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Heterosexual Identity Development:
A Multidimensional Model of Individual and Social Identity

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This article builds on earlier conceptual models of identity development to propose a model of heterosexual identity development. A review of the existing literature on majority and minority group identity development, heterosexuality, and other relevant foundational literature is provided as a rationale for the proposed model. Based on an analysis of the strengths and limitations of the existing literature, the authors propose a preliminary model of heterosexual identity development. The article concludes with implications for research, practice, training, and measurement in counseling psychology.

Heterosexuals are often assumed to be "a monolithic, stable group with predictable attitudes about nonheterosexuals and a consistent clear sense of their own heterosexual identity" (Eliason, 1995, p. 821). Research that addresses the ways that heterosexual individuals perceive their own sexual identity is all but nonexistent. Indeed, some scholars may question the extent to which anything exists that might remotely resemble something called "heterosexual identity development," a point demonstrated in the reality that virtually all literature regarding sexual orientation is situated in volumes designed to address lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) issues. Alternatively, such a process is likely to be ignored or relegated to unconsciousness in a heterosexist society as a result of "normative" assumptions about heterosexuality (Fassinger, 2000). However, at least two authors (Eliason, 1995; Sullivan, 1998) have attempted to identify and describe the processes by which heterosexual individuals develop a sexual identity. The purpose of this article is to propose a new model of heterosexual identity development.

Although some people use the terms *sexual orientation* and *sexual identity* interchangeably, we prefer to distinguish between one's sexual predispositions and one's recognition and identification with such predispositions. Specifically, sexual orientation refers to "an enduring emotional, romantic, sexual or affectional attraction to [(an)other person(s)] . . . that ranges from exclusive homosexuality to exclusive heterosexuality and includes various forms of bisexuality" (American Psychological Association, 1998). Similar to Ellis and Mitchell (2000), we propose that recognition, acceptance, and identification with one's sexual orientation are collectively one facet of sexual identity. This distinction is important because sexual orientation is acknowledged to be something other than a "choice" (e.g., American Psychological Association, 1998), and yet sexual identity is considered to be something people "adopt" (e.g., Broido, 2000). Thus, sexual orientation should refer to one's sexuality-related predispositions (whether or not those predispositions are genetically, biologically, environmentally, and/or socially determined or constructed). Therefore, we use *sexual orientation identity* as a more precise term regarding one's acceptance and recognition of sexual orientation (see also Mohr, 2002 [this issue]) and reserve the term *sexual identity* for the comprehensive process involving self-definition more broadly as a sexual being. Therefore, heterosexual identity development refers to the process by which people with a heterosexual sexual orientation identity (i.e., heterosexually identified individuals) identify with and express numerous aspects of their sexuality. As noted in Worthington and Mohr (2002 [this issue]), these important distinctions allow for an examination of heterosexual identities from constructivist and essentialist perspectives without implying that sexual orientation is a choice or reasonable target of change (e.g., via conversion therapies).

In the following sections, we will (a) review and evaluate the existing literature on identity development, (b) identify the biopsychosocial influences on sexual identity development in Western cultural contexts, (c) propose a preliminary model of heterosexual identity development, and (d) describe implications for research, practice, and training.

Existing Literature

The earliest pioneers in sexuality theory and research produced literature that reflected the heterosexist biases of their times. Although Freud attempted to describe issues of so-called normal sexual development, in reality he did very little to address issues of identity. Despite believing that all individuals have the capacity to obtain sexual gratification from anything, including people of any gender, animals, and inanimate objects, Freud suggested that "healthy" individuals sublimated their tendencies toward

same-sex attraction (Fancher, 1973). Erikson (1950) suggested that "healthy genitality" is characterized by "mutuality of orgasm . . . with a loved partner . . . of the other sex . . . to regulate the cycles of work, procreation, [and] recreation" (pp. 230-231). However, Erikson essentially ignored same-sex attraction in his writings (reflecting the stringent heterosexism of the era). Building on the work of Erikson, Marcia (1987) conceptualized identity development along two continua: exploration and commitment. He proposed four ego-identity statuses: (a) *diffusion* refers to the absence of an active sense of identity (low exploration, low commitment); (b) *foreclosure* refers to acceptance of an identity imposed by expectations of other people or society without exploration (low exploration, high commitment); (c) *moratorium* refers to a suspension of commitment during the process of active exploration (high exploration, low current commitment); and (d) *achievement* refers to commitment to an identity, having explored options (high prior exploration, high commitment). Until recently, Marcia's model had never directly been applied to sexual identity.

Eliason (1995) conducted a qualitative analysis of essays written by 26 heterosexually identified undergraduate students enrolled in a course on human sexuality about how their sexual identities formed. She used the identity development theory of Marcia (1987) to interpret her findings. Eliason categorized the largest proportion of her participants as exhibiting identity foreclosure. A large percentage of students were categorized in identity diffusion, primarily because they expressed confusion about sexual identity. Of the small proportion of students who were identity achieved, Eliason found differences between the process by which men and women in her sample reached achievement. Whereas the men appeared to commit to heterosexuality based primarily on a rejection of gay identity, the women appeared to be more open to other alternatives at a later point. Similarly, all participants categorized as identity moratorium were women. Although preliminary, these findings shed some light on heterosexual identities.

Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin (1948) and Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, and Gebhard (1953) have been widely cited as the first to recognize that sexual orientation varies along a continuum between sexual experiences with persons of the same- and other-sex, with relatively few people falling on either of the two extreme ends of the continuum. In a modification of the Kinsey et al. scale, Storms (1980) suggested an alternative two-dimensional scheme reflecting independent continua for homoeroticism and heteroeroticism resulting in four distinct sexual orientation types: *homosexuals* [*sic*] (high homoeroticism, low heteroeroticism), *bisexuals* (high homoeroticism, high heteroeroticism), *heterosexuals* (low homoeroticism, high heteroeroticism), and *asexuals* (low homoeroticism, low heteroeroticism). Fritz Klein (1990) further elaborated the complexities of human sexual attitudes, emotions, and

behaviors by developing the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG), which described seven dimensions hypothesized to make up sexual orientation (sexual attraction, sexual fantasies, sexual behavior, emotional preferences, social preferences, self-identification, and lifestyle) and accounted for the variance of these factors over time (i.e., past, present/past year, ideal future goal). Like others, Klein used gender as the central criterion in defining sexual orientation.

Cass (1979) was the first widely known and disseminated model of gay and lesbian sexual identity development, although more recently her model has been more accurately considered a model of the *coming-out process* rather than a true model of identity development per se (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Since the early appearance of Cass's six-stage model of gay and lesbian identity formation, a number of other authors have also offered models of lesbian and/or gay identity development (e.g., Troiden, 1988), which all have relatively similar features (Prince, 1995). Although too numerous to fully review here (readers are referred to Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000, for a thorough review), arguably the most advanced developmental models of sexual minority identity are those of McCarn and Fassinger (1996) and Fassinger and Miller (1996). Their models extend beyond the coming-out process to describe both individual and social processes of identity development through four phases: *awareness*, *exploration*, *deepening and commitment*, and *internalization and synthesis*. Despite these advances in sexual identity development theory for gay men and lesbians, corresponding advances have yet to take shape with respect to bisexuality (Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000) or heterosexuality (Ellis & Mitchell, 2000). This condition is parallel to the introduction of White racial identity development theories into the literature, a foundational literature we address in the following section.

The most prominent model of majority group identity (parallel to heterosexual identity) is Helms's White racial identity development (WRID) model (Helms, 1995), which emphasized specific attitudes a White individual holds toward other racial identity groups and posits that developing a White identity requires progression through two phases: Phase I—Abandonment of Racism and Phase II—Defining a Nonracist White Identity. Whites in Phase I are characterized by moving from a lack of awareness of racism and of one's own racial identity to becoming increasingly conscious of one's whiteness. In Phase II, one moves from a cognitive understanding of sociopolitical aspects of race toward an increased motivation to confront one's own biases and role in perpetuating racism. Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson (1994) criticized Helms's model for overemphasizing attitudes toward racial minority group members rather than concentrating on specific attitudes a White individual holds toward his or her own racial identity. Following the work of Marcia (1987), the White Racial Consciousness (WRC) model (Rowe et al.,

1994) is composed of statuses that are categorized as either unachieved or achieved WRC. This seminal work in the area of White identity development has the capacity to inform more broadly our understanding of the impact of ordinate-subordinate group relations.

