

2013

Conceptualized Heterosexual Theory and Identity Development

Breyan Haizlip
Walden University

Scott Schaeffe
School of Education and Human Development at the University of Colorado Denver, scott.schaeffe@ucdenver.edu

Danica Hays
Old Dominion University

Jennifer Cates
Regis University

Follow this and additional works at: http://source.ucdenver.edu/cpce_publications

 Part of the [Marriage and Family Therapy and Counseling Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Haizlip, B., Schaeffe, S., Hays, D., & Cates, J. (2013). Conceptualized heterosexual theory and identity development. *Professional Issues in Counseling*, Winter. Retrieved from http://www.shsu.edu/~piic/documents/ConceptualizedHeterosexualTheoryandIdentityDevelopment_002.pdf

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Counseling Faculty Scholarship at source. It has been accepted for inclusion in Counseling Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of source. For more information, please contact kelly.ragland@ucdenver.edu.

Conceptualized Heterosexual Theory and Identity Development

Breyan N. Haizlip

Georgia Southern University

Scott Schaeffe

University of Colorado Denver

Danica Hays

Old Dominion University

Jennifer Cates

Regis University

Authors Note

Breyan N. Haizlip, Department of Leadership, Technology, and Human Development, Georgia Southern University.

Danica Hays, Department of Counseling and Human Services, Old Dominion University

Jennifer Cates, Division for Counseling and Family Therapy, Regis University

This research project was partially funded by a grant from the Southern Association of Counselor Education and Supervision.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Breyan Haizlip, Georgia Southern University, P.O. Box 8131, Statesboro, GA 30458.

E-mail: bhaizlip@georgiasouthern.edu

Abstract

Through the use of consensual qualitative research and interpretative phenomenology, the present study examined how 50 heterosexually identified counselors-trainees conceptualized their sexual identity development. The results provide support for Conceptualized Heterosexual Theory, which indicates that how heterosexual counselors conceptualize their sexual identity is related to four developmental dimensions: *inherent orientation responses*, *pre-conceptualized heterosexuality*, *heterosexual identity development*, and *identification*, directed towards 3 distinct identities: *interdependent heterosexuality*, *independent heterosexuality*, and *unresolved heterosexuality*. Implications for counselor education and future research are discussed.

Keywords: heterosexuality, heterosexual identity development, sexual identity development, consensual qualitative research

Conceptualized Heterosexual Theory and Identity Development

Historically, sexual identity development (SID) is a phenomenon traditionally investigating minority sexuality (e.g., gay and lesbian) and dominant cultural (e.g., heterosexual) attitudes towards or knowledge of minority sexuality. A number of theoretical perspectives and models exist that illustrate the formation of sexual identity among gay and lesbian individuals (see Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Cox & Gallois, 1996; Fassinger & Miller, 1996; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995; Sophie, 1985; Troiden, 1988). However far less research has concentrated on describing the identity formation of heterosexual persons (Hoffman, 2004; Worthington et al., 2002). While existing literature on sexual identity development has increased attention to specific processes of development for gay and lesbian identified individuals, such research has also contributed to creating an influx of multicultural literature that focuses solely on minority processes of identity development (Author, 2011), inadvertently perpetuating the notion of heterosexuality as the “norm” and gay and lesbian identity as the “other”. This leads to a situation where terms like “sexual orientation” are pejorative, identifying aberrant behaviors (Brammer, 2012) that may unintentionally propagate heterosexual bias in research.

In recent years, counselor education literature has expanded to emphasize the development of multicultural proficiency, as well as the development of social justice-oriented clinicians (Ratts, D’Andrea, & Arredondo, 2004). Ultimately, the goal of this expansion is to train future practitioners to see their professional skills and positionality as having the propensity to facilitate positive change for lesbian and gay identified clients who experience oppression and discrimination, as well as prepare practitioners to serve as a conduit for positive social change in minimizing oppression towards minority sexual identities (Croteau, Bieschke, Fassinger, & Manning, 2008; Rostosky & Riggle, 2011). However, within these efforts are questions as to

how counselor educators are addressing sexual identity and related competencies (i.e., multicultural competency & social justice advocacy) in counselor education.

Sexual Identity Development

Identity is an internalized and self-selected regulatory metacognitive system (Adams, 1992). It is an integral part of how we come into awareness of the many dimensions of self. It represents an organized and integrated psychic structure, requiring the distinction between the inner self and the outer social world (Adams, 1992). As one's identity develops, it combines one's own values, beliefs, traditions, and cultural scripts (Berzonskya, Ciecich, Duriez, & Soenens, 2011; Schwartz, 2001) that inform how one creates meaning of self and others. Identity includes awareness and interpersonal knowledge of gender, race, ethnicity, social class, religion, and sexuality.

