

Sexual Identity Development in the Context of Compulsory Heterosexuality

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ABSTRACT This study analyzed the implications of sexual identity development for global, political, religious, and occupational identity development in 358 college students. Participants completed a written survey packet including the Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (EOM-EIS) and measures of sexual identity, physical/sexual preference, and emotional/affective preference. Data from the EOM-EIS suggest that having a sexual minority identity (lesbian, gay, bisexual, or “other” nonheterosexual identity) and reporting strong same-sex sexual or physical preferences are linked with more advanced global, political, religious, and occupational identity development. Heterosexual-identified participants were more likely to score high on identity foreclosure, moratorium, and diffusion, while sexual-minority-identified individuals scored higher on identity achievement. Individuals with strong same-sex physical/sexual preferences showed a pattern of results similar to those of sexual-minority-identified participants. Themes coded from a free-response question highlighted the finding that sexual-minority-identified participants more often viewed their sexual identity as salient and involving an effortful process. These individuals also stressed the importance of having support or modeling for their sexual identity.

Sexual identity development is a growing area of academic inquiry (e.g., Golden, 1987; Firestein, 1996; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995;

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Rust, 1993). However, this literature has often been removed from the context of research on identity development in general. This paper uses the extant research on global identity development as a framework for studying sexual identity development, as it tests the hypothesis that coming to terms with a sexual minority identity facilitates identity development in other domains.

Theorizing Identity Development

The construct of ego-identity status was derived from Erikson's theory of identity development. Erikson (1968) described committing to a cohesive identity as a pivotal crisis individuals must weather in order to be psychologically healthy. He defined an identity crisis as "a necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must move one way or another, marshaling resources of growth, recovery, and further differentiation" (Erikson, 1968, p. 16). He added that well-developed identities become stable for the individual and that "the term identity...connotes both a persistent sameness with oneself (self-sameness) and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others" (Erikson, 1956, p. 57). Erikson stressed the importance of the ego in facilitating this task: "Ego identity then, in its subjective aspect, is the awareness of the fact that there is a self-sameness and continuity to the ego's synthesizing methods, the style of one's individuality, and that this style coincides with the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for significant others in the immediate community" (Erikson, 1968, p. 50).

Erikson conceptualized identity as dynamically changing, both over the life course and in response to social contexts. He also stressed, though, its function for the individual in providing a sense of unity and coherence across different social situations. The generalizability/universality versus specificity/situationality of identity and the self remains a current debate in psychology, as in other disciplines. Roberts and Donahue (1994) articulated the alternative positions in this debate. They identified one position as the "multiple selves" perspective, in which identity and other aspects of the self are differentially sculpted in response to varying roles and social situations. They noted that this perspective has dominated recent identity research, citing Stryker and Statham's (1985) hierarchical conceptualization of identities as an example (see also Linville, 1985, 1987). Roberts and Donahue identified the other view as a "dispositional"

perspective, in which the self is viewed as an entity that is consistent across situations.

Perhaps the “dispositional” perspective focuses more on the relatively unified identity that individuals tend to subjectively experience, while the “multiple selves” perspective reflects the viewpoint of outsiders observing how situational and cultural contexts influence the person. Individuals may strive for some degree of stable identity in order to reduce the psychological stress that can accompany frequent changes in identity (e.g., interpreting information differently and engaging in different social interactions after adopting new identities). Consequently, they may selectively choose to process cognitively the information about themselves and their environment that supports the maintenance of their current identities. Considering women in particular, Flax (1990) identified one motive for this kind of process; she suggested that women may gain agency by conceptualizing a consistent self that permits them to claim their memories and histories. She pointed out that “without a sense of an I among we’s, politics as (distributive) justice is not possible” (p. 221).

In the context of this debate, Deaux and Stewart (2001) called for researchers to “unpack” gender identity, and other social identities that are often seen as monolithic, by considering the cultural context in which individuals define, create, maintain, and change their identities. They also encouraged researchers to explore the intersectionalities between different identity categories, such as ethnicity and sexual identity, by examining the way multiple identities interact with each another. Deaux and Stewart concluded that exclusively conceptualizing identities as either constant or situationally dependent obscures the complexity of identity. By ignoring situational variations in identity, researchers are overlooking points of “conflict and disjunction” among individuals’ identities. Conversely, bypassing consistent areas of identity fails to consider continuities in identities. They stress, then, that identities may serve some functions supporting stability and consistency, while retaining a dynamic relationship to context and a capacity for change.

