youth may be strategic regarding the disclosure of their sexual or gender identities as a means of minimizing the risks harassment, abuse, or neglect (Gipson, 2002; Rosario et al., 2009), and the abandonment (Mabry, 2005; Majd, Marksamer, & Reyes, 2009; Quintana et al., 2010; Rosario et al., 2009; Sullivan et al., 2001). Sexual and gender minority youth may also engage in identity management strategies that minimize potential losses in close relationships (Maguen et al., 2002; Orne, 2011). Sarah's identity management strategy, particularly as it relates to the interaction with the peer mentioned in the quote above, warrants additional empirical research to learn more about the ways that sexual and gender minority youth who are already dealing with issues of loss, manage their identities and other aspects associated with adolescent development. We will talk more about identity development more later in this chapter.

Context Domain: Self Disclosure. Unlike the other informants who took part in this research, Sarah did not have a coming out story. Although Sarah believed that she was hiding her sexuality from her peers and members of her family, most people appear to have made assumptions about her sexuality based in part on her gender presentation and her interests. As a child, Sarah was interested in sports and characterized her interests and behavior as “tomboyish.” Of course gender identity, presentation, and sexuality are interlocking, but distinctly different aspects of identity development. However, people often make assumptions about one or more

aspects of one's identity based in part on their conformity to or perceived deviation from gender norms (Carragher, 2002; Eleze, 2005; Hong et al., 2011; Orne, 2011).

Once Sarah disclosed her sexuality to her sister and the word got back to her family and her close knit peers, they all appeared relieved that it was out in the open. Since then, she has not really had to explain her sexuality or her interests to others except in those instances where she actually felt inclined to discuss it. Sarah cannot ever recall a time where she was harassed in any setting or context as a result of her gender presentation or because of her sexuality. She is, however, abundantly aware the pervasive use of heteronormative jokes and the experiences of transgender students who attend her school. Sarah described her school as welcoming of sexual minorities; however, she described her observations of how some students in her school respond to peers who identify as transgender she stated:

Yeah. Umm we have like a few transgender people here and they're (the students in the school) always talking about them (the transgender students). There's always like like right in the beginning like people were like pointing it out laughing and stuff. Like all the time. Like still someone will say her name or something and people will ohh ohh like make fun of it.

While on her way to our last interview, Sarah reportedly overheard a student in the hallway equivocate something with being "so gay." She appeared annoyed when processing that experience, but admitted that it was timely given the nature of the information that we were exploring. She reported no experiences of intolerance or rejection in her home or in the community in which she lives and appears to enjoy a level of tolerance in her school due, in part, to the visibility of sexual minorities in this context. Sarah stated that:

Well, I never hear anything about like the gay, bisexual, all the other ones. Only people think there is is gay, bisexual or lesbian. I never hear anything about that cause everyone is like so open to it cause like it's literally like everywhere. Like in the school it's like every other person. And people, just like, are okay with it really.

Sixty percent of the transgender youth who participated in a study conducted by McGuire et al. (2010) reported experiences of verbal harassment regarding their identities on a daily basis. Fifteen percent of the transgender youth who participated in the Toomey et al. (2012) study reported that they had been harassed or bullied based, in part, on their performance and presentation of gender. Performances of gender that violate dominant constructions of the masculine/feminine binary are often policed, at the microsystem level, with harassment and bullying based, in part, on perceived violations of the hegemonic notions of how gender should be performed in both private and public spaces (McGuire et al., 2010; Mogul et al., 2011; Toomey et al., 2012). The McGuire et al. (2012) study is also important because the participants much like the informants in this current investigation, attended schools that had a GSA. The GSA was discussed in both Chapter I & II and will be discussed, again, in Chapter V.

Dating. In the seventh or eighth grade, Sarah dated a girl whom she had met through her brother. Sarah had developed romantic interests during this time in a peer that she had met while visiting friends in her neighborhood. Although she would later learn that her friend was bisexual, she kept her romantic interest a secret out of fear that the interest would not be reciprocated and out of concern that the relationship would be irrevocably damaged as a result of her disclosing her feelings. The young lady that she ultimately dated during the time had actually dated Sarah's brother before then, but once the two had broken up, she made contact with Sarah via a social media website. After some initial hesitation, Sarah dated the young

woman for a short period, but would break it off citing irreconcilable differences as her rationale. Sometime later, Sarah met a boy, and the two dated for a short period. When describing this period, Sarah remarked:

I don't know (laughs). Like in the summer like I'd go to my grandmother's house. Like everyone would go there cause he lived in a neighborhood with a whole bunch of like kids and we'd all like hang out. And he like was there and we like I don't know how to describe. I mean they all knew that I liked girls. Like they all knew.

Sarah dated this boy for a matter of months, but remarked that dating him helped to solidify her interest in girls. Dating him helped her to process these feelings that she had long withheld from the world. However, in spite of her best efforts, Sarah's family and some of her peers had already had their suspicions. When describing how her peers and members of her family knew about her sexuality, Sarah stated that she often talked to some of her peers about her thoughts and interests. She remarked that she did:

not openly [talk about it] but like [talked about it with or] to just a few people. And like I think that they could tell because how I was. Like after that other girl the one that I was talking about [and] after the boy I dated another girl. I really liked her and right when I started dating her I like told my sister and my sister just screamed out to my entire family. She's like Sarah is dating a girl. And I'm like what (laughs)! And like they were like you like girls or something and I was like yeah. And they were like yeah I already knew that. I never told them they just knew. I was like yeah- they could just tell just because I was. I guess. It was kind of obvious.

Sarah is currently dating a young woman who she met in her current school. They met years ago when the two took a math course together, but it was not until much later that the two would

begin dating. Sarah and her current girlfriend would see one another in public spaces, and at some point, they befriended one another on Facebook. Later, the two began dating and have been together for a matter of years. Sarah's girlfriend graduated from high school last year but the two visit one another frequently. Neither of them have any idea where the relationship will go next but they appear committed to exploring the possibilities.

D

Process Domain: Background. D is a 17 year old Caucasian gender nonconforming female who identifies as lesbian, but is currently investigating the extent to which the term transgender would accurately describe her expression, presentation, and understanding of her own gender. D described herself as a gamer (she likes video games) and is somewhat reserved in her sense of connectedness to peers and others as a measure of reducing the amount of “drama” that she experiences in her life. She lives with her father and an older brother with whom she is quite close. Her biological mother and another brother live nearby, and while she is quite close with her mother, she described her relationship with her other brother as strained.

Person Domain: Introspection. In a few days after the recording of our first session, D will have celebrated the two year anniversary of the date that she made the decision to no longer engage in self-injurious behavior. By her account, she had been self-harming since the 8th grade. She did this, in part, as a way to cope with some of the relational dynamics that were going on around her, but also, as a way to deal with the angst that she felt having been bullied in school. She described experiencing a significant amount of distress in the 8th grade as a peer bullied her on a regular basis because she had not yet developed breasts and due to socioeconomic issues that were compounded by her mother's health related issues. This experience was particularly distressing because the peers with whom she had developed a close-knit relationship were often

present during the harassment and seldom if ever spoke up on her behalf. When describing that painful period, she remarked:

it got to the point where I started to eat lunch in the office because my friends at the time weren't willing to stand up for me and so (pause) umm yeah. And so I did not like I did not like just go home one day and go oh well this is fun it was just I was in science class and I don't know I was like messing around with scissors and you know I started scratching myself and it was like okay that did not feel necessarily bad so I started doing it home and then you know I started doing it until blood drew and so then it just developed into it.

In the 9th grade, she recounts being suspended from school due to a violation of her school's policy related to use and dissemination of prescription medication. She reports that after settling into her current school that she made concerted efforts to avoid "drama" and those situations that might trigger a relapse to her substance use or the self-harming. D still has moments where she feels sad and overwhelmed; however, she has learned new ways to manage her feelings of distress. She plays video games, listens to music, and if need be, cries as a way of "releasing emotions."

In her freshman year D began the process of exploring her gender identity and sexuality. She used an online site that allows participants to create their own avatars and identities to construct a male persona. Although she looks back on this with a sense of embarrassment, she admits that this allowed her an opportunity to explore gender in ways that she could never have imagined in her previous high school.

I started like- (long pause) so there is like this website- war bears. It's sort of like a chat room but you can create an avatar and it's not like hobo hotel there are mods

(moderators) where you can't like swear or anything. It's more for like it's kind of like club penguin but not for penguins. I created (shifts thought) I had (still formalizing response) I created one as a guy and I decided on the name D cause at the time I was obsessed with (names the celebrity that inspired the name) and his real name was Darnell so I was like I'm gonna name this guy (laughs together) D. Yeah and so I met like a girl on there and we were talking and ended up dating I guess and so and it was then that I knew that I might be like bisexual. So then you know later on like in 2013- no later on in 2012 going into 10th grade I, you know, came out as bisexual and then it got to the point where I was like I don't- guys- No. And so I came out as lesbian and so.

For several weeks, she had long conversations with another gamer, and at some point, the two dated until D disclosed that she was a female at which point the person with whom she was corresponding terminated the friendship. This was a deeply disappointing period for her, however, D did note that “[I]f I hadn't done that I wouldn't be as comfortable with my sexuality as I am.”

In 2012, D's mother was hospitalized for a condition that had progressed so significantly that her mom was put in a medically-induced coma as a measure to save her life. It was during this period that she decided to live with her father rather than stay in the home that she had long shared with her mother and the older brother described above. She reports that the relationship with one of her brothers was so strained that she seldom came out of her room before her mother's illness progressed. She recalls feeling a sense of guilt at not spending more time with her mother before the brief hospitalization. But once her mother went onto the hospital, D moved to live with her father as a way to minimize the stress related to being around her brother and because this new setting was much closer to her current school. She had not always been as

close with her father as she would have liked. He had had his own struggles with substance abuse, but she was much too young to really recall how bad things were when he was in the throes of his addiction. She and her father have a much closer relationship now, and she continues to be close with her mom and one of her older brothers whom she views, and sometimes calls her second dad.

Context Domain: Self Disclosure. Using social media websites like Facebook offer a safe space with which to explore topics related to gender and sexuality and a means with which to disrupt narrow constructions about her own identity development. D explored her gender identity and sexuality a bit in an online gamer site, and after gaining a better understanding of her identity, she told her mother, father, and her two siblings. Although she was not aware of bullying, harassment, or marginalization of sexual and gender minorities before coming out, she said that she was a little concerned that her mother, who was ill at the time, might not accept her due to her mother's deeply religious beliefs. She remarked:

in 2013 no later on in 2012 going into 10th grade I you know came out as bisexual and then it got to the point where I was like I don't- guys- No. And so I came out as lesbian. And so. my mom is a Christian and so you know it (shifted thought) she did not (pause) I did not know at the time that there was such a thing as homophobia or preju (carefully sounds the word out) preju- prejudice against gay people and so I just told her mom I think that I might like girls. And she was like are you sure and I was like yeah. Yeah. I think so. She did not, you know, really (pause) resent that. She umm loved me unconditionally and she still does. We still you know talk sometimes about that issue and you know it's obvious that you know no matter what she's still gonna love me. My dad

he really doesn't care. As long as I'm happy he's happy as long as I'm not harming myself. They were pretty accepting of it. You know... Yeah.

D was deeply appreciative of the fact that most of her family understood and was supportive of her disclosure related to her sexuality. D noted that some of the conflict that exists between she and one of her older brothers centers around her revelation and his inability to fully accept her disclosure regarding her sexuality at face value. He appeared to suggest that it was implausible for her to truly know for certain whether or not she is a lesbian unless she actually has sex and finds it desirable. She and her brother have had other conversations about this and other matters that appear to have deepened the rupture in their relationship.

D did note that as she explores her gender identity that a number of her family members who are accepting of her sexuality are less tolerant of her request to be called by a name some may view as androcentric. As D explores her transgender identity, she has asked her family, peers, and staff within the school context call her by the name that she selected based on her sense of connection to the celebrity as detailed in the quote just above. D described that conflict that she experiences getting her family and peers to use her chosen name as follows:

Because like, whenever I talk to like my mom about it because you know I don't know (shifts direction). With dad, he's- my father is more like- he's just taking time to get used to it. So I don't really bring it up much because I live with him and have to deal with him every day. So if I cause any problems you know I have to like deal with that. Umm, but with my mom I bring it up more often because she- I don't know- She's- I don't really have to see her every day. And so when I bring up the fact that that or sometimes she brings it up- or she brings up- [and she asks] does that upset you that I don't call you D? And like, yeah it does upset me. But umm I understand the fact that you named me

Marie (another pseudonym created for this study) So I can understand why it's sort of difficult. But, sometimes I feel like if I came out as transsexual which I'm you know- I'm thinking about- like I'm trying more to find myself I guess. Umm, If they will honor that and I feel like my dad would honor that but I feel like my mom wouldn't only because she's more religious than my dad is. She's, I don't know, closed minded about I don't know, that I guess. But it's upsetting because she has no real problem about my sexuality but calling me a different name from Marie is just too far (breathes and pauses).

The disappointment, hurt, and frustration was palpable during the interview; yet, like David, D appears willing to allow her parents time to adjust to the disclosure regarding her gender identity. In the quote above, she indicates that she speaks with her mother about her gender identity more frequently than she does with her dad because there is less risk related to holding her mother accountable for the pain and hurt that may be associated with being called by the name that she was given at birth rather than by the name that she has asked to be used in day to day conversations. Here she does not clearly define what the consequences could be if she were to invite more forceful discussions with her dad about the issue, but I got the sense that doing so could have a deleterious impact on her relationship with her father and potentially jeopardize her ability to continue living with him leaving few other options should a rupture in their relationship occur. Here D is not conceding power as much as she's being deliberately strategic in her exercise of command over the way that her identity is shaped by the people and in the contexts that she spends the vast majority of her time.

Although D had experiences with bullying based on issues related to development and her socioeconomic standing that were out of her control, she has not been bullied in school-based on her gender presentation or her sexuality. She is, however, aware of the fact that some of the

adults around her may internalize religious doctrine and peers who may hold heteronormative views, but she does not allow those to impact her sense of self-worth. She characterized her overall experiences regarding her gender identity particularly as it relates to her experiences in school as follows:

Umm, I don't know I mean school doesn't really like- school hasn't really made that much of an impact. I mean, it's nice to come here and be like respected. Umm, like my teachers you know the first day of any class that call out Marie because that's my legal name and so it's nice that you know when I tell them that I go by D that they honor that umm because my dad and my mom don't call me D. Because, well, my mom's just irritating and then my dad is just (pause) I don't know- he's just taking time to get used to it. And so, umm, it's nice to you know, be respected here. Umm, I haven't really like come across any problems regarding that. I mean, because here has been you know basically respectful of it. Umm, so. Yeah

Dating. In the 9th grade, during the period where she transitioned from one high school to the one she is in now as a result of the academic suspension, D suffered a rupture in the relationship with one of her close friends. It seems the violation that resulted in D needing to make the transition from one school to the next took a toll on her relationship with her peer. However, time appears to have helped to repair the rupture, and the two have since dated for a few months. According to D, her peer was "curious about girls", so they dated for a while but the new relationship was short lived. Her partner was also dating a boy during the same period that they were together, so D made the decision to terminate the relationship. D then created the online persona described above in an effort to explore her gender identity and her sexuality. It was through this experience that she met a peer whom she dated for a matter of months but that

relationship, too, was short lived because the pressure to meet in person forced her to reveal that she was a girl. The peer whom she had been communicating with abruptly ended that relationship.

Two years ago, D met the young woman whom she is currently dating. She recounted the experience of receiving a note that extended an invitation for her to meet up in the Gay Straight Alliance in the school. The peer indicated, in the note, that she had seen D around school and wanted an opportunity to get to know her better. Although D's peer had signed the note and included a contact telephone number D was reluctant to follow through. When describing her concern she remarked that in her previous high school:

if somebody received a note at [the previous high school] it was most likely a prank. And so I was just really nervous about this note and I was like I don't know if this is real. Is this a real thing. And so one of the school psychologists here who also acts as one of the guidance counselors umm made me go.

D described receiving the note as curiosity inducing and anxiety provoking, in part, because she was interested in knowing more about the person who had taken an interest but she questioned the veracity of the note based on experiences in her previous school. Although she reflected on her decision to go to the school psychologist about the note with a sense of embarrassment, she agreed that it was probably an appropriate measure to take in an effort to ensure her safety given her observations in the previous school. Yet going to the school psychologist showed a level of trust in and connectedness to the staff that allowed her a space with which to explore her concerns about the note, her continued safety in the school, and the existence of the Gay Straight Alliance. After meeting with the psychologist, D decided to go to a GSA meeting.

Attending her first GSA meeting was memorable because it allowed her the opportunity to explore her identity in an environment with peers who shared some of her developmental concerns. This is also a particularly fond memory for her because that first GSA meeting was where she met her “best friend.” She remarked:

In the way that I met my best friend there. I mean, I met my best friend that way. I mean I, I personally never would have had the courage to even think of writing a note and giving it to a person that I thought was cute. Because of the fear of rejection and you know that was going through her mind as well. But her her friends at the time pushed her to do it and you know it's (pause) it's so crazy to think that that note- it she hadn't have worked up the courage to give that to me we wouldn't have become so close and we wouldn't be dating. So it it's just nice.

Emergent Codes and Areas of Convergence

All of the informants shared the process that they recall going through as they began navigating their emergent identities. As a researcher, I recognize that these stories potentially essentialize their experiences. However, in keeping with the goals of phenomenological research (Finlay, 2011), I am less concerned with the ordering and accuracy of the stories that they have shared than I am about how they make sense of those experiences. I am also interested in how these stories shape their understanding of the world and how they function as transformative and transactional parts of their identity development.

In this section, I plan to process in greater detail, the themes that were most relevant to and prevalent within the microsystem domain. In Chapter I, I provided a brief overview of the extant literature as it relates to the broader theme of identity development with particular focus given to the coming out process. In the section above, I provided a detailed description of my

informants introspection regarding their identities, and I provided numerous quotes to substantiate their experiences discovering and subsequently disclosing their emergent identities. I also included a section which details my informants' experiences with dating with specific focus paid to the internal and external processes that they believe most influenced this part of their identity development. Here, I argue that introspection, self-disclosure, and dating are all codes that are subsumed under the larger theme of identity development.

I also talked a great deal about the role the one's sense of connectedness to family and peers in both Chapter I and II. Because this theme emerged across and within the narratives, I included a section that addresses this construct in this section, too. My informants have had a number of experiences that appear to have contributed to a strong sense of connectedness to their families, peers, and communities; however, some of the participants had also described experiences that have left them feeling alienated from or marginalized within the relationships and contexts in which they spend time. Because two of my informants described, in detail, some of the experiences that they felt contributed to self-harming behaviors, I presented that data because it emerged organically in two narratives and it appears to be associated with the internalization of negative messages about one's emergent sexual or gender identity. Lastly, a few of the informants had also had some experiences with bullying that was based in part on factors unrelated to their gender or sexuality. Therefore, a section was added that addresses the theme of bullying.

Identity Development.

Each of the informants appears to have had vivid memories of the period in their life where they discovered that their sexual and or gender identity differed from that of their peers. In the participant profile section above, we learn that this was a particularly troublesome

discovery for David because he did not know what to make of the thoughts and feelings so he tucked them away. In the excerpts above, David stated that he made a concerted effort not to think about the possibility that he might be gay choosing instead to go into a “period of recession” so that the bullying that he had experienced, based on other parts of his identity, would not be exacerbated if his peers found out. He also said that he “thought the worst” about how his father might react. He feared that his relationship with his dad would be ruptured and that his dad would “treat [him] poorly.”

The same theme appears to have emerged in Sarah’s narrative. She remembers having that first experience of same sex attraction in middle school. The object of her affection was quite specific and unwavering. Like David and a number of the other informants in my study, she did not know what to make of her feelings so she kept them to herself. A controlling narrative that emerged in excerpts discussed in Chapters IV, V, VI, & VII from my interviews with each of the informants on this topic, is that their intrapsychic and externally constructed expectations regarding their sexual and gender identities had been disrupted. They utilized medico-religious descriptors which tended to pathologize their non-heterosexual identities. In Chapter V, under the Connectedness heading, there is an excerpt from an interview with Sarah where she described her realization that she might have a non-heterosexual identity as “weird.” She did not elaborate much more on her thoughts on the subject other than to say that there was something about her sense of attraction towards her object of choice that had changed her but she could not explain how.

Imbricated within each of the narratives discussed here are a host of intrapsychic micro-social responses to discovering and subsequently disclosing one’s sexual and gender identity. Bound to these narratives are the demonstrative steps that each of my informants took to

strategically manage both their identities as well as the stigma that might occur once the disclosure is made. As I reviewed the contours of the sections of the narratives that overlapped I documented and subsequently talked more about medico-religious models of sexuality that emerge within the narratives. In later chapters, I spend a little more time processing my informants' experiences with managing their identities, the fluidity with which they view gender and sexuality, with some attention given to controlling narratives, like homophobia, heterosexism, and heteronormativity. Although the bulk of the focus both here and in the remaining chapters will be dedicated to the codes and themes that were most prevalent within and across all of the narratives, a little time will be spent discussing something that was seemingly absent from all of my discussions with my informants.

Each of them talked extensively about their experiences with managing their identities in settings that might be perceived as hostile to their sexual and gender identities as a result of discourse tied to medico-religious ideology. Absent from their narratives was any meaningful connection to the ways that the legal system may perpetuate the marginalization of non-heterosexual identities. In the final stages of the interviews with my informants, totally curious about the fact that it had not emerged organically, I asked about their perceptions of the legal system and the extent to which it either disrupted or perpetuated animus towards sexual and gender minorities: The informants tended to view the legal system as benign. Although my informants were not aware of the ways that medico-religious discourse has contributed to the development and maintenance of constitutionally sanctioned animus towards sexual and gender minorities, I have an obligation to make the connection to the extensive literature on the topic presented in Chapters I and II. A little time will be spent here developing that connection.

Adolescence is the period where one's sexual and gender identity is believed to be individuated (Smart, 2012). I say believed because in many ways, children are socialized in contexts where they are discursively positioned as either asexual (aversion or indifference to sex; Emens, 2014; Smart, 2010) or heterosexual. The hegemony acts as a controlling narrative which, in many instances, is used as a mechanism with which to police the identify development of sexual and gender minority youth. However, this discourse has a pernicious effect on gender and sexual minority youth and other marginalized groups who violate the cultural and societal norms (Herek, 2000, 2002c, 2004, 2008; Herek et al., 1995; Herek et al., 2007; Herek et al., 2013; Horn et al., 2010; O'Brien, 2008; Yep, 2002). I plan to discuss a case which exemplifies some of the ways in which the legal system has come to shape identity as a means with which to bridge that understanding.