Although the terms sexual orientation and sexual identity have been used interchangeably to describe sexuality (Worthington, 2004), the term sexual identity more fully represents the range of concepts and factors associated with sexuality (Schreier & Lassiter, 2010). Casting a broad and inclusive net, sexual identity acknowledges the essentialist theory of the fixed, inborn nature of an individual's sexual orientation (LeVay, 1993), as well as the more fluid sexual identity that is constructed by societal, historical, intrapsychic, and interpersonal factors (Patterson, 1995; Stein, 1997). The term sexual identity also recognizes the multifaceted nature of sexuality and the complex integration of variables, such as attraction, affection, arousal, and behavior (Schreier & Lassiter, 2010).

While sexual orientation has been the epicenter of sexual identity research, one's sexual identity also includes intimacy, eroticism, sexual activities, one's communication of sexuality (e.g., sexual behaviors and self-expression), and the characteristics one finds sexually attractive

(Gilbert & Walker, 1999). Sexual identity is a subjective and individualized pattern of sexual arousal, desire, fantasies, and responses to cultural norms. Sexual identity includes coping with inevitable issues of socially dictated gender role expectations and developing comfort with, and certainty of, one's sexual identity to cultivate a personal sexual value system (Masters, Johnson, & Kolodny, 1994). Thus, sexual identity development (SID) is the process by which individuals, regardless of sexual orientation, embarks upon conceptualizing their sexuality, sexual identity, and sex value system (Worthington, Savoy, Dillon, & Vernaglia, 2002).

Heterosexual Identity Development

The majority of literature pertaining to SID models assumes a heterocentric or a heteronormative view of majority group identification, and assumes that heterosexuals are a monolithic group with predictable attitudes about non-dominant sexual identities, as well as having developed a steady or clear sense of their own identity (Eliason, 1995). Heterosexuals are rarely asked to conceptualize their own identity development similarly to other dominant cultural groups. To date, much of the research in counseling and related professions has failed to address questions of how heterosexuals attain sexual identity or ask whether heterosexuals even experience themselves as having a sexual identity. Not until recently have theorists begun to explore *heterosexual identity development* (HID).

Sullivan (1998) and Eliason (1995) were the first to publish work that offered insight into HID that was not focused largely on biological and developmental (e.g. Masters et al., 1994) or feminist (e.g. Rich, 1981; Richardson, 1996; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1993) perspectives. Building on the work of Eliason, as well as Hardiman and Jackson's (1992) racial identity development model, Sullivan (1998) described five stages of increasing awareness and complexity regarding HID: *naiveté, acceptance, resistance, redefinition, and internalization*.

More recently, scholars (Mohr, 2002; Worthington & Mohr, 2002; Worthington et al., 2002) have conceptualized HID from available sexuality theories (Kinsey et al., 1953; Klein, 1990) and traditional models of sexual identity development (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Eliason, 1995; Marcia, 1987; Sullivan, 1998; Troiden, 1988). Worthington et al. (2002) and Mohr (2002) present two independent models of HID that integrate theoretical models of majority group identity development (Helms, 1995), suggesting that HID processes may parallel white racial identity development, in that there may be universal developmental statuses experienced by Caucasians, which include movement from a complete lack of awareness to full acknowledgement of bias and privilege (Simoni & Walters, 2001).

Worthington et al.'s (2002) multidimensional model also includes developmental statuses and biopsychosocial influences of individual and social identity, which are often overlooked in traditional models (Hoffman, 2004). Worthington et al. additionally proposed that HID might be characterized by a convergence of individual and social identity development processes within a biopsychosocial context (Hoffman, 2004). Worthington et al. discussed six biopsychosocial influences that affect SID: *biology*; *microsocial context* (messages from important persons regarding gender role conformity, sexual knowledge, attitudes, sexual values, and sexual behaviors); *gender norms and socialization*; *culture* (a set of beliefs, traditions, and values); *religious orientation*; and *systemic homonegativity* (sexual prejudice and privilege).

Worthington et al. theorized that the processes of individual and social identity development for heterosexuals may occur within five statuses on both conscious and unconscious levels throughout all proposed statuses. These statuses include: unexplored commitment, active exploration (purposeful exploration), diffusion, deepening and commitment, and a synthesis status.

Mohr (2002) presented a model of sexual orientation identity that emphasized heterosexual-identified therapists' work with gay and lesbian clients. Mohr's model reflects his belief that prejudiced practice by heterosexual therapists can be conceptualized as a "manifestation of their efforts to process and respond to sexual issues in ways that foster a positive and coherent identity" (2002, p. 533). Mohr (2002) suggests that personal and public identity interact to influence heterosexual identity. *Personal identity* is the internal experience and understanding of one's heterosexual orientation, whereas *public identity* is the manner in which individuals externally express their experiences of heterosexuality (Hoffman, 2004). Mohr (2002) defined heterosexual identity as a "product of the interplay between individuals' sexual orientation schemas and their motivation to fulfill basic needs for social acceptance and psychological consistency" (p. 492).