A number of authors have proposed that social stratification along the lines of race, gender, social class, and sexual orientation have powerful influences on the identity development of members of ordinate and subordinate social groups (Fouad & Brown, 2000; Helms & Piper, 1994; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Worthington & Juntunen, 1997). For example, Worthington and Juntunen (1997) proposed group membership identity (GMI) and group membership salience (GMS) as constructs explaining the extent to which individuals identify with and give importance to membership in a specific group or groups. These constructs are important to an understanding of (a) intersecting aspects of identity within a given individual, (b) intergroup relations, and (c) recognition and awareness of the nature of oppression and privilege. Specifically, GMS, which arises from GMI, is likely to influence perceptions of (a) oneself, (b) members of one's own group, (c) members of different groups, and (d) events that occur in one's life. For example, members of subordinate groups are hypothesized to be more likely than members of ordinate groups to perceive their sociodemographic characteristics as influencing (e.g., limiting) access to resources and opportunities, whereas members of dominant social groups (e.g., heterosexuals) may be more inclined to overemphasize the influence of group membership (e.g., sexual orientation identity) as a determinant of behavior and a justification for one's privileged status (Fouad & Brown, 2000; Helms & Piper, 1994; Worthington & Juntunen, 1997). From this perspective, GMI is a critical aspect of sexual identity for members of majority and minority groups. Having surveyed the literature on majority and minority group identity, we now turn to the only existing model of heterosexual identity development.

Sullivan (1998) extends notions commonly associated with racial identity development (i.e., Hardiman & Jackson, 1992) to the identity development process of both LGB and heterosexual college students. She describes the development of heterosexual identities within five stages shaped by an atmosphere of homophobia and heterosexism. In the first stage, *naivete*, there is little or no awareness of sexual orientation, and persons are being socialized to view heterosexuality as the only option. Individuals move into the *acceptance* stage once they have internalized societal messages and begin to take heterosexuality for granted. The emergence of an awareness of the powerful, oppressive forces that exist in society characterize the *resistance* stage, in which there is greater appreciation for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) persons as a valid part of a diverse society (Sullivan, 1998, p. 7). In the fourth stage, *redefinition*, individuals begin to define themselves less

by reaction and rejection of social conventions and begin to seek a positive heterosexual identity that is not dependent on heterosexism. The fifth stage, *internalization*, includes an integration of one's emerging identity into all aspects of life.

Strengths and Limitations of the Existing Literature

Until the publication of the works by Sullivan (1998) and Eliason (1995), the literature on heterosexuality had largely focused on sexuality from biological/developmental (e.g., Masters, Johnson, & Kolodny, 1994) or feminist perspectives (e.g., Rich, 1981; Richardson, 1996; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1993)—neither of which effectively addresses identity per se. As such, the works of Eliason and Sullivan help to fill a conceptual void in the literature regarding the processes by which heterosexual individuals arrive at their sexual identity. By beginning to delineate the nature of individual differences among heterosexually identified persons, these early models help to demonstrate the constructedness of sexual identity and exemplify the distinctiveness of different types of heterosexual identities, highlighting the possibility that people are socialized to be heterosexual (consistent with Rich's [1981] concept of compulsory heterosexuality). Sullivan's model foreshadows our work by explicating the embeddedness of heterosexual attitudes toward sexual minorities within identity processes.

The central weakness of the existing literature is the primary focus on sexual orientation as the sole component of sexual identity. Although this bias also exists in the larger Western cultural context, it tends to perpetuate the dichotomization of sexual identity along heterosexual-homosexual lines of distinction. Sullivan's (1998) model, for example, relying on a sexual dualism, tends to overemphasize the tension between members of the majority and minority groups in conceptualizing heterosexual identity. As a result, Sullivan's model does not explain other important aspects of sexual identity beyond sexual orientation and tends to blur individual and social identity processes (a problem for which Helms's (1995) WRID model has been extensively criticized). Similarly, Eliason's (1995) study also investigated heterosexual identity from the standpoint of sexual orientation. However, there may be considerable overlap in sexual identity processes understood as multidimensional, consisting of an understanding and acceptance of one's sexual orientation as well as sexual needs and values, and preferences for sexual activities, partner characteristics, and modes of sexual expression.

In addition, biopsychosocial influences (e.g., biological aspects of development and maturation, gender norms, gender role socialization, culture, religion, systemic homonegativity, sexual prejudice, and privilege) are often lost or ignred as contributing factors in sexual identity development. As a

result, Marcia's (1987) model may be only partially fitting in the context of strong societal forces that mandate compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1981) and stigmatize and punish nonconformity. For example, it may be impossible for a person to have no active sense of sexual orientation identity (i.e., diffusion) in a society that relies on a duality model for defining the sexual orientation of its members. Instead, individuals who go through the process of sexual orientation identity transformation (e.g., coming out) are likely to remain relatively committed to one sexual orientation identity or adopt a moratorium identity (lack of commitment during exploration) rather than to relinquish commitment and exploration altogether. However, this does not eliminate the possibility of diffusion with respect to other dimensions of sexual identity.

As a stagewise theory, Sullivan's (1998) model is out of step with modern conceptualizations of the fluidity and permeability of human development. Movement from one stage to the next is described in a linear, unidirectional fashion and inadequately accounts for cycling or recycling through critical conflicts and issues across various dimensions of sexual identity. Although Marcia's (1987) model utilizes "statuses" instead of "stages," it suffers from confounds in its ability to manage the relative fluidity of exploration and commitment across time (e.g., Klein, 1990). For example, low commitment in the moratorium status could involve the suspension of an earlier level of commitment or the historical absence of commitment. Furthermore, high commitment in the achievement status tends to suggest a lack of current exploration, despite the requirement for an earlier level of high exploration in reaching that commitment. As a result, the statuses in Marcia's model tend to distort fluctuations of commitment and exploration across time.

Existing models tend to overemphasize individual identity processes to the exclusion of social identity processes, ultimately failing to consider the impact of group membership affiliations and privilege on the identity statuses of heterosexuals. Social identity processes associated with group membership are presumed to exist among majority group members as well as minority group members (Fouad & Brown, 2000; McCarn & Fassinger, 1995; Worthington & Juntunen, 1997), requiring their integration into identity models.

Biopsychosocial Influences on Sexual Identity Development

Biology. Without question, the most common approach to understanding human sexuality is from a biological perspective (cf. Everaerd, Laan, Both, & van der Velde, 2000; Everaerd, Laan, & Spiering, 2000; Masters et al., 1994). Biological processes influence sexual health, development, desire, behavior, reproduction, and orientation (Jones, Shainberg, & Byer, 1978; Tortora &

Anagnostakos, 1981). Specifically, a great deal of attention has been given to the possible biological determinants of sexual orientation. Although we are not specifically concerned with the debate over the etiology of sexual orientation, there are certain aspects of this debate that have direct implications for sexual identity. For example, early theories regarding the etiology of homoeroticism suggested that gay men were genetically female (Zucker & Bradley, 1995). Although this theory was easily dismissed, it conveys the social importance placed on gender conformity among the biological scientists examining sexual orientation during the early 1930s. Similarly, many other biological theories have been proposed (e.g., those regarding amino acids, hormonal deficiencies, genetic familiality, molecular genetics, prenatal sex hormones, prenatal maternal stress, functional cerebral asymmetry, neuroanatomical sex differences, sibling sex ratio and birth order, temperament, and physical attractiveness). The validity of all of these biological theories remains unclear due to mixed or unreplicated results that are complicated by methodological issues and require further exploration (Zucker & Bradley, 1995). Because biology is assumed to play a role in the predispositions individuals have regarding sexual phenomena, we posit that sexual identity will also be influenced indirectly by biological factors.

For example, sexual identity will also be influenced by the uncontrollable biological contexts an individual encounters internally at critical points during the course of development. In particular, sexual development is closely related to physical maturation in both women and men. Evidence from studies of adjustment among boys and girls indicates that early developing boys adjust better than their later developing counterparts, whereas girls show a curvilinear pattern of adjustment (e.g., early and late developers do not adjust as well as middle developers) (Unger & Crawford, 1992). Although these outcomes can be substantially attributed to the differing dictates of social conformity for boys and girls, it stands to reason that both timing and specific outcomes (e.g., physical characteristics) of biological maturation will also have an influence on the internalization of each individual's sexual self-understanding. However, it is critical to remember that, biologically, sexual development is a multistep and multiply-gated process leading to substantial variation in anatomy, psychology, and behavior (Perper & Cornog, 1999).