Matthew Limon, an adjudicated minor who was held in a state sanctioned institution for youth with developmental disorders, was arrested in 2000, just days after his 18th birthday for engaging in a sexual act with a minor three years his junior. Matthew was living in a mental health facility and appears to have been housed on a floor where he shared space with teens a few years younger than him (Allender, 2009; Higdon, 2008; Tribe, 2004). At the time of his arrest, Kansas enforced a law, otherwise known as a Romeo and Juliet provision, which established a minimum age of consent regarding the sexuality of minors. According to Higdon (2008), the Romeo and Juliet provisions provided states that use them, a mechanism with which to prosecute minors in cases where youth violate laws involving what would otherwise be considered statutory rape.

The Romeo and Juliet statutes, as they were enforced at the time of Matthew's arrest, required a substantially longer prison sentence for youth found in violation anti-sodomy statutes.

Under the provision in Kansas at the time, a heterosexual male, for instance, who committed what amounted to statutory rape, would likely serve up to 18 months in prison (Higdon, 2008). However, Matthew didn't qualify for a reduced charge or sentence under the existing statutes because his sexual act involved another male. He was charged with a felony, sentenced to more than 27 years in prison, and would have had to register as a sex offender upon release from prison (Allender, 2009; Higdon, 2008; Tribe, 2004). This case is particularly galling not simply because of Matthew's age or where he was living at the time of his arrest. This case is disturbing because the amount of state and institutionally sanctioned animus towards sexual minorities contributed to far harsher sentences in cases concerning sodomy even in cases involving youth.

Bowers v. Hardwick, as you might recall from Chapter II, was a U. S. Supreme Court ruling reached in 1986 that upheld state sanctioned anti-sodomy statutes across the U. S. This U.S. Supreme Court holding was utilized by a number of states, like Kansas, to formulate laws that disproportionately impacted sexual and gender minorities. In 2003, some three years after Matthew was arrested under the Romeo and Juliet statute in Kansas, the U. S. Supreme Court holding in *Lawrence v. Texas*, overturned the *Bowers v. Harding* ruling and opened the door for Matthew to file what amounted to a secondary round of appeals based on the recent ruling from the highest court in the land. Before this point, an Appellate Court in Kansas, citing *Bowers v. Hardwick*, upheld his conviction, and because the Supreme Court of Kansas had refused to hear his case, an appeal was made to the U.S. Supreme Court on Matthew's behalf (Allender, 2009; Higdon, 2008; Tribe, 2004). Having handed down its new decision in *Lawrence v. Texas* which overturned anti-sodomy statutes throughout the U.S., The U.S. Supreme Court, responding to an appeal on Matthew's behalf, remanded the case back to the Court of Appeals in Kansas and asked that the judges reconsider their ruling in light of the recent reversal at the federal level.

Because of the narrow language with which the U.S. Supreme Court made its ruling, the Appellate Court concluded that *Lawrence v. Texas*, the case which overturned anti-sodomy laws, had no bearing on Matthew's case. Because the Appellate Court upheld their decision, another appeal was made to the Supreme Court of Kansas; Only, this time the Supreme Court of the state concluded that the Romeo and Juliette provisions had violated both state and federal constitutions (Higdon, 2008). By striking down the Romeo and Juliette provision, as Higdon (2008) notes, the Supreme Court of Kansas rejected a host of claims made by the state that the statutes, as they were enforced, were necessary as they claimed they ensured:

- (1) the protection and preservation of the traditional sexual mores of society; (2) preservation of the historical notions of appropriate sexual development of children; (3) protection of teenagers against coercive relationships; (4) protection of teenagers from the increased health risks that accompany sexual activity; [and] (5) promotion of parental responsibility and procreation. (p. 19)

The state utilized medico-religious and societal animus towards homosexuality and dominant constructions of the vulnerability of youth as an argument for preserving anti-sodomy provisions. Although my informants were not aware of this case or any of the other local, state, or federal statutes that minoritized non-heterosexual identities, they all credit provisions like marriage equality with creating an atmosphere of tolerance. However, I plan to unpack this in the discussion section in the final chapter of this study.

Strategic Outness and Gender Performance

Orne (2007) described strategic outness as the ongoing process of socially managing one's sexual and gender identity. According to this theory, coming out is a continuously evolving process that requires management of one's identity across relationships and contexts.

Orne (2007) argues that in addition to having direct conversations with family and peers about their gender and sexual identities that more often than not this cohort of youth found additional ways of expressing their interests. Writing a letter that details one's subjective experiences with gender and sexuality may be one way of making the self-disclosure others might include liking or commenting on related issues on social media websites; some sexual and gender minorities may express support for issues that have a direct impact on the lives of gender and sexual minorities without ever making public disclosure of their own subjective experiences; and then others may simply express their sexuality through forms of gender performance and dress (Cheverette, 2013; Orne, 2007;).

As D reflected on her identity development, she stated that she had initially gone to the internet to learn more about issues of sexuality and her non-gender conforming interests. She remembered feeling confused about her identity and stated that the internet provided a certain amount of anonymity not afforded her in other relationships and contexts. Although D has received a significant amount of support for her sexuality among her family and peers, she has found that people had been less receptive to or understanding of her emergent transgender interests. D used the internet to find her first love interest and she utilized social media sites, like Facebook, to learn more about issues related to transgender identity and development. D's engagement with her transgender identity can be described as performative. She admits that when people look at her they assume that her presentation is indicative of an essentialized lesbian identity but admittedly this is a way for her to express her identity and interests.

Like so many of the informants in this study, Noel stated that she was confused about her emergent sexuality due, in part, to some of the messages that she had internalized about sexual and gender minorities. As she initiated the coming out process, she found a significant amount

of support which helped her to cope with some of the experiences of marginalization that and isolation that she had felt prior to making the self-disclosures. The strategy that she used when she began the process of coming out was to ask a peer how she would react if she knew she had a friend who identified as a sexual or gender minority. Although she knew that her peer had held some very conservative beliefs particularly as it relates to issues of sexuality, she decided to have a discussion with her as a way to test the boundaries of her relationship with this peer. Even though the peer's reaction reified some of the fears that Noel had had about making a disclosure, she made the effort to tell her cousin and that experience helped shape her approach to telling others. She is very open, particularly if asked about her sexual or gender performance, but she still manages her identity in contexts like her work environment or other spaces where there may be risks associated with being as open.

David's road to self-actualization is a little more complex. Like other informants in this study his narrative includes a number of carefully plotted steps towards the goal of making the self-disclosures. He started by telling a peer in his school, and based on the positive outcome, he has also disclosed to his family, peers, and members of his faith based community. While interviewing David, I got the sense that impression management was of the utmost importance to him. While he made the revelation about his sexual identity, part of him still feels the need to manage the impressions that others hold about his identity development. After he made the revelation he wanted people to know that he would not change and that the person that they had come to know and respect would remain the same. More importantly, he feels compelled to do things that minimize the perpetuation of stereotypes of sexual and gender minorities. Embedded in his narrative is what Richardson (2005) might call a neoliberal desire to find a sense of sameness with the dominant culture. Social inclusion, based on this approach, requires the

minimization of characteristics that challenge the similarities discourse. In a later section, we will see that David has a visceral reaction to issues of gender non-conformity. One of his identity management strategies includes the goal of maintaining a sense of connectedness to the person he was prior to discovering his sexual identity and projecting that sense of self to others.

Self-Harm

The issue of social--isolation- and self-injurious behavior emerged organically in two of the narratives. Once the informants discussed their experiences with self-harm, they were asked more poignant questions to gain a better sense of how it emerged and the ways that they resolved this concern. D started cutting herself in middle school having had significant and unavoidable experiences of bullying by a peer in her grade. Her peer picked on her due to issues related to body shaming and based on socio-economic factors that were out of her control. She also reported that she was picked on in public settings in school and felt isolated as the peers whom she had called friends sat by idly as another peer berated her. By her account, the self-harming was unrelated to her sexual or gender identity as it appears to have started before she had any awareness of her emergent identity. Although she continued her self-harming well into her high school years, she would later discontinue doing so because it was tiresome and required a significant amount of energy to carry it out and then to conceal it. At the time of the interviews, she was preparing to celebrate the one year anniversary of the date that she discontinued harming herself and reported that she found other outlets to release emotions.

Noel also had experiences with self-harming and like D, her peers and members of her family were aware of the fact that she was cutting and engaging in other maladaptive activities. Although Noel sees a connection between the self-harming behavior and her sexual and gender identity, she made it clear that her internalization of social mores had significantly impacted her

desire to self-harm. By her account, she engaged in self-harming behaviors as a way to fight off the demons that she had come to believe were living in her. She wanted to have a relationship with God, but she had come to believe that being a sexual or gender minority was seen as evil in the eyes of God. As she initiated the coming out process, she started to reevaluate the things that she had come to believe about herself. She reestablished connections with her family and with the peers around her. She also took a religion course in school which, by her account, was highly influential in her continued sense of faith and spirituality. Like D, she no longer engages in self-harming behavior not simply because she got tired of doing it, but because her mother proactively addressed the concern that she might lose her daughter if she continued along that path. She also appears to have discontinued cutting having made a promise to her brother on the day of his birth that she would work to reconcile her identity and make a conscientious effort to protect him from feelings of isolation and marginalization that she felt contributed to her cutting. This finding appears to lend support to research which has found an association between self-harming behavior and sexual minority youth who have experiences in relationships and across contexts where their identities are not affirmed (Carragher et al., 2002; Diaz et al., 2010; Hong et al., 2011; Skidmore, 2008; Stryker, 2004).

Experiences with Bullying

Although most of the informants have had experiences with bullying none of the marginalization that they experienced appears to have been related to their sexual or gender identity. As noted above, D shared some experiences with being bullied based on body shaming and socioeconomic factors while Noel was harassed based in part on her attempts to conceal her self-harming behaviors. Noel recounted one event where peers made fun of her for wearing sweats and long sleeve shirts in school in hot weather. This was particularly disheartening for

her because she engaged in self-injurious behavior as a way to release distress, and she found herself, once again, critiqued and publically shamed because of it.

David also had some pretty remarkable experiences of bullying that started in middle school. He reported that he was bullied because of his weight and due to a speech impediment. As he came to realize that he might be gay, he feared that if his peers found out he might be bullied because of that as well. He stated that he took extraordinary steps to socially manage his sexual minority status as a way of minimizing any harassment that he might experience because of that. He stated that he became withdrawn and seldom talked to peers. Interestingly enough, his peers in school, assumed that his decision to be socially withdrawn was a signifier that he was either depressed or that he engaged in self-harming. In addition to socially managing how his peers viewed his sexuality he also took the extraordinary step of showing his peers his wrists in an effort to disrupt the rumors that had gone viral throughout the school that his social being socially distant was tied to self-harming behavior.

Once he transitioned into high school the speech impediment had all but resolved itself. While he had been bullied in middle school because of his weight, in high school, he used his height, size, and broad shoulders to manage perceptions his peers might have about his identity. By his account, his peers assumed that he is straight based on his stature. Given the fact that he also holds a leadership role in the school-based Gay Straight Alliance his performance of gender allows him a way to socially manage perceptions regarding his sexual identity.

Connectedness to Family and Peers

All of the informants reported feeling a sense of connectedness to their families, peers, and communities. This was especially important for them as they took the first steps towards

disclosing their sexual and gender identities. The sense of connectedness they experienced tended to dictate how they socially managed their identities across relationships and contexts.

D expressed some reservations about telling her mom about her sexuality based in part on her mom's Christian conservative values. She was quite pleased to see that her relationship was not ruptured as a result of her coming out as lesbian. She had long had a contentious relationship with her one of her brothers and appeared disappointed that coming out created an additional strain on that relationship. Although her family and peers appear to be supportive of her sexuality, they appear to be less understanding of her gender identity. In spite of this, she has found a way to manage those relationships while also remaining true to herself. She has realized that her girlfriend is exceedingly accepting and supportive of her identity and she cherishes the respect that she has been shown by teachers and administrators in school particularly when it comes to the issue of being called by the name of her choosing rather than the one assigned to her at birth.

Sarah appears to manage her relationships by keeping most things to herself. Her parents and peers have long been open to and receptive of her sexual identity and her gender presentation, yet she is still rather reserved when it comes to talking much about her thoughts and experiences. Even though she does not share much about herself she still feels a sense of closeness to her family, peers, and her social networks.

Summary

The chapter opened with an overview of Bronfenbrenner's theory with specific attention given to the focus of this chapter; the microsystem domain. As I explained above, the microsystem is comprised of the interpersonal and context specific experiences and interactions that occur on a regular basis. Before discussing the codes that emerged in the data, I discussed

the recruitment process and I provided a description of IPA and the steps that I took to analyze the data. I then provided an overview of the participant profiles followed by a more detailed description of the Process, Person, and the Contexts in which identity development were most relevant to the informants. I concluded the chapter with an additional review of emergent codes and areas of convergence that included the insights of the informants as it relates to their identity development, identity management strategies, experiences with self-harm and bullying, and I concluded the section with a discussion of the final theme that emerged in the data; the informant's experiences of connection to their family and peers.

In Chapter V, I will include an overview of the mesosystem domain and the experiences that were most relevant in two or more relationships or contexts for each informant. I provide a discussion of the Process and the Person domains; however, much of the focus will be on the Context Domain where identity development was noted to have occurred. I review the experiences in school, experiences within the GSA, and I provide an overview of the informants' experiences of connectedness across relationships and contexts. The final theme that will be discussed relates to the informant's development and integration of new belief systems.

Chapter V Mesosystem Domain

Overview

The mesosystem, the second domain within Bronfenbrenner's (1986) PPCT model, is comprised of an ecology of relational and context specific interactions each playing a role in the process of identity development. Although the more proximal relationships, like the contact one has with their family, as Bronfenbrenner (1986) notes, hold a significant amount of influence on identity development, the experiences that occur in peer relationships and contexts outside of the home are also important. In Chapter IV, I presented data on microsystem experiences for each of the informants followed by a brief discussion of their experiences in one relationship or contexts. Here I plan to present, once again, the PPCT model followed by a discussion of the themes that emerged most frequently in the data.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Immediately following the initial interviews with my informants, I began the process of transcribing the interviews with my informants. I allocated and subsequently utilized two eight hour blocks of time the day after the interviews occurred so that I could transcribe the data. The day that the sessions took place, I wrote a few quick memos so that I could process some of my initial thoughts. My notes were reviewed and updated on a pretty regular bases so that I could document and track alternative ways of analyzing the data. I processed one transcript per day so that I would not be overwhelmed with the amount of data being analyzed. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and included nuances regarding speech and other patterns or information that were noticeable during the transcription. I worked vigorously to get the transcripts done within the week that the interviews took place because, as I noted in the previous chapter, I had anticipated that I would either gain access to another school district or that I would receive more

referrals that would require more of my time. I also transcribed them as soon as possible so that the information was fresh in my mind so that when I meet up with my peer debriefers for an informal meeting I would have questions or thoughts already formulated. The beginning of the session included a discussion of any thoughts that occurred to the informants following the previous session then shifted to a discussion of follow up questions that were generated after reviewing the transcripts. The remainder of the session was semi structured focusing on questions regarding their experiences in two or more relationships or contexts. The themes discussed here are a product of the material gathered in these sessions based on convergent data between and within the narratives.

The Mesosystem Domain

Process. Each of the participants described subtle nuances in the ways that they went about exploring their gender and sexual identities. The relationship that the informants had with their peers and their families helped to shape the self-exploration and self-disclosure processes. The level of acceptance that they experienced in one relationship helped to encourage self-disclosure in other contexts and relationships. The participants also discussed the process of becoming aware of their sexuality, and to a lesser degree, their burgeoning gender identities and reflected on the challenges inherent in navigating this stage along with other developmental milestones.

Person in relationship to others. David recalled having a close relationship with his parents and the members of his faith based community during the period that he first became aware of his sexuality. However, his confusion over why he was having the thoughts and feelings that he had had and experiences with being bullied in school had an impact on his sense of safety and connectedness across relationships and contexts. Although he was not bullied in

school because of his sexual identity or for his gender performance, he expressed a concern that disclosing his sexuality would have a deleterious impact on his relationships. David described his disclosure to his peer from the drama club as a way to test how his family, members of his church, and peers in his school might react if he told them that he was gay. Here is an excerpt from my second interview with David regarding the things that he takes into account before making the decision whether or not to make a disclosure regarding his sexual identity:

Umm, well, like I said last time, the entire beginning process of how I came out to people was kind of a test. We went over the whole you know dipping your toe in the water seeing all that. And when coming out to someone or to a group of people, you really have to use your best judgment. Cause you have to think about that person or that group of people. How do you think they might react? Do they have certain reasons that they might accept it? Or do they have certain reasons that they may not? You think a lot before you actually tell someone because you don't want to tell someone and have them get really mad at you or something. Umm. And there's a lot of people that I'm really close friends with that they don't know. Cause it's just something that I'm not entirely sure how they would react. Even though I have thought about it for many hours I wasn't entirely sure so I just decided that it was better to just leave it. Umm, just sort of let things go on. If it came out one day then (pause) it came out.

Noel survived the separation and divorce of her parents and found a way to manage the anxieties associated with relating to her father who she described as deeply religious but flawed. She remembers having a strong sense of connectedness to her family and the peers with whom she had known since kindergarten, but expressed having some reservation about disclosing her sexuality: she feared that telling her family and her peers might negatively impact her

relationships with them. Like David, Noel disclosed to a childhood friend whom she had known since kindergarten as a way of determining how others in her life might react to her disclosure. She engaged in self-harming and other problematic behaviors as a way of exercising demons her father and her peer from kindergarten had taught her were associated with sexual and gender nonconformity. Her strategic disclosure to the peer from kindergarten delayed her self-exploration as it reified some of the fears she had had about telling others. However, completely counting on the sense of connectedness she had long had with her family, she made the decision to disclose to her cousin and her response disrupted some of the problematic messages that Noel had long internalized.

Well my cousin was basically my best friend. We knew everything about each other already. We hung out all the time. We did everything together. We went to movies. We (shifts thought).. She was more like my sister rather than my cousin. She had told me about one of her friends who came out as gay and who was completely fine with it and she was saying how he was such a great friend and she was saying how he was such a great guy and that she would do anything make him happy and how he was so great to her as a friend that she couldn't see why something so small would ruin their entire friendship. That's when I kind of got okay with asking more questions and getting her to question me and we were just extremely open with that kind of stuff after she had told me about her friend... Well any question I got she got the answer and as soon as she answered she asked a question I had to answer it. So it was like she gets something and I get something right back. It's not like I'm giving and giving and giving and she's not giving just as much. So with that it was extremely easy but my other friend I would ask one thing and she would be like well this is what I believe blah blah blah and I would

back down and not talk about things as much and then she'd ask and be like well why was there a reason. She'd question me but wouldn't expect me to really say anything and if I did she wouldn't really listen she would just be like well I don't believe that.

Disclosing to her family appears to have strengthened the relationship that she had with her family and provided an opportunity for her to explore her identity.

D's parents separated and then got divorced when she was quite young. D's relationship with her family is much closer than it had been in the past. She went through a period when her father was not a part of her life. Today, most of her family is accepting of her sexuality; yet, they appear to struggle with understanding her gender identity. She has a girlfriend whom she's been dating for a while and finds a sense of comfort in that relationship. As she navigates her sexuality and her gender identity, she turns to her friend and partner for the kind of support that she needs. Although she has a small network of peers with whom she is close, she often utilizes the internet as a means with which to explore her identity.

I, umm, in 10th grade I (pause) really like I was like yeah I think I'm transsexual. But when I told that to the girl who I was talking to at that time and my best friend at the time, they were like no you're not transsexual. There's no way that's- yeah, you're not that. You're not that. So that really shut it down for me because I mean that it (pause) I don't know. I don't want people to.. I don't know. What people think is important to me to an extent. It's not as strong an extent as it was in the 10th grade. But umm, so this year umm I just I feel I've been looking at like Facebook and because I'm friends with trans people I don't know- just observing people there's characteristics about a man that I want like a beard and and I don't know- females can get muscles too but that muscle tone and and you know sometimes the genitals (lowers voice) whatever. But then there's other

times when I'm like I don't want a (pause) penis but then- so it's jus really like an internal discussion most of the time. Because I don't know. I feel weird to talk about that to talk about that- to someone like just be like- So this is how I'm feeling. This is how I've been feeling but then sometimes I feel like this. And so I usually just keep it to myself. But my girlfriend does know that like I've been like not necessarily yet playing around with the idea of me being trans. So, yeah

The internet offers a space to explore without judgement or reservation. Social media sites like Facebook provide an opportunity to commune with transgender peers: D doesn't actually chat with the peers that she meets there but by friending some she is able to follow their posts and to reflect on the conversations that take place in that space.

Sarah's parents also separated then divorced when she was quite young. She remembers moving to her current city when she was in middle school. Although she appears to have had some trouble making new friends in her new school, analysis of her narrative suggests a more global theme. Sarah appears to have some apprehension about establishing new connections, in part, out of concern regarding the veracity and durability of relationships. In a longer excerpt from the discussion regarding the peer whom she developed romantic interest that were not reciprocated, Sarah described her concern with disclosing her thoughts, particularly as it relates to romantic interests, as follows:

Yeah. (Pause) And then a couple of years ago (mumbles as she thinks about her response) tenth grade when, I was like, or two years ago probably I think. Two years ago, she moved (the peer whom she had a romantic interest in) to Connecticut and we didn't even talk. I don't think she even told the other people. And I like I still like liked her but that was for a while. But then she was the only one and I was like what is this. I

was like I don't like girls I like this person. So it was like. I don't know. I wouldn't talk to anyone. It was like only her and then we stopped talking totally. She like messaged me one day while I was in class she was like telling me how much she missed me and how she was so proud of me. It was like a big message and then we started talking again and I like told her (that she had developed romantic interests). I just told her and she was like ohh that's so cute. Yup that was cute (being facetious). Okay.... Well I wasn't trying to do anything. I was just telling her that I did the whole time. Like before. I wasn't trying to get her to say anything back. I was just telling her to let her know. That's all. Yeah. Other people knew. She just didn't (almost incredulous that others knew and she didn't).... No. She literally like disappeared and I was like what happened. I was like (pause)- I didn't know what happened? Like I didn't know. Cause it was like she she just had to go. And I don't even know why

While Sarah is often reserved in her conversations with her family and peers about her thoughts and feelings on a number of subjects, she is a little more open in her presentation of and discussions regarding her sexuality. Sarah is in a committed relationship, but neither she nor her partner knows what the future holds for them. She is, however, appreciative of the fact that her family and peers are unconditionally accepting of her relationship and her identity.