Collectively, these models outline HID processes, individual differences in HID, and implications of heterosexual identity for training, practice, and research in counseling. However, the models of Mohr (2002) and Worthington et al. (2002) have yet to be empirically tested. Thus, implications of these models are tentative and hypothesized through a comprehensive review of literature.

Purpose of the Study

Compelled by the counseling profession's emphasis on multicultural proficiency and CACREP standards (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2009), which specify sexual orientation as one of the areas of diversity that counselor-training programs must address, programs have focused on developing trainees' competencies by first attending to the awareness dimensions of the Multicultural Counseling Competencies and Standards (MCC; see Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). However,

even with increased attention to majority cultural groups and the interface of power and privilege (Croteau, Talbot, Lance, & Evans, 2002; Hays, Dean, & Chang, 2007), sexual identity literature investigating heterosexual identity development (HID) is minimal. The paucity of literature limits counselor educators' ability to offer insightful perspective related to awareness of heterosexually identified counselor-trainees. In order to train multiculturally proficient and social justice-oriented practitioners, all dimensions of sexuality must be included within identity development models. Using consensual qualitative research and interpretative phenomenology, the present study sought to gain an understanding of how heterosexually identified counselor-trainees conceptualized their sexual identity development process. The goal of this research is to expand knowledge related to heterosexual identity development in an effort to normalize the challenges, barriers, and developmental milestones related to sexual identity development as a human condition, inclusive of all orientations.

Methodology

Consensual Qualitative Research

The term *qualitative research* defines a wide array of methodological approaches that share some general characteristics. Qualitative researchers emphasize description over explanation and stress the importance of having concepts emerge directly from the data and apply rigorous data collection and analysis methods (Patton, 2003). Accordingly, using a consensual qualitative research (CQR) tradition (Patton, 2003; Hill, 2005), the present study investigates HID as a developmental process of identity formation. CQR combines components of grounded theory and interpretative phenomenology to generate theoretical propositions related to a phenomenon (Hill, 2005). Phenomenology is a broad philosophical approach with multiple roots and methods (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008). Phenomenological qualitative research focuses on

describing what all participants share in common in a specific experience, with the overall purpose of describing the “universal essence” of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). This approach focuses on the “how” and the “what,” rather than seeking to understand the “why” of the phenomenon. Interpretive phenomenology, a method developed to better understand psychological phenomena (e.g., Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008; Willig, 2001), seeks to understand the individual view, recognizing that a researcher can never directly access the ultimate experience of the individual. Thus, interpretive phenomenology proposes that the categorizing of generated themes and theorized process described by the researcher is always an interpretation of the individual’s experience as there is an interaction between the researcher’s own worldview and the participant (Willig, 2001).

CQR involves the use of a research team to analyze and debate emergent themes to consensus in an effort to minimize the impact of researcher bias by analyzing data through multiple interpretations. This methodology relies heavily upon rigorous methods of triangulation, member checking, and data analysis to achieve creditability and trustworthiness in data analysis. Within the CQR framework, it is essential to target a specific audience to avoid creating a participant pool that is too diverse, as that may increase the difficulty for a researcher to find common experiences, themes, and the developmental essence of the experience (Creswell, 2007). Thus, for the present study, participation was narrowed to heterosexually-identified counselor educators and doctoral counselor-trainees who reported learning that sexual identity development is a process negotiated exclusively by gay and lesbian individuals in their counseling coursework.

The essential components of CQR are the use of (a) open-ended questions in semi structured interviews; (b) several judges or a research team used throughout the data collection

process to foster multiple perspectives; (c) consensus to arrive at interpretations of the data; (d) an auditor to check the work of the primary team and minimize researcher bias; and (e) domains, core ideas, and cross analyses (Patton, 2003).

Research Team

Two primary research teams, or rotating primary research teams (Hill et al., 2005), were utilized for this study. Research team members were not involved with participant interviewing or data transcription. The primary investigator (PI) was a member of each research team. The primary investigator (PI) is a 34-year old African American female and counselor educator, currently in a heterosexual marriage of 6 years, although she identifies as Bisexual. The research teams varied in ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and sexuality-related assumptions in an effort to minimize the impact of bias on data interpretation and provided a range of perspectives for consensus. The first research team was comprised of 4 researchers: a Caucasian, heterosexual female, counselor education doctoral student; a Caucasian, homosexual, male, counselor education doctoral student; an African-American, heterosexual, female, counselor education doctoral student; and the primary investigator. The second research team consisted of 3 members: a Caucasian, heterosexual, female holding a PhD in Counseling Psychology; a Caucasian, homosexual male, counselor education doctoral student; and the PI.