Microsocial context. The microsocial context includes those individuals with whom one has immediate, regular contact (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Microsocial influences on sexual identity development stem from one's immediate relationships with family, peers, coworkers, neighbors, and others. Sexual identity development may be influenced by the particular values, needs, or beliefs espoused by members of the microsocial systems within

which different individuals function. Gender role conformity, sexual knowledge, sexual attitudes, sexual values, and some sexual behaviors are each learned within microsocial contexts unique to a given individual. For example, heterosexual parents who maintain traditional, stereotypic gender roles and define sexuality accordingly may contribute to the development of similar beliefs and practices in their children. Likewise, as one matures and his or her social network expands, the peer group takes on a more influential role in sexual identity formation (Masters et al., 1994).

Gender norms and socialization. We conceptualize heterosexual identity development as subordinate and concomitant to the processes involving gender identity development in Western cultural contexts. Gilbert and Scher (1999) posit four levels of analysis of gender. *Gender as difference* attributes one set of specific characteristics to one sex and another set of characteristics to the other sex. *Gender as organizer and structurer* refers to societal and cultural norms and principles that often serve to structure the roles of men and women along traditional, stereotypical lines. Specific views of men and women are also depicted through *language and discourse about gender.* Finally, *gender in the form of an interactive process* refers to the process by which men and women internalize societal constructions of gender and act according to these internalized norms in their interpersonal interactions. The first utterance about most newborn babies is "It's a girl/boy," which represents the cultural centrality of gender. The biological sex of an individual elicits attributions of gender characteristics and prompts social norms for organizing and structuring behavior along gender lines. Cultural language and discourse about gender fosters an internalization of societal constructions of gender differences and circumscribes identity development within gender-based expectations for heterosexuality.

Social and cultural influences on gender roles are pervasive throughout every culture in the world. An individual's sexual identity is inevitably influenced by one's experiences of the societal and cultural contexts of gender. Inevitably, in a social ecology in which the gender of sexual partners is of central concern, identity development as a sexual being will be influenced strongly by an individual's level of internalization of gender role expectations and norms (Schwartz & Rutter, 1998). The dichotomization of biological sex into two distinct categories (male and female) inevitably confuses physiological, hormonal, reproductive, and genetic factors with gender (a socially constructed set of ideas, beliefs, and values about males and females that are based on historical, economic, sociopolitical, and cultural factors) (Fassinger, 2000, p. 347). Persistent double standards regarding sexual behavior for males and females ultimately shape and confine sexual identity development and result in harsh judgments against both males and females

when conformity is not adopted. Accordingly, we view sexual identity as, in part, arising from the predominant focus of society on gender socialization and conformity (Fassinger, 2000).

For women, the socialization of gender and sexual identity are influenced by mixed messages from familial, societal, and cultural contexts. From an early age, women learn that they are "responded to as sexual, but they are not to act sexual" (Westkott, 1986, as cited in Gilbert & Scher, 1999, p. 92). Given the insidious influences of gender socialization in the United States, many attempts have been made to explicate the development of a healthy gender identity in women. Based on earlier models of racial/ethnic minority development (e.g., Cross, 1978), Downing and Roush (1985) developed a model of feminist identity development and Helms (1990b, as cited in Ossana, Helms, & Leonard, 1992) later developed a model of womanist identity development. The model of feminist identity development suggests that women may move from passive acceptance of traditional gender role norms to a healthy identity as actively committed to feminism and societal change. Womanist theory suggests that healthy identity for women is characterized by a sense of self that is defined by internal, personal standards as opposed to traditional, external standards imposed by society and culture. Both models provide a means for understanding a process of cognitive, behavioral, and affective change resulting in an evolved sense of self and relationships with others. The identity development process incorporates elements of attitudinal and behavioral change toward (a) oneself, (b) others of the same biological sex, and (c) members of the other sex.

Recently, there has been considerable attention to conceptualizing issues related to men and masculinity (cf. Brooks & Good, 2001). One element of the conceptual discourse has been the distinction between biologically determined sex-based characteristics and psychologically based conceptualizations of masculinity. In terms of the latter perspective, two core models of masculinity and related concepts are the "blueprint for manhood" (Brannon, 1976) and the "masculine mystique" (O'Neil, 1981). These models describe male gender role socialization toward independence and achievement (instrumentality, personal agency), restriction and suppression of emotions (rationality), and avoidance of characteristics stereotypically associated with femininity and homosexuality (interpersonal dominance). These models also indicate that men are socialized toward physical aggression, toughness, and status seeking (Good & Sherrod, 2001). Therefore, one aspect of male gender role socialization is the acceptance of a default heterosexual identity and avoidance of being perceived as gay. Extreme outcomes of male gender role socialization might include avoidance or denial of emotional experience (i.e., alexithymia) and engaging in hate crimes and other forms of homophobia and heterosexism. More subtle and pervasive outcomes may include strug-

gling to develop intimate friendships with other men, feeling uncomfortable when other men initiate emotional and/or physical contact, and remaining hypervigilent when behaviors might be considered stereotypically performed only by gay men (Mahalik, 2001). The impact of societal homonegativity on male gender role identity, and ultimately sexual identity development, can be seen in the male gender role expectations for engaging in heterosexual sexual contact early in life and as often as possible, in which sexual conquests are viewed as a demonstration of one's masculinity, and sexual encounters that lack attachment and intimacy are the norm (Blumenfeld, 1992; O'Neil, 1981; Stevens, 2001).

Emerging recognition of the constructedness of gender in Western cultural contexts, and transgender issues in particular, are of critical importance to our conceptualization of the influence of gender on sexual identity development. Although early categorizations of transgender individuals were simplistic (e.g., transvestites or transsexuals), current literature suggests that there are a multiplicity of self-ascribed labels in use among transgender people, including two-spirit (from Native American traditions), transgenderist, drag king, drag queen, genderblend, and androgyne (Cole, Denny, Eyler, & Samons, 2000). Furthermore, Eyler and Wright (1997, cited in Cole et al., 2000) have developed a Nine-Point Gender Continuum to describe current gender self-concept and evolution over time, ranging from female-based identities through nontraditional identities to male-based identities. The nine categories include female (F), female with maleness (F/M), genderblended female predominating (GB/F), othergendered (O), ungendered (U), bigendered (B), genderblended male predominating (GB/M), male with femaleness (M/F), and male (M). It stands to reason that as traditional conceptions of gender begin to lose emphasis, we will also need alternative descriptions of sexuality and sexual identity that do not rely exclusively on gender for definition. Although there is sometimes a great deal of confusion as to whether there is any connection between sexual orientation and being transgender, the reality is that transgender people can be any sexual orientation (Lees, 1998).

Culture. Human sexuality is defined and given meaning in the contexts of cultures (Wagstaff, Abramson, & Pinkerton, 2000). Cultures are specific to locations in time and place, making human sexuality as much a social construction as any other aspect of human functioning (e.g., Foucault, 1978). Although sexuality is probably most often studied from universalistic and biological perspectives, there are vast variations in sexual practices, values, and meanings across cultures. Sexual orientation, for example, is a construction of the late 19th century—including notions of both heterosexuality and homosexuality—and there are a number of cultures and societies that not

only accept but also revere homoeroticism (Wagstaff et al., 2000). As events of the 21st century unfold, it is clear that modern cultural influences will continue to affect the sexual lives of people throughout the world, including (a) the advent of new drug therapies for common yet taboo sexual dysfunctions (such as hormone replacement therapies and Viagra); (b) technological advances of the information age that have produced sex on the Internet and may result in the next sexual revolution; and (c) the impact of the AIDS epidemic, recent advances in the treatment of HIV/AIDS, and the introduction of safer sex practices (Cooper, Boies, Maheu, & Greenfield, 2000; Wagstaff et al., 2000).

Recent attention in multicultural counseling has focused on understanding the intersection and complexity of multiple cultural influences on identity development and other cultural variables (e.g., Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000). This attention reflects the growing complexity of culture in the United States, where multiple cultures coexist, bidirectionally influence, and at times conflict with one another. To understand human beings within cultural contexts more completely, is it essential that we acknowledge the complexity of integrating multiple cultural identities and ways of coping with multiple oppressions. For example, cultural contexts of family, community, cultural norms, and oppression can potentially magnify or inhibit an individual's affectional preferences and sexual behaviors, thereby affecting his or her sexual identity development. Adherence to one's cultural identity may require acceptance of heterosexist and homonegative attitudes. Losing highly valued relations with family and community and experiencing conflict with valued religion/spiritual beliefs and traditional gender roles may be consequences of stepping beyond culturally prescribed sexual values and practices (Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000; Greene, 1997; Loicano, 1989). Therefore, sexual identity development may include avoidance of nontraditional gender roles or LGB individuals to adhere to more salient aspects of cultural identity.