Context

The home life for the participants interviewed for this study offers a complicated, yet compelling glimpse into the nuanced relationship that each informant appears to have had in a number of contexts. As each of the informants decided the best means of making the disclosure regarding their gender identity or sexuality most did so giving significant thought to the impact that telling their family would have on their relationships. The verbal and performative disclosures to one

or more peers and members of their immediate families eased the process of making revelations in other settings. In the next section, I'll discuss some of the themes that appear to emerge in the data regarding relational experiences that were most commonly discussed and the contexts they were noted to have occurred.

School. The school context was chosen as the site for recruitment as it's the setting that youth spend a great deal of their developmental years. Schools often reify the sentiments and interests of the communities in which they are embedded. Overall, the participants in this study expressed a belief that their school was a safe space with which to explore their identities, but none was more salient than the narrative offered by D.

Although D's family and her peers are open to and respectful of her sexuality they have been less receptive to the idea that her gender non conformity might be associated with an emergent transgender identity. Her parents appear to struggle with the idea of referring to her with a male gender name. However, the teachers and the staff are more receptive. In her words:

it's nice to come here and be like respected. Umm, like my teachers you know the first day of any class they call out [Marie] because that's my legal name and so it's nice that you know when I tell them that I go by D that they honor that. Umm, because my dad and my mom don't call me D. Because, well, my mom's just irritating and then my dad is just (pause) I don't know- he's just taking time to get used to it. And so, umm, it's nice to you know, be respected here. Umm, I haven't really like come across any problems regarding that. I mean, because here has been you know basically respectful of it.

The level of professionalism that the teachers and staff are noted to show was duly noted in each of the narratives that were analyzed for this study. This is a particularly unique finding because gender non conformity remains a site ripe for policing. Discrimination against transgender

children (and adults) is noted to be quite pervasive and is often associated with negative attitudes regarding this groups gender nonconformance with particular focus given to their gender presentations (Chesir-Teran, 2003; Norton & Herek, 2013).

The participants indicated that the staff reacts with deliberate speed to address harassment or bullying in the school context. They appear to also respond to heteronormative jokes (ie- “that’s so gay”) or comments that may alienate members of the student body who may be impacted by the comments. But try as they might, a number of students still perpetuate heteronormative jokes that they hear in other contexts. As I ended my final interview with Sarah, she stated that on her way to the interview she overheard two students refer to something as being “so gay”. Some students may be so anesthetized to hearing comments like this that they blend into the background. Sarah’s bringing this up at the end of the session was surprising to me, because she could not think of any ways that heteronormativity emerges in the school context until after I had asked questions about the ways that sexual and gender minorities might be marginalized in other settings.

Still, participants like David would “100% say that this high school is accepting.” In a follow up interview on this subject, David remarked:

Yes there is gossip and yes people might get into arguments but I would never really say that there is bullying and if there is I would say that our counseling department does really well to get rid of. The general idea of bullying especially against the gay community has sort of, at least in our school, disappeared. Because our school is extremely accepting of the gay community. Like surprisingly accepting.

In an upcoming section of this chapter, we will complicate this idea of safety, in part, by using sections of David’s own narrative to explore some of the ways that the strategies that some of the

informants in this study use to minimize experiences of harassment and marginalization. That withstanding, it is important to draw a little attention to two experiences that one informant discussed before moving onto the next section.

Gay Straight Alliance. All of the participants in this study were aware of the existence of the GSA. Although David accepted a leadership role within the organization, the others were not as active in the group. The GSA is where D met her current girlfriend but once her partner graduated, she no longer felt as connected to the group. Both Sarah and Noel have been to meetings and other organizational functions in the past, but work and other interests often preclude their ability to participate as often as they would like. One theme that appeared to emerge in all of the narratives was the usefulness of having the GSA in the school and the ways that its presence may help to disrupt problematic harassment of sexual and gender minorities. Participation, on the other hand, appears to create its own set of conflicts for those who may have an interest in participating.

When asked to describe some of the other factors, beyond those noted above, that might have an impact on her level of participation in the GSA, Noel stated the following:

I was very reluctant to [participate] because of what I said earlier: because of the whole I don't like telling people what to do and I don't like them telling me what to do. But I also have a friend that was in it and then was not in it and then went to a meeting and then stopped going to meetings and like went to activities. I asked her why she kept doing it and she said that she was nervous about actually being a part of it and being accepted into the group. Rather than just showing up and leaving or doing whatever she wanted when she wanted to. So I guess her reason was basically because she was afraid that even though this was a group for people like us that she wouldn't be accepted into it.

GSA meetings are typically group oriented and offer a space for peers to share stories and to give and receive advice (Fetner et al., 2007; Watson et al., 2010). Since coming out, Noel prefers to make her own choices regarding matters of intimacy and identity development and appears reluctant to offer advice to her peers. The GSA is, by all accounts, a welcoming and accepting group; however, much like D and Sarah, Noel's peer struggled to establish a sense of connectedness as a result of some difficulty forming bonds within the group. David, however, was the only participant to suggest another rationale for not participating: stigma. According to David:

Well, like I said, as soon as you go to the GSA meeting you automatically acquire this umm label of this GSA attendee. Umm, so people will, you know, hear ohh well Johnny went to the GSA. Is he gay? You know people automatically assume that he must be gay because he went to the GSA. But all you have to do is not be homophobic to go to the GSA. I mean. It is just a place that you can go to and be around other people that understand. So. For those that chose not to go- I do agree that a lot of the time people don't go just because they don't want to or they're too tired and they just want to go home after school or something like that. I mean that's normal for a teenager. But the few that actually think about going and then choose not to it might be because they don't know how their friends will react when they hear that they went to the GSA. Because they don't know if any of their friends are homophobic. So if they go to the GSA even though they're straight they might be labeled as gay and they might be insulted for it.

The GSA is noted to be an environment where sexual and gender minority youth can find and extend support to peers who need or want the support. A number of informants appear to have benefited from the format utilized in this context; however, the narratives above suggest that

there are some students within the school context who struggle with making establishing connections even within the group. A benefit of having the group in the school is that it appears to provide a base from which to challenge harassment based on one's sexual or gender identity. Nevertheless, some students who might otherwise participate might not go based on the stigma potentially attached to attending a meeting. Gossip, as David notes in the excerpt above, may have an impact on the participation of those who might be questioning their identities but are not yet ready to answer questions in contexts outside of the space where the meetings occur. Gossip may also have an impact on the participation of straight allies who may avoid the group altogether in an effort to minimize questions about their own sexuality that might emerge as a result of attending a group.

Convergence Across Narratives

The mesosystem involves the interaction between experiences that occur across relationships and contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). I looked for the themes that emerged within and across the narratives and found that the sense of connectedness across relationships and contexts and the integration of new ways of thinking were the most relevant to this chapter. These themes will be discussed in a little more detail below.

Connectedness. Access to affirming relationships (Sadowski et al., 2009), a sense of connectedness across contexts (Diaz et al., 2010; Hong et al., 2011), and the absence of marginalization based on one's sexuality or gender identity are associated with psychological health and overall well-being for sexual and gender minorities (Birkett et al., 2009). But the focus, as the research points out, should also address the needs of youth who have not yet established or confirmed their "sexual identity" (Hong et al., 2012). As Hong et al. (2012) note,

youth with an established sexual identity are far more likely to receive support than those who may be undecided or unsure about their sexualities.

Each of the informants in this study appears to have gone through a stage where their emergent sexuality came as a surprise. When describing the first time that she had feelings towards a peer in her class, Sarah remarked that she:

did not discover anything about myself. I discovered this girl and I was like this is weird.

This is not normal cause this is like fourth grade and I was like what is this and I was like there is this girl and I was like what is going on.

She remembered thinking that the feelings that she had had were “weird” and described them as something abnormal. Before she had the chance to figure these feelings out, her family relocated to a new town, and it would be several more years before she would have those feelings again. Although she eventually gained the support and affirmation from her family and peers, it was several years before that conversation took place. In the interim, she mostly remained silent about her sexuality until a member of her family eventually asked her about it. Sensing that they were affirming rather than rejecting, she confirmed her identity.

Noel was noted to have come from a very close-knit family. However, she still had lingering concerns that once she disclosed her sexual identity, there would be ruptures in her familial relationships. She engaged in self-harming and other self-destructive behavior having internalized ideology that demonized her identity. However, once she told a few members of her family and found that they had embraced her as they had before, she made the disclosure. She discontinued her engagement in self-harming and appeared more open to talking with her mom and peers about her identity and other factors related to her development. Noel described this part of her life as follows:

Well it got to the point where my mother saw my scars on my arms and she had talked to me and she was crying and she was telling me that she was upset that I was doing those kinds of things and that I just needed to stop and that she was going to get me help blah blah blah. The same day she told me that she was pregnant for my younger brother. So during that timeframe I was mad at her for telling me that I couldn't do something that was making me feel like even though I knew it was stupid making me feel like I was helping myself in the long run. From that to being okay, she's at least accepting the fact that I do this and she knows that I need help and she knows this kind of stuff and she's not judging me on it to promising that I would at least try not to do that anymore (self harm).

Like the previous studies that have addressed the needs of sexual and gender minority youth (Birkett et al., 2009; Ryan et al., 2010), Noel's narrative supports the finding that having a supportive and affirming family is one of many buffers against self-harming and self-destructive behavior. Once Noel was able to tell her mother what was bothering her and having been told by her mom that she was loved no matter what, Noel was able to discontinue the need to self-harm having found the support that she needed to counter the messages that she had internalized regarding her emergent identity. She also appears to have found a renewed sense of purpose and a profoundly different outlook on life.

Integrating new belief systems. David's experiences with bullying in middle school appear to have made him more sensitive to the treatment of his peers. As he began to the process of strategic disclosing his sexuality to his family and peers, he became more engaged in the GSA at school. By his account, his peers often came to him as a source of comfort asking for his advice on ways that they could approach coming out to their family, peers, and in their communities.

Coming out is a deeply personal experience that requires, in many instances, careful thought to the relationships and contexts the revelation will be made. As youth begin this process they often integrate new beliefs about how their relationships will be altered once they make the self-disclosure regarding their sexuality or their gender identity (Watson et al., 2010). Making the self-disclosure, in the time, manner, and fashion of one's choosing, can also have a profound impact on the (re)examination of previously internalized beliefs about one's identity status by challenging negative perceptions and views that may have been shaped through interpersonal relationships and across contexts (Watson et al., 2010). The youth in the D'Augelli et al. (2008) study who made the self-disclosure to one or more of their parents reported that doing so greatly reduced their fears about being rejected.

When Noel transferred to the area during late middle school, she stated that she was bullied for her gender non-conforming interests and because she was a "girl that was one of the guys." Once she transitioned into the high school, she remembers being harassed for wearing clothes that concealed the scars left from cutting. She was also bullied because she did not have any friends. Once Noel initiated the coming out process she remembers becoming more vocal in her attempts to disrupt harassment and marginalization. Disclosing her sexuality to her mother appears to have helped her to challenge some of the messages that she'd internalized regarding her relationship to God and her overall self-worth. When she took a religion class in school, she did her own research and began the process of integrating new messages about what her identity meant to her. As she reflected more on her identity, she more proactively resisted efforts to police her identity by letting her peers know that she was no longer going to be a target of harassment and abuse. This included one peer in her school who had told her that she was going to hell for being a lesbian. Noel said that her friend:

basically freaked out on me and we did not talk for a while and now we are basically in the same classes. So it's not like we can get away from each other. And she talks to me a little more than before and she's not so ohh you're going to hell but she's not exactly like let's hang out let's be friends either. So it's like we talk but we're not friends.

Although harassment based on her sexuality may not have been a more global concern, it was a little disconcerting for Noel to be stuck in classes with a peer who had verbalized negative views about her identity. This peer who had told Noel that she was going to hell because of her identity was in most of her classes so seeking safety was rather problematic. Their relationship has improved, in part, because the peer, as Noel noted in a follow up interview, could not avoid her. Having multiple classes together changed the dynamics of their relationship, and she reported that the two get along well enough to make it through the classes that they share together. The experiences of harassment that she experienced appear to be far behind her, in part, because she found the strength to stand up for herself.

Summary

Chapter V included an overview of the mesosystem domain and the experiences that were most relevant in two or more relationships or contexts for each of the informants. Although I provide a discussion of the Process and the Person, much of the focus was devoted to the Contexts where identity develop was noted to have occurred. I discussed their experiences in school, experiences within the GSA, and an overview of the informants' experiences of connectedness across relationships and contexts. The final theme that was discussed was related to the informant's development and integration of new belief systems.

Chapter VI will provide an overview of the exosystem domain with specific attention given to the Process, Person, and Contexts most relevant within and across the narratives. In the

Process section, I discuss the Federal Equal Access and the Dignity for All Student's Act as each are developed in settings far removed from the contexts where my informants spend their time; however, the policies have a direct bearing on their experiences within school contexts. In the Person section, the themes that were most relevant to the identity development of my informants were related to their experiences with religion and their thoughts about the interpersonal and context specific events that may have an impact on the level of acceptance that their families and peers may have once disclosure of their sexual or gender identities is made. In the Context section, I process some of the informant's thoughts about the school-based interventions and experiences with tolerance within the school context.

Chapter VI Exosystem Domain

Overview

The Exosystem, the third domain with Bronfenbrenner's PCCT model, is comprised of the interaction between one or more microsystems and a relationship or context that does not involve the individual, but has an impact on identity development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Hong et al., 2012). According to Bronfenbrenner (1986), "the parents' workplace..., [their] social networks, and.. [the] community" each play a role in influencing "family functioning" (p. 728). In this chapter, I will review the exosystem level contexts and relationships that emerged most frequently within and across the narratives.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

The third and final phase included the transcription and analysis of the data from the last interviews and the development of a new set of questions that required additional probing. The materials from each of the sessions conducted until this point were analyzed so that additional gaps in the data could be identified and clarity could be sought in the follow up interview. The questions involved greater detail to relational and context specific phenomenon that indirectly fuels identity development. The interviews began with an exploration of any thoughts or insights that emerged after the previous session or as a result of reviewing the transcripts from the last interviews. The current interviews included an exploration of nuances that emerged in informant's responses to the questions. Brief journal assignments and informal discussions with my peer debriefers were helpful.

Process

The coming out process, a unique characteristic of identity development for sexual and gender minorities, includes an interaction between beliefs systems, experiences across

relationships and contexts. At the exosystem domain level it also involves influences that are beyond the control of the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986, 1994a, 1995). The Process are far more abstract so it becomes exceedingly more challenging at this level to draw a direct connection between domains within the exosystem; however, the questions in this section involved a review of the level of awareness that each of the informants had regarding antidiscrimination laws and their experiences of marginalization or acceptance across relationships and contexts.

The Federal Equal Access Act (FEAA) and New York State's Dignity for All Students Act have likely had an indirect impact on the overall experiences of minoritized students in school contexts (Advocates for Children of New York, 2005; Berkley, 2004; Caudillo, 2004). These Acts were explained in great detail in Chapter II, so please refer to that chapter for an in depth exposition of this content. However, it is important to note that without this legislation, schools may not be incentivized or compelled to address the needs of their sexual and gender minority student populations (Fetner et al., 2008; Higdon, 2008; Mayo, 2008; Watson et al., 2010). Staff in school settings who want to implement these school-based reforms like the Gay Straight Alliance, may be experiencing a lack of administrative support, may be pressured by members of the community to abandon plans to implement programs that protect sexual and gender minorities, or may face other barriers to the implementation of programs that support the developmental needs of sexual and gender minoritized youth in school contexts. The FEAA and New York states Dignity for All Students Act were developed in spaces seemingly far removed from the contexts in which they are actually implemented. While most of the informants were vaguely aware of anti-bullying policies, they did not appear to have any familiarity with the

FEAA which has been used by advocates to ensure that schools are afforded the opportunity to establish interventions like the Gay Straight Alliance (Fetner et al., 2008).

The coming out process, based on the narratives from the informants, appears to be liberating but fraught with dangers. Each of the participants appears to have carefully navigated this experience, choosing strategies that minimize risks but allow them the greatest opportunity to be themselves. The disclosure process was approached in a variety of ways. While some of the participants either initiated or responded to questions about their sexuality as a way of inviting the conversation, others were performative in expressing their identities. Because societal norms regarding gender performance are complicated, especially among the informants in this study, we will save the discussion regarding this approach to disclosure for the macrosystem domain section. We will, however, review some of the experiences at least one informant had regarding responses a few members of the broader community appear to have had to the existence of the GSA in the school.

Person

This section includes an exploration of the experiences of each of the informants in relationship with a part of the relationships or contexts that have an impact on identity development but do not involve them directly. A number of the informants indicated that religion and the relationships that extended family and peers played a direct and indirect role in their identity development so this section will review some of those connections.

Religion. Although only two participants had ever regularly attended a religious service most of the informants cited religion as a salient factor in the strategy that they took when they came out. Noel's close peer from kindergarten and her father were described as very religious and often espoused negative views about sexual and gender minorities. Even though Noel described her

relationship with her family as quite close, she opted to make the disclosure to her friend before telling her family. It is not clear if Noel believed the rest of her family held similarly oppressive views about her developing identity. However, the fear that telling them might have a deleterious impact on her sense of connectedness contributed to her decision to tell the religious friend before discussing it with the rest of the family. She did a better job of hiding her sexuality than she did the scars that reflected the deep sense of conflict she held about the possibility of being gay, losing her family, and going to hell. The world religions course that she eventually took, along with the conversation that she eventually had with her mother about her self-destructive behavior, appear to have helped her to shift the understanding of the problem repositioning it as something tied more closely to normative values.

David's family is deeply religious and attends services on a regular basis. He feels quite close to the members of his church and has a strong sense of connection to his faith. Yet he expressed having some reservations about coming out fearing the potential loss of connection to his family and his church community. A theme that emerged in David's narrative was the idea that disrupting stereotypes can help alleviate the ostracism that sexual and gender minorities experience. We will process this a bit further in the macrosystems level as his conceptualization of the problem and the resolution is uniquely tied to a belief about gender performance, and it reveals a nuanced approach to coming out that may be designed to diminish harassment and minoritization by engendering and embodying (gender) normative values. Beyond that, David articulated one other thing about the coming out process that was seemingly absent in the other narratives. David expressed an awareness of some of the ways that the interpersonal relationships and contexts in which his parents spend their time can have an impact on the way

that one or more of his parents respond to his self-disclosure. An excerpt from that part of the interview with David will be presented in the section to come.

Parental and Peer Influences. When describing the process of coming out to his family, David was nervous about the reactions that they would have and the extent to which telling them might lead to a rupture in their relationship. While describing the slow but steady process that he had experienced getting his father to understand his sexuality and later the fact that he is dating, David indicated that another influence could very well be his father's peers. David remarked that:

I mean none of his friend's sons are gay. So...He doesn't. He's sort of umm (pause) swimming in new waters treading in new waters. I mean it's- he's learning. We're learning. My entire family is learning. And we're doing the best that we can. So I think that when he learns of these new factors I think that he needs a little bit of time to process it a little bit more than the rest of us do. Because he- his entire life he's been expecting his son to grow up marry and have a bunch of kids and I could still do that but not the way he imagined.

The excerpt above was David discussing his father's reaction to the news that he may be dating someone. This part of the narrative suggests a nuanced and complicated relationship to the coming out process. Coming out requires one's parents and peers to reconceptualize issues of intimacy, loving relationships, and normative values (Martin, 2009). David seemed to think that his father never having had a peer, that he knows of, who has a child that identifies as a gender or sexual minority made it more challenging to come to terms with the possibility that being gay may mean dating or other forms of intimacy that deviate from the one's expectations.

Parents, as Martin (2009) notes, often believe, until evidence to the contrary emerges, that the children that they are raising will grow up to be heterosexual. They come to develop expectations for the trajectory of the lives their children will lead long after they have started to live on their own. Societal norms regarding issues of (hetero)sexuality, race and culture, relationships with peers and the internalization of fundamental religious ideology are among some of the factors that help to shape the central role that heterosexuality often impacts families and the identity development of children particularly sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth (Herek, 2000, 2002c, 2004; Herek et al., 1995; Herek et al., 2007; Herek et al., 2013; Norton et al., 2013). Just as the informants in this study needed time to reimagine what life will be like for them considering their newly emergent identities, so too must the parents as noted by the narratives of several of the informants.

Context

At the exosystem domain level, the context involves influences that are beyond the control of the individual but that have an impact on identity development in both direct and indirect ways (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986, 1994a, 1995). The questions in this section involved a review of the level of awareness of antidiscrimination policies and the degree to which they were perceived to be helpful or harmful in the school context.

School-based interventions and Tolerance. Although this particular study cannot directly link the implementation and enforcement of policies to the overall experiences of tolerance within the school, it is important to note that the schools are not compelled to enact a GSA, but they are mandated by the Dignity for All Students Act to minimize bullying. All of the informants in this study felt that the staff did an extraordinary job of creating a climate of safety and respect that

differs dramatically, for some of the informants, from their experiences in other (school) contexts. D described her experience of tolerance in this way:

Umm (pause), the tolerance like the staff has I feel like the staff can keep track of people and who said what and you know whatever. And so... I just (pause) felt like it was (pause) just better here. Because I knew that you know if something had happened that I could go to the staff and be like what the hell is this. Why did this just happen. And they would have been like well I don't know but I can take care of it right now and it would be gone and taken care of right then. But at [her previous high school] it would have taken like five years to take care of because of how many kids there are and the staff there can't keep track of anything.

Unlike the other informants in this study D had had experiences in another local high school before transitioning to this setting. Here she expressed a sense that the smaller size of the school made it easier for the staff to keep track of issues and to act on harassment more quickly than had been her experience in another setting. Although the practical implications for the aforementioned policies may be described as ubiquitous, the existence of the GSA is not as well known or understood as one might think. Every year the school hosts an event that showcases the clubs and organizations that are a part of the community within the school. The event is open to the general public so in addition to having students from the school, visitors from the broader community often come out to gain a better understanding of the types of clubs that are available within the school. Guests can ask questions and are often provided literature that can help inform their understanding of the clubs. As one of the leaders in the GSA, David attended an event as a spokesperson for the group and he said that he answered:

like very basic questions. Like what do you guys do? When do you guys meet? Is there certain things that you would like to do that you can't? You know. Just basic questions that a club should be able to answer. Umm, and it- it's just (pause) it's getting the word out there while trying to show people that we aren't just umm a band of gays you know trying to force our views on anyone else. People automatically assume that we're like trying to turn people gay or something like that. People automatically assume that if you're talking- like if there are two guys talking and that one's gay and one's not people automatically assume that the gay guy is going to start hitting on the other one. 95% of the guys in the school and I would just have regular conversation I wouldn't want to hit on them.