Research team members participated in a 3-hour training specific to the CQR process. This training was facilitated by the primary investigator and developed in collaboration with a CQR methodologist. All research team members had completed doctoral level course work in qualitative research prior to the study.

CQR design suggests that researchers report both expectations and biases so that readers can evaluate the findings with this knowledge in mind (Hill et al., 2005). Prior to beginning the

research study, the research team had an in-depth discussion of researcher biases, assumptions, and expectations. Research team members expressed a range of biases. All research team members reported beliefs that sexuality existed on a continuum and was a result of biological, social, cultural, and spiritual factors. The largest discrepancy among research team members was regarding whether or not sexual orientation and sexual identity were the same. All research team members, with the exception of the African-American, heterosexual female, believed that sexual orientation and identity were different. Researchers disputed over whether sexual identity is a matter of choice and can be manipulated by factors that include biosociocultural factors, while sexual orientation is a matter of genetics. Researchers further argued that heterosexual identity development may not necessarily be a process because opposition or oppression is not a factor. The research team member identifying as a Caucasian homosexual male argued that while the process for LGB persons may be illuminated because of oppression, establishing a commitment to any identity is a process - although the length and rigor of that process may vary. Research team members were able to resolve this discrepancy by agreeing to highlight the context of each team member's perspectives on this issue when it was relevant in data analysis and interpretation.

The diversity of the research team ensured for maximum variation and provided a range of perspectives for consensus of the data interpretation process, which is an integral element of the CQR method (Patton, 2003). Accordingly, CQR relies on mutual respect and equal involvement. Thus, this diversity in viewpoints among research team members was valued, honored, and protected. As a result of subtle meanings that may be conveyed through the interview process in CQR, this variety of viewpoints and experiences among the team members assisted in unraveling the complexities and ambiguities of the data retrieved (Patton, 2003).

Participants

Participants were recruited via purposeful sampling and convenient sampling measures. Of 64 possible participants, 50 were selected based on established selection criterion (i.e., self-identified heterosexuals and counselors) and maximum variation (i.e., gender, age, social class, ethnicity, and race). Data were collected from two semi-structured interviews and one meaning-making reflective essay from 29 females and 21 males. Ethnic classification included: 21 Caucasian-American, 19 African-American, 7 identifying as multi-ethnic (unspecified), 2 Latina-American, and 1 Asian-American participant. Participant ages ranged from 24-58. Data were collected over a two-year period.

Data Analysis

Each transcript was described and analyzed using an inductive approach. The research team members received a copy of original transcripts and were instructed to utilize the following approach. First, the open coding method, also known as level I coding, was conducted to produce a large set of codes for each transcript (Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The open coding process produces concepts and codes that fit the data being analyzed (Hutchinson, 1988; Strauss, 1987). There was increased focus on the data that produced concepts that related to “conditions, interactions among actors, strategies and tactics, and consequences” of interest to this particular research question (Strauss, 1987, pp. 27–28).

The next phase of analysis examined the relationships among the various codes created and moved the open codes up to a more abstract level through categorization of concepts. The level I codes were taken from each individual transcript and then put together in categories that addressed the codes for all of the transcripts. These new codes were labeled as the level II codes (Hutchinson, 1988).

The final phase of the analysis consisted of analyzing the level II codes across all participants and important classification variables, including age, gender, and ethnicity. This step facilitated the process of finding the major themes that fit the data, producing level III codes (Hutchinson, 1988). Level III codes were categorized as *general*, *typical*, or *variant*. General themes were experiences reported by 50-35 individual participants, while typical themes identify experiences expressed by 34-15 individual participants. Those themes reported by 14 or less participants were categorized as variant. After the level III codes were produced, the data were formulated into chronological emergence related to development to address the research questions of this present study. Each coding level was debated to consensus prior to moving forward. Consensus was also formed in generated developmental positioning of generated codes (Hill et al., 2005).

Results

The authors present findings as a developmental model of *Conceptualized Heterosexual Theory* (see Figure 1) purposed in exploration, as opposed to definitive identification. Conceptualized Heterosexual Theory (CHT) situates the sexual identity formation into four distinct developmental dimensions: *inherent orientation-related dimension*, *pre-conceptualized heterosexual dimension*, *heterosexual identity development dimension*, and *identification dimension*, recycling through three distinct heterosexual identities: *interdependent heterosexuality*, *independent heterosexuality*, and *unresolved heterosexuality*. Developmental dimensions of CHT emerged as general codes in the data as experienced by all participants. CHT posits that the initial development challenge for heterosexuals entails detaching one's gender identity from one's sexual identity, *identity disintegration*, which is experienced as synonymous prior to engaging in a process conceptualization activity. The emergence of a

uniquely and subjectively defined *critical incidence* compels one to look at gender and sexuality as separate constructs of identity. The authors maintain that CHT is not a linear model of identity formation, but rather a cyclical, permeable, multidimensional, and lifelong process of identity exploration (see Appendix A).