Religious orientation. For many people, religion and sexuality are inextricably intertwined because virtually every religion regulates sexual behavior among its membership and dictates specific values regarding sexuality. Moral convictions regarding sexual orientations, values, needs, or behaviors can have significant consequences for sexual identity development. A theological approach to understanding human sexuality is primarily concerned with theological teachings about sexual matters, which gives more attention to praising or condemning specific sexual practices than to theories of human nature in their fullness and variety (Parrinder, 1987).

Religiosity, in terms of religious affiliation, frequency of religious attendance, spirituality, and beliefs, is of particular relevance to sexual identity development because it provides a context for the development of individual

and social sexual identity processes. High levels of sexual prejudice are typically found among heterosexuals who frequently attend religious services and who identify with ascetic or fundamentalist religions (Fisher, Derison, Polley, Cadman, & Johnston, 1994; Herek, & Capitanio, 1996; Johnson, Brems, & Alford-Keating, 1997; Marsiglio, 1993). Conversely, some religious leaders have moved to publicly condone a diversity of sexual orientations, practices, and values. In addition, Davidson, Darling, and Norton (1995) found that women who attended church were more likely to perceive masturbation as an unhealthy or sinful sexual behavior. Similarly, Robinson and Calhoun (1982) found that undergraduates who attended church less frequently were more sexually permissive than those with higher rates of attendance were. Conclusively, the role of religiosity in one's life can have significant effects for sexual identity development regarding the levels of exploration and commitment that one may exhibit in defining one's sexuality.

Systemic homonegativity, sexual prejudice, and privilege. In the United States (and elsewhere), heterosexuals are a powerful, oppressive majority group. As a result of this hegemony, society is saturated with images, role models, and stereotypes that negatively portray same-sex relationships and LGB individuals and may even implicitly sanction antigay violence. Homonegative prejudice, harassment, and violence are pervasive throughout every level of society (Berrill, 1990; Franklin, 1998). In a survey conducted by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), widespread antigay violence was reported on university campuses nationwide (as cited in Liddell & Douvanis, 1994). According to Franklin (1998), harassment and hate crimes against LGB students by their peers is so commonplace that nearly 25% of community college students in her sample admitted to harassing people they thought were LGB. Eighteen percent of men in the sample admitted to threats and physical assault, and 32% admitted to verbal harassment. Homonegativity is so pervasive at both macro and micro levels of the social ecology that it undoubtedly has an impact on the sexual identity development of both males and females. For example, a great deal of male gender role socialization is founded on the injunction against same-sex attraction (Fassinger, 2000), and females tend to be forced into subordinate social positions with respect to males such as to mandate "compulsory heterosexuality" (Rich, 1981).

According to Blumenfeld (1992), homonegative prejudice has a number of influences on development that may not be readily apparent including but not limited to (a) inhibiting one's abilities to form close, intimate relationships with members of one's own gender, (b) adding to the pressure to marry (possibly before one is ready to do so), (c) causing premature sexual involvement to prove to oneself and others that she or he is "normal," resulting in (d)

increasing the chances of teen pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmit-
ted diseases, and (e) reducing the complete transmission of knowledge and
information through school-based sex education. In addition, people who are
perceived as LGB but who are in actuality heterosexual, are sometimes also
the targets of homonegative prejudice and violence (Blumenfeld, 1992).
Finally, an equally important aspect of the pervasiveness of homonegativity
is that heterosexuality has become defined most critically by what it is not
(e.g., lesbian, gay, or bisexual), rather than by what it is, resulting in the rela-
tive absence of a true sense of sexual identity for many (if not most) hetero-
sexually identified individuals. All of these outcomes (as well as others) can
be hypothesized to have an impact on the development of sexual identity, thus
making homonegativity a central determinant of heterosexual identity
development.

Privilege has been defined as "the right or immunity enjoyed by a person
or persons beyond the common advantages of others; the principle or condi-
tion of enjoying special rights or immunities" (Finnegan, Heisler, Miller, &
Usery, 1981, p. 1187). In recent years, there has been a crescendo of literature
regarding "male" and "White" forms of privileged status in Western cultural
contexts (e.g., Lazos Vargas, 1998; McIntosh, 1988; Neville, Worthington, &
Spanierman, 2001), which refers to a system of social advantages or special
rights for Whites and men based primarily on race or gender rather than
merit. A similar system of privilege has been identified for heterosexuals as
well, including the right to marry, death benefits for life partners, partner
health benefit packages from employers, the protection of custody and visita-
tion rights, and the protection from hate crimes, just to name a few. Within
this system of inequity, heterosexuals often assume that they are entitled to
resources and opportunities that are not made available to their LGB counter-
parts. These unequally distributed resources and opportunities become a
power base of unearned advantages and a sense of entitlement that results in
both societal and material dominance by heterosexuals over LGB people.
This hidden power base is conferred, maintained, and reinforced through a
culturally constructed set of symbols and protocols (or societal norms) that
act as sanctions for the expression of privilege and foster the invisibility of
LGB people and relationships. As such, heterosexual privileges, like White
and male privileges, are important components of heterosexual identities, in
which the delineation of majority identity theories becomes a critical aspect
of the examination of privilege.

Multidimensional Model of Heterosexual Identity Development

"Identity is conceptualized as an internalized and self-selected regulatory
system that represents an organized and integrated psychic structure that

requires the developmental distinction between the inner self and the outer social world" (Adams, 1992, p. 1). Gilbert and Scher (1999) conceptualize sexuality as inclusive of intimacy, eroticism, sexual activities, how one's sexuality is communicated (e.g., sexual self-expression), how one's needs are satisfied by behavior, and characteristics of individuals one finds sexually attractive. Person (1985) states that sexual identity refers to one's self-definition as a sexual being, which includes a sociosexual role assumed by the individual to indicate that she or he is following (or rejecting) sexual expectations within a society or cultural context, and the patterned, individualized experience of desire, sexual arousal, and discharge as well as the behaviors and fantasies that stimulate them. This definition adopts a middle-ground perspective between essentialism and social constructivism (Broido, 2000; Epstein, 1987). Masters et al. (1994) add to this definition by suggesting that sexual identity includes dealing with issues of socially dictated gender role expectations, developing comfort with and certainty about one's sexual orientation, and developing a personal sex value system (p. 435). Therefore, we define *heterosexual identity development* as the individual and social processes by which heterosexually identified persons acknowledge and define their sexual needs, values, sexual orientation and preferences for sexual activities, modes of sexual expression, and characteristics of sexual partners. Finally we add to this definition the assumption that heterosexual identity development entails an understanding (implicit or explicit) of one's membership in an oppressive majority group, with a corresponding set of attitudes, beliefs, and values with respect to members of sexual minority groups.