When asked to talk a little more about the assumptions that people make about the group, he intimated that there were a few guests who had negative reactions to the existence of the GSA and to their having a booth at the event. According to David:

They weren't even (pause) extreme negative reactions either. They were just sort of you know people that- I wouldn't if anything I wouldn't be afraid to call them positive reactions in a way. Because it was people that came to the booth skeptical or they did not like the GSA. They thought, you know, why are you guys here and why do you think that you deserve a booth? And then I would have a discussion with them and they would walk away a bit more understanding. Umm, it's just you know that initial reaction that people have seeing us having a booth somewhere.

Permeating through each of the narratives was this idea that the broader community can inform the level of acceptance and understanding extended to gender and sexual minorities. In the next chapter, we will take a closer look at some of the macrosystem phenomena that appear to shape

the ways that heterosexuality permeates expectations of youth and the ways that the treatment of this construct may be internalized by or help inform the identity development of my informants.

Summary

Chapter VI included an overview of the exosystem domain with specific attention given to the Process, Person, and Contexts most relevant within and across the narratives. In the Process section, I discussed two policies that are developed in settings far removed from the contexts where my informants spend their time that have a direct bearing on their experiences within school contexts. In the Person section, I discussed my informant's experiences with religion and their thoughts about the interpersonal and context specific events that may have an impact on the level of acceptance that their families and peers may have once disclosure of their sexual or gender identities is made. In the Context section, I process some of the informant's thoughts about the school-based interventions and experiences with tolerance within the school context.

In Chapter VII, I review the macrosystem domain level themes that were most relevant for the vast majority of my informants. Although I discussed the FEAA and the Dignity for All Students Act in Chapter VI, I will spend a little time discussing them in a little detail in Chapter VII because policies like these are often formed at the abstract level before they are implemented contextually. In the Process section, I discuss some of the challenges inherent in finding a common language for the inner workings of oppression. Utilizing the perspectives of my informants I begin by processing their thoughts regarding the usefulness of the word homophobia to address the way that oppression of sexual and gender minorities works. I then build on this discussion by introducing heterosexism, compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity as critiques of experiences that marginalize sexual and gender minorities.

In the Person section building on the discussion in the previous section, I process my informants' perspectives regarding gender roles. In the Context section I discuss my informant's experiences in school with particular attention given to the use of marginalizing language and the ways that some may be so anesthetized to it based on the frequency with which hearing words like "fag" or "retard" may occur. I close the chapter by allowing D to have the last word.

Chapter VII

The Macrosystem Domain

The macrosystem is the fourth and final domain within Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory (1986) that will be discussed in this study. The macrosystem is the domain in which the societal roles are forged and maintained. This is the abstract level in which issues like bullying, tolerance, heteronormativity, heterosexism, and gender binarisms are debated and where behaviors are ultimately policed. This is also the setting in which normativities can be challenged, and if need be, disrupted.

The FEAA and Dignity for All Students Act were discussed in the context of the exosystem and the macrosystem domains for a few reasons. Although the FEAA has been successfully utilized to support the emergence of interventions like the GSA in school contexts the passage of this legislation, as I have painstakingly outlined in an earlier chapter, it was not intended to address the needs of sexual and gender minority youth (Berkley, 2004; Caudillo v. Lubbock, 2004; Davis, 1999; Fetner et al., 2007). Advocates for this cohort, having seen it used to address the needs of Christian youth groups in public schools, began using this legislation as an approach to support the development of interventions for sexual and gender minorities with some methodical success (Berkley, 2004; Caudillo v. Lubbock, 2004; Davis, 1999; Fetner et al., 2007; Valenti et al. 2009). However, the implementation appears to be as sparse nationally as it is in the city where I contacted the 17 superintendents seeking permission to recruit from schools in their district.

The rationale for discussing the Dignity for All Students Act in the context of the exosystem was done on similar grounds. While this piece of legislation does certainly take the extraordinary step of holding schools accountable for addressing the harassment of sexual and

gender minority youth in their care, the law is uniquely designed to address concerns in schools located in the state of New York (New York State Education Department, 2013, 2014). The final concern that I have about the latter piece of legislation is that not enough time has elapsed since its passage to know the extent to which the implementation has made any significant difference in the treatment and experiences of sexual and gender minority youth in schools at the macrosystem level. However, one of the goals of selecting schools as the site for recruitment is to provide some early indicators regarding the experiences of youth that can help shape the implementation of follow up interventions in this context.

Sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth often navigate the initial stages of the coming out process on their own (Dane et al., 2009; Kus & Saunders, 1985). As I have discussed in Chapters IV, V, and VI a number of the youth who participated in this study recalled a sense of confusion as they had new thoughts and feelings emerge suddenly that they could not explain. Seldom seeing images of sexual or gender minorities in mass media and not knowing any peers who shared these thoughts and feelings was a bit disconcerting for a number of informants. Social science research is brimming with theories about the processes that shape the experiences of sexual and gender minority youth; however, much of that language is not accessible to the average high school age student. Rather than ask about their experiences with heterosexism, heteronormativity, or compulsory heterosexuality, they were asked to describe their experiences with harassment or marginalization based on their identities. Because David introduced the construct of homophobia, the remainder of the informants were asked to discuss their thoughts about this concept.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Although a number of informants had discussed institutional and social forms of oppression at various stages of the interview process, the latter portion of the interviews involved a more directive approach to exploring this phenomenon. The informants were asked to discuss the terminology that they would use that would help others to understand their experiences, societal level beliefs or practices that either help or hinder their identity development. Some of my informants reported that their schools and other contexts and relationships were safe so they were asked to discuss their rationale for managing their identities. This part of the interviews included a more detailed exploration of areas of convergence as well as parts of the narratives that appeared inconsistent. We spent time discussing the information that was processed in the previous interview followed by a discussion of clarifications.

The interviews were transcribed immediately after the sessions ended followed by a round of coding of themes within and across narratives followed by a larger round of coding for themes across the broader data set. Although the informants had taken the transcripts home in the earlier parts of the interviews the adjustments to the data were mostly grammatical rather than contextual. As a result, I made one final trip out to the school to drop off the transcripts only for those informants who requested to review them before I initiated the next stages of the analytic process. The informants who requested to see the transcripts were able to retrieve them from a sealed envelope with their alias on them left in a secure location within the school. They were given a week to review the material so that they could make any adjustments that would be useful to the overall goals of the study. They were all given instructions, whether they requested to review the final round of transcripts or not, to think about the sessions in greater detail and to reach out, within a week of the last session, if they wanted to meet face to face or write a

statement that filled any gaps from the interviews. Only one of the informants had actually requested to see the transcripts and what they were returned they only included corrections to typos.

During the final stages of the coding process, I listened to each of interviews and found that this was useful in helping me to center my analysis on the voices of my informants. This was especially useful in those parts of the data where there appeared to be some incongruence within and across the data. Journaling and peer debriefers were also useful at this stage of the process as well.

Process

The process, at the macrosystem level, included an interaction between the unique characteristics of individuals and the dominant constructions of issues related to identity as they emerged within and across the relationships and contexts that involve the informants in both direct and indirect ways. The interviews involved an exploration of the language that is most useful in describing oppression and culminated with a deeper exploration of some of the challenges inherent within that discourse.

Finding Common Language for Oppression. According to Bryant and Vidal-Ortiz (2008), homophobia has become a catch-all phrase used in many instances to describe structural inequality particularly as it relates to the devaluation of sexual and gender minorities. As they note, the term is “often deployed without adequate critical attention to its meanings and consequent effects (Bryant et al., 2008 p. 387).” Once the term materialized organically in the narratives, the informants were asked to describe their understanding of how this construct functions and the mechanisms that they believe contribute to its emergence across relationships and contexts.

David was the first informant to utilize this concept, and when asked to describe his understanding of the term, he responded by stating:

to me the idea of homophobia is just you know someone who obviously doesn't like gays and lesbians. But I think that the term is also being thrown around relatively loosely recently. People sometimes associate it with just someone who uses the term gay as like an insult or a joke or something. Or people won't use it at all even when you know someone is actually being homophobic. And so it is thrown around relatively loosely, recently. Umm, I would definitely associate it with someone who sort of has something against gays. It usually ends up being someone who follows the bible a bit too closely or someone who has had a past experience and so they just don't trust gays or something.

It should be noted that before the term homophobia gained wide approval that there had long been a push by liberationists to create a dialog around the widespread experiences of marginalization that sexual and gender minorities encounter that go well beyond the day-to-day relational and context specific interactions (Herek, 2008; Yep, 2002). In the quote above, David provides a few examples of the ways that homophobia is believed to operate. The first example that he provided describes people who hold negative views about or attitudes towards sexual and gender minorities. Homophobia, as Herek (2008) and Yep (2002) note, was believed to be rooted in irrational fears regarding interactions with sexual and gender minorities. This concept was an important first step towards moving the conversation and interventions away from the mere focus on micro-political experiences of stigmatization to the more profound macro-structural phenomena of intolerance (Herek, 2008). In other words, the genesis of the discrimination, based on this framework, would rest on the individual expression of intolerance often obscuring systemic and cultural forms of minoritization of sexual and gender minorities.

Although this new framework has had a profound impact on the way that intolerance of sexual and gender minorities is processed, there are a number of limitations inherent in using this framework (Herek, 2008; Yep, 2002). Yep (2002) citing the work of Plumber (1998) lists the problems with the utilization of homophobia as follows:

(1) it reinforces the idea of mental illness; (2) it neglects women; (3) it ignores how sexuality intersects with other vectors of oppression, namely, race, gender, and social class; (4) it directs attention away from the larger landscape of oppression of sexual minorities in general, and (5) it ignores the underlying structural and social conditions leading to sexual oppression by focusing on individuals rather than the larger social and cultural system (as cited in Yep, 2002 p. 166).

That withstanding, based on the statement at the end of the quote, David would associate the term homophobia with people who hold specific animus towards sexual and gender minorities. The attitudes towards homosexuality, he remarks, often emerge when “people follow the bible too closely” but he also felt that homophobia was a socio-cultural phenomenon. David also noted some instances when peers in his school have used terms like “that’s so gay”, for instance, as an insult or a joke. However, the latter view requires some awareness of the inner workings of the person who uses statements like “that’s so gay” forcing the listener to consider whether the remark was meant to be humorous or whether or not it was hurled as an epithet (Garcia, 2011). However, as homophobic remarks go, “that’s so gay”, whether indented as an insult or joke, delegitimizes same-sex relationships by equivocating gay with something dumb stupid, or devalued (Kosciw et al., 2012; Marston, 2015). Homophobia, then, is highly suggestive, it’s open to a number of interpretations, and may be context and relational dependent

and require interventions that move beyond what Marston (2015) calls individualising approaches to ones that are more system centric.

Noel was one of the few informants who had not used the word homophobia to describe her understanding of the ways that inequality impacts the lives of sexual and gender minorities. However, because others had used the term, I waited until our third interview to ask what she thought of the construct, and she responded by stating:

In my opinion, homophobia doesn't really- I'm not going to say that it doesn't exist because like I guess it could. But I don't think that- I think that people who say that they have homophobia aren't- [they] don't really have it and they just they don't believe in it (homosexuality). So they say- they're (shifts thought)- they're afraid of things that that they don't believe in. Like it's (pause) it's kind of like people in religion who are afraid of the devil or demons or whatever. So homophobia kind of makes me think of that and like how you're not afraid of us you're afraid of something completely different.

In Noel's view, the word homophobia engenders a sense of fear about sexual and gender minorities based, in part, on one's own heterosexual identities and the inability to relate to this cohort of peers simply because they do not understand or believe same sex feelings are real. Her latter statement suggests another explanation for the emergence of homophobia. Just to make certain that I understood the quote I paraphrased her statement, and she followed that up by saying that:

I feel like people that are homophobic are more judging the people that are (a sexual or gender minority) rather than afraid of them... [I]n my opinion it comes from people that are religious. Cause most people that aren't religious aren't really homophobic. I mean there's certain people that I know [who] aren't religious that don't exactly (shifts

thought)- they're not afraid of people that like the same gender but they don't they don't want to be a part of it. Like one of my friends from this school is as straight as an arrow. As straight as you can get. We connected because I went through a similar situation that she was going through. I told her that I liked girls and it did not bother her at all. So it's kind of like the way she carries herself made me think that if I told her that she'd freak out. But she did not. So I- I don't understand how somebody could be homophobic but not know who the homos that they're talking about are- they're afraid of or whatever.

Both David and Noel have noted that religious ideology can be a source for the generation of negative attitudes towards sexual and gender minorities. However, the research findings are as varied as the responses noted in the informant narratives. I have already addressed this research elsewhere in this publication so rather than revisiting the findings I want to focus my attention, instead, on the connection between using the word homophobia to address the negative attitudes directed towards sexual and gender minorities based, in part, on deeply held religious beliefs and the tensions inherent in using theory to describe the animus directed and sexual and gender minorities.

Herek (2004), using the broad framework of sexual prejudice, reminds his readers that both heterosexuals and sexual and gender minorities can be the targets of negative attitudes and beliefs; however, “[g]iven the power relations in contemporary society [...] prejudice is most commonly directed at people who engage in homosexual behavior or label themselves gay, lesbian, or bisexual (14).” Leaning on discourse related to prejudice, Herek (2004) utilizes sexual prejudice to describe the tendency to construct pervasive attitudes and beliefs “on the basis of their group membership [and] not their individual qualities (17).” In the quote above, Noel alludes to the fact that heterosexuals may have contact with a sexual and gender minority

and may very well have positive experiences particularly in situations where the interaction take place before the disclosure of one's minoritized position emerge. The excerpts from my interviews with David and Noel suggest that homophobia, as a theory, is demonstratively lacking in its ability to clearly define the structurally sophisticated manner in which prejudice operates. Because this is also a point of contention within the broad field of social science, I will review some of the arguments that have contributed to the development of additional ways of theorizing how socio-cultural animus towards sexual and gender minorities functions.

Rethinking Homophobia. The term homophobia, as Bryant et al. (2008) and Herek (2004) note, emerged as a way to explain the negative attitudes that some may hold about sexual and gender minorities. However, this term, as Bryant et al. (2008) attest, has been critiqued for its perceived inability to address the bidirectional way in which negative attitudes have an impact on and help fuel the stigmatization of sexual and gender minorities. Because of the challenges inherent in finding common ground from which to capture the constellation of micro-political and macro-structural phenomenon associated with the oppression of gender and sexual minorities, several theories emerged as a way to bridge that understanding.

Heterosexism and compulsory heterosexuality are constructs that emerged around the same time that homophobia gained national attention (Herek, 2008). According to Herek (2008), these constructs gained prominence among "lesbian-feminist" scholars and as Pascoe (2007) notes, they refer to a "constellation of practices, discourses, and interactions (p. 86)" that reinforce rituals which perpetuate inequalities based, in part, on the hegemonic suturing of gender roles to gendered bodies.

A number of the informants indicated that they were surprised and confused by their emergent sexualities, in part, because they were socialized to believe that heterosexuality was

natural and ideal. In this instance, heterosexuality was internalized as compulsory, alienating the informants from their families and peers contributing to strategic approaches to the disclosure of their sexual minority status in stages. David was the only informant who appears to have had to take the additional approach of telling his family that he had developed an interest in dating, further disrupting the expectations that he would grow up and form a family constellation consistent with the heterosexual structure in which he was raised.

Heterosexism, like Rich's (1980, 2003, 2004) compulsory heterosexuality, which I outlined in an earlier chapter, has been used as a mechanism to explain and disrupt the systematic erasure of forms of sexuality and gender performance that fall outside of established norms (Chesir-Teran, 2003). According to Chesir-Teran (2003), heterosexism normalizes pervasive attitudes and beliefs about sexuality and narrowly defines gender roles and identity. Heterosexism, then, perpetuates the belief that heterosexuality and gender conformity are both normative and ideal (Chesir-Teran, 2003; Cheverette, 2013; Tharinger, 2008). A number of the informants had experiences where peers held negative attitudes towards sexual and gender minorities. Sarah was noted to have an experience with a peer in her class who told her that she was going to go to hell because of her identity. She was noted to have felt isolated from her family and peers, in part, because she did not know anyone else who had shared her interests or identity. The dominant constructions of heterosexuality were so pervasive that they contributed to a sense of confusion and isolation. All of the informants reported a sense that coming out appears to have unsettled the quotidian experience of isolation by disrupting the unnamed privilege that heterosexuality had come to command across relationships and contexts.

Queer theorists began to use the term heteronormativity to describe the stigmatization of sexual and gender minorities as the result of hegemonic suturing of whiteness to a constellation

of unearned privileges based, in part, on one's race, gender, religious identity, and positioning within the dominant culture (Berlant et al., 1998; Carter, 2007). Whiteness and heterosexuality, as Carter (2007) notes, "share a certain unwillingness to acknowledge their own power and the many forms of coercion and violence that uphold their unearned advantages: both prefer to perceive themselves as natural traits, simultaneously noble and innocent of political meanings (p. 27)." The unearned privileges often contribute to quotidian experiences of acceptance or marginalization of minoritized groups, particularly sexual and gender minorities, based in part on one's identity and the relationships and contexts in which development occurs (Chesir-Teran, 2003; Cheverette, 2013; Toomey et al., 2012). The hegemonic suturing of whiteness to heterosexuality is believed to contribute to controlling narratives that police the perceptions about, attitudes towards, and overall treatment of those who are neither white nor heterosexual (Carter, 2007; Mogul et al., 2011; Skidmore, 2008; Sommerville, 2005; Van Eeden-Moorefield et al., 2011; Ward et al., 2009). Heteronormativity can then be viewed as a critique of institutional, social, and cultural forms of dominance whose hegemonic position is taken as natural and benevolent. More to the point, this theory has been utilized as a means with which to critique the hegemonic positioning of women (Mogul et al., 2007), people of color (Sommerville, 2005), people with disabilities (Higdon, 2008), and sexual and gender minorities (Allender, 2009; Belkin, 2008; Beemyn, 2003; Berlant et al., 1998; Carter, 2007; Dane et al., 2009; Hamilton, 1987; Reichard, 2010; Surtees et al. 2010; Tribe, 2004) as dangerous, promiscuous, sexually aggressive deviants. This (re)framing of the experiences of sexual and gender minorities has contributed to the development of social science research which has explored some of the stigma management strategies that sexual and gender minorities often utilize in response to experiences of marginalization (Cheverette, 2013; Franck, 2002; Hong et

al., 2012; Horn et al., 2010; McGuire et al., 2010; Rosenfeld , 2009; Sharma, 2009; Toomey et al., 2012; Tribe, 2004). It has also been fueled, in part, by the theories, like compulsory heterosexuality, heterosexism, and heteronormativity, which critique the dominant constructions of gender, sexuality, and other binarisms (Carter, 2007; Herek, 2004; Hong et al., 2012; Horn, et al., 2010) and the macro-political phenomena that perpetuate the marginalization of minoritized groups (Carter, 2007; Mogul et al., 2011; Sommerville, 2005).

According to Herek (2004), lesbian-feminist, utilized compulsory heterosexuality and heterosexism as a means with which to critique the taken for granted assumptions related to heterosexuality which positions it as normative and ideal. The goal of this critique would be the dismantling of the dominant construction of gender: Gender, then, is posited to be the site that fuels patriarchy and the oppression of women and other minoritized groups. Queer theorists, as Herek (2004) notes, utilize heteronormativity to note the normalizing effects that heterosexuality has on perpetuating the hegemony of sexual dominance. Rather than focus on the dismantling of gender, the focus here is on the disruption of the heterosexual-homosexual binary (Herek, 2004).

Of course a more complex review of each of the theories is presented in an earlier chapter. However, they're presented here as a way of detailing a few of the ways that theorists have attempted to "rethink homophobia" (Bryant et al., 2008; Herek, 2004) and as a way of drawing a connection to the lived experiences of my informants. In social relationships and contexts, compulsory heterosexuality, and to varying degrees heterosexism, and heteronormativity, may act as a mechanism that police both sexuality and issues related to gender performance. As David and Noel both pointed out, people often hold very narrow views about sexuality and gender identity based in part on social norms and personally held views regarding gender. Within families, parents and siblings may assume that everyone is

heterosexual (Martin, 2009). Sexual and gender minorities, as the narratives outlined in Chapter IV reveal, may then strategically disclose their identities in those relationships and contexts where ruptures are least likely to occur or as a means of minimizing negative attitudes that may emerge once a disclosure is made. In an upcoming section, I will push in a bit more on this concept of heteronormativity. David's narrative provides an opportunity for a discussion of the ways that strategic outness rests on the internalization and reproduction of hegemonic norms (Rosenfeld, 2009).

Person

Gender Norms. Each of the informants expressed varying degrees of awareness regarding the ways in which their identities violated gender norms. When peers were developing interests in dating and exploring their sexuality, D turned to the internet to gain a better sense of her gender identity. As representations of sexual minority identities increase in the media and other contexts, there remains a gap in the visibility of gender non-conforming identities (Beemyn 2003; Skidmore, 2008; Stryker, 2004; Vitulli, 2010). Social media websites like Facebook appear to be a safe haven within which to meet others who hold shared identities.

As societal respect for and tolerance of sexual minority identities increases (D'Augelli et al., 2008), there remains a lot of space for disrupting the ways that gender normativities impact the lives of youth (Cole et al., 2008). Clicking 'like' on Facebook and becoming 'friends' with peers allows D a space to explore both her sexuality and gender nonconformity in a judgement free environment. D is less concerned today about what people think about her gender or sexuality; she uses her gender expression as a representation and performance of her gender identity. She believes that most people assume that she is a lesbian because her performance of gender defies conventional norms. Every day she comes out to the world without ever uttering a

word about her sexuality or gender, and in most instances, people, by her account, develop their own narratives about her life based on their interpretations of her gender performance.

The coming out process was particularly distressing for David. He had had experiences with bullying in middle school-based on his weight and a speech impediment. As he became aware of his emergent sexuality, he feared that he would become a target of bullying for that too. Like the other informants David navigated the self-disclosure process being strategic in the timing and the targets with whom he made his revelations. He found a significant amount of support and understanding from his family and peers as he explored his sexuality and discovered a renewed sense of connectedness the people with whom he made the disclosure. However, something unique emerged in his narrative that is worthy of some exploration here. Although most of the informants celebrated their gender nonconformity, David appeared reluctant to embrace unconventional forms of gender expression. In the quote below, he was asked to articulate the concerns that he has with gender nonconformity. He appeared to celebrate the fact that his gender normative behavior could engender the belief that he is heterosexual. He also expressed some concern that gender non conformity, particularly among flamboyant gays, often reifies problematic stereotypes that contribute to the marginalization and harassment of sexual and gender minorities. He stated:

Umm, well I would definitely say that there are different levels of flamboyance.