Inherent Orientation-Related Behavior Dimension

Participants described a recognition and response to biological antecedents or inherent sexuality-related impulses in early childhood memories (ages 2-4) as the earliest dimension of conceptualization. Participants reported sexual orientation-related impulses prior to the emergence of social consciousness or meaning related to sexual identification. These findings corroborate Worthington et al.'s (2002) distinction between *sexual orientation* (one's sexuality-related predispositions) and *sexual orientation identity* (one's conscious identification with one's sexual predispositions). When asked to provide information about early heterosexual experiences, one male participant reported:

...it was before I was becoming social as a human. I was very young I guess before I could even conceptualize being attracted to the opposite sex. I think when you identify as something is when you... realize there is an alternative... But if it's the only thing you know it's hard to identify as anything....so you are just being. I was just acting on how I felt. I liked girls. I just wanted to touch them.

This dimension also included a same-sex explorative component for 19 participants. Participants reported experiences in which they probed the genitalia of the same sex as a source of comparison of their own genital development. However, participants further reported that this exploration was void of sexual arousal. A majority of female participants (19 of 29) reported an early sexual experience with another female in late childhood. These participants noted that

while it was a sexual interaction, they were exploring their own sexuality and consider these actions responses to inherent sexual feelings for the opposite sex.

Pre-Conceptualized Heterosexual Dimension

This dimension includes several pivotal developmental characteristics that emerged as codes in the data: *unreconciled heterosexuality*, *critical incident*, *active or passive conceptualization*, and *identity disintegration*.

Unreconciled heterosexuality. Unreconciled heterosexuality, categorized as a typical code, was experienced by 31 participants within the aforementioned dimension. Findings suggest that because heterosexuality is a prescribed norm in Western culture that is endorsed within most American cultural groups, an unreconciled heterosexuality is the starting point for many of participants. This characteristic reflects sociocultural (e.g., familial, societal, cultural, spiritual) influences of sexual identity. Similar to Mohr's (2002) first working model, characteristics include individuals who have not seriously considered their identity as heterosexual persons or reflected upon heterosexual privilege or sexual minority oppression. Worthington et al. (2002) discussed a similar stage in their proposed model of HID, which they called unexplored commitment. Thus, it is vital to demarcate differences between these paradigms. While unexplored commitment suggests that an individual accepts and adopts the dominant sexual orientation imposed by sociocultural variables, unreconciled heterosexuality emphasizes that gender identity formation was reported to be the salient sociocultural variable influencing sexual identity formation within a larger dimension. While other influences (i.e., spiritual values) were significant, they were experienced with less importance. Gender identity as an almost indistinguishable construct from sexual identity most notably characterizes unreconciled heterosexuality. The dichotomization of gender roles into two distinct categories

(male and female) regarding specific gender-related behaviors was the central focus of unreconciled heterosexuality. For female participants, gender socialization guides sexual intentionality towards seeking an opposite sex partner with whom one could procreate and unite in marriage. This normal behavior is affirmed through early play experiences. For male participants, gender socialization suggests that masculinity is defined by overt expressions and declarations of heterosexuality. One male participant states:

I mean...you gotta like show other men that you are a man amongst men by being overtly sexual towards women. Like we used to play this game where your boy pushes you into a girl and you have to try to touch her boob or if you are really the man...you gotta like try an get a feel on her cooch [vagina]...I don't know...it's like being straight...you almost gotta prove it by being sexually aggressive towards girls. I don't think I really saw my sexuality as different then like being a man...guys that are straight go after girls...and if you like don't try to make a production out of it then they think you are gay...like less of a man.

Gender and sexuality is also intertwined with religious orientation. Worthington et al. (2002) assert that religious organizations typically attempt to regulate and define sexual behavior and values through teachings. One female participant wrote:

My understanding of the place for sexuality came from the Bible and what I learned in church during my upbringing. As a child, I knew that getting married and having children with a man was what God wanted for women. It was not until I reached college that I began to experience alternative perspectives and look to other sources to understand my own sexuality.

Participants' responses suggest that unreconciled heterosexuality was synonymous with gender identity formation; however, gender identity is heavily influenced by religious orientation.

Critical incident and conceptualization. The emergence of a critical incidence ignites dissonance for heterosexual participants, who reported significant experiences that cause interpersonal identity conflict by presenting perspective in opposition to their current values. These incidents include: *first sexual encounter, pregnancy, education, prolonged exposure to alternative sexual identities, divorce, and spiritual dissonance*. Such incidents are deemed to be critical as they are a catalyst for conceptualization. Conceptualization varies among participants, as 37 participants fell into a general category dynamically moving towards *active conceptualization*, while others recycled back towards unreconciled heterosexuality via *passive conceptualization*, avoiding in-depth reflection concerning the impact of the critical incident experienced. Categorized as variant, 13 Caucasian male participants report *passive conceptualization*. Prior to experiencing a critical incident, individuals tended to reduce sexual orientation to bipolar dichotomies (people are either heterosexual or homosexual). It is speculated that intact binary systems of gender deter individuals from exploring alternative understandings of gender and sexuality.