Stages of Sexual Identity Development

Erikson’s theory of identity development was operationalized by Marcia (1966) in terms of four stages of identity formation. These stages result from differential outcomes with respect to two dimen-

sions articulated in Erikson's theory. The first dimension assesses the presence of a "crisis" in which different options for one's identity are explored. The second gauges whether the individual has made a commitment to a particular identity (see also Grotevant, 1987). These dimensions are applicable to theorizing about both sexual minority and heterosexual sexual identity development.

Identity *achievement* occurs when one commits to an identity after actively questioning it. Looking specifically at heterosexual sexual identity development, Worthington, Savoy, Dillon, and Vernaglia (2001) refer to a similar construct of "deepening and commitment," defined as "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" (p. 30). For example, an individual may have an "achieved" sexual minority identity as lesbian, gay, or bisexual after falling in love with someone of the same sex and struggling with experiencing same-sex attractions. Conversely, a person may have an "achieved" heterosexual identity after exploring whether she or he is sexually attracted to people of the same sex and concluding that these attractions are not centrally important to him or her.

Identity *foreclosure* transpires when individuals commit to their identity without undergoing an identity crisis. Most people experiencing identity foreclosure simply adopt the ideals and values of their parents or other authority figures without questioning them. In a society where heterosexuality has been constructed as the norm (Rich, 1993; Katz, 1996), people who adopt this sexual standard de facto for themselves without questioning it or exploring any same-sex attractions would be categorized as having a foreclosed identity. Worthington and colleagues (2001) use the term "unexplored commitment" in their model of heterosexual identity development to refer to internalizing the "microsocial (e.g., familial) and macrosocial (e.g., societal) mandates for acceptable gender role and sexual behavior and/or avoidance of sexual self-exploration, which may preempt legitimate experimentation" (p. 24).

Considering women's sexual identity development in particular, Rich (1993) wrote that heterosexuality is mandated for women as a consequence of our patriarchal social arrangements. Rich concluded that rigidly enforced social scripts delineating heterosexuality as the norm for women promote "male right of physical, economic, and emotional access" to women (p. 216). Consequently, any challenges

women make to “compulsory heterosexuality” may be viewed as threats against the entire system of patriarchy, which undergirds our political, economic, religious, and other macrolevel social structures in the United States. Clearly, there are social incentives for women to refrain from questioning their assumed heterosexuality in our society and to assume a foreclosed heterosexual identity.

Identity *moratorium* occurs when people question their identity, but do not commit to any particular resolution. In theorizing heterosexual sexual identity development, Worthington and colleagues (2001) discuss a similar construct of “active exploration” of one’s sexual self-identity, defined as “exploring, evaluating or experimenting with one’s sexual needs, values, sexual orientation, and/or preferences for activities, partner characteristics, and modes of sexual expression” (p. 26). People who are in the process of exploring their sexuality and do not feel comfortable committing to a sexual identity would be classified as experiencing identity moratorium.

Identity *diffusion* is the type of identity development in which individuals neither question nor commit to an identity. While individuals experiencing diffuse sexual identity development may be sexually active, they do not analyze their sexuality and therefore do not espouse a sexual identity. Worthington and colleagues (2001) explained that diffusion may be difficult to differentiate from active exploration, since in some cases, individuals in sexual diffusion may be sexually experimenting through their thoughts or actions. However, diffusion is characterized by a lack of goal-directed intentionality that is a prerequisite for active exploration. In other words, sexually diffuse individuals may be sexually experimenting, but their experimentation is not designed to test the appropriateness of espousing a specific sexual identity (e.g., engaging in same-sex sexual activity to see if one is “really” gay).

While ego-identity status has been widely studied in the psychological research literature (over 60 studies on identity status are cited in Adams, 1998), its relationship with sexual identity has been largely ignored in the research literature (Ellis, 2000). One notable exception is Eliason’s (1995) research with heterosexual-identified college students. Eliason found that 17% of women and 29% of men were classified as “identity diffuse” regarding their sexual identity, while 33% of women and 50% of men were foreclosed. Eliason’s work provides initial data indicating that most heterosexual-identified young adults tend, at least in the area of sexual identity, to be

concentrated in the two least advanced stages of identity development. However, this study did not include a sexual-minority-identified group of students with which to compare these findings.