Obviously there's the idea behind flamboyance is that you sort of act girly-girlish I guess you could say. Not even like girlish because there are so many different kinds of girls.

You can't label all girls as one specific girl. You act girly girlish. You do the whole like hand motions (does motions with hands) you have like the really gay voice (speaks here in a high nasal voice) and umm (laughs) it's those it's those stereotypes that come out

about you know being a girly-girl and each gay person sort of I guess you could say that they get rated in a way based on how flamboyant they are. I'm very low on the flamboyant scale in the sense that umm maybe once or twice I have done something flamboyant but even then that was more of a joke if anything. Umm, and then there are some people in our school who are very flamboyant. And it's just there is just this whole range of umm being flamboyant. People are just sort of I noticed that a common trend is that sort of get annoyed with the really flamboyant gays just because a common trend among the really flamboyant gays is that they try to use the fact that they are gay against other people. They'll do the whole you only hate me because I'm gay kind of thing. Those of us who are on the less flamboyant scale we sort of are more modest about it when you hear that someone is gay you get a mindset. It's unintentional. Even I get a mindset of a flamboyant gay is and you get another immediate mindset of what another flamboyant gay is. It's just automatic. And so there is this sort of scaling in the community of what flamboyant is and what it is not

Several things emerge from this extended quote, so let us take a moment to dissect this. First, he appears to recognize that gender normative values can have an impact on the ways that the gender performance of others is processed. In many instances, even among sexual and gender minorities, there may be an urge to rate the gender performance of peers: the strongest reaction to the gender nonconformity among other males appears to be reserved for those on the polar end of the masculinity scale (Pascoe, 2007). In other words, gender nonconformity may elicit a visceral reaction even among those who do the work of disrupting heteronormative messages. This may be an ongoing challenge even among sexual and gender minorities as they too are bombarded by the same heteronormative messages that a part of a constellation of has been

called the “dominant social [and cultural] constructions” about gender norms (Rosenfeld, 2009 p. 622).

In an earlier discussion, David equated being gay with being a “rebel.” However, he cautioned that “you can't like flaunt it [or] people will get annoyed with you.” Flamboyance, then, is viewed as haughty and an unnecessary display of pride that reifies unproductive stereotypes. In each of the relationships and contexts that David described, he appeared to feel compelled to assure those around him that he would not become flamboyant and that he would avoid doing things that would change the way that those around him might view him. Although he stated that people tend to value one being honest about their gender and sexual identity describing those who hold those identities as “rebels”, he struggled to see the strength and courage that it must take to be gender nonconforming in a world that gets “annoyed” with those who appear to flaunt their identities. In another quote, he stated:

Because in my view you already have enough of the world hating you. There is no reason to make them hate you more. And that's why I have sort of adhered to the straighter (gender normative or conforming) gay kind of lifestyle. And personally I enjoy this kind of lifestyle because I can hide it if I want to. Like I can be- I can be sort of straight if I needed to. Umm so umm I mean it did scare me because I knew that not only would I sort of hate myself I knew that a lot of other people would get annoyed with me and it would make it less likely that they would be openly accepting of me. So I did want to make sure that people understood that I was not going to be a flamboyant gay. I wanted them to understand that you know that I'm going to be me.

Here, acceptance may be contingent on his willingness to be gender conforming in his appearance. Deviations from the gender norms could potentially rupture well established

relationships. Presenting oneself as straight is a strategy that minimalizes ruptures in relationships and may provide a sense of safety (Orne, 2011; Rosenfeld, 2009). His performance of gender affords him what he called an “incognito advantage.” His “broad shoulders” and stature makes it exceedingly less likely that he will be bullied like he had been in grade school due to the weight and the speech impediment. His reproduction of the “dominant social [and] cultural” constructions of masculinity offers him a cache of benefits that are extended to those whose identities most closely fit the established norms (Orne, 2011; Pascoe, 2007; Rosenfeld, 2009; Tharinger, 2008).

In the final part of our discussion regarding his experience as a leader within the school-based GSA, he described the peer support program as mostly a discussion group. However, he did indicate that the group often looks for ways to increase the visibility of the group, so that his peers within the school have an awareness of the group’s existence. In the midst of this discussion, he described his participation in an expo that the school put on for peers within the school as well as members of the extended which provided an opportunity for guests to learn more about the types of programs and peer support groups available within the school. During this part of the conversation, he talked about the importance of having a presence at events like this. While most visitors to the booth understood the importance of having a GSA in the school, there were some who had visceral reactions to sexual and gender minorities having their own peer support group within the school. He described his role as one of disrupting assumptions about the GSA:

It it goes back to the whole you know regular stereotypes of gays. It’s something that has been around for so long. It’s umm it goes along with the whole if I’m gay I’m automatically flamboyant. If I’m this I’m automatically that and it’s just those

stereotypes that have lived on throughout the years. One of our main goals is to get rid of those stereotypes. Cause most of them aren't true.

Getting “rid of those stereotypes” appears to require the systematic erasure of individuals and groups whose gender performances perpetuate stereotypes about gender and sexual minorities. David’s speaking role at the event serves as a tool for strategically managing perceptions about his own identity while also dispelling concerns about the benefits and potential risks of having a GSA in schools. This part of the narrative reveals some tension between the desire to disrupt heteronormative expectations that contribute to the alienation of sexual and gender minorities across relationships and contexts and the emergence of homonormativity.

I discussed the construct of homonormativity extensively in Chapter I, so it will not be revisited in too much details here. However, this construct has some probative value for our work here. There are at least two interlocking and at times overlapping matrices that have been utilized to shed a light of the experiences of sexual and gender minoritized groups (Bryant, 2008). According to Bryant (2008) “[Lisa] Duggan’s account locates homonormativity within a matrix of neoliberal politics [while] Stryker’s locates it within LGBTQ intergroup dynamics (p. 457).” Although Lisa Duggan’s (Bryant, 2008; Duggan, 2004) version, which involves neoliberal identity politics, consumption, and domestication are important contributions to our understanding of how the minoritization of sexual and gender minorities works, Susan Stryker’s (2008) account is more useful for this study.

Homonormativity, as Stryker (2008) notes, was a term first used to describe “the double sense of marginalization and displacement experienced within transgender political and cultural activism (p. 145).” In some ways, the seemingly new essentialist sexual identity categories that have emerged often share many commonalities with the dominant constructions of gender that

some hoped to disrupt leaving those who differed the most even more vulnerable to continued isolation from the movement for equality. By all accounts, notwithstanding the occasional heteronormative jokes that are still used in a number of settings, the informants in this study appeared to agree that within the school context sexual minority peers have earned a place of tolerance often not shared with their gender nonconforming peers. Whether we are talking about Sarah's experience hearing peers laugh as a teacher calls a student by the name of her choosing rather than by the one assigned at birth or the reactions to flamboyance, gender nonconformity appears to remain a site for policing. The flamboyant gay peers, by David's account, are inconvenient reminders of the ways some sexual minorities differ from the dominant constructions of gender. I should point out that just as David made the remarks noted above, he did recognize his own gender (non)conformity. He believed that he was rather low on the "flamboyance scale" and noted that "[t]hose of us who are on the less flamboyant scale, we sort of are more modest about it. When you hear that someone is gay you get a mindset. Its unintentional."

Flamboyant gays may utilize a form of strategic outness that varies significantly from the approach used by most of the informants in this study and appear to create a sense of urgency that require deliberate approaches that distill beliefs that most gays are flamboyant. Of course not all of the informants shared David's concern; however, his remarks are important because of his role as a leader within the school-based GSA. In the section of the narrative cited above, David is noted to have remarked about the challenges many face, in part, because of the stereotypes that heterosexuals may hold about sexual and gender minorities. Dispelling those beliefs, by his account, may lead to the "unintentional" dislocation of the stereotypes and perhaps the displacement of flamboyant deviations from the dominant constructions of gender further

perpetuating the marginalization that gender nonconforming youth experiences within relationships and contexts.

Context

School. The school context certainly is not the only setting in which the informants find themselves; however, it is the one setting where the majority of the informants spend vast amounts of their time. High Schools are embedded into the very fabric of society. They often exemplify, and in some ways, obscure the best as well as the most problematic actions and views held by the broader society.

All of the informants indicated that the school context was a site that was overwhelmingly safe for sexual minorities. They associated this feeling of safety to the implementation and enforcement of anti-harassment policies, the acceptance extended them by the teachers and their peers, and the increased visibility of sexual minorities in the media and in other contexts. The participants often overhear comments like ‘that’s so gay’, and in most instances, the intention behind the statement is not malicious. David said this about his experiences with hearing the jocks and others use the word fag in school:

Umm, (pause) two common groups that I would associate it with that I have heard- You’re gonna hear my titles for groups within the school- would be the jocks and the stoners. Umm, there’s sort of a group of kids that’s always hanging around like the main lobby of the school. They’re always talking about- well you know I went home and did you know these drugs or something like that. You always hear them dropping the F word. And then jocks just do it. They do it unintentionally. I know that the jocks just sort of do it unintentionally because it’s just sort of become a habit for them. And that’s sort of, that’s what it is. It’s become just a word that people say. Like when people say

oh that's so gay. Like it's, it's yes, it's frowned upon but it's- it's like when people say that's retarded. Like it's just an accepted thing at this point. Like there is very little that you can do to stop it. Umm and I think that there is sort of this middle ground that we have to meet where it's we can learn to accept it if you learn not to use it in every sentence that you speak. You know just tone it down a little bit because it's unnecessary

The use of minoritizing language appears, by this account, to be a regularly occurring albeit unwelcomed part of their experiences in some contexts. I gathered from a later part of my conversation with David, when he described the school as 100% safe for sexual and gender minorities, that when he described the jocks use of fag that he had become anesthetized, in some respects, to the use of the word. In other words, some of the peers utilize the language like this so often that its emergence is not viewed as malicious or harmful in its intent. However, his desire to see them "tone it down a little bit" suggests that the language may be viewed, at minimum, as problematic.

In many instances, the presence of the GSA in the school contexts helps to disrupt some of the problematic experiences by offering a space with which sexual and gender minorities along with their peers can find and extend support. The narratives do, however, indicate that just as tolerance of divergent forms of sexuality has increased, that there remains room for the disruption of the problematic treatment of gender nonconformity. In the section just above, David's narrative suggests that sexuality may remain a site fraught with heavy policing. Another quote detailed above from the interview with Sarah reveals a level of discomfort with gender nonconformity that often elicits laughter when teachers or other staff refers to transgender students by the name that they request rather than by the one that was assigned at birth. Those experiences, of course, are not limited to the school context. Some of the informants, like D,

have had difficulty getting their family, who are accepting of their sexuality, to understand and respect their gender identities. According to D:

trans people have, I feel, have more to fear than you know (shifts thought)- coming out as trans has more obstacles than coming out as gay or lesbian or pan because umm, I don't know. It's just parents aren't as accepting because they're literally watching their child change into another person. I can understand why there would be a bit- they would be a little hesitant towards trans people. But on the other hand let them be happy. If they're happy as a guy let them be happy. If they're happy as a woman let them be a woman.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed the macro-cultural themes that were most relevant within and across the narratives for the vast majority of my informants. Although the FEAA and the Dignity for All Students Act was processed in Chapter VI, I spent a little time discussing it here because policies like these are often formed at the abstract level before they are implemented. Both policies are designed to address identity based harassment in school-based contexts. In the Process section, I discussed some of the challenges inherent in finding a common language that fully encapsulates how oppression works. Utilizing the perspectives of my informants I begin by processing their thoughts regarding the usefulness of the word homophobia to address the way that oppression of sexual and gender minorities work. I then built on this discussion by introducing heterosexism, compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity as critiques of experiences that marginalize sexual and gender minorities.

In the Person section building on the discussion in the previous section, I process my informants' perspectives regarding gender roles. I utilize homonormativity as a mechanism with which to frame how gender, particularly for those along the flamboyant end of the gender norm

continuum, is policed. In the Context section I discussed my informant's experiences in school with particular attention given to the use of marginalizing language and the ways that some may be so anesthetized to it based on the frequency with which hearing words like "fag" or "retard" may occur. I closed the chapter by allowing D's perspective to linger in the minds of my readers regarding the experiences of transgender youth and the need for greater tolerance and understanding of the needs of this cohort.

Chapter VIII

Analytic Discussion

While there are a number of quantitative studies that explore the needs of adolescents who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and gender non-conforming (Birkett et al., 2009; Diaz et al., 2010; McQuire et al., 2010; Toomey et al., 2011), there is a paucity of qualitative work with this population (Singh et al., 2011). A number of search terms were utilized to locate peer reviewed research which addresses issues of marginalization from or instances where youth felt a sense of connectedness within the relationships and contexts most relevant to their identity development. Surprisingly, there is a dearth of qualitative research which addresses these phenomena. Although I was not entirely hoping to generate new theory, I was interested in confirming one or more theories regarding the coming out process. This study confirmed Orne's (2011) theory of Strategic Outness regarding the ongoing process that sexual and gender minorities may take with regards to coming out. Although I did not plan to ask questions about social isolation or self-harm, these constructs emerged organically and they challenge theories which might suggest that there is a direct correlation between being a sexual or gender minority and the propensity to engage in self-destructive behavior. My findings suggest that the relationship between self-harm and social isolation are complex and require a nuanced approach that is theoretically grounded and sensitive enough to capture and attune to the range of phenomena that can have an impact on those associations as they relate to sexual and gender minorities.

This study fills an important gap in the extent literature building on the existent knowledge by capturing the voices of sexual and gender minority youth. A goal of this study was to avoid the replication of research which has tended to focus on the recruitment of this cohort of youth from community-based contexts. Although the latter approach has generated a

significant amount of information about sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth who access these services, the research tells us that there are a number of youth in school-based contexts who hold these identities and seldom seek out community-based services due to concerns related to safety, financial limitations, and other related barriers (Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2011). A number of studies have recruited sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth from community-based settings, in part, because of the safety that this group is believed to experience in settings that are open to and supportive of identities that diverge from the heterosexual and gendered norms. A limitation to using community-based settings as the site for recruitment is that some youth may not be aware of or have access to community-based services (Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2011). Another concern that appears to emerge in some of the literature that I reviewed relates to issues of recruiting sexual and gender minority youth across contexts (Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2011; Carragher et al. 2002).

Researchers utilize community-based settings, in part, because of the challenges gaining access to this cohort of youth. The research tells us that there may be a number of youth who fail to disclose their identities in school and other contexts in an effort to minimize the loss of interpersonal relationships (Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2011). This stigma management strategy makes finding culturally representative samples challenging but not impossible. That notwithstanding, I still felt the need to find an approach that might grant me access to my population of interest within the setting that development is believed to occur. The steps that I took to include a more diverse population of students did not have the preferred outcome. I have, however, outlined the steps that were taken to recruit the informants for this current study in Chapter IV, and I plan to discuss the limitations of my approach soon.

Recruitment and the Discourse of Vulnerability

Sexual minority and Gender Non-Conforming youth are often viewed as a vulnerable population (Caudillo v. Lubbock, 2004; Davis, 1999; Fetner et al., 2007). However, the discourse which surrounds the treatment of this group is complicated and often focuses on the negative experiences that this group encounters (DeBlaere et al., 2010; Wells, 2009), while obscuring the experiences of youth (and adults) who find acceptance and connection in the families and communities upon disclosure of their identities (Dane et al., 2009). Some of the studies have also overlooked some of the macro level phenomenon which fuels the experiences of acceptance or rejection that members of this population experience across relationships and contexts (Hong et al., 2012; Horn et al., 2010) or the construction of supportive spaces that disrupt quotidian experiences of marginalization (Arnold et al., 2009; Boag, 2003; Chauncey, 1994; Sadowski, 2010). Although a considerable amount of the extant literature has tended to focus on this group's vulnerability for psychological, social, and interpersonal problems (Davis, 1999; Fetner et al., 2007), studies like the one that I am conducting here disrupt and further complicate the lives and experiences of youth.

Sexuality and gender expression are complicated and often differ depending on interlocking identities such as gender, race, class, and socio economic standing (Hong et al., 2012; Horn et al., 2010; Arnold et al., 2009; Boag, 2003; Chauncey, 1994). Given what we know about the experiences of acceptance and rejection that may be felt, at least in part, by the legal, political, and other macro system factors (Allender, 2009; Boag, 2003; Chauncey, 1994, 2004; Curtis et al., 2008; Lund et al., 2004; Mills, 2004; Spindelman, 2013; Tribe, 2004; Wardinski, 2005), I utilized Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory as a way to shape my conceptualization of the informant and to inform how my participants were recruited. In recognition of the challenges inherent in recruiting sexual and gender minority participants,

particularly within communities of color, I sent a few additional emails to one superintendent because she had five high schools most of which were located in or near communities of color.

The following is an excerpt from one of my last emails to this particular superintendent:

I wanted to take one final opportunity to invite students from one or more of your schools who meet the inclusion criteria to participate in a study which explores the identity development of sexual and gender minority youth. The development of the project I plan to embark upon for my dissertation took a year to develop and another year or so to get my committee to see my vision. As I wrote the first three chapters of the dissertation proposal I noticed a theme in the literature- one where the experiences of youth of color, among others, were all but invisible, in part, due to the methodological approach used to recruit the informants. I selected the school context as a way of addressing some of the limitations associated with ensuring a diverse pool of participants. While I await the IRB's review of and response to the memorandum and the updated application, which I have attached here for review, I thought that I would take one final opportunity to forward this packet to you so that you could consider approving your high schools for inclusion in my study.

Should you agree to participate, your school(s) will not be identified no matter the outcome of the study. You will be referred to simply as a school or schools in a northern city in New York State. The identities of the students who agree to participate will also remain confidential and I have included a description of the steps that I plan to take in an effort to ensure their safety and protection. Finally, although schools have been selected as the context from which to draw my informants, I am interested in the range of experiences that youth have across contexts and relationships. In short, this is not simply

a study about the experiences of sexual and gender minority youth in schools. Instead, this is an exploration of the experiences this cohort of youth have as members embedded in multiple contexts and relationships.

A growing body of literature, many of which are quantitatively focused (Birkett et al., 2009; Diaz et al., 2010; McQuire et al., 2010; Toomey et al., 2011), has used schools as the settings for recruiting youth, as schools are the settings that youth spend the vast majority of their time. Doing research in schools facilitates discussions on how to make this context a diverse setting that is tolerant and respectful of differences. Such research holds the potential for disrupting experiences of alienation and marginalization while also contextualizing interpersonal and context specific experiences that lead to a sense of connectedness. Completion of this study may help to increase the visibility of gender non-conformity and concerns of sexual minority youth in counseling related journals. This research may highlight the steps that counselors and school staff could take to support the agency and social justice efforts of youth without privileging actions or discourse that would lead to further alienation.

Leaning on Existing Policies

In 2010 the New York State implemented the Dignity for All Students Schools Act which outlines the steps that schools in the state must take to address issues of harassment students may experience as a result of their gender, race, religious practices or beliefs, as well as their sexual identity or gender presentation (New York State Education Department, 2013 & 2014). Schools are required to identify a staff member who holds the responsibility for tracking and disrupting issues of harassment (New York State Education Department, 2013 & 2014). These staff are also tasked with the responsibility of providing support for students who feel marginalized because of their identities and for conducting workshops and in-services which

contribute to a sense of connectedness to the school, its staff, and the broader community (New York State Education Department, 2013 & 2014).

A number of schools in New York also have Gay Straight Alliances. These are student facilitated and staff mentored groups that provide supports for sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth and their allies in school contexts. Gay Straight Alliances are one of many school-based interventions which are associated with a reduction in school-based harassment (Currie et al., 2012; Fetner et al., 2008; Mayberry, 2013; Mayberry et al., 2011; Mayo, 2008; Russell et al., 2009). These interventions are also associated with an increased sense of connectedness to the school, staff, and peers as well as for facilitating the coming out process.

Integrative Discussion of Findings

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1986, 1994a, 1995; Bronfenbrenner et al., 1994b; Bronfenbrenner et al., 2005; Christensen, 2010; Darling, 2007) consists of four main domains which are believed to play a role in identity development. The Microsystem Domain consists of the idiosyncratic characteristics like personality, for instance, and the way experiences in relationships and across contexts help shape identity development. The Mesosystem Domain reflects the interaction between and within one or more microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Hong et al., 2012; Horn et al., 2010). Although I opted to present an overview of the informants alongside their experiences in one setting in Chapter IV followed by a more robust discussion of some of the interactions that may occur between and across relationships and contexts in Chapter V, I need to explain that this was done for you, the reader, to make it easier to see the subtle distinctions between these two domains. Due to the overlap between the microsystem and mesosystem domains, I plan to provide a combined overview of the emergent themes from these two chapters followed by a discussion of the implications in an upcoming section.

The Exosystem Domain consists of an interaction between the domains in which identity development occurs and one or more contexts that have an impact on identity development but do not involve youth directly (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Hong et al., 2012; Horn et al., 2010). The Macrosystem, the fourth and final domain that was presented in this study, addresses societal level views regarding issues like bullying, homophobia, heterosexism, and heteronormativity. These views can certainly have an impact on the implementation of policies that influence the experiences that youth have across relationships and contexts. Although the Macrosystem has an indirect role in shaping the Micro, Meso, and Exso system domains, I presented this as a separate chapter for you, the reader. However, for reasons similar to my rationale for combining Microsystem and Mesosystem in the review to follow, I have opted to present a combined overview of Exosystem and Macrosystem followed by a discussion of the implications based on the emergent themes.

Bronfenbrenner (1986) often described the parent's places of work as having an indirect impact on identity development because in many ways their income, scheduled hours, and commute to and from work do not involve the youth directly but they may have an impact on the ways that parents interact once they get home. This is true and holds a lot of significance; however, for the purpose of this study I utilized the development of legislation like the Dignity for All Students Act and the GSA as two policies that have a direct impact on youth but are developed in places far removed from the school as examples of the exosystem domain. In Chapter VI, I discuss the interventions and their perceived impacts on identity develop with specific focus given to the school context. In Chapter VII I discussed several of the theories that are noted to have an overarching impact on the development across relationships and contexts. However, as noted above, Chapters VI and VII will be presented in a combined section.