On the other hand, *active conceptualization* entails personal interrogation of one's own values related to sexuality and gender. Active conceptualization assists individuals in reconciling value conflict and developing a more sophisticated and relativistic understanding of non-heterosexual states as their understanding of self evolves. Purposeful exploration of one's own sexual preferences, needs, and values characterizes active conceptualization. For male participants, active conceptualization is primarily a cognitive process; however, female

participants included both cognitive and behavioral exploration. While this activity was purposeful, it was not specifically goal-directed. A clear desire to move towards any ideal status was not expressed; rather an interest in exploring feelings of dissonance is highlighted in active conceptualization.

Identity disintegration. Those individuals who engaged in active conceptualization experienced identity disintegration. This characterizes a shift from an oversimplified and dualist understanding of sexuality and gender as synonymous towards a more comprehensive and integrated paradigm, in which individuals begin to become aware of the differences between their gender and heterosexuality. When these identities are viewed as interconnected, yet separate, one is able to explore heterosexuality as a construct of sexual identity. At this time, individuals moved toward purposeful sexual identification.

Heterosexual Identity Development

Heterosexual identity development is a single component of Conceptualized Heterosexual Theory, in contrast to recent models of HID (Eliason, 1995; Marcia, 1987; Mohr, 2002; Sullivan, 1998; Worthington et al., 2002). While recent models of HID provide micro-articulation of HID, in which the goal is to understand heterosexual orientation, CHT offers a macro-articulation of a broader sexual identity developmental processes, of which HID is one dimension. From this perspective, the goal for dominant group members is not orientation identification, as sexual identity is not a reactive process in response to oppression or discrimination. Instead, heterosexuals attempt to develop a sexual value system that is congruent with a healthy sense of self. The HID dimension is initiated by an explorative trajectory of one's own sexuality-related preferences, behaviors, values, and modes of expression with opposite sex partners, and occurs after one has moved past a pre-conceptualized heterosexual dimension. It is

important to note that HID exploration does not always lead to identification with one's sexual orientation, as the goal is less motivated by orientation awareness. However, the HID dimension does lead towards a more self-authorized heterosexual value system that may or may not be congruent with one's sexual orientation.

Identification

Achieving a self-constructed heterosexual identity is presumably the goal of HID. However, CHT asserts that HID does not conclude with a culminating and stagnant identification that remains intact over a lifetime. Individuals persevere and recycle through various dimensions as critical incidents prompt further exploration over a lifetime. In this dimension, individuals prescribe to a set of self-authorized values to their heterosexual identity that deepens their understanding of their own heterosexual identity. Through exploration, individuals may resolve towards one of three identified heterosexual identities: *interdependent*, *independent*, or *unresolved*.

Interdependent Heterosexual Identity. Interdependent heterosexuals define their sexuality as an interconnected aspect of their total identity. While identity development is seen as a process of developing multiple aspects of one's identity simultaneously (i.e., spiritual identity, gender identity, racial/ethnic identity), interdependent heterosexuals resolved that one's spiritual or religious identity served as the foundation by which they chose to define all other aspects of individual identity. While interdependent heterosexuals may be willing to adopt a cognitively complex definition of heterosexuality, their heterosexual value system is explored and articulated within the context of a prevailing identity. In theory, such constraints would be debilitating and limit one's ability to explore sexual orientation uninhibitedly; however, the goal of exploration in the HID dimension is to accomplish a self-constructed heterosexual identity.

From this perspective, interdependent heterosexuality is an achieved and self-authorized heterosexual identity.

Independent Heterosexual Identity. This typical identification captures the sentiments of 22 participants. Independent heterosexual identity closely resembles Worthington et al.'s (2002) synthesis status. Presumably the most integrated identity, independent heterosexuality is achieved via uninhibited cognitive and behavioral exploration leading to a construction of heterosexuality that encompasses one's own sexual value system and translates into positive and non-judgmental attitudes toward minority sexual orientation. The sexual value system of independently identified heterosexuals is inclusive, comprehensive, and independent from other aspects of one's identity.

Unresolved Heterosexual Identity. Categorized as variant, nine female participants report continual questioning of sexual orientation, despite commitment to a heterosexual identity. This identification captures the experiences of heterosexual individuals that embark upon cognitive and behavioral exploration and discover that their sexuality may be more closely related to a bisexual orientation. However, for varying reasons, they continue to self-identify as heterosexual.