Facilitating or Impeding Identity Development

The research on gender differences in identity status has been inconclusive (Adams, 1998). While Erikson did not explicitly propose any gender differences in his theory of identity development, some of his research stemming from this theory did focus on gender differences. In Erikson's (1968) research with children at play, he found that boys are likely to build tall phallic structures of exteriors, while girls tended to design interior configurations and arrange their toys in a circular pattern. Erikson suggested that these play patterns stemmed from biological gender differences, since men have external sex organs and women have internal sex organs.

Turning to more recent research on identity development and gender, Adams (1998) suggested that since girls tend to experience the onset of puberty before boys, they may feel more pressure to explore adult roles to accompany their maturing bodies. Consequently, girls may reach identity achievement before boys. Several studies have supported this hypothesis, as they concluded that more girls are identity achieved than boys of the same age (Grotevant & Adams, 1984; Mead, 1983; Streitmatter, 1987). Conversely, Fregeau and Barker (1986) reported that females were more likely than males to be experiencing moratorium and diffusion. Finally, many studies reported no sex differences in identity status (Abraham, 1983; Adams, Ryan, Hoffman, Dobson, & Nielsen, 1985; Adams, Shea, & Fitch, 1979; Adams & Fitch, 1982; Rodman, 1983; Streitmatter, 1993).

General identity achievement has been linked with several environmental and individual difference factors. Grotevant (1992) proposed that individuals need a supportive environment that provides freedom to explore and develop different identities. Grotevant and Cooper (1986) concluded that the optimal family environment for supporting identity development is one that allows for both individuality and connectedness. Grotevant (1992) added that individuals base their decision to commit to an identity upon the cognitive and affective consequences they experience in their environment during identity exploration. On the other hand, some research has suggested

that challenging environmental circumstances, like parental divorce, may stimulate identity development (Grossman, Shea, & Adams, 1980).

Environmental factors may appear to be relatively constant for individuals during identity development, since people tend to gravitate toward environments that match their openness to experience (Kroger, 1993). For example, Adams and Fitch (1983) found that foreclosed students sought more restrictive environments that were not amenable to identity exploration. Considering this finding, individuals without achieved identities may become “stuck” in an environment that does not support their identity development.

For example, applying these environmental theories to sexual identity development, a woman who is exploring identifying as a lesbian requires an environment that does not restrict her exploration in this area (e.g., not a family that is adamant that homosexuality is a “sin”) in order fully to achieve her sexual identity. At the same time, she would benefit from support from those in her social network while she engages in this identity exploration. If she dates a woman and begins publicly to identify as a lesbian, she is more likely to commit to this identity if her relationship and new identity “feels right” to her and is praised and supported by others.

Grotevant (1992) also proposed that identity development is affected by individual differences in compartmentalization, or the degree to which one domain of identity is insulated from other domains. He suggested that people who have less compartmentalized identities are more likely to experience enhanced identity development because their identity domains influence one another. People with less compartmentalized identities may be particularly likely to find that the work they do on their sexual identity development facilitates their identity development in other domains. Postulating individual differences, the notion of compartmentalization suggests by implication that there must be a routine process of cross-domain transfer in identity formation.

Alternatively, there are also theories suggesting that adopting a sexual minority identity stifles identity development in other domains. For example, Grotevant (1992) hypothesized that adopting a socially undervalued identity leads to psychological problems (inferiority, low self-esteem, an external locus of control) and social difficulties (such as prejudice and discrimination) that could inhibit identity development. Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990) wrote

that ethnic minority individuals experience “culture clash” between their own culture and the dominant culture. This discrepancy leads to a prolonged identity crisis and a lack of identity commitment. In an analogous way, sexual-minority-identified individuals whose same-sex relationships are supported in sexual minority communities lack social and legal recognition within the dominant culture. As a result, these individuals might find it difficult to achieve their sexual and other identities.

There has been a lack of published research on the interplay among sexuality, gender, and identity status. While Baumeister’s (2000) theory of erotic plasticity and Bem’s (1996) exotic-becomes-erotic theory both theorize gender differences in sexuality, these theories do not directly address issues of identity formation in other domains. Thus, analyzing the relationships among sexuality, gender, and identity status remains a question for future investigations.

Research Hypotheses

In light of the tendency for our society to impose “compulsory heterosexuality” on individuals at birth (Rich, 1993), this study hypothesizes that heterosexual-identified individuals will be more likely to score high on the less advanced stages of global identity development (diffusion, foreclosure, and moratorium) than sexual-minority-identified participants (H1). People who identify as heterosexual may do so because they have not questioned our culture’s “compulsory heterosexuality”; they also may not question the other domains of their identity. In contrast, people who take on a sexual minority identity are likely to engage in a process of identity exploration that may well extend into other domains.