Building on the work of Kinsey and colleagues (1948, 1953), Klein (1990), McCarn and Fassinger (1996), Fassinger and Miller (1996), Helms (1990a, 1995), Downing and Roush (1985), Marcia (1987), Sullivan (1998), and Eliason (1995), we have produced a model of heterosexual identity development. We hypothesize that one's progression through the processes of sexual identity development is influenced by biological, psychological, and social factors. Depicted in Figure 1 are several key biopsychosocial influences on heterosexual identity development. Like the models of Fassinger and colleagues, our model distinguishes two parallel, reciprocal processes: (a) an individual sexual identity process involving recognition and acceptance of, and identification with, one's sexual needs, values, sexual orientation and preferences for activities, partner characteristics, and modes of sexual expression and (b) a social identity process involving the recognition of oneself as a member of a group of individuals with similar sexual identities (i.e., group membership identity) and attitudes toward sexual minorities. Although the group membership identity for most heterosexually identified individuals may be restricted to heterosexuality, other aspects of group membership also may be salient (e.g., celibacy, swinging, nudism, voyeurism,
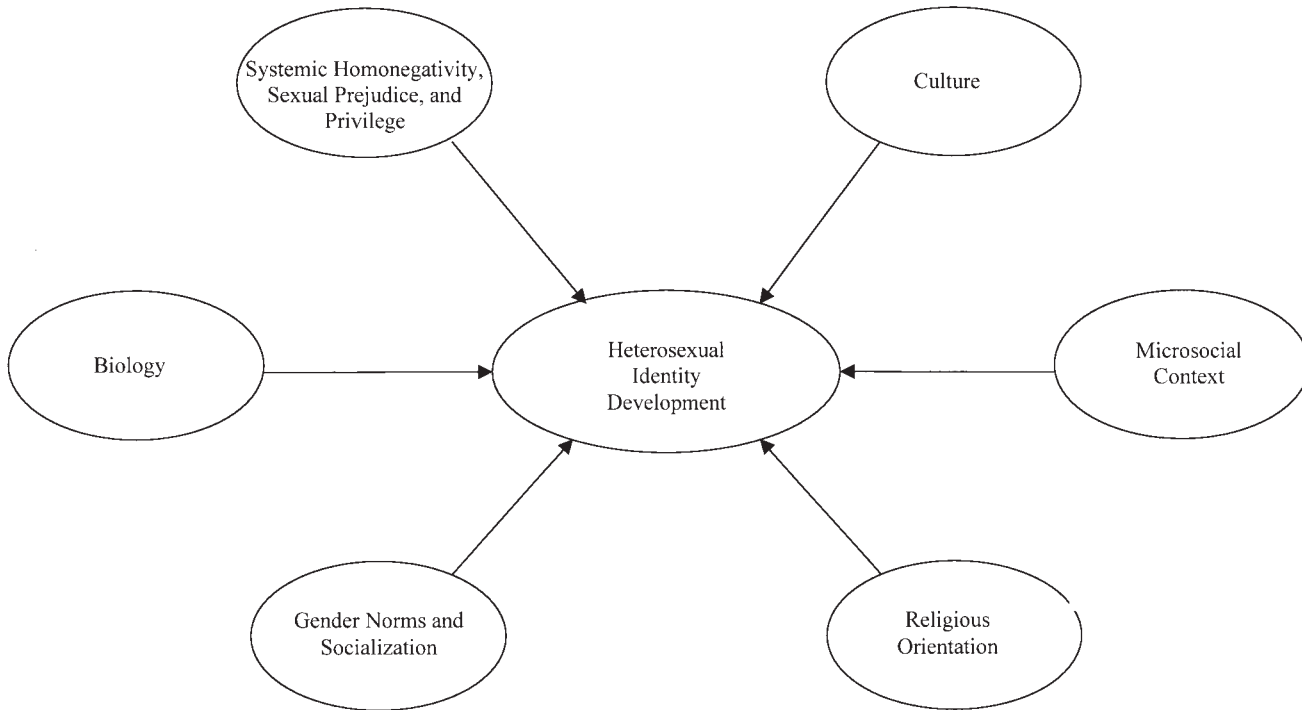
Figure 1. Biopsychosocial influences on heterosexual identity development.

exhibitionism, leather, dominance/submission). The basic processes and dimensions of sexual identity development are presented in Figure 2. The two process components occur within five discernible identity development statuses (see Figure 3): (a) unexplored commitment, (b) active exploration, (c) diffusion, (d) deepening and commitment, and (e) synthesis. Although the model is meant to describe developmental phenomena, there are opportunities for circularity and revisiting of statuses throughout the life span development of any given individual. Thus, points in the model should be thought of as flexible, fluid descriptions of statuses that people may pass through as they develop their sexual identity. As can be seen in Figure 3, there are many different trajectories and outcomes of identity development.

Another central advance of sexual identity theory in this model is the conceptualization of individual sexual identity as including but not limited to sexual orientation identity (see Figure 2). Instead, sexual identity is understood as a multidimensional construct that includes (a) identification and awareness of one's sexual needs, (b) adoption of personal sexual values, (c) awareness of preferred sexual activities, (d) awareness of preferred characteristics of sexual partners, (e) awareness of preferred modes of sexual expression, and (f) recognition and identification with sexual orientation (i.e., sexual orientation identity). *Sexual needs* are defined as an internal, subjective experience of instinct, desire, appetite, biological necessity, impulses, interest, and/or libido with respect to sex.[1] *Sexual values* are defined as moral evaluations, judgments, and/or standards about what is appropriate, acceptable, desirable, and innate sexual behavior. *Sexual activities* are defined as any behavior that a person might engage in relating to or based on sexual attraction, sexual arousal, sexual gratification, or reproduction (e.g., fantasy, holding hands, kissing, masturbation, sexual intercourse). *Characteristics of a sexual partner* are defined as any physical, emotional, intellectual, interpersonal, economic, spiritual, or other attributes that might be preferred in a potential or current sexual partner. *Modes of sexual expression* are defined as any form of communication (verbal or nonverbal) or direct and indirect signals that a person might use to convey her or his sexuality (e.g., flirting, eye contact, touching, vocal quality, compliments, suggestive body movements or postures). *Sexual orientation identity* is defined as one's personal self-definition as any number of sexual orientation identities, including but not limited to heterosexual, straight, bicurious, bi/straight, heteroflexible, pansexual, questioning, bisexual, gay, lesbian, and queer, among others.

These components of individual sexual identity evolve and interact with the processes of group membership identity and attitudes toward sexual minorities. For example, certain sexual activities may never be considered if they correspond to societal taboos regarding homoeroticism, especially if an individual has negative attitudes toward sexual minorities and a group mem-
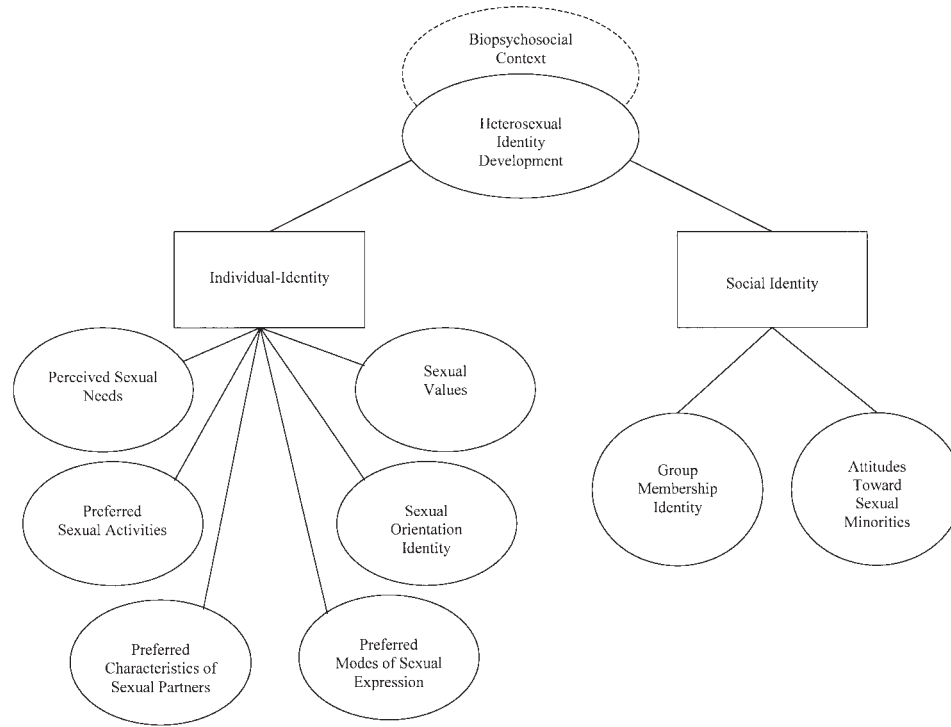
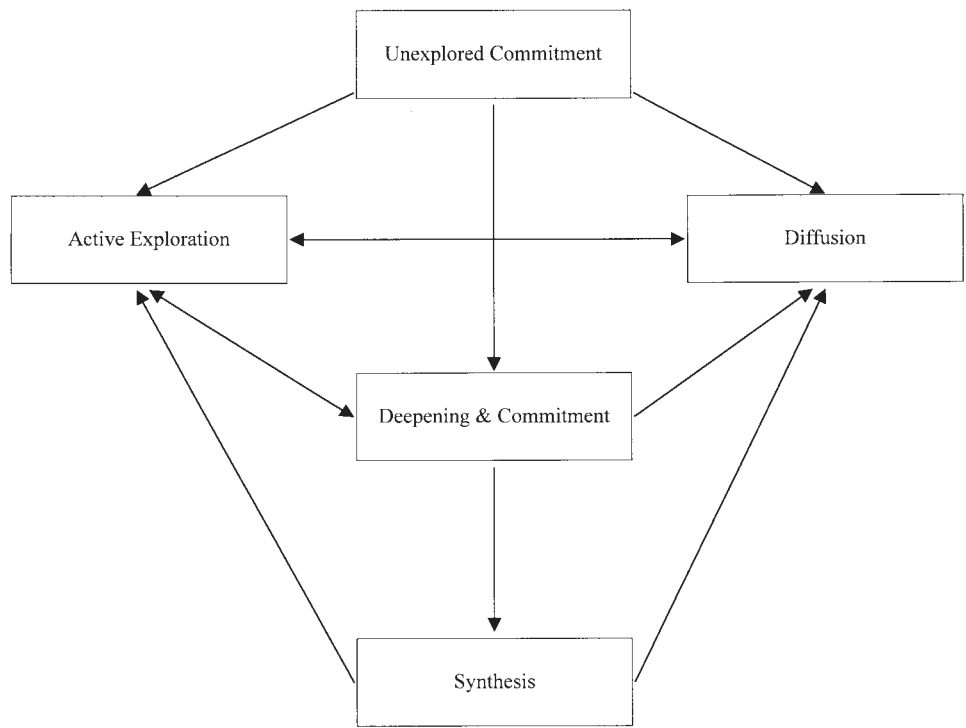**Figure 2. Dimensions of heterosexual identity development.**

Figure 3. Developmental statuses of heterosexual identity development.

bership identity that relies heavily on privilege and sexual prejudice. Regardless of whether a person is sexually active or celibate, individual sexual identity development is a process that may occur on both conscious and unconscious levels throughout all stages of the model. This means that exploration can involve cognitive or behavioral activities (or both) but is not limited to behavioral experimentation. As described previously, dimensions of sexual identity under exploration are unlikely to occur simultaneously; meaning that exploration and commitment may be haphazard or idiosyncratic based on the individual's developmental context.