Discussion

Many counselors have been taught to address feelings and attitudes related to sexual minorities by learning about culturally different individuals, as opposed to learning about sexual identity through a developmental and inclusive lens that examines challenges related to oppression and privilege. While this approach acknowledges the need for understanding by addressing the knowledge dimension of the Multicultural Counseling Competencies and Standards (MCC), it fails to address the awareness dimension of multicultural proficiency

through which MCC knowledge and skills are cultivated. Conceptualized Heterosexual Theory may be a useful tool to promote increased awareness and enhance knowledge and skills among heterosexual trainees. The authors hypothesize that a greater understanding of heterosexuality may reduce the tendency for counselor trainees to dichotomize sexual orientation, reducing heterosexism and developing LGBTQ affirming attitudes in their counseling practice. Findings further assert that programs that encourage self-exploration for heterosexual trainees provide opportunities for critical incidents (i.e., direct contact with GLB identified individuals, introduction to heterosexuality-related research) and can be successful in increasing LGBTQ affirming attitudes and reduce heterosexual bias. It may additionally foster increased comfort with and understanding of sexuality and sexual identity related issues presented in counseling. However, taking the next step to initiate a program or address heterosexual exploration in counselor training programs may be a challenge for counseling faculty. As with counseling trainees, the proposed model of CHT may prove to be of benefit to faculty members and supervisors who, like heterosexual counselor trainees, are encouraged to engage in reflective practice and ongoing self-exploration.

Furthermore, it is the responsibility of the counselor educator to offer students opportunities to translate increased awareness of self and sexuality into best practice behaviors in counseling. For instance, faculty may offer case vignettes of heterosexual and non-heterosexual clients of various genders and cultural backgrounds and invite students to participate in a discussion of heterosexual influence (Author, 2011) and the counseling process. Instructors might then prompt discussion related to broaching sexual identity development and psychoeducational approaches that integrate CHT and promote healthy SID. Activities that offer counseling trainees opportunities to reflect upon their own sexuality and its influences on the

counseling process may help trainees to eliminate notions of normative sexual orientation, which may result in greater preparedness to work with clients.

Further research, particularly quantitative analysis, is needed to support the model or suggest modifications. Future research endeavors should include the design of statistical instruments that will measure key constructs presented in the proposed model. Designing a quantitative instrument that measures heterosexual attitudes; recognition of membership in a privileged, oppressive majority group; and heterosexist behavior might help to provide more information about the relationship between heterosexual attitudes and LGBTQ affirmativeness. The proposed model might also be tested with respect to the relationship between heterosexual identification and counselor effectiveness.

The proposed model and its implications regarding the counseling process provide a framework that challenges oversimplified notions of sexual orientation by offering a conceptualized perspective of majority group membership. This model offers a conceptualized illustration of heterosexually identified counselors and illuminates the need for counselor preparation programs to train culturally competent counselors who construct positive attitudes towards others by first developing a heightened awareness of their own identity. In doing so, counselor educators may help to develop counselors who are role models, social advocates, and change agents for their clients and communities.

References

- Arredondo, P., Toporek, R., Brown, S. P., Jones, J., Locke, D. C., Sanchez, J., & Stadler, H. (1996). Operationalization of the multicultural counseling competencies. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 24*, 42-78.
- Adams, G. R. (Eds.), (1992). *Adolescent identity formation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Berzonsky, M., Cieciuch, J., Duriez, B., & Soenens, B. (2011). The how and what of identity formation: Associations between identity styles and value orientations. *Personality and Individual Differences, 50*, 295–299.
- Brammer, R. (2012). *Diversity in counseling*, (2nd ed.). Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Cass, V. C. (1979). Homosexual identity formation: A theoretical model. *Journal of Homosexuality, 4*, 219–235.
- Coleman, E. (1982). Developmental stages of the coming out process. *American Behavior Scientist, 25*, 477.
- Cox, S. & Gallois, C. (1996). Gay and lesbian identity development: A social identity. *Journal of Homosexuality 30*, 1-30.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Croteau, J. M., Bieschke, K. J., Fassinger, R. E., & Manning, J. L. (2008). Counseling psychology and sexual orientation: History, selective trends, and future directions. In Brown & Lent (Eds.). *The handbook of counseling psychology*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley.
- Eliason, Michele J. (1995). Accounts of sexual identity formation in heterosexual students. *Sex Roles, 32*, 821-834.