We also hypothesize that sexual-minority-identified participants are more likely to score high on global identity achievement than those who are heterosexual-identified (H2). In a heterosexist society, individuals who have strong same-sex sexual feelings may feel a stronger need to commit to a marginalized sexual identity (e.g., for personal support and political gains). In turn, the work that they invest in forming their sexual identity may facilitate their identity development in other domains.

Considering the conflicting arguments for gender differences in identity status, we hypothesize that significant differences in identity status by gender will not be found (H3).

Similar to hypotheses one and two, we hypothesize that individuals expressing strong same-sex physical or sexual preferences will score lower on identity diffusion, foreclosure, and moratorium (H4) and higher on identity achievement (H5). These hypotheses stem from the idea that experiencing strong same-sex physical or sexual preferences is a key aspect of questioning one's compulsory heterosexual identity ascribed at birth, as experiencing sexual feelings toward the same sex seems to be outside the purview of this default social identity.

Additionally, we hypothesize that sexual-minority-identified participants will be more likely to report that their sexual identity development involved an effortful process (H6) and that their sexual identities are salient (H7). Identity issues may be more difficult to resolve and more salient for individuals who are experiencing same-sex sexual feelings, since these feelings often force individuals to question the heterosexual identity they were presumed to have since birth (Cass, 1979; Rich, 1993). Finally, considering that a heterosexual identity is the "default" in our society, we hypothesize that individuals who identify as a sexual minority will express a need for support or modeling for their sexual identity more than heterosexual-identified individuals (H8).

METHOD

Participants

Participants in this study were 358 undergraduate and graduate students. Ninety-eight were male, 257 female, and three transgendered. The mean age was 22.3, with a standard deviation of 5.6. The sample was predominantly Euro-American, with 83.9% identifying as Euro-American, 5.9% as African American, 2.5% as Asian American, 3.1% as Latino/a, and 4.5% as "other."

Participants included 202 students who identified as heterosexual, 100 as lesbian or gay, 40 as bisexual, and 14 as "other" nonheterosexual identities (e.g., "queer"). Two participants did not identify their sexuality. Given the small numbers of bisexual and "other" identified participants, we combined the three groups of nonheterosexual-identified participants into one group and compared them with the heterosexual-identified students. We will report, though, any instances where the bisexual-identified students differed significantly from the lesbian- and gay-identified students, since that group was relatively substantial in size.

Participants were recruited via undergraduate and graduate courses at an eastern university, local sexual minority student groups, e-mail (general sexual minority discussion lists, university sexual minority lists, and The American Psychological Association Division 35 and 44 discussion lists), and sexual minority and sexual-minority-friendly conferences (The Midwest Bisexual, Lesbian, Gay, and Transgender College Conference and The Association for Women in Psychology Conference).

Due to the “snowball sampling” method utilized in this study (distributing surveys to those involved in sexual minority communities and hoping they distributed them to others), an exact response rate and tally of the source of all surveys received could not be calculated. Although problems exist with using snowball sampling, including the lack of precise control over survey distribution and national representativeness, this sampling method has been by far the dominant one used to recruit sexual minority participants (Harry, 1990; Sell, 1996). Considering the relatively low base rate of individuals identifying as sexual minority (e.g., Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994 estimate that 3.1% of men and 1.4% of women in the United States identify as a sexual minority) and the fact that some potential respondents may have felt that sexuality was a sensitive topic and refused to answer questions pertaining to sexuality, employing standard procedures for representative sampling, such as random-digit dialing, would have been impractical (Harry, 1990). However, it is possible that our recruitment procedures confounded group orientation and/or political consciousness with sexual orientation.

Procedure

Participants were given (in person or in the mail) a packet of surveys consisting of a demographic information sheet, six questions about sexual identity and preferences, and the EOM-EIS. They were asked to complete the packet at their convenience and return it by mail in a post-paid envelope. Participants also received a letter informing them that they were not obligated to participate in this research and that by completing the surveys, they were implicitly expressing voluntary consent to be a participant. The results reported here are part of a larger study on sexual identity development. Results using this sample pertaining to the variability of sexual preferences among heterosexual-identified participants were reported elsewhere (Hoburg, Konik, Williams, and Crawford, in press).