Microsystem & Mesosystem Domain Discussion

In Chapter IV, I presented the themes that emerged in microsystem domain. The microsystem domain involves the intrapsychic, interpersonal, and context specific phenomenon that are most relevant to the process of identity development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Hong et al., 2012; Horn et al., 2010). In Chapter V, I discussed the mesosystem related themes that appear to emerge across relationships and contexts. As part of the review of the microsystem domains, the informants were asked to talk a little bit about their identity development. The initial questions involved a brief description of the ways that they viewed their relational style and culminated in a review of their earliest memories with same sex interest or desire and the strategies each used to deal with the real, perceived, or anticipated reactions to their disclosures. As I shared in an earlier chapter, consistent with an IPA approach (Finlay, 2011; Smith et al., 2009), I was less interested in any essentialist coming out story as much as I was focused on the meaning that the informants have made of this part of their development. The follow up interviews involved questions which sought to clarify points made in the previous sessions. The informants were then asked to describe the ways that their identity had impacted their experiences in one or more relationship or context.

Identity Development

Adolescent development involves biological, physiological, and psychological growth (Smart, 2012). In some cultures this stage of development is marked by the completion of incremental age related tasks that lead up to a sense of individuation from one's family and peers (Smart, 2012). Children who hold non-heterosexual identities are often socialized in environments where sexual minority and gender non-conforming identities are marginalized concretizing the presumption that heterosexuality is natural, normative, and ideal (Gladding, 2013; Sullivan et al., 2001). In addition to navigating the stages of adolescent development,

sexual and gender minority youth must also manage identities in settings that are often perceived as hostile to their sexual and gender identities as a result of discourse tied to medico-religious ideology (Gladding, 2013). Sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth often grow up without the support of families that help guide them through this part of their identity (Dane et al., 2009; DiFulvio, 2011) which, as Gladding notes, can contribute to a range of identity management strategies leading up to and including “feelings of isolation, stigmatization, and trouble with peer relationships, as well as family disruption (p. 112).”

Strategic Outness

Strategic outness can also be viewed as a form of resiliency particularly as it emerges in relationships and contexts that marginalize non-heterosexual identities. As I have discussed earlier, the coming out process may be context specific and may differ across interpersonal relationships (Cohn et al., 2010; Lasser et al., 2003; Moore, 2010; Orne, 2011). Not all parents or staff are intolerant of identities that differ from the heterosexual and gender norms and youth often make disclosures in their own way and in a timeframe that meets their needs (Cohn et al., 2010; Lasser et al., 2003; Moore, 2010; Orne, 2011). Disclosure is noted to lead to an increased sense of connectedness and is often facilitated in situations where there are policies or actions which signify unconditional acceptance (D’augelli et al., 2008; D’augelli et al., 2010; Diaz et al., 2010).

From Isolation and Self-Harm to a Sense of Connectedness

A sense of social isolation and the engagement in self-harming behaviors emerged organically in a number of the narratives. However, the genesis of the self-harming behavior emerged for reasons indirectly related to their marginalized sexual or gender identities. Strategic management of one’s identity was associated with a sense connection in those relationships and contexts that were perceived as tolerant of their non-heterosexual identities.

Noel started cutting not simply as a way of coping with her emergent pansexual identity. She appears to have engaged in self-harming behavior as a result of the alienation that she felt having internalized a belief that God would not love her because of her identity. She engaged in self-harming behavior for years until she finally had a conversation with her mother and she had the opportunity to talk openly about the things that were going on with her. The unconditional support that her mother extended her and the love that she had for her newborn brother became a catalysis for change. Noel also took a world religions course in school which helped her to internalize new messages about her identity and her relationship with God.

David did not engage in self-harming behavior but he was noted to have isolated himself towards the end of his middle school years and for the first part of his high school years. He was picked on due to his weight and a speech impediment and fearing that others might learn that he was gay, before he was able to fully process what that meant, was terrifying to him. Isolating was a way for him to minimize any harassment that he might experience as a result of his sexual minority status. Like Noel, as David began to make the self-disclosures about his identity, he reported that he felt less isolated from and more connected to his family, peers, and the settings in which he spent the vast majority of his time.

Connectedness is defined by the extent to which one's feels like a valued member within the relationships as well as the contexts in which development occurs (DiFulvio, 2011). Both proximal and distal phenomenon can have an impact on the level of connectedness one feels across milieu and may be associated with the emergence or reduction of maladaptive behavior. At the micro and meso system domain levels, connectedness, as DiFulvio (2011) notes, contributes to "lower levels of social isolation" and acts as a buffer "against suicidal thoughts and behaviors, substance abuse and other high-risk behaviors (1612)." At the exo and macro system level, the

implementation and enforcement of antidiscrimination policies, is associated with a reduction in reports of victimization and a lessening of hostility towards sexual and gender minorities (Diez et al., 2010).

Integrating New Belief Systems

Once D, Noel, and David initiated the coming out process, they discontinued self-harming or social isolation and replaced that with various forms of strategic outness. To be clear, they were not at all ashamed of their identities. However, they used strategic outness as a means with which to manage their identities across relationships and contexts. Like the informants in the (DiFulvio, 2011) study, the informants in this current investigation, developed new narratives which replaced the dominant constructions that had contributed to the minoritization of their emergent identities.

These findings support the contention that researchers should take appropriate steps to account for the ecological factors that might contribute to the emergence of maladaptive behaviors among sexual and gender minoritized youth (Diaz et al., 2010; Freidman et al, 2006; Goodenow et al., 2006; Hong et al., 2012; Horn et al., 2010; Kosciw et al., 2009; Sandfort et al., 2009; Seidman et al., 1999; Telingator et al., 2011; Toomey et al., 2012; Watson et al. 2010). Particular attention should be given to the relationships between the dominant constructions of gender and sexuality and the emergence of self-harming and social isolating behavior (Birkett et al., 2009; Currie et al., 2012; D'Augelli et al., 2008; Friedman et al., 2009; Goodenow et al., 2006; Kivalanka et al., 2009; McGuire et al., 2010; Russell et al., 2009; Ryan et al., 2010; Telingator et al., 2011; Toomey et al., 2012; Valenti et al., 2009).

Microsystem and Mesosystem Implications and Recommendations

The implications for this section are that as the methodological approaches to studying the needs of sexual and gender minoritized youth grow, researchers should take appropriate steps

to account for the range of experiences that sexual and gender minority youth often have across relationships and contexts. A number of the superintendents who declined to allow their students to participate cited privacy concerns as well as a perceived disconnect between the goals of this study and district wide strategic plans. The hope is that as the data that districts are mandated to gather as part of the Dignity for All Student's Act begin to trickle in, administrators might rethink the types of research or school-based programs they exclude from their strategic plans. I would hope that additional thought might be given to the impact that doing so may have on the overall experiences of sexual, gender, and other minoritized youth in their settings.

The sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth in this study experienced the discovery that they might hold a non-heterosexual identity as jarring. They had all had experiences in relationships and contexts that sanctioned heterosexuality as the only form of identity that was viewed as natural and normative. Before they made the disclosure of their identities, there had never been any substantive discussions within their relational experiences with their families or within the school or other contexts regarding gender, sex or sexuality. However, the informants had all internalized devaluing messages in one or more of the relational or context specific settings where they spent their time. The youth, then, were burdened with the role of managing their identities in order to maintain a sense of connectedness to their parents, peers, and communities. Dominant constructions of gender and sexuality, particularly controlling messages that foreclose on the range of identities that are viewed as normative, were found to have created ruptures in the informants' sense of connectedness to the relational and social settings most important to their development.

Coming out for the informants in this study, led to stigma management strategies which included discursive and performative disclosures in the settings and relationships that were

perceived as safe: The implications are that before this point, most of the informants in this study bore the burden of managing perceptions about their identities and the stigma potentially associated with it in order to minimize losses in their relationships. These strategies were also utilized as a way to maintain a sense of connectedness to and safety within the settings and contexts they spent the vast majority of their time. Their sexual and gender identities are important parts of their development but they had to compartmentalize this part of their life often becoming socially isolated or engaging in self-harming in an effort to cope.

Therefore, parents might want to consider the ways that devaluing messages may, perhaps, contribute to the development of stigma management strategies that may include withholding important parts of their identity, social isolation and withdrawal, and more substantial concerns like substance abuse and self-harm. All of the informants appear to have paid close attention to pop culture and other influences that impact peer-to-peer relationships within schools and other settings. Schools and other contexts should be aware of the ways that the dominant constructions of gender and sexuality are perpetuated or disrupted by teachers, staff, and adult mentors in their responses to bullying or other marginalizing activities. Because a number of the youth had had experiences with bullying or ostracism at the hands of other peers in schools at all levels, and having had experiences with peers looking on without responding, indicates that schools may need anti-bullying programs which address the target, the antagonist, as well as the witnesses to bullying (Hong et al., 2012). The schools are embedded in communities which potentially have an impact on the level of support that exists to address bullying. As Hong et al. (2012) note, addressing the perceptions and attitudes held by faculty and staff towards the needs of sexual and gender minoritized youth is paramount. Seeing the

staff respond to bullying and other disruptive behavior facilitated a sense of connectedness and engendered a feeling of safety within the school.

Schools should develop policies that encourage counselors, teachers, and school administrators to become aware of the controlling narratives that they hold about identity and the ways that these may shape their responses to bullying or harassment within the school context. The communities in which the schools are embedded hold a responsibility for ensuring the passage of laws that address bullying no matter what form it takes within the school and other related contexts. It is imperative that school counselor preparation programs also work to develop curricular clinical experiences that prepare school counselors to address issues such as harassment, coming out, and identity development. School counselors must respond to students on the micro level as well as to the broader systems level. They are uniquely positioned to advocate for appropriate policies developmental programs, and adequate support services.

Legislators and school administrators should encourage youth to take on a participatory role in the development of policies that are implemented in settings and contexts where development occurs. Having a participatory role may engender a sense that they are valued members of the communities and the relationships most important to their development. Of course, this could lead to future empirical studies which explore the bidirectional relationship between having a greater participatory role in policies and statutory provisions and the impact that this has on identity development across and within relationships and contexts.

This study cannot say much at all about the overall academic performance of the informants regarding their sense of connectedness across relationships and contexts once they made the disclosures. However, future studies may wish to address this, perhaps, by conducting a mixed methods study that closes this critical gap. That withstanding, the informants in this

study were noted to have felt a renewed sense of connectedness to their families, peers, and communities once they were able to talk openly about their identities. Having access to and participating in the GSA and knowing that the school had anti-harassment provisions appear to have helped the informants to deal with this part of their development.

More research which accounts for the bidirectional relationships between the idiosyncratic characteristics of sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth form within the relationships and contexts where identity development occurs could help administrators with their goal of fostering diverse settings which minimize the marginalization and alienation of youth based on their real or perceived sexual identity or gender expression. Learning more about these youth could also assist the with goal of reducing incidences of bullying and facilitate the goal of enhancing connectedness to school, the staff, and one's peers via actions that disrupt negative experiences that have the potential for negatively impacting the learning and development processes.

Exosystem & Macrosystem Domain Discussion

As I noted earlier, the Exosystem Domain consists of the interactions between two or more microsystems and a setting that does not involve the youth directly but has an impact on their identity development. The macrosystem domains consist of the societal level thoughts about and reactions to issues like bullying, homophobia, and the overall experiences with sexual and gender minorities. In Chapter VI, I discussed the development and implementation of policies and interventions that appear to have an impact on the emergent identities in school contexts. The FEAA, Dignity for All Students Act, and interventions like the GSA have been implemented as a means with which to address the harassment that students experience across identity domains within the school context. The informants in this study were asked to describe their level of awareness of those policies, and to discuss the ways that schools are experienced as

a result of the aforementioned interventions. In Chapter VII, I discuss their perceptions regarding the language often used to describe their experiences of oppression. In this section I will provide a brief overview of the themes most relevant to the exosystem and macrosystem domains.

The GSA and Antidiscrimination Legislation

Antidiscrimination legislation and the implementation of interventions like the GSA have been noted to be useful first steps towards the goal of making schools safer for sexual and gender minority youth (Currie, et al., 2012; Schindel, 2008; Watson et al., 2010). Most of the informants appear to have had a general awareness of the genesis for implementing policies and for the presence of the GSA; the redress of harassment based on their identities. However, when I asked them to describe any contexts, beyond the high school setting, where oppression based on one's sexual or gender identity might occur, most struggled to respond.

Sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth are often socialized in relationships and contexts that are impervious to or recalcitrant towards the needs of this cohort (Mogul et al., 2011). Although many youth experience acceptance in the relationships and contexts in which they make the strategic disclosures regarding their identities (D'augelli et al., 2008; D'augelli et al., 2010; Diaz et al., 2010), there are some sexual and gender minorities who are rejected (Majd et al., 2009; Quintana et al. 2010; Rosario et al., 2009; Singh, 2013; Sullivan et al., 2001) and abused as a result of their disclosures (Rosario et al., 2009). Sexual and gender minority youth have varying levels of awareness about the level of tolerance that exists towards their identities so they often make the disclosures regarding their identities at their own pace and in their own way (Maguen et al. 2002; Orne, 2011). These strategies are designed to minimize rejection and are implemented with the goal of maintaining a sense of connectedness to the relationships and

contexts most relevant to their development (Gipson, 2002; Lasser et al., 2003; Miller et al., 2006; Moore, 2010; Rosenfeld, 2009; Sullivan et al., 2001).

Coming out as a sexual or gender minority challenges the dominant constructions about intimacy so many youth strategically plan their disclosures in order to minimize abuse or losses across relationships or contexts (Maguen et al. 2002; Orne, 2011). The strategic management of one's development, in this current investigation, was associated with a greater sense of mastery of over the perceptions that others held about them in the contexts in which they spent the vast majority of their time. By taking ownership over their identities, the informants were able to establish meaningful relationships that often helped to disrupt marginalizing narratives that are often more pronounced in the broader culture (DiFulvio, 2011).

Finding a Common Language for Oppression

In Chapter VII, I expanded upon the theories of homophobia, heterosexism, and heteronormativity. It is worth noting that the experiences with oppression often differ depending on one's race, socioeconomic standing, religious beliefs, and gender identity and presentation (Gipson, 2002; Lasser et al., 2003; Miller et al., 2006; Moore, 2010; Rosenfeld, 2009; Sullivan et al., 2001). Experiences with oppression are as varied as the discourse used to describe those encounters. In many instances, the terminology, as we have seen in the previous chapters, is broad, onerous, and open to a number of interpretations. The narratives indicate that experiences with oppression narrow rather than present opportunities to form and maintain connections. By developing a language with which to describe their feelings of marginalization, the informants were able to redefine their identities. Relying on the close knit relationships served as a base from which to reclaim their identities, and this acted as a way to resist essentialist notions of gender and sexuality.

Exosystem and Macrosystem Domain Implications and Recommendations

All of the informants appear to have had some relationship with the GSA. D had been in the school for a short time before she realized that the GSA existed. Once she got around to attending her first group, she developed close relationships with a few peers and even found her long term girlfriend in that space. Unfortunately, the peers with whom she established a long term relationship have long since graduated, and because of that she no longer felt as connected to the group as she had when they were still here. She has since discontinued going to the group and finds other activities to fill her time. Noel found the group to be useful during the initial stages of her coming out; however, work and other responsibilities made attendance at the group something of a challenge. Although she could not attend the groups, she would often schedule impromptu meetups with sexual minority peers that she knew from her current school and one other setting in the area. Sarah stated that she went to a few of the groups but she was too shy to speak in the group so she eventually discontinued going. However, in the event that she needed the support, she knew that the GSA was there for her. David, having come out to his family and peers, established a connection with the GSA by attending groups and going to scheduled events. By his account, his peers within the school held him in high esteem, and because of the steps that he had taken to be responsive to harassment within the school context they nominated him for and he subsequently accepted a leadership position within the school-based group. All of the informants were noted to have expressed the sense that the presence of the GSA contributed to a sense of safety in and connectedness within school even among those who did not attend the groups regularly.

Most of the informants expressed a sense that the school was safe and they pointed to the swiftness with which acts of aggression (verbal and physical) are addressed by the administrative staff. When I asked other reasons why they school felt safe, several, once again, mentioned the

overall climate within the school and implementation and enforcement of antidiscrimination policies along with the relationship that they are noted to have had with the faculty and staff as a major factor in their sense of safety within the school. I will admit that I spent quite a few days sitting in the counseling suite as I waited for my informants to arrive for their sessions. I got the impression that the staff had established some meaningful connections with the students, and I could certainly see why they would have such an affinity for their school. However, I did have a number of questions based on some of the themes that emerged in a few of the narratives.

Given the level of connectedness that the students were noted to have had with the staff and given David's sentiment that he would "100% say that this high school is accepting," I asked all of the students why some sexual and gender minority students do not attend meetings in the GSA. More importantly, I was curious to know why some would continue to engage in strategic outness if the climate within the school context was as safe as many had described it. As you might recall from Chapter II, I discussed a two part study conducted by Toomey et al. (2012) with students, in part, to learn about their experiences of safety within the school context. The heterosexual identified peers and the straight allies were more likely to perceive the schools as safe compared to the sexual and gender minoritized peers. Although the GSA is noted to have provided an impetus for addressing issues of harassment within the school context the reader would be hard pressed to find a study where the informants had concluded that the school was 100% accepting of the experiences of sexual and gender minorities (Birkett et al., 2009; Diaz et al., 2010; Espelage et al., 2008; McGuire et al., 2010). Given the responses from three of the informants that indicated that the school was not without its problems but certainly not free from harassment, I was drawn to the statement that David made that attested to the school's safety.

Although there is one theme that I need to address in the limitations section, I plan to address a few of my thoughts regarding his statement here.

In the Diaz et al. (2010), study which I detailed in Chapter II, the informants who participated in the GSA reported a heightened sense of connectedness to the school and an overall reduction in harassment. However, participation in the GSA was noted to be associated with greater victimization within the school context. When I asked the participants about their experiences with being harassed while participating in the GSA, most indicated that peers within the school often gossiped about the perceived sexuality of the students who participated in the group. The GSA meetings occur after school and they often take place in the conference room located in the counseling suite. The high visibility of the group makes it possible for those passing by to get a glimpse of the students who attend the group. Some of the informants had also indicated that there are some members of the group who actually disclose the names of people who drop in. Although the visibility within the group is not problematic it does appear to have contributed to rumors about and innuendo regarding the sexuality of the people who drop in for the group discussion. This could be jarring particularly for those youth who have not yet established their sexuality. Those youth who have to answer questions about their sexuality before they have had the chance to process it all for themselves may feel compelled to avoid the group or to keep their identities to themselves as a measure of ensuring their safety in and sense of connectedness within the school. The peers who initiate the rumors may not intend for the gossip to be internalized as hostile; nonetheless, gossip appears to disrupt the sense of connectedness and can undermine the efforts that the staff takes to make schools feel safe.

Rather than move the group, part of the resolution might be to address the impact that rumors and gossip might have on the lived experiences of youth particularly for those with no

established sexuality as the research indicates that it is that cohort of youth who are far more likely than their peers who identify as heterosexual and their sexual minority and gender nonconforming peers to experience harassment within the school context (Espelage, 2008). According to Espelage et al. (2008), youth who had not yet established their sexuality were also noted to perceive their parents to be less supportive than their heterosexual identified and sexual minority and gender nonconforming peers. Of course, more empirical work needs to be done to gain a better understanding of these perceptions.

Schools should consider developing support groups that address issues of marginalization no matter the form that it takes. Using interventions like the Gay Straight Alliance as a guide, these groups could take on a number of forms that include, but certainly not limited to, education, advocacy, and open discussion. Additionally, the groups would be open to all students who feel marginalized within the school and include students who hold an interest in the disruption of thoughts or actions that perpetuate the dislocation of peers based on identity or other related factors. This model could be implemented in elementary, middle, and high school levels, and include age appropriate approaches and language for dealing with issues that are unique to the setting.

Invariably, the dominant constructions of gender and sexuality were noted to have had a deleterious impact on experiences of safety and connectedness within relationships and across the contexts in which development occurred. The development of a non-heterosexual identity fostered a sense of alienation and a belief that the informants were the only sexual minority or gender non-conforming youth in the relationships and contexts they spent the vast majority of their time. The narrow constructions of gender and sexuality also contributed to missed

opportunities, particularly in the beginning stages of their development, for my informants to find support from peers with shared experiences of minoritization.

The dominant constructions of homophobia, a construct that describes the animus towards sexual and gender minority populations, were also perceived as quite limited with regards to addressing the way that oppression functions, or more importantly, the way that it is experienced or internalized. Attempts to rehabilitate the theoretical usefulness of homophobia may be useful in academia; however, my informants were critical at best and at worst indifferent to the use of the word. Although terms like compulsive heterosexuality, heterosexism, and heteronormativity fill important gaps left unarticulated in settings away from academia, these terms are cumbersome and do not translate as easily to the day to day experiences of youth. It may be helpful to develop language that utilize the experience of youth as its focus so that it could then be used as a way to help children articulate the impact that dominant constructions of gender and sexuality have on their identity and overall development.

In Chapter II, I discussed several cases which involved both pre-service and professional counselors who either sued their institutions of higher learning or their employer based on the perception that they were terminated from their school or places of employment because of their religious beliefs (*Bruff v. North Mississippi Health Services, Inc*, 2001; Herlihy, Hermann, & Greden, 2012; *Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley*, 2001; Kocet et al., 2014; *Walden v. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 2010, 2012; *Ward v. Wilbanks*, 2010, 2012). However, the Court has overwhelmingly disagreed with this framing of the cases deciding, instead, that the settings involved provided accommodations, which would have honored the plaintiff's deeply held religious beliefs that were ultimately rejected in favor of demands that provisions be made

for the pre-service and professional counselors to limit their work with those individuals and groups whose identities align with their religious beliefs.

This position, as the Court has noted, is problematic, in part, because it overburdens schools and other settings that may lack the resources or staff to fully accommodate such narrowly constructed requests. It is also troublesome because the students, with whom the counselors may be assigned to work, may seek out their guidance or support as the last refuge from the marginalization that they may experience in some of the relationships and contexts most important to their identity (Broz, 1998). The inability of pre-service trainees and professional counselors who work in community and other related contexts to bracket their religious views potentially limits the levels of comfort that youth may have for finding support for their developing identities and has the potential for reifying social structures that require that students remain silent about their gender identity or sexuality, even in those settings where verbal and physical violence are a quotidian part of their developmental experience. To be clear, sexual and gender minority youth do not need for counselors to validate their identities as much as they need for them to be empathic regarding the extended range of experiences that are unique to their development. Thankfully, the American Counseling Association and other licensure bodies (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2005; American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2014; Anastas, 2013; Bowers et al., 2005) have been responsive to the nuanced litigation; yet, more needs to be done to ensure that trainees who plan to enter the profession do so with a comprehensive understanding of the duties and responsibilities of professional counselors as well as the ways that the expectations of diversity and inclusion are evaluated. Accrediting bodies for Counseling and other related disciplines hold a responsibility for evaluating the programs that receive their certification for ensuring that issues of diversity and

inclusion are integrated into and across all required coursework rather than isolated to the one class on multiculturalism.