- Fassinger, R. E. & Miller, B. A. (1996). Validation of an inclusive model. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 32, 53-78.
- Gilbert, L. A. & Walker, S. J. (1999). Dominant discourse in heterosexual relationships: Inhibitors or facilitators of interpersonal commitment and relationship stability? In J. M. Adams (Ed.), *Handbook of Interpersonal Commitment* (pp. 393-406). New York, NY: Plenum.
- Giorgi, A. P. & Giorgi, B. (2008). *Phenomenological Psychology*. In C. Willig & W. Stainton-Rogers (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.
- Hardiman, R., & Jackson, B. W. (1992). Racial identity development: Understanding racial dynamics in college classrooms and on campus. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 53, 21-37.
- Hays, D. G., Dean, J. K., & Chang, C. Y. (2007). Addressing privilege and oppression in counselor training and practice: A qualitative analysis. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 83, 317-324.
- Helms, J. E. (1995). An update of Helms' white and people of color racial identity models. In J. G. Ponterotto, J. M. Casas, L. A. Suzuki, & C. M. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (pp. 181-198). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hill, C. E., Knox, S., Thompson, B. J., Knutt-Williams, E., Hess, S. A., & Ladany, N. (2005). Consensual qualitative research: An update. *Journal of Counseling*, 52, 196-205.
- Hutchinson, S. (1988). Education and grounded theory. In R. R. Sherman & R. B. Webb (Eds.), *Qualitative research in education: Focus and methods* (pp. 123-140). New York: Falmer Press.

- Hoffman, R. M. (2004). Conceptualizing heterosexual identity development: Issues and challenges. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 82*, 375-380.
- Kinsey, A. C., Pomeroy, W. B., Martin, C. E., & Gebhard, P. (1953). *Sexual behavior in the human female*. Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders.
- Kitzinger, C., & Wilkinson, S. (1995). Transitions from heterosexuality to lesbianism: The discursive production of lesbian identities. *Developmental Psychology, 31*, 95-104.
- LeVay, S. (1993). *The sexual brain*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Marcia, J. E. (1987). Identity in adolescence. In J. Adelson (Ed.), *Handbook of adolescent psychology*. New York: John Wiley.
- Mohr, J. J. (2002). Heterosexual identity and the heterosexual therapist: Using identity as a framework for understanding sexual orientation issues in psychotherapy. *The Counseling Psychologist, 30*, 532-566.
- Patton, M. Q. (2003). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*. (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ratts, M., D'Andrea, M., & Arredondo, P. (2004). Social justice counseling: Fifth force in counseling. *Counseling Today, 47*, 28-30.
- Rostosky, S. S., & Riggle, E. D. B. (2011). Marriage equality for same-sex couples: Counseling psychologists as social change agents. *The Counseling Psychologist, 39*, 956-972.
- Schreier, B. A., & Lassiter, K. D. (2010). *Competencies for working with sexual orientation and multiple cultural identities*. In J. A. E. Cornish, B. A. Schreier, L. I. Nadkarni, L. H. Metzger, & E. R. Rodolfa (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling competencies* (pp. 291-316). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley.

- Schwartz, S.J. (2001). *The evolution of Eriksonian and neo-Eriksonian identity theory and research: A review and integration*. *Identity*, 1, 7–58.
- Simoni, J. M. & Walters, K. L. (2001). Heterosexual identity and heterosexism: Recognizing privilege to reduce prejudice. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 41, 157-172.
- Strauss, A. L. (1987). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Sue, D. W., Arredondo, P., & McDavis, R.J. (1992). Multicultural counseling competencies and standards: A call to the profession. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 70, 477-486.
- Sullivan, P. (1998). Sexual identity development: The importance of target or dominant group membership (pp. 3-12). In R. L. Sanlo (Ed.), *Working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender college students: A handbook for faculty and administrators*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- Troiden, R. R. (1988). Homosexual identity development. *Journal of Adolescent Health Care*, 9, 105–113.
- Willig, C. (2001). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and methods*. Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.
- Worthington, R. L., & Mohr, J. J. (2002). Theorizing heterosexual identity development. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 30, 491-495.
- Worthington, R. L., Savoy, H., Dillon, F. R., & Vernaglia, E. R. (2002). Heterosexual identity development: A multidimensional model of individual and group identity. *Counseling Psychologist*, 30, 496-531.

RESOLVED Heterosexuality
*Results to experience
consistency concerning
sexuality.*

Appendix A: Conceptualized Heterosexuality

INDEPENDENT Heterosexuality
*Intentional and active exploration
leads to healthy and balanced
sense of sexual identification.*

INTERDEPENDENT Heterosexuality
*Sexual identity is fixed and
defined by another aspect of
identity.*

Heterosexual Identity Development
*Active behavioral and cognitive exploration of sexual preference, attractions,
emotions, fantasies, values, and beliefs.*

IDENTITY DISINTEGRATION
*Separation of Gender Identity and Sexual
Identity*

Active Conceptualization
*Active Process of Separating Gender
and Sexual Identity*

CRITICAL INCIDENT
Experiences Dissonance

**Passive
Conceptualization**
Inactive Recycling

**Male
Gender Identity**
*Male identity
synonymous with
heterosexual identity*

**UNRECONCILED
Heterosexual Identity**
*Synonymous with Gender
Identity*

**Female
Gender Identity**
*Female identity
synonymous with
heterosexual identity*