Measures

Sexuality. Participants were classified into groups based on responses to five questions presented in a 2×2 sexuality grid initially proposed by Chung and Katayama (1996). The first question reads “How would you identify your sexual orientation? Please circle the most accurate response.

Please circle only one response.” The response options include heterosexual, homosexual (gay or lesbian), bisexual, other (with space for an explanation of this response), and choose not to identify.¹

Participants then answered four questions measuring same sex and other sex emotional/affective preference and physical/sexual preference using 6-point Likert scales. These questions were designed to gauge specific components of the larger construct of sexual orientation and appeared as follows: “How would you rate your physical or sexual preference for people of the other sex?” “How would you rate your physical or sexual preference for people of the same sex?” “How would you rate your emotional or affective preference for people of the other sex?” “How would you rate your emotional or affective preference for people of the same sex?”²

On the same-sex physical or sexual preference scale, gay- and lesbian-identified participants scored the highest ($M = 5.73$, $SD = 0.53$), followed by bisexual-identified ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 0.89$), other-identified ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 1.68$), and heterosexual-identified participants ($M = 1.43$, $SD = 0.84$). Conversely, for the other-sex physical or sexual preference scale, heterosexual-identified participants scored the highest ($M = 5.70$, $SD = .54$), followed by bisexual-identified ($M = 4.89$, $SD = 1.28$), other-identified ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.67$), and gay- and lesbian-identified participants ($M = 1.73$, $SD = 1.00$).

A similar, but somewhat less differentiated, pattern emerged for emotional preferences. Considering same-sex emotional or affective preferences, gay- and lesbian-identified participants scored the highest ($M = 5.64$, $SD = 0.61$), followed by other-identified ($M = 5.50$, $SD = 0.52$), bisexual-identified ($M = 4.92$, $SD = 1.06$), and heterosexual-identified participants ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.72$). For the other-sex emotional or affective preference scale, heterosexual-identified participants scored the highest ($M = 5.33$, $SD = .77$), followed by bisexual-identified ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 1.17$), other-identified ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.98$), and gay- and lesbian-identified participants ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.50$).

Identity themes. A free-response question allowed participants to explain the process through which they formulated their sexual identities. This question followed one on self-identified sexual identity and the four preference scales described above. It appeared as follows: “Please explain

1. The word *orientation* was chosen for this question instead of *preference* because this question was designed to ascertain participants’ conceptualization of their sexuality as a relatively global, fixed entity, as *orientation* implies (Chung & Katayama, 1996).
2. The word *preference* was intended to suggest that these dimensions can change more freely and are not necessarily congruent.

how you arrived at the answers to the last 5 questions. Feel free to explain how you formulated your sexual identity and any other information that you feel would be important for this study.”

Two coders scored the free-response sexual identity question. The “effortful process” category was used when participants indicated that they experienced an extended process that involved effort or labor in forming their sexual identity. Examples of this category included: “My sexual identity was formed through careful contemplation and experimentation” and “I began to think, ‘How do I know I am heterosexual?’” The “salient identity” category was used when participants specifically mentioned the term “identity” or coming out or letting others know that they labeled themselves as a specific sexual identity. Examples of this category were: “I have a strong heterosexual identity as I am in a satisfying relationship with my husband” and “I came out to my family and friends that I am a lesbian.” The final category was “sexual identity support or modeling,” which was used when participants noted experiencing support or modeling from family, friends, or their immediate social network for their sexual identity. Examples of this category included: “My mother associated with a gay male cousin when I was young” and “Since watching my mom and dad hold hands when I was a kid, I knew that I wanted to marry a man when I grew up.” Although responses could be coded for multiple categories, the categories were designed to be mutually exclusive (e.g., a comment such as “I struggled for a year, thinking and reading all I could about sexuality, then I came out to my family and friends as a lesbian” would be coded as “effortful process” for the first half of the response and “salient identity” for the last half). These responses were coded with an inter-rater reliability of .85 (percent agreement; Smith, Atkinson, McClelland, & Veroff, 1992).