My interviews with the informants took place just weeks before the U.S. Supreme Court reached its decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), a case which ultimately extended constitutional protections to sexual and gender minorities allowing same sex marriages in all 50 states. When I asked about oppressive or protective policies that have an impact on sexual and gender minorities, nearly all of the informants pointed to the right to get married in the state of New York as evidence that equality existed well beyond the walls of the school. Before we got to this point in the interviews, a few of the informants had made subtle remarks that suggested that the struggle towards the arch for equality was all but done.

All of the informants were slated to graduate and will soon begin the process of applying for work. As they do, some may be shocked to find that as advances have been made towards the goal of establishing the constitutional right to marriage that a few critical gaps remain that need to be addressed. Among them is the continued struggle to pass local, state, and national policies which protect sexual and gender minorities from harassment and abuse in the workplace (Aravosis, 2007; Stryker, 2007). The sticking point, as you might recall from my brief discussion on this topic in Chapter II, is the inclusion of language that would protect workers, no matter their sexual identity, from work place abuse that is based on their real or perceived sexual identity or due to their gender performance.

There is also the matter of the overrepresentation of sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth among the homeless population (Alvi, Scott, & Stanyton, 2010; Corliss et al., 2011; Freeman & Hamilton, 2008; Gipson, 2002; Gwadz et al., 2009; Hein, 2011; Kidd, 2007; Milburn et al., 2006; Mottet, 2003; Mottet et al., 2003; Quintana et al., 2010; Walls et al.,

2009; Wells, 2007; Whitehurts, 2007) the juvenile justice system (see Gipson, 2002; Majd et al., 2009; Meiners, 2011; Mogul & Ritchie, 2011) and child welfare populations (see Gipson, 2002; Sullivan et al., 2001). I had hoped that having the ability to recruit from the McKinney Vento Act (school-based homeless coordinators) liaison within the school that I would be able to gain access to one or more sexual or gender minoritized youth within this context who were homeless; however, there were none who met the criteria for inclusion in my study. The implication for mentioning this group in this part of the study is that there may be youth even within the school context whose experiences with rejection could include homelessness; however, their strategic disclosure may limit opportunities for peers and other within the context to have an awareness of the ways that oppression or acceptance operates for them.

The communities in which the schools are embedded hold a responsibility for ensuring the passage of laws that address bullying no matter what form it takes within the school and other related contexts. How can we expect for our children to grow up to become productive engaging members of society if they spend a significant amount of their developmental years socially withdrawing from the very settings that are designed to prepare them for life beyond their educational years? This would also require that politicians, the media, and medico-religious leaders consider the ways that children are impacted by the dominant constructions of gender and sexuality and its impact on the identity development of sexual and gender minority youth.

In an earlier Chapter I referenced *Nabonzy v. Podlesny* (Broz, 1998), *State v. Limon*, and *Limon v. State* (Allender, 2009; Tribe, 2004) as a way to draw attention to some of the ways that animus towards sexual and gender minorities are often concretized by state sanctioned provisions. In *Nabonzy v. Podlesny* (Broz, 1998), the administrators who were sued for their roles in perpetuating the verbal and physical abuse that Jamie experienced in both middle and

high school, argued that they held no responsibility for protecting he or any other students within the school. They also argued that state sanctioned anti-sodomy laws obscured their responsibility for addressing harassment based on one's sexuality or gender performance (Broz, 1998).

In *State v. Limon* (Allender, 2009; Tribe, 2004), the state of Kansas, relying on anti-sodomy provisions, charged Matthew with statutory rape. The anti-sodomy provision was utilized to give him a substantially longer prison sentence due to the sexuality of Matthew and the youth with whom he had a sexual encounter. In *Limon v. State* (Allender, 2009; Tribe, 2004), the case which challenged the constitutionality of the provision used to charge Matthew, the Appellate Court, relying on what some have called the minority exception within the U.S. Supreme Court holding in *Lawrence v. Texas* (Allender, 2009; Tribe, 2004), concluded that the aforementioned ruling which struck down state sanctioned animus in anitisodomoy provisions was not applicable in Matthew's case. Although the Supreme Court of Kansas eventually ruled that the provision on which Matthew was charged unconstitutional, he spent several years in prison before the legal system corrected itself.

These cases are emblematic of the ways the dominant constructions of sexuality and gender have been utilized to perpetuate state and institutionally sanctioned provisions and their application in instances involving sexual (and perhaps gender) minority youth. Although the U.S. Supreme Court struck down anti-sodomy laws, the narrow language used to describe the limits of the *Lawrence v. Texas* holding (i.e. the Minority Exception) have left sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth vulnerable to the implementation of new provisions that are developed, using the dominant constructions of sexuality and gender, and the discourse regarding their vulnerability, as the rationale. Using the legislative and the judiciary processes to

implement policies and legal provisions based on animus towards a minoritized group not only lowers the threshold for justice, it reeks of moral bankruptcy particularly in cases where youth are the targets. Policy makers should be held accountable particularly in instances where they use their positions of power to alienate segments of the population. Not only are laws that discriminate against minoritized groups immoral, they waste valuable time and resources that could be spent elsewhere.

Policy makers should be held accountable for ensuring that sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth are afforded the same Title IX and 14th Amendment protections in charter school settings as students who attend publicly funded schools. This recommendation is of vital importance, today, as some policy makers, like New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo, are throwing support behind voucher provisions that would allow parents to use tax credits to attend Catholic schools. In some instances, religious teachings conflict with legal provisions which provide mechanisms for protecting sexual and gender minorities from harassment or marginalization based on their identities. My goal is not to revive anti-religious sentiments grounded in state-sponsored provisions (i.e. Blaine Amendment) designed to limit tax funding to Catholic institutions (DeForrest, 2003). However, as religious institutions begin to receive state funding for children to attend their schools, the states, then, have an obligation for holding these settings accountable for the same standards of inclusion as those expected in publicly funded institutions as required by Title IX, the Federal Equal Access Act, the 14th Amendment as well as the Dignity for All Students Act (in New York).

Concluding Phenomenological Analysis

Phenomenological research involves what Smith et al. (2009) describe as the double hermeneutics of the researcher gaining access to the lived experiences of their informants while the informants grapple with and attempt to explain to the best of their ability their insights

regarding the experiences that shape their development. The researcher will often have thoughts and experiences which may shape the understanding and interpretation of the narratives gathered during the interviews. Smith et al. (2009) described that process as follows:

Making sense of what is being said or written involves close interpretative engagement on the part of the listener or reader. However, one will not necessarily be aware of all one's preconceptions in advance of reading, and so reflective practices and a cynical approach to bracketing are required (p. 35).

Invariably, phenomenological research also requires a certain amount of empathy coupled with cynicism (Smith et al., 2009). According to Smith et al. (2009), the empathy allows the research a space in which to view the experiences from the perspective of the informant, while the cynicism offers an opportunity to make interpretations of the narratives that are grounding in the abundance of scholarship. In this study, I utilized peers in the informal role of debriefers so that I had an opportunity to process some thoughts about the a few areas where tension appears to have emerged in the narratives. In this next section, I want to describe the tension and the process that I went through to resolve how I made sense of it all.

Double Hermeneutics: Tension within the Narratives.

In Chapter IV, I provided an excerpt from my first interview with D (p. 186). In that portion of the interview, D indicated that she coming out to her mom was not that much of a challenge because at that point in her life, she was not aware of sexual or gender minorities having experiences of marginalization because of their identities. In an earlier portion of the conversation, D disclosed that she had used a social media website to create an account that was used to socialize with others. It was in this space that D generated a "fake persona" so that she could meet new people. She forged a close friendship with a female companion whom she dated

for a while before revealing her true identity. D also said that she was not aware of students being bullied based on their sexual identity or gender performance. However, when she received the note from the peer who asked her to meet up in the GSA meeting after school, D met with the school's psychologist just to make certain that the group existed and that she was not being set up to be hurt or ridiculed. I empathized with her position, but I also suspected that there was some part of her that realized that there was a degree of animus directed at sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth (and adults).

I also discussed some of the seemingly disparate views expressed by David in Chapter IV too (p. 158). David was the only informant to describe the school as being 100% safe; yet, he also noted to have engaged in a number of identity management strategies which included being selective about the disclosure of his sexuality particularly within the context of the school. His decision to be strategic about his sexuality was evidenced by his desire to ensure his family, peers, and members of his faith community that he was not going to change. He needed for them to know that he would not reproduce the most problematic notions often associated with gayness. Most important among those concerns was his desire to not be viewed as flamboyant. I certainly empathized with his position because in many ways, flamboyance is viewed as a challenge to dominant constructions of gender and sexuality (Pascoe, 2007). David's reliance on his broad shoulders and his height represent markers that that some boys utilize, as Pascoe (2007) notes, to "demonstrate to themselves and to others that they are indeed masculine" (p. 23). Much like the ways that strategic outness can help youth to gain a sense of mastery over their sexuality, the performance of gender can play a profound role in avoiding perceptions that they are weak and lacking the characteristics associated with one's assigned gender. Weakness, as David noted in the interviews, could result in him being singled out for bullying and harassment, so it is

understandable that he would want to take steps to minimize experiences of marginalization within the contexts most important to his identity.

Debriefers

At various points throughout the data analytic stages of the dissertation, I had informal discussions with my peer debriefers in order to process thoughts I had about the interviews with my informants. My debriefers were peers on whom I relied for a sense of self-care, but they were also important sources for deep reflection and a space within which I could consider a range of ways to process and make sense of the interactions I had with my informants. After each discussion, I journaled about my interaction with my debriefers before returning to the transcript, the PPCT Model (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1994; Bronfenbrenner et al., 2005), and IPA (Smith et al., 2009) to help guide my interpretations.

I saw my informants as complicated beings who took extraordinary steps to maintain a sense of comfort and safety in a world that invariably struggles to identify with sexual and gender minorities. Although some of the informants in this study gave up on (at least suggesting that they had) caring much about the perceptions their peers held about their gender performance or their sexuality, there were some for whom this was a bit more challenging. I imagine that this was particularly precarious position for David because: 1) He had experiences with being bullied in middle school and he did not want to reoccurrence in high school; 2) Homosexuality is often inconsistent with teachings within the church; yet, he appears to have forged close relationships where his peers remain accepting of him; 3) Identifying as gay challenges dominant constructions of gender and sexuality. Not only did he have to come out as gay, he then needed to disclose his interest in dating.

Limitations

The utilization and integration of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Hong et al., 2012; Horn et al., 2010) and IPA (Finlay, 2011; Smith et al., 2009) provided a unique opportunity for the participants and researcher to explore the experiences from a multi-dimensional and engaged perspective. Capturing the voices of youth addressed a significant area of research needing more attention. In spite of my best efforts, all of the informants in this current study were drawn from the same school. I would have liked to have had the opportunity to interview a few students in another setting but the administrators in the 16 other districts voiced concerns regarding confidentiality or the lack of connection between the goals of the current study with their overall strategic plans as the rationale for denying access. Although qualitative studies are not interested in making claims of generalizability, gaining access to another setting may have added to the richness of the data gathered.

Another limitation of my study involves the lack of inclusion of students from other socio-economic backgrounds, youth of color, or any sexual minority or gender non-conforming youth who are homeless. By reaching out to 17 superintendents of schools and following up the administrators in the largest district in the area where recruitment took place, I had hoped to fill this critical gap in my study. Although one other school gave provisional approval in the later stages of my data gathering and analysis, I was told that I could only recruit from the Gay Straight Alliance and not from the sources identified in my outreach letter (i.e. the Dignity for All Students Act Coordinator, the McKinney Vento Act Liaison, school counselors). In the end, there were no students within that group who met the established age requirements. While I did express a willingness to amend my IRB protocol in an effort to lower the age range requirement,

the administrator, having informed me that there were no recruits in my age range, simply wished me well.

One of the limitations regarding my interviews with David related to his standing as student within the school and his role as a leader within the GSA. At one point during the interview David had indicated that he often served as the public face for the GSA both within and functions related to the school. When he stated that the school was 100% safe, I wondered, at times, given his use of strategic outness even within the school context, how much of his assessment was related to his leadership role within the school. In other words, I cannot say with any amount of certainty how much his assessment is due to his personal experiences within the school as opposed to his overall perceptions that are tied to the leadership role he filled within the GSA.

The relationship that my informants had with the staff within the school context is another limitation. I recognize that there may be a number of sexual minority and gender nonconforming youth, particularly within the school context, who may not disclose their identity to the faculty or staff. I see the value in generating scholarly research that explores the needs and experiences sexual and gender minorities who have varying levels of connection with their families, peers, and the adults within the contexts where identity occurs. However, I opted to recruit from the pool of students who had made the disclosure to their families and the staff within the school as a measure of reducing experiences of marginalization as a result of participating in this study. There are others ways to minimize experiences of marginalization and I encourage researchers to explore those options so that we can generate interventions that meet the needs of this cohort of youth.

Bronfenbrenner's theory is interested in learning about the bidirectional ways in which identity is developed. A limitation of this current investigation is that privilege is given to the perceptions of the informants regarding the ways that their idiosyncratic characteristics shape those experiences. I have to assume that their perceptions about themselves accurately reflect the way that they engage the world. The cross-sectional time limited nature of this study is yet another limitation. I would have loved to have had more time to explore additional parts of their narratives. However, the dissertation process is a slow arduous process that also comes at a financial cost. A goal is to be studious but expeditious in the exploration of the phenomena of interest. Based on the interviews with my informants, it is clear that the sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth who I had the pleasure of interviewing have changed significantly over the last several years. Only time will tell how their views will change in the years after they graduate.

Recommendation for Future Research

Because youth who identify as heterosexual are more likely to view their schools as safe when compared to the responses of their sexual minority and gender nonconforming peers and those with no established sexual identity (Birkett et al., 2009; Diaz et al., 2010; Espelage et al., 2008; McGuire et al., 2010), I was curious about the ways that strategic outness may shape one's sense of safety within the school context. David was the only informant to claim that the school was 100% accepting; yet, he was also the only informant to claim to have used strategic outness within the school context. It might be challenging to recruit youth who engage in stigma management strategies; however, the experiences of these youth and the relationships and contexts in which they use strategic outness are worthy of empirical investigation.

Another group whose experiences are worthy of additional empirical investigation are the youth who hold no established sexual identity. This cohort of youth, in the Espelage et al. (2008) study, were more likely than their peers who had an established sexual identity to feel that their parents and the environments in which they spent the majority of their develop as supportive. Learning more about this group may aid in the process of disrupting the dominant narratives regarding sexuality and broaden the scope of youth who are extended the developmental support most appropriate for their age and needs.

Although the incidents of marginalization are noted to be greatly reduced in settings that have anti-harassment policies and interventions like the GSA (Birkett et al., 2009; Currie, Mayberry, & Chenneville, 2012; D'Augelli et al., 2008; Friedman et al., 2009; Goodenow et al., 2006; Kivalanka et al., 2009; McGuire et al., 2010; Russell et al., 2009; Ryan et al., 2010; Telingator et al., 2011; Toomey et al., 2012; Valenti & Campbell, 2009), less is known about the mechanisms that aid in the differences. The GSA is well documented to aid in the reduction of stigma in schools (Birkett et al., 2009; Currie, Mayberry, & Chenneville, 2012; D'Augelli et al., 2008; Friedman et al., 2009; Goodenow et al., 2006; Kivalanka et al., 2009; McGuire et al., 2010; Russell et al., 2009; Ryan et al., 2010; Telingator et al., 2011; Toomey et al., 2012; Valenti & Campbell, 2009); however, there is little empirical work that informs whether or not the benefits are the same across groups (i.e. activist, structured, or discussion), or whether or not there is a benefit of one type of group over another. Empirical studies of these interventions could explore the extent to which the groups are diverse and the extent to which the members and the leaders challenge the dominant constructions of gender and sexuality.

While the Dignity for All Students Act is relatively new (New York State Education Department, 2013 & 2014), the Department of Education might want to begin the process of

gathering data on the parts of the policy that are most effective at curbing the marginalization of sexual and gender minority youth with specific focus given to schools that do not have a GSA (or a similar intervention), and those settings that had previously been identified as settings where teachers either engaged in discriminatory behavior or took no action when it occurred (Advocates for Children, Inc., 2005).

Empirically grounded approaches to research with sexual and gender non-conforming youth could then be developed that contribute to the disruption of factors that ostensibly violate professional values, particularly as it relates to the work that teachers and counselors perform in their day to day work with youth. These evaluations should not be limited in their scope to the day to day practices of individual providers. Like the failures of the concept, homophobia, mere focus on individuals potentially misses an opportunity to broaden the scope by looking for institutional factors that inadvertently reinforce incompetent practices. Future scholarship may also wish to explore how multiculturalism is institutionally defined and individually incorporated into course curriculum and clinical practices (see Vavrus, 2009). Scholarship could also examine the extent to which tolerance and affirming practices are encouraged and the ways that these concepts are internalized and implemented in professional practice if any traction is to be made towards the goal of closing the gaps in teaching, scholarship, and professional practice.

Conclusion

Although there are political and social forces that have an impact on the identity development of sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth, these experiences are differentially experienced and vary widely (Hong et al., 2012; Horn et al., 2010; Arnold et al., 2009; Boag, 2003; Chauncey, 1994). Additionally, the disclosure of one's sexual minority and gender non-conforming identities will also vary across contexts and relationships (Cohn et al., 2010; Lasser et al., 2003; Moore, 2010; Orne, 2011). However, all of the youth who participated

in this study came from homes where self-disclosure were already made and they attended a school which provided the emotional support that they may have needed to cope with the internalization of negative thoughts that may be based on social forces that are out of their control.

While the discourse of vulnerability is widely used to talk about youth in a number of contexts, the framing of that word may be problematic if it is defined as a 'risk' for psychological harm without a broader exploration of some of the micro-cultural or macro-political forces which might inform the reader's understanding of that concern (Hong et al, 2012; Horn et al., 2010). There are many scholars who challenge this framework and operate from the position that the risk of psychological harm is greatly diminished based on the inclusion factors such as the supportive home environment and supportive school climates that are both tolerant and respectful of identities that differ from the heterosexual norms. My findings lend support to the reconceptualization of how risk, as it relates to sexual and gender minorities, is understood. Supportive relationships and environments appear to greatly reduce any political and social risk factors that might result from self-disclosure (D'augelli et al., 2008; D'augelli et al., 2010; Diaz et al., 2010; Friedman et al., 2009; Goodenow et al., 2006; Singh, 2013).

A goal of this study was to explore the relationships and contexts that encourage or hinder their ability to fully question and explore their identities. My hope is that this may lead to additional suggestions for the ways that families and communities (schools) can be supportive within the bounds of the law towards the goal of making schools and other contexts diverse settings where differences are respected.



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
Institutional Review Board
MEMORANDUM

TO: Nicole Hill
DATE: January 21, 2015
SUBJECT: Expedited Protocol Review - Approval of Human Participants
IRB #: 14-318
TITLE: *A Qualitative Approach to Studying the Phenomenological and Bio-Ecological Experiences of Gender Nonconforming and Sexual Minority Youth in School Settings*

The above referenced protocol was reviewed by the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) and has been given **expedited approval**. The protocol has been determined to be of no more than minimal risk and has been evaluated for the following:

1. the rights and welfare of the individual(s) under investigation;
2. appropriate methods to secure informed consent; and
3. risks and potential benefits of the investigation.

The approval period is **January 20, 2015 through January 19, 2016**. A continuing review of this protocol must be conducted before the end of this approval period. Although you will receive a request for a continuing renewal approximately 60 days before that date, it is your responsibility to submit the information in sufficient time to allow for review before the approval period ends.

Enclosed are the IRB approved date stamped consent and/or assent document/s related to this study that expire on **January 19, 2016**. The IRB approved date stamped copy must be duplicated and used when enrolling new participants during the approval period (may not be applicable for electronic consent or research projects conducted solely for data analysis). Federal regulations require that each participant indicate their willingness to participate through the informed consent process and be provided with a copy of the consent form. Regulations also require that you keep a copy of this document for a minimum of three years after your study is closed.

Any changes to the protocol during the approval period cannot be initiated prior to IRB review and approval, except when such changes are essential to eliminate apparent immediate harm to the participants. In this instance, changes must be reported to the IRB within five days. Protocol changes must be submitted on an amendment request form available on the IRB web site. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others must be reported to the IRB within 10 working days of occurrence.

Thank you for your cooperation in our shared efforts to assure that the rights and welfare of people participating in research are protected.

Jeffrey Stanton, Ph.D.
 IRB Chair

Office of Research Integrity and Protections
 121 Bowne Hall, Syracuse, New York 13244-1200
 (Phone) 315.443.3013 ♦ (Fax) 315.443.9889
 orip@syr.edu ♦ www.orip.syr.edu



Counseling and Counselor Education, 805 South Crouse Ave., Lower Level, School of Education, Syracuse University, 315-443-2266

***Appendix II
Consent Form #1***

A Qualitative Approach to Studying the Lived Experiences of High School Aged Sexual Minority and Gender Nonconforming Youth Across Relationships and Contexts.

I'm contacting you to request permission to include your son or daughter in a study designed to understand the connection between sexual minority status and or gender non conformity and one's sense of safety and comfort being oneself at home, in the community, and in school contexts. Participants need to be 17 years or older, currently enrolled in high school, identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, or Questioning. An initial interview will last about 90 minutes followed by up to two additional interviews which will last approximately 60 minutes in length in an effort to clarify data gathered in the initial discussion.

Interviews will be conducted on school grounds primarily after school hours and occasionally during the school day provided that meeting doesn't conflict with class attendance. Your permission will be sought to conduct interviews during the day those instances when meeting after school is not possible due to scheduling conflicts or unforeseeable events. In the event that an interview needs to be scheduled during the day, I'll also request permission from the school administrative team in an effort to ensure that a private space is open to conduct the one on one interviews. We will also plan to meet in a private space after school hours on school grounds as well so we'll need to coordinate those meetings, too, with the school in an effort to ensure that we have an office space in which to meet. The interviews are confidential so I'll request permission to meet in a space that affords the greatest amount of privacy so that the participant (your son or daughter) can feel comfortable engaging in the interview.

In addition to the face to face interviews, the participants will be asked to review the transcripts of the discussions and to provide comments on and reflections about the data that was gathered. Like the face to face interviews, the transcripts will be shared with the participants on school grounds; however, there may be some instances where email may be the most expedient way of sharing the material. To that end, your permission is also being sought to correspond via email with the youth in an effort to clarify data that is disclosed during the interview process. Like the face to face interviews, the email correspondence will remain confidential; however, my advisor and the Chair of my dissertation committee, will be blind carbon copied on all email correspondence as an added security measure.