Unexplored commitment. Dimensions of sexual identity within this identity status reflect microsocial (e.g., familial) and macrosocial (e.g., societal) mandates for acceptable gender roles and sexual behavior and/or avoidance of sexual self-exploration, which may preempt legitimate active exploration. On the dimension of sexual orientation, individuals who accept and adopt the compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1981) required by Western cultural socialization are characteristic of the unexplored commitment status. Most heterosexually identified individuals, because of societal assumptions about normative development, are likely to experience very little conscious thought about their adoption of compulsory heterosexuality. People exhibiting the unexplored commitment *individual identity* status can be any age but will often be prepubescent boys and girls who may not have much opportunity to consider their sexuality at a conscious level. Because sexuality is so strongly circumscribed in most cultures, unexplored commitment is likely to be the starting point for most individuals, and seldom will there be an individual who begins sexual identity development in another status. This status closely resembles the identity status of foreclosure in Marcia's (1987) model of identity development. Although a large proportion of heterosexually identified individuals may exhibit the unexplored commitment status with respect to sexual orientation, other dimensions of sexual identity are less likely to be similarly circumscribed throughout the life span. Movement out of unexplored commitment is permanent in that entry into one of the other statuses ultimately precludes the type of naive commitment to sexual identity characteristic of this status.

In terms of group membership identity, individuals at the unexplored commitment level tend to operate within culturally prescribed norms for heterosexist assumptions about normative behavior on the part of others and see their own group as "a monolithic, stable group with . . . a consistent clear sense of their own heterosexual identity" (Eliason, 1995, p. 821). Concrete, all-or-nothing thinking tends to characterize conceptions of group membership. Thus, attitudes toward other members of the same group are "group appreciating" (cf. Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1995). One's status as a member

of a privileged, oppressive majority group is either repressed from awareness or accepted without question as normal, understandable, and justifiable. As such, the attitudes toward sexual minorities identity process is "group depreciating" (cf. Atkinson et al., 1995) and tends to be strongly influenced by unexamined heterosexist, homonegative societal biases. People at this level of identity development are likely to assume that nonheterosexuals do not exist in their microsocial contexts (e.g., familial and immediate social circles) and believe that they do not know anybody who is LGB. As such, LGB group members are often understood only in abstract, stereotypic terms. Although the range of attitudes exhibited by unexplored commitment individuals may vary, the nature of this status suggests that the most positive level of attitude is likely to be at the tolerance end of Herek's (1984) *condemnation-tolerance* continuum or the acceptance level of attitude described by Riddle (1985).

Active exploration. Purposeful exploration, evaluation, or experimentation of one's sexual needs, values, orientation and/or preferences for activities, partner characteristics, or modes of sexual expression are typical of the active exploration status of individual identity. Active exploration of individual sexual identity is distinguished from naive behavioral experimentation in three important ways that will have implications for other statuses in the model. First, exploration can be cognitive or behavioral. Although there may be a bias toward behavioral exploration in modern society, cognitive forms of exploration are possible as well and may be the preferred form of exploration among individuals who engage in abstinence-oriented lifestyles. Second, active exploration is purposeful and usually tends to be goal directed. Whereas naive behavioral experimentation might be haphazard and somewhat random, such that conscious decision making is not necessary, active exploration is usually intentionally directed toward a specific set of experiences (in thought or action) with anticipated outcomes in mind. Third, socially mandated aspects of heterosexuality that constitute normative exploration within a given context must be questioned or abandoned for active exploration to occur. In other words, normative exploration is assumed to occur within most individuals as part of uncontrollable maturational processes. However, contextual influences are assumed to constrain sexual identity exploration within socially acceptable boundaries for every individual. Although these constraints are variable from person to person depending on a number of dimensions of social context (e.g., gender, culture, age, religious orientation), for active exploration to occur the individual must engage in cognitive or behavioral exploration of individual sexual identities beyond that which is socially mandated within one's social context. For some, active exploration regarding preferred characteristics of a sexual partner might

entail the development of sexual or romantic relationships with people having different types of physical, social, economic, or spiritual characteristics despite being raised to believe that acceptable sexual partners are only persons of the same race, different gender, similar age, same socioeconomic status, and same religion. For others, active exploration might entail such things as experimenting with different types of sexual activities, transcending gender roles through adoption of gender atypical modes of sexual expression, engaging in sex with more than one partner (e.g., group sex), reading books about sex, and so on. As a result, active exploration could be characterized very differently depending on contextual factors, and there is a wide range of levels of exploration (e.g., type, depth, and duration of exploration).

Active exploration will most typically coincide with biological maturation (e.g., physical capacity) but could occur at nearly any point during the course of the life span. Due to the powerful impact of systemic homonegativity and sexual prejudice, many heterosexually identified individuals who enter this status are likely to focus primarily on needs, values, and preferences for activities, partner characteristics (with the exception of gender), and modes of sexual expression to the exclusion of a legitimate active exploration of sexual orientation identity. Although some individuals in this status may consciously experiment with symbolic (fantasy) or real sexual activities with same-sex partners, most seem to reserve the privileged status associated with identification as heterosexual.[2] Some others may come to reflect on the possibility that their compulsory heterosexual orientation does not fit them and consider or adopt an LGB identity.[3] This status closely resembles the identity status of moratorium in Marcia's (1987) model of identity development, characterized by a suspension of commitment in favor of active exploration. We have conceptualized only two pathways out of active commitment: (a) into deepening and commitment following active exploration or (b) into diffusion (see below).

The group membership identity process is likely to enter consciousness more clearly for active exploration–status individuals, whereby one's recognition of self as a member of the dominant heterosexual group might result in (a) questioning the justice of a privileged status or (b) more consistently asserting the privileges of majority status. In this status, the interaction of self and social processes of identity development can become considerably intertwined. For example, willingness to violate cultural sanctions against sexual self-exploration (especially for women) may also aid individuals to recognize and more fully understand the nature of ordinate-subordinate group dynamics and majority group privilege. As such, some individuals may associate with members of oppressed sexual minority groups or other alternative groups by experimenting with so-called taboo behaviors; nonetheless, heterosexuality can be reserved as the identified orientation, and homoerotic

thoughts, feelings, and behaviors can be dismissed as transient. Many hetero-sexually identified individuals can overtly or secretly experiment with behaviors that involve more than one partner and/or one or more same-sex partners without ever identifying with the oppressed groups. Thus, behaviors and sexual individual identity can be conveniently separated and the privileged group membership status as heterosexual maintained—which may also serve an "ego preservation" function, protecting truly homo-"phobic" individuals from threatening thoughts and feelings. However, characteristic of the active exploration status, some individuals may more openly associate with (and come to identify with) LGB individuals and groups through friendship patterns, sexual exploration, and other types of affiliation. *Attitudes toward sexual minorities* are likely to vary considerably both within and between individuals in the active exploration status and may or may not correspond to other processes of identity development (i.e., individual identity and group membership identity). However, we hypothesize that an orientation toward active self-exploration is likely to correspond with more positive attitudes toward sexual minorities.