Ego-identity status. The prototype Objective Measure of Ego-Identity Status (EOM-EIS) (Adams et al., 1979) was utilized to analyze global identity formation. The prototype EOM-EIS is a 24-item instrument that measures the four different outcomes in developing an identity (diffusion, moratorium, foreclosure, and achievement) as originally proposed by Marcia (1966). Each of these four outcomes is measured in terms of a global identity scale and three subscales for political, religious, and occupational identity within each of the four outcomes (for a total of 12 subscales). Scores on both the four global outcomes and 12 subscales are used in this study. The EOM-EIS items use 6-point Likert scales, with scores on each of the four global scales ranging from 6 to 36. Numerous studies have been conducted to demonstrate the reliability and validity of the EOM-EIS (Adams, 1998). The median of internal consistency scores in 14 studies using the EOM-EIS was .66 and the test-retest reliability median was .76. Evidence for the construct validity of the EOM-EIS was

provided by Weiss (1984), who found that achieved and moratorium participants scored higher on a measure of cognitive development than diffuse and foreclosed individuals. Adams, Shea, & Fitch (1979) also reported that individuals with greater self-esteem and self-acceptance were more likely to have reached identity achievement and moratorium.

Design

A Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted using EOM-EIS scores as the dependent variable and self-identified sexual orientation and gender as the independent variables. Considering that individuals tend to become more identity achieved as they grow older (Adams, 1998), age served as a control variable in these analyses. Multiple regressions were also performed on the EOM-EIS global scales and subscales using age and the four same-sex and other-sex physical/sexual and emotional/affective preference scales as predictor variables.

In analyzing the free-response sexual identity formation question, chi-square tests were conducted to assess whether heterosexual-identified and sexual-minority-identified participants concentrated on different themes in their responses.

RESULTS

The hypotheses involving the global EOM-EIS scales were generally confirmed with these data.³ Multivariate Pillai's Trace tests in MANCOVA revealed a significant main effect for sexual identity ($F(4, 314) = 14.62, p < .001$) but not one for gender ($F(4, 314) = 1.69, p > .05$). The interaction between sexual identity and gender was also significant ($F(4, 314) = 4.91, p = .001$).

Looking at the main effect for sexual identity, heterosexual-identified participants scored higher on identity foreclosure ($F(1, 321) = 56.41, p < .001$) and moratorium ($F(1, 321) = 7.73, p < .01$) than sexual-minority-identified participants (H1).⁴ There was also a trend

3. Due to their small numbers, the three transgendered participants were not included in these analyses.

4. For all analyses using categorical measures of sexual identity (EOM-EIS global and subscale analyses and free-response question identity themes analyses and word count analyses), no significant differences were found between bisexual-identified participants and gay- and lesbian-identified participants. Participants identifying their sexuality as "other" were excluded from these comparisons due to their small numbers ($n = 12$) and the heterogeneity of their responses.

for heterosexual-identified participants to score higher on identity diffusion than sexual-minority-identified participants ($F(1, 321) = 3.12, p < .10$). Conversely, sexual-minority-identified participants scored higher on identity achievement ($F(1, 321) = 9.90, p < .01$) (H2). The only significant gender difference was that male participants scored higher on diffusion than female participants ($F(1, 321) = 4.71, p < .05$) (H3). There were no significant gender differences on foreclosure ($F(1, 321) = 0.19, p > .05$), moratorium ($F(1, 321) = 0.24, p > .05$), or achievement ($F(1, 321) = 0.52, p > .05$).

There were significant interactions between sexual identity and gender on diffusion ($F(1, 321) = 5.90, p < .05$) and foreclosure ($F(1, 321) = 4.20, p < .05$). Considering foreclosure, heterosexual-identified women scored the highest, followed by heterosexual-identified men, sexual-minority-identified men and sexual-minority-identified women. After performing a Bonferroni correction, comparison of the estimated marginal means on foreclosure at the 5% significance level revealed that heterosexual-identified men and women were more foreclosed than sexual-minority-identified men and women. For diffusion, sexual-minority-identified men scored the highest, followed by heterosexual-identified women, heterosexual-identified men, and sexual-minority-identified women. Using Bonferroni-corrected estimates of marginal means at the 5% significance level, sexual-minority-identified women were less diffuse than heterosexual-identified women and sexual-minority-identified men. The interactions between gender and sexuality were not significant for moratorium ($F(1, 321) = 0.19, p > .05$) and achievement ($F(1, 321) = 1.86, p > .05$). Means and standard deviations for these scales can be found in Table 1.