Voluntary Nature of Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary and permission is being requested from the parents of youth who are 17 years of age. Your son or daughter may discontinue their participation at any time and they will not have to answer any questions that they don't want to. Nothing will happen your son or daughter chooses not to answer any questions or if they decide not to participate.

Confidentiality:

Responses in the interview will be confidential with one minor exception; the faculty who are serving on my dissertation will be allowed to review interview transcriptions, write-up, notes, and recording for the purpose of providing feedback and supervision for my project. However, these files will be kept in a secure file cabinet in my home to which only I have access. The recordings will be kept on a password-protected computer. All recorded data will be deleted within three months of my defending the dissertation. Data will be compiled in such a way your son or daughter cannot be identified. Thus, I will not attach names, address, or any other identifiable information about your son or daughter to any of their responses, or to any reports or publication describing the results of this study. Instead, I plan to generate an alias which will be used during the write up of the project and in the final analysis in an effort to protect your child's identity. I plan like to record the interview using one or more voice recording devices so that I can transcribe and subsequently analyze the data that is gathered during our face to face interview(s). These recordings will ensure that I capture and compile a report that is true to the information that is shared during the interviews.

Granting permission means that you agree to waive any right to request to see the transcripts or information that is shared by your son or daughter. Confidentiality safeguards the interview process and provides a space for the participants to respond openly and honestly about their experiences. You will, however, be afforded an opportunity to address concerns about your son or daughter's participation at any time during or after the study's conclusion.

We will keep your child's study data as confidential as possible with the exception of certain information we must report for legal or ethical reasons. For example if your child was to tell us about something or someone that hurt them or others, we would have to tell someone outside of the study

Potential Risks and Benefits:

Although there may be no direct benefit to your son or daughter participating in this study, their willingness to share their experiences and knowledge may provide valuable insights for improving the resources for LGBTQ (sexual minority) and gender non-conforming youth. There are no known risks as a result of their participation; however, it is possible that the discussion of their personal experiences may feel uncomfortable at times. Sexual minority and gender non-

conforming youth often come from loving homes and experience which range from acceptance to marginalization. Although sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth often have experiences in supportive home and community-based settings, there are some who experience rejection and abuse as a result of disclosing their sexual and gender identities.

Steps have been taken, as identified above, to ensure the confidentiality of your son or daughters sexual or gender identity as well as the basis for our sessions together. Should your son or daughter experience any distress as a result of our discussions or activities related to our time together, we can discuss options with which to address any concerns. I plan to coordinate those efforts with the school-based staff in an effort to ensure that all parties involved are aware of the range of services that are available to address any concerns.

Your son or daughter may experience some discomfort speaking with a stranger about their identities and that's pretty normal. Your child maintains the right to refuse to answer any questions that make them feel any distress. They also maintain the right to discontinue in interview at any point. They may also withdraw from the interview process, too, if they find the interview to be distressing. However, we should talk about that discussion so that I have the opportunity to review options, as discussed above, for addressing any conflicts or distress.

Point of Contact:

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact me directly at mcallowa@syr.edu or Dr. Nicole Hill, Professor at Syracuse University and advisor for this project at nrhill@syr.edu. Dr. Hill can also be reached in the event that you have any concerns about your child's rights as a research participant in this study.

The parent or guardian who provides consent will be given a copy of the consent form.

Parents are asked to place their initials above that of their children signifying their consent along with that of their children for their children to participate and their consent to the sessions being recorded.

_____ I agree to allow my child to be audio recorded.

_____ I do not agree to allow my child to be audio recorded.

Parents are also asked to place their initials above that of their children signifying their consent for their child to complete the demographics form and submit it to the researcher without viewing it. Granting this permission also means that the parent agrees to waive any right to request permission to view the demographic screening tool during any stage leading up to and including the conclusion of this study.

_____ I agree to waive my right to review the completed demographic screening tool.

_____ I do not agree to waive my right to review the completed demographic screening tool.

Signature:

Your signature below means that you have read the information above and agree to allow your son or daughter to participate in this study and that you are in agreement with the terms as outlined above particularly the clause about recording the sessions and the confidentiality of the discussions between the interviewer and the youth participant. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask me now or at any time during the study.

Participants who are under the age of 18 will be required to have one or more parent/guardians sign off on your participation as an added layer of protection.

Signature _____ ***Printed*** _____ ***Date*** _____

Participant Signature _____ ***Printed*** _____ ***Date*** _____

Investigator Signature _____ ***Printed*** _____ ***Date*** _____



Counseling and Counselor Education, 805 South Crouse Ave., Lower Level, School of Education, Syracuse University, 315-443-2266

Appendix III

Assent/Consent Form # 2

A Qualitative Approach to Studying the Lived Experiences of High School Aged Sexual Minority and Gender Nonconforming Youth Across Relationships and Contexts.

My name is Michael Calloway, and I am a Doctoral Candidate at Syracuse University. I am inviting you to participate in a research study. Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you may choose to participate or not. This sheet will explain the study to you and please feel free to ask questions about the research if you have any. I will be happy to explain anything in detail if you wish.

I am contacting you today to invite you to participate in a qualitative (interview) study that will explore your experiences of safety and comfort at home, in your community, and in school. Participants must be 17 years of age or older, currently enrolled in high school, and identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, or Questioning (LGBTQ), hold a primary (sexual) identity other than heterosexual, or be gender non-conforming. You've been asked to participate because you either attend a school that has a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) or you attend a school that has an inclusive policy that is designed to address the developmental needs of those who identify as LGBTQ and/or those who are gender non-conforming.

Description:

You are being asked to participate in one-on-one interview. The purpose of this study is to understand the connection between sexual minority status and or gender non conformity and one's sense of safety and comfort being oneself at home, in the community, and in the school setting. If you agree to participate you will be invited to attend an initial interview which will last about 90 minutes. You may be asked to participate in one or more follow up interviews each lasting approximately 60 minutes in length in an effort to clarify data gathered in the initial discussion.

Voluntary Nature of Participation:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may stop at any time and you do not have to answer any questions you don't want to. Nothing will happen to you if you choose not to answer any questions or if you decide not to participate.

Confidentiality:

Your responses in the interview will be confidential with one minor exception; the faculty who are serving on my dissertation committee will be allowed to review interview transcriptions, write-up, notes, and recording for the purpose of providing feedback and supervision for my project. However, these files will be kept in a secure file cabinet in my home to which only I have access. The recordings will be kept on a password-protected computer. All recorded data will be deleted after 3 years. Data will be compiled in such a way that you cannot be identified. Thus, I will not attach your name, address, or any other identifiable information about you to any of your responses, or to any reports or publication describing the results of this study. Instead, I plan to generate an alias which will be used during the write up of the project and in the final project in an effort to protect your identity. I plan to record the interview using a hand held voice recording device so that I can transcribe and subsequently analyze the data that is gathered during our face to face interview(s). These recordings will ensure that I capture and compile a report that is true to the information that you share during our time together.

Interviews will be conducted on school grounds primarily after school hours and occasionally during the school day provided that meeting doesn't conflict with your class attendance. Parental and school administrative permission will be sought to conduct interviews during the day those instances when meeting after school is not possible due to scheduling conflicts or unforeseeable events. In the event that an interview needs to be scheduled during the day, I'll also request permission from the school administrative team in an effort to ensure that a private space is open to conduct the one on one interviews. We will also plan to meet in a private space after school hours on school grounds as well so we'll need to coordinate those meetings, too, with the school in an effort to ensure that we have an office space in which to meet. The interviews are confidential so I'll request permission to meet in a space that affords the greatest amount of privacy so that the participant (your son or daughter) can feel comfortable engaging in the interview.

We will keep your study data as confidential as possible with the exception of certain information we must report for legal or ethical reasons. For example if you tell us about something or someone that hurt you or others, we would have to tell someone outside of the study.

Potential Risks and Benefits:

Although there may be no direct benefit to you following your participation in this study, your willingness to share your experiences and knowledge may provide valuable insight for improving the resources for LGBTQ (sexual minority) and gender non-conforming youth.

There are no known risks to you as a result of your participation in this study. It is possible that the discussion of your personal experiences may make you feel uncomfortable at times and should that occur we can discuss options with which to address any concerns. That said, we'll

engage in a post interview debriefing in an effort to process any concerns that may emerge as a result of your participation.

Sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth often come from loving homes and experience which range from acceptance to marginalization. Although sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth often have experiences in supportive home and community-based settings, there are some who experience rejection and abuse as a result of disclosing their sexual and gender identities.

Steps have been taken, as identified above, to ensure the confidentiality of your sexual or gender identity as well as the basis for our sessions together. Should you experience any distress as a result of our discussions or activities related to our time together, we can discuss options with which to address any concerns. I plan to coordinate those efforts with the school-based staff in an effort to ensure that all parties involved are aware of the range of services that are available to address any concerns.

You may experience some discomfort speaking with a stranger about your identities and that's pretty normal. You maintain the right to refuse to answer any questions that make you feel any distress. You also maintain the right to discontinue in interview at any point. You may also withdraw from the interview process, too, if you find the interview to be distressing. However, we should talk about that discussion so that I have the opportunity to review options, as discussed above, for addressing any conflicts or distress.

Contact information:

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact Dr. Nicole Hill, Professor at Syracuse University, Chair of the Counseling and Human Services Program, and advisor for this project at nrhill@syr.edu. Dr. Hill can also be reached in the event that you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant in this study.

Signature:

Your signature below means that you have read the information above and agree to participate in this study and to have the interviews recorded. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask me now or at any time during the study.

Participants who are under the age of 18 will be required to have one or more parent/guardians sign off on your participation as an added layer of protection.

Participants are asked to place your initials next to the statement that reflects your response to being audio recorded.

Parents are asked to place their initials above that of their children signifying their consent for their children to participate and their consent to the sessions being recorded.

___ I agree to *be* audio recorded.

___ I do not agree to be audio recorded.

Signature _____ *Print Name* _____ *Date* _____

Parent Signature _____ *Print Name* _____ *Date* _____

(Parental signature (and initials) applies to those who are under the age of 18)

Researcher Signature _____ *Print Name* _____ *Date* _____



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Appendix IV

Initial Interview Schedule with Student Participants

1. Tell me a little about yourself (interests, hobbies, introvert versus extravert...)?
2. At what point do you recall becoming aware of or questioning your sexual identity?
3. With whom have you disclosed your sexual identity?
4. How did you make the disclosure?
5. How would you describe your gender presentation (congruent/not congruent with assigned gender)?
 - a. (If gender non-conforming, can you describe the ways that you transgress gender roles?)
6. How long were you aware of your sexual identity before making the disclosure?
7. Have people made assumptions about your sexual identity?
8. What's your relationship like with the people that know about your sexual identity?
9. Do you think that your sexual identity (or gender presentation) has had an impact on your relationships with others? Explain?
10. Are there people that you would like to tell but haven't yet?
11. Are there people that you would not disclose your sexual identity to?
12. How do you decide with whom you're going to make the self-disclosure?
13. With whom do you currently live?
14. Do you experience your home a safe environment to be something other than heterosexual?
 - a. Define safety?

- b. Are there interpersonal experiences with members where you feel the most safe integrating your sexual identity/gender presentation?
 - c. Are there situations at home where you feel the least safe for integrating your sexual identity or being gender non-conforming?
 - d. Do you experience your family as being proactive (actively involved in disrupting bias via education or other efforts) or reactionary (actions taken when issues arise) to your sexual identity/gender presentation?
15. Do you experience your community as a safe environment to be something other than heterosexual?
- a. Define safety?
 - b. Are there settings within your community that you experience as safer than others?
 - e. Are there situations in the community where you feel the least safe integrating your sexual identity or being gender non-conforming?
 - f. Do you experience peers as being proactive (actively involved in disrupting bias via education or other efforts) or reactionary (actions taken when issues arise) to your sexual identity or your gender non-conforming?
16. Is your school a safe place to be something other than heterosexual?
- a. Do you experience peers as being proactive (actively involved in disrupting bias via education or other efforts) or reactionary (actions taken when issues arise) to your sexual identity or your gender non-conforming?
 - b. Do you experience teachers and school administrators as being proactive (actively involved in disrupting bias via education or other efforts) or reactionary (actions taken when issues arise) to your sexual identity or your gender non-conforming?
17. Are there settings within the school context that feel safer than others?
- a. Define safety?
18. Are there settings within the school that you experience as least safe?
- a. Describe an experience with harassment or violence based on your sexual identity or gender presentation?
19. Does your school have a Gay Straight Alliance?
20. Are you an active participant in the Gay Straight Alliance?
21. How did you become actively involved in the GSA?
22. What role does the GSA fulfill for you?
- a. Please share an example of ways that involvement in the GSA has had an impact on your life at home, in the community, and/or your experiences in the school?)
23. In what ways does it serve the school community?
24. How do students find out about and subsequently get involved or in touch with the GSA?

25. Are peers, teachers, and parents supportive of the GSA?
 - a. How so?
 - b. Are there open discussions about LGBTQ identities and or gender normativities?
 - c. Are there inclusive policies or rules regarding tolerance?

26. What are some of the daily challenges faced by sexual minority and gender non-conforming youth?
 - a. Is bullying or harassment a problem?
 - b. In what settings does bullying or harassment occur?
 - c. Those times when bullying happens, what form does it take (verbal, physical)
 - d. Are peers, adults, family reactive to its emergence?

27. Are there other experiences that you feel are relevant to our discussion?

28. What are some aspects of your life that you feel are of importance that you'd like to share that haven't been addressed here?



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Appendix V

Student Demographic Screening Tool

1. How old are you? Please specify your age on the line below
 - a. _____
2. What is your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Transgender
3. Which terms best describe your gender expression/gender presentation
 - a. Gender presentation is consistent with social norms (gender conforming)
 - b. Gender presentation is not consistent with social norms (non-gender conforming)
4. What is your ethnicity? Please circle one
 - a. African American
 - b. Caucasian
 - c. Asian/Pacific Islander
 - d. Hispanic
 - e. Native American
 - f. Multiracial
 - g. Other (please specify) _____
5. Which of the following best describes your primary orientation/identity? Please circle one.
 - a. Heterosexual
 - b. Gay
 - c. Lesbian
 - d. Bisexual
 - e. Queer
 - f. Questioning
 - g. Other (please specify) _____
6. Which of the following statements best describes your interest in dating/non sexual intimacy? (Please circle one).
 - a. I have an interest in dating/non sexual intimacy with a male.
 - b. I have an interest in dating/non sexual intimacy with a female
 - c. I have an interest in dating/non sexual intimacy and gender is unimportant

- d. I have an interest in dating/non sexual intimacy but I am unsure about my interests in males or females
 - e. I don't have an interest in dating or non-sexual intimacy.
7. I have had or I currently have an interest in sexual contact with (please circle one/complete the sentence)
- a. Males
 - b. Females
 - c. Males and Females
 - d. I have not had sexual contact and I don't have an interest at this time
 - e. I have not had sexual contact but I have interest in sexual contact with _____
8. I have disclosed my sexual identity to (please select all that apply to you)
- a. Mom
 - b. Dad
 - c. Siblings
 - d. Extended family
 - e. Neighbors
 - f. Friends
 - g. Peers in school
 - h. Teachers
 - i. School Counselors
 - j. Other (please specify) _____
9. Does your school have a Gay Straight Alliance
- a. Yes
 - b. No
10. Does your school have a policy that addresses harassment based on sexual identity?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I'm not sure
11. Does your school have a policy that addresses harassment based on gender presentation?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I'm not sure



Counseling and Counselor Education, 805 South Crouse Ave., Lower Level, School of Education, Syracuse University, 315-443-2266

Appendix VI
Consent Form for School Superintendents:

I'm reaching out to you today in an effort to request your permission to contact the school principals, the Gay Straight Alliance, McKinney Vento Act Homeless Liaisons, and the Dignity for All Student Act Coordinators, or counselors in your districts in an effort to recruit students for participation in a study that is designed to understand the connection between sexual minority status and or gender non conformity and one's sense of safety and comfort being oneself at home, in the community, and in school contexts. I'm asking for your assistance with identifying the staff in your district who hold the positions listed above as these staff are likely in the best position to know students who meet the criteria for my study. I was hoping to enlist your permission to conduct the study in one or more schools in your district and to ask for your help reaching out to the appropriate staff.

Participants need to be 17 years of age or older, currently enrolled in high school, and identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Questioning. As an added layer of protection participants, primarily those who are 17 years of age, will need to have disclosed their identity to at least one parent as well as at least one of the staff members listed above. An initial interview will last about 90 minutes followed by up two additional interviews which will last approximately 60 minutes in length in an effort to clarify data gathered in the initial discussion.

The method of data collection will be one on one face to face interviews which will be scheduled on school grounds either during the school day provided there is no conflict with attending classes or after school provided the participant has arranged appropriate transportation to get them home safely. The interviews will be conducted in an office behind closed doors to allow full privacy and confidentiality. I will also utilize a sound muffling device (white noise) that as an added measure to prevent the disclosure of protected information that emerges during the interview sessions.

Voluntary Nature of Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary and permission is being requested from the parents of youth who are 17 years of age. The youth may discontinue their participation at any time and they will not have to answer any questions that they don't want to. Nothing will happen should the youth choose not to answer any questions or if they decide not to participate.

Confidentiality:

Responses in the interview will be confidential with one minor exception; the faculty who are serving on my dissertation will be allowed to review interview transcriptions, write-up, notes, and recording for the purpose of providing feedback and supervision for my project. However, these files will be kept in a secure file cabinet in my home to which only I have access. The recordings will be kept on a password-protected computer. All recorded data will be deleted within three months of my defending the dissertation. Data will be compiled in such a way that the identities of the youth who participate remain confidential. Thus, I will not attach names, addresses, or any other identifiable information about the youth participant to any of their responses, or to any reports or publication describing the results of this study. Instead, I plan to generate an alias which will be used during the write up of the project and in the final analysis in an effort to protect the participants' identities. I plan to record the interviews using one or more voice recording devices so that I can transcribe and subsequently analyze the data that is gathered during our face to face interview(s). These recordings will ensure that I capture and compile a report that is true to the information that is shared during the interviews.

Granting permission means that you agree to waive any right to request to see the transcripts or information that is shared by your son or daughter. Confidentiality safeguards the interview process and provides a space for the participants to respond openly and honestly about their experiences. You will, however, be afforded an opportunity to address concerns about the youth's participation at any time during or after the study's conclusion.

Potential Risks and Benefits:

Although there may be no direct benefit to your student's participation in this study, their willingness to share their experiences and knowledge may provide valuable insights for improving the resources for LGBTQ (sexual minority) and gender non-conforming youth. There are no known risks as a result of their; however, it is possible that the discussion of their personal experiences may feel uncomfortable at times. Should that occur, we can discuss options with which to address any concerns.

Appendices:

Attached you'll find a copy of the Consent form for Teachers and School Administrators, a Consent form for parents, the Youth Participant Invitation, the Student Demographic screening tool, the Consent form for Student Participants, and a copy of the questions which will guide the initial semi-structured interviews. Lastly, I have also included a copy of the Letter of Cooperation which Syracuse University's Institutional Review Board will require before they give the authorization for me to conduct my study in your district.

Point of Contact:

The informational packet is being sent so that adjustments can be made that satisfy the needs of the School District, parents, and the students who agree to participate in this study. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact me directly at mcallow@syr.edu or Dr. Nicole Hill, Professor at Syracuse University and advisor for this project at nrhill@syr.edu. Dr. Hill can also be reached in the event that you have any concerns about your students' rights as a research participant in this study.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Michael Calloway
Doctoral Candidate and Investigator
Syracuse University
mcallowa@syr.edu

Nicole Hill
Professor and Chair of Counseling and Human Services Department
Chair of Dissertation Committee
Syracuse University
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Education

PhD Candidate	Counseling and Human Services, Syracuse University
M.S. Counseling Psychology; Counseling in the Community	Graduate Program, Counseling Psychology Holy Family University
B.A. Psychology	Psychology, Temple University

Teaching Interests

Counseling Theories Development, Life Span	Professional Development Interviewing Skills	Multicultural Interventions
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Teaching Experiences

Teaching Assistant, Syracuse University
Foundations of Mental Health Counseling, Richard Shin (Spring, 2011)
Practicum, Tamara Clingerman (Fall, 2012)
Internship (School & Community Mental Health Tracks) Dennis Gilbride & Derek Seward (Spring 2012)

Co-Instructor, Syracuse University
Counseling Prepracticum II: Advanced Multicultural Skills, Richard Shin (Fall, 2010)
Introduction to Education for Cultural and Social Transformation, Richard Shin (Fall, 2011)
Counseling Prepracticum II: Advanced Multicultural Skills, Derek X Seward (Spring, 2012)

Instructor, Syracuse University
General Counseling Methods (Spring, 2013)

Supervision of Students

Individual Supervision

Individual clinical supervision (1) student Spring, 2009 (J. Bernard, supervisor)
Individual clinical supervision (1) student Fall, 2010 (D. Gilbride, supervisor)
Individual supervision (1) student Fall, 2011 (J. Bellini, supervisor)
Individual supervision (1) student Spring 2012 (D. Gilbride, supervisor)
Group/individual supervision (4) students Spring 2012 (D. Steward, supervisor)

Research Interest

Heteronormativity and its impact on relationships
 Assessing the internalization of ablest discourse and ways to challenge the messages
 Disrupting hierarchies and their impact on the counseling process
 Exploring relationship styles and the ways that these emerge in supervision sessions
 Teaching pedagogy and multicultural practice in the classroom

Research Apprenticeship Program

From marginalization to a sense of connectedness: Narrative interviews with informants
 along the LGBTQ continuum of identities: It's a rap! Completed and approved Fall 2012

Doctoral Examinations

Clinical Exam, Oral passed Fall, 2012
 Relational-Cultural and Attachment Theories and Work with Diverse Populations.
 Clinical Exam, Written passed Spring, 2013
 Heteronormativity, Color-Blind Universalism, Post Racial Liberalism,
 Meritocracy, & Individualism; The Birth of a Myth.

Master's level Examination

Comprehensive exam taken and passed Spring, 2006

Honors

Graduate Assistant/Teaching Assistant 2011-2013	Syracuse University
Future Professoriate Program 2010-2013	Syracuse University
Selected to give the Benediction Prayer, Graduation 2007	Holy Family University
On the Spot Award 2006	Dept of Veterans Affairs

Internships

Lemoyne College	
Wellness Center 2010-2012	Syracuse, NY
Department of Veterans Affairs,	
Methadone Maintenance Clinic 2005-2007	Philadelphia, PA