Diffusion. Diffusion is defined as the absence of exploration or commitment (Marcia, 1987) and often results from crisis. In some cases, diffusion may be difficult to distinguish from active exploration, because experiences (in thought or action) characteristic of this status might often resemble experimentation. However, diffusion typically lacks goal-directed intentionality—one of the criteria necessary for active exploration to occur. Individuals in diffusion are likely to be rejecting of other social and cultural prescriptions for values, behavior, and identity and extend this social noncompliance to their sexual life. People exhibiting diffusion may be intentional in their nearly random willingness to try or be almost anything, however this intentionality is with respect to rejection of social conformity for its own sake rather than toward a specific set of experiences or outcomes. People experiencing diffusion are likely to have identity confusion in other aspects of their lives and are generally more likely to be reactive and/or chaotic in their experiences than individuals in other statuses. They are likely to experience a lack of self-understanding or awareness, without the more typical knowledge of one's underlying motives or intentions that might otherwise characterize people in other statuses. A loss or absence of a sense of identity characterizes people experiencing diffusion and might typically coincide with a number of forms of psychological distress. Thus, the only pathway out of diffusion is through active exploration, which in some cases may require professional psychological services. Because diffusion often results from crisis, individuals can enter this status from any of the other identity statuses, but more integrated

levels of identity are less susceptible to diffusion and may require greater impetus (e.g., crisis) for diffusion to occur.

Deepening and commitment. Movement toward greater commitment to one's identified sexual needs, values, sexual orientation and/or preferences for activities, partner characteristics, and modes of sexual expression characterize individuals exhibiting this individual identity status. This status most closely resembles the identity status of achieved in Marcia's (1987) model of identity development; however, a critical distinction is that deepening and commitment in our model is hypothesized to be possible (or even likely) without the individual's engaging in active exploration. Therefore, individuals entering this status may transition out of unexplored commitment more often than active exploration. We hypothesize this possibility on the basis of the strong social forces that create sets of narrowly defined expectations for sexual identities consistent with one's social and cultural contexts. As such, deepening and commitment of sexual identity may occur through the process of maturational development and consequent deepening of heretofore developmentally inaccessible thoughts, feelings, or behaviors, in which behavioral and/or cognitive exhibition of an unexplored commitment simply deepens without the process of active exploration. From this perspective, many heterosexually identified individuals will move directly from unexplored commitment into deepening and commitment as a function of maturational changes in cognitions and behaviors that do not meet the criteria for active exploration. Individuals may move out of deepening and commitment via three pathways: (a) into synthesis (described below), (b) back into active exploration, or (c) into diffusion.

Group membership and attitudes toward sexual minorities identity processes also begin to deepen and crystallize into conscious, coherent perspectives on dominant/nondominant group relations, privilege, and oppression. Again, this process of crystallization may take virtually any form along the continuum of attitudes from condemnation to tolerance to affirmativeness.

Synthesis. Potentially the most mature and adaptive status of sexual identity is characterized by a state of congruence among the dimensions of individual identity as well as the three developmental processes. People come to an understanding and construction of heterosexuality that fulfills their self-definitions and carries over to their attitudes and behaviors toward other heterosexually identified individuals and LGB persons. Individual sexual identity, group membership identity, and attitudes toward sexual minorities merge into an overall sexual self-concept, which is conscious, congruent, volitional, and (hopefully) enlightened. Broadly speaking, other aspects of

identity are likely to blend into the synthesis—in the sense that intersecting identities (e.g., along lines of gender, race/ethnicity, religious orientation) will have a high degree of coherence and consistency in relation to sexual identity. Given the complexity of sexual identity development, with six dimensions of individual identity and two additional processes of social identity, it is likely that few individuals ever achieve synthesis.

There is only one pathway into synthesis, through deepening and commitment. However, we hypothesize that synthesis may require active exploration, in that individuals who achieve deepening and commitment directly from unexplored commitment are unlikely to develop the capacity to achieve full integration of sexual identity. As a result, because we also hypothesize that active exploration is associated with more flexible thinking with respect to sexual diversity, individuals reflecting the status of synthesis are likely to be more affirmative toward LGB individuals and understand human sexuality along continua. However, the difficulty of achieving synthesis does not preclude an individual from moving out of synthesis for one reason or another, which we hypothesize to occur via either active exploration or diffusion.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, RESEARCH, AND TRAINING

In this section, we address the implications of the model of heterosexual identity development for counseling research, practice, and training. Of critical importance is that this model has not been empirically validated. Thus, implications for practice and training are speculative. Our research implications primarily relate to issues needing empirical evaluation.

Implications for Research

Although our model is founded on existing literature on minority/majority identity development, a sufficient empirical foundation from which to assess the validity of the model is not immediately available. Among the first research endeavors necessary for any new theoretical model is its operationalization in instruments designed to measure its key constructs. As such, instruments to measure the dimensionality of individual sexual identity are needed. Furthermore, current instruments measuring heterosexual attitudes toward sexual minorities were designed to measure homophobia exclusively or only measure the most general levels of heterosexual attitudes. To more fully and completely understand heterosexual attitudes toward sexual minorities within the context of increasing affirmativeness and backlash

within society more broadly (Yang, 1997), highly refined measures are needed to replace existing practices in which low scores on homophobia scales are assumed to reflect affirmativeness (e.g., attempting to measure the presence of something based on the absence of its opposite). Furthermore, recognition of membership in a privileged, oppressive majority group will also need to be operationalized.

With valid measurement, the model can be applied to a host of different research and social problems. For example, we hypothesize that the various dimensions of heterosexual identity development are related to a host of sexual processes and outcomes, including unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, contraception use, safer sex practices, the use of cyberporn and Internet chat rooms, and the acceptance of rape myths. Furthermore, it could be useful to examine the relations between sexual identity statuses and sexual health awareness and help seeking. Furthermore, research might investigate whether educational and psychological interventions targeting various social ills (e.g., risky sexual practices, antigay attitudes and behavior, and heterosexism and homonegativity more generally) can be tailored according to aspects of sexual identity present in the target groups to increase their effectiveness. We also hypothesize that one's potential for antigay attitudes and behaviors is related to specific dimensions of heterosexual identity development (e.g., group membership identity and attitudes toward sexual minorities). Our premise that LGB affirmativeness among heterosexually identified individuals is a function of heterosexual identity development is also worthy of investigation. Research involving interventions designed to affect sexual identity development and related variables will be facilitated by investigations into the contextual influences on heterosexual identity development. Research on intersecting identities related to race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation (among others) will be facilitated by the ability of researchers to understand and characterize sexual identity of heterosexually identified persons on par with that of LGB individuals. Finally, the model will need to be tested with respect to the implications for practice and training noted in the following sections. Ultimately, this model can be a starting point from which an extensive program of research on heterosexual identities can be produced.

Implications for Practice

Sexual identity may be a salient aspect of the counseling process for either clients or counselors (see also Mohr, 2002; Worthington, Savoy, & Vernaglia, 2001). As a result, probably one of the most often cited recommendations for counselors working with LGB clients is to learn a model of lesbian and gay identity development (Pope, 1995). When either a client or counselor or both

identify as heterosexual, our model may have implications for aspects of how counseling proceeds. This is probably true for heterosexual counselors regardless of the sexual orientation of their clients. It would also be true when any counselor is working with heterosexually identified clients or clients for whom sexual identity is not known, clear, or achieved. The impact of heterosexual identity development on counseling process could be in the form of (a) direct effects of client sexual identity, (b) direct effects of counselor sexual identity, or (c) interaction effects related to both counselor and client sexual identity development.

The sexual identity development of heterosexually identified clients. Sexual identity development may be directly or indirectly connected to a wide array of different presenting problems in counseling. Clearly, there are a variety of clients for whom our model of heterosexual identity development will be particularly salient. Clients whose sexual functioning is of concern will likely benefit from an assessment of the various dimensions of sexual identity. In addition, because sexual needs, values, and preferences are often more salient aspects of the lives of adolescents and young adults, sexual identity development may be an appropriate focus of counseling regardless of whether sexuality-related issues are presented. Interestingly, clients for whom many aspects of sexual identity are unexplored may tend to experience discomfort with counselors who encourage exploration, due to the societal stigma associated with exploratory sexual behavior (Blumenfeld, 1992; Leiblum & Rosen, 1989).

Attention to sexual identity should not be limited to clients presenting sexual concerns. A client's sexual identity development status could have a bearing on counseling whether or not sexuality-related concerns are at the forefront of counseling. For example, an assessment of a client's sexual identity development may help a counselor to better understand the meaning or significance of risky sexual activities that appear in the context of other problems. It may also lead to an understanding of a previously unexplained set of difficulties with interpersonal relationships. A couple seen in conjoint therapy may not present issues related to sexual compatibility or functioning, but such issues may be either contributing to or influenced by the presenting problem. Clients with difficulties developing, establishing, or maintaining romantic partnerships may suffer from lack of awareness regarding aspects of sexual identity. Clients presenting with difficulty establishing same-gender friendships may have unresolved social identity issues stemming from systemic homonegativity (e.g., Blumenfeld, 1992).