Overall, the results from the global ego-identity status scales generalized to the political, religious, and occupational subscales of the EOM-EIS. These results indicated that adopting a sexual-minority sexual identity was associated with having a more achieved political ($F(1, 321) = 14.89, p < .001$) and religious ($F(1, 321) = 10.16, p < .01$) identity. Alternatively, identifying as heterosexual was associated with greater political diffusion ($F(1, 321) = 31.44, p < .001$), foreclosure ($F(1, 321) = 23.02, p < .001$), and moratorium ($F(1, 321) = 17.30, p < .001$), religious diffusion ($F(1, 321) = 7.65, p < .01$) and foreclosure ($F(1, 321) = 83.50, p < .001$), and occupational foreclosure ($F(1, 321) = 8.46, p < .01$). There were no significant differences between heterosexual-identified and sexual-minority-identified participants on occupational diffusion ($F(1, 321) = 1.15, p > .05$), moratorium

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations for Global EOM-EIS Scores as a Function of Sexual Identity and Gender

Variable	Sexual-Minority-Identified			Heterosexual-Identified		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Diffusion						
Men	19.37	4.79	51	18.95	4.84	38
Women	16.55	5.36	83	19.22	4.47	150
Total	17.63	5.31	134	19.16	4.53	188
Foreclosure						
Men	10.73	4.12	51	13.79	4.79	38
Women	9.75	3.30	83	15.43	5.40	150
Total	10.12	3.65	134	15.10	5.31	188
Moratorium						
Men	16.53	5.17	51	18.63	3.96	38
Women	16.46	5.61	83	18.17	5.39	150
Total	16.49	5.43	134	18.26	5.13	188
Achievement						
Men	26.92	4.06	51	24.61	4.16	38
Women	25.88	4.10	83	24.77	4.32	150
Total	26.28	4.10	134	24.74	4.28	188

($F(1, 321) = 2.13, p > .05$), and achievement ($F(1, 321) = 0.06, p > .05$) and religious moratorium ($F(1, 321) = 0.47, p > .05$).

The only significant gender difference was that men had higher levels of occupational diffusion ($F(1, 321) = 4.12, p < .05$) (H3). The only significant interaction between sexual identity and gender was on political diffusion ($F(1, 321) = 10.58, p = .001$). Heterosexual-identified women scored the highest on political diffusion, followed by heterosexual-identified men, sexual-minority-identified men, and sexual-minority-identified women. Using Bonferroni-corrected estimates of marginal means with a 5% significance level, sexual-minority-identified women were significantly less politically diffuse than heterosexual-identified men and women and sexual-minority-identified men. Also, sexual-minority-identified men were less politically diffuse than heterosexual-identified women. Means and standard deviations for these subscales can be found in Table 2.

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations for EOM-EIS Subscale Scores as a
Function of Sexual Identity and Gender

Variable	Sexual-Minority-Identified			Heterosexual-Identified		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Political Diffusion						
Men	6.37	3.24	51	7.08	2.33	38
Women	4.99	2.53	83	7.87	2.32	150
Total	5.51	2.89	134	7.71	2.34	188
Political Foreclosure						
Men	4.20	1.92	51	4.95	2.09	38
Women	3.83	1.70	83	5.53	2.17	150
Total	3.97	1.79	134	5.41	2.16	188
Political Moratorium						
Men	5.92	2.30	51	7.00	1.86	38
Women	5.82	2.56	83	7.14	2.13	150
Total	5.86	2.46	134	7.11	2.08	188
Political Achievement						
Men	8.80	1.44	51	8.05	1.45	38
Women	8.76	1.65	83	7.95	1.59	150
Total	8.78	1.57	134	7.97	1.56	188
Religious Diffusion						
Men	7.18	3.03	51	5.58	2.33	38
Women	6.17	2.75	83	5.80	2.80	150
Total	6.55	2.89	134	5.76	2.71	188
Religious Foreclosure						
Men	3.14	1.51	51	5.13	2.43	38
Women	2.88	1.48	83	5.79	2.52	150
Total	2.98	1.49	134	5.65	2.51	188
Religious Moratorium						
Men	5.59	2.27	51	5.74	1.61	38
Women	5.36	2.29	83	5.64	2.61	150
Total	5.45	2.28	134	5.66	2.44	188
Religious Achievement						
Men	9.71	1.97	51	8.74	2.18	38
Women	9.36	1.80	83	8.71	2.01	150
Total	9.49	1.87	134	8.71	2.04	188
Occupational Diffusion						
Men	5.82	2.09	51	6.29	2.30	38
Women	5.40	2.37	83	5.55	2.24	150
Total	5.56	2.27	134	5.70	2.27	188

(Continued)

Table 2 (Cont.)