The sexual identity development of heterosexually identified counselors. Awareness of one's own sexual identity development statuses along the

various dimensions in the model will have implications for heterosexually identified counselors regardless of whether they are working with clients on sexuality-related issues. Therapeutically addressing sexuality-related issues will likely vary as a function of the quality of sexual identity development of the counselor. Heterosexual counselors who have not explored or achieved a clear understanding of their individual or social identities are probably ill-prepared to engage in counseling with clients for whom sexuality may come into play (an issue we will further address with respect to training). Furthermore, the extent of exploration and achievement of sexual identity is hypothesized to be related to (a) level of affirmativeness regarding LGB issues (e.g., attitudes toward sexual minorities identity and group membership identity), (b) recognition of and comfort with sexuality-related material in counseling (e.g., sexual expression individual identity), (c) ability to recognize and address erotic transference and countertransference in the context of counseling (e.g., sexual needs and expression of individual identity), (d) avoidance of sexual exploitation of clients (e.g., sexual needs, values, expression, and preferences for sexual partners individual identity), and (e) an ability to prevent sexual values from unduly influencing one's work with clients (e.g., sexual values individual identity).

The interaction of client and counselor sexual identity development. Although this is a particularly complex level of analysis due to the shear numerical possibilities in terms of the different possible combinations of sexual identities, Helms (1990a) proposed an interactional model with respect to racial identity development that can be applied in parallel fashion to sexual identity development. Regardless of one's status in terms of majority or minority identity development, counseling dyads in which counselors are at more integrated levels of identity development than their clients are described as progressive and tend to be favored. Dyads characterized by clients who are more advanced in sexual identity development than their counselors are described as regressive and are considered potentially problematic. Parallel dyads are acceptable if both parties are at integrated levels of identity development but are likely to be problematic if both are at less integrated levels.

Implications for Training

An understanding of heterosexual identity development may reduce the tendency of trainees to dichotomize sexual orientation along heterosexual-homosexual lines of distinction and help to eliminate notions of normativeness regarding heterosexuality. It may foster increased understanding of and comfort with sexuality-related issues that clients may bring to counseling, as

well as facilitate the understanding of issues related to ordinate-subordinate group dynamics. Heterosexuality can be understood with greater complexity, complete with variations of identity, behavior, values, preferences, and attitudes. Helping trainees to understand sexual identity beyond sexual orientation will better prepare them for other forms of sexual diversity as well.

It may seem odd to suggest that the time has come for counselors-in-training to learn about heterosexuality. Only recently has increased attention been given to LGB issues, and it continues to be critical that training in psychology addresses these long-standing deficiencies. Graduate students in psychology lack sufficient levels of self-awareness and knowledge concerning LGB issues and do not feel that their training prepares them to work with LGB clients (Phillips & Fischer, 1998). For heterosexually identified students, examination of sexual identity development may be an important step toward preparation to work with LGB clients, because self-knowledge is the foundation on which an understanding of others is based. Furthermore, it will provide a framework for supervisors to understand the training needs of heterosexually identified trainees in the development of LGB counseling competencies. As a result, a critical component of competence for heterosexually identified counselors working with LGB clients is functioning at more highly integrated levels of heterosexual identity development.

Elsewhere, we have proposed that heterosexual attitudes toward LGB people can only be understood within the context of sexual identity development (Worthington et al., 2001). In fact, we have proposed a model of the development of LGB affirmativeness that has its basis in the sexual identity development for heterosexually identified individuals. Individuals are hypothesized to move from passive acceptance of homonegativity, through an intellectualized (e.g., politically correct) understanding of LGB individuals, toward active commitment to combating social inequities and LGB affirmativeness. Within the context of this model, heterosexually identified trainees have the opportunity to evaluate their level of affirmativeness toward LGB individuals as they develop professional competencies.

Heterosexually identified faculty members and supervisors can also benefit from applying heterosexual identity development to themselves. As noted by Lark and Croteau (1998), mentorship relationships for LGB students are perceived as problematic due to the continuing relative scarcity of LGB faculty members and supervisors and the difficulties of finding heterosexually identified faculty members and supervisors who are LGB affirmative. In the same way that heterosexually identified trainees require self-exploration of heterosexual identity development, heterosexually identified faculty members and supervisors may benefit from similar self-exploration as a means of

facilitating positive working relationships with LGB students and creating an LGB-friendly training atmosphere more generally.

CONCLUSION

Although the concept of a heterosexual identity development is relatively new to the literature, attempts to define and conceptualize sexual identity have continued for decades. Our focus has been on describing the sexual identity development of members of a privileged majority group through an understanding of the multidimensionality and constructedness of heterosexuality. The proposed model of heterosexual identity development incorporates what has been learned from years of research and theorizing on sexuality, LGB identity development, attitudes toward sexual minorities, and the meaning of ordinate and subordinate group membership. We have attempted to demonstrate the intersection of various contextual factors that influence the individual and social processes of sexual identity development among heterosexually identified individuals. By extending sexual identity beyond sexual orientation, we have attempted to demonstrate points of overlap and divergence with LGB identities.

Efforts to examine the potential overlap among the sexual identities of LGB and heterosexual individuals will likely face political as well as scientific scrutiny. Because of the complexity of these issues, we have attended to them only as they directly relate to the dissemination of our model. However, some important issues to consider in the discussion might be (a) the possible permeability of majority and minority identity models of sexual identity such that some individuals may traverse more than one pathway during the course of a life span, (b) the inclusion of multidimensionality in LGB models of sexual identity such that sexual orientation identity becomes only one of several important facets, thereby increasing overlap in our understanding of sexual identity more broadly, and (c) the possibility of model integration into a more comprehensive understanding of the multiplicity of pathways toward sexual identity available to human beings.

Elsewhere, we have proposed a corresponding model of LGB affirmativeness that describes the process by which heterosexuals move beyond tolerance to levels of affirmativeness toward LGB people (Worthington et al., 2001). As one develops a greater understanding of his or her own sexual values, needs, orientation, preferences for characteristics of sexual partners, sexual activities, and modes of sexual expression, he or she is more likely to develop a greater appreciation for and affirmation of sexual diversity. In particular, there is likely to be a strong association between more affirmative atti-

tudes toward LGB persons and more integrated sexual identity statuses associated with the exploration process. Therefore, an understanding of heterosexual identity development is an essential foundation for understanding of the development of LGB-affirmative attitudes and behaviors.

Societal overemphasis regarding the gender of a person's sexual partners results in the inadequate understanding of the multifaceted nature of human sexual functioning. Our model provides a framework by which simplistic bipolar notions of sexual identity can be eliminated in favor of more complex conceptualizations. The definition of sexual identity is expanded beyond sexual orientation identity, depicting a multidimensional construct that also includes sexual needs, sexual values, preferences for characteristics of sexual partners, modes of sexual expression, and sexual activities. Increased clarity is achieved regarding essentialist and constructivist features of sexual orientation, sexual orientation identity, and sexual identity via enhanced precision in terminology. Sexual behaviors among heterosexually identified individuals that do not conform to common notions of heterosexuality are more fully explained. Similarities and differences in the processes of sexual identity development for heterosexual and LGB individuals can be more thoroughly explicated. Heterosexual attitudes toward LGB people are contextualized within complex processes of sexual identity development. Nevertheless, until simplistic notions of sexual orientation can be sufficiently deconstructed to reduce or eliminate pervasive homonegativity, heterosexism, and heterosexual privilege, heterosexuality will continue to be an arbitrarily simplistic category defined more by what it is not than by what it is.

NOTES

1. In our formulation of the distinctions between *sexual orientation*, *sexual orientation identity*, and *sexual orientation*, we would place sexual orientation in this category, as a reflection of sexual needs, which are likely to be associated with the strongest biological determinism.

2. Note that this part of our conceptualization of heterosexual identity allows us to incorporate heterosexually identified individuals who engage in same-sex sexual behaviors, yet who continue to identify as heterosexual. Thus, persons may or may not express their sexual orientations in their sexual behaviors (American Psychological Association, 1998).

3. In these terms, the use of the term *heterosexual identity development* may be considered a misnomer because it could be argued that the model is applicable to lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals as well. However, we assume that those who adopt an LGB identity experience processes specific to the realities of the context of an oppressive, heterosexist, homonegative society. Although the models may have some overlap, we believe there are clear differences between LGB identity development within an oppressive society and the privileged status of heterosexual identity development.

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