Variable	Sexual-Minority-Identified			Heterosexual-Identified		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Occupational Foreclosure						
Men	3.39	1.84	51	3.71	1.80	38
Women	3.04	1.51	83	4.12	2.04	150
Total	3.17	1.65	134	4.04	2.00	188
Occupational Moratorium						
Men	5.02	2.58	51	5.89	2.22	38
Women	5.28	2.61	83	5.39	2.56	150
Total	5.18	2.60	134	5.49	2.50	188
Occupational Achievement						
Men	8.41	2.78	51	7.82	1.98	38
Women	7.76	2.74	83	8.11	2.63	150
Total	8.01	2.76	134	8.05	2.51	188

Consistent with our hypotheses, indicating higher levels of same-sex physical/sexual preference generally was predictive of lower scores on identity foreclosure and moratorium (H4) and higher scores on identity achievement (H5). Higher levels of same-sex physical/sexual preference predicted lower scores on foreclosure (global foreclosure ($\beta = -.23, p = .01$), political foreclosure ($\beta = -.19, p < .05$), and religious foreclosure ($\beta = -.30, p = .001$)) and moratorium (political moratorium ($\beta = -.22, p < .05$)). Higher levels of same-sex physical/sexual preference predicted higher scores on identity achievement (global achievement ($\beta = .19, p = .05$), political achievement ($\beta = .28, p < .01$)). Higher same-sex emotional/affective preference predicted lower religious foreclosure ($\beta = -.13, p < .05$). The remaining global scales and subscales of the EOM-EIS were not significantly predicted by any of the four same-sex or other-sex physical/sexual or emotional/affective preference scales. The regressions of the global EOM-EIS scales can be found in Table 3, and the subscale regressions with significant predictors are reported in Table 4.

The three hypotheses concerning the free-response, sexual identity development question were supported. First, sexual-minority-identified participants were more likely to describe sexual identity formation as an effortful process ($\chi^2 = 50.61, p < .001$) (H6). They also were more likely to mention explicitly "identity" and identity-related

Table 3
Multiple Regression Analysis With Global EOM-EIS Scores as
Criterion

<i>Global Diffusion</i>			
Variable	B	SEB	β
Age	-.12	.05	-.12*
Same-Sex Physical/Sexual Preference	-.09	.24	-.04
Other-Sex Physical/Sexual Preference	-.13	.27	-.05
Same-Sex Emotional/Affective Preference	-.12	.20	-.04
Other-Sex Emotional/Affective Preference	.40	.25	.12

Note: $R^2 = .04$ ($N = 335$, $p < .05$).
* $p < .05$.

<i>Global Foreclosure</i>			
Variable	B	SEB	β
Age	-.26	.05	-.25***
Same-Sex Physical/Sexual Preference	-.59	.23	-.23*
Other-Sex Physical/Sexual Preference	.33	.26	.12
Same-Sex Emotional/Affective Preference	-.35	.19	-.11
Other-Sex Emotional/Affective Preference	.02	.24	.01

Note: $R^2 = .25$ ($N = 334$, $p < .001$).
*** $p < .001$. * $p < .05$.

<i>Global Moratorium</i>			
Variable	B	SEB	β
Age	-.17	.06	-.17**
Same-Sex Physical/Sexual Preference	-.43	.26	-.17
Other-Sex Physical/Sexual Preference	-.07	.29	-.02
Same-Sex Emotional/Affective Preference	-.03	.21	-.01
Other-Sex Emotional/Affective Preference	-.10	.27	-.03

Note: $R^2 = .05$ ($N = 338$, $p < .01$).
** $p < .01$.

(Continued)

Table 3 (Cont.)

<i>Global Achievement</i>			
Variable	B	SEB	β
Age	.17	.04	.20***
Same-Sex Physical/Sexual Preference	.39	.20	.19*
Other-Sex Physical/Sexual Preference	.06	.22	.03
Same-Sex Emotional/Affective Preference	.08	.17	.03
Other-Sex Emotional/Affective Preference	.12	.21	.04

Note: $R^2 = .08$ ($N = 333$, $p < .001$).

*** $p < .001$. * $p = .05$.

issues, such as espousing membership in a particular sexual identity group, in answering this question ($\chi^2 = 24.84$, $p < .001$) (H7). Additionally, sexual-minority-identified participants were more likely to mention the importance of support or modeling of their sexual identity within their immediate social network ($\chi^2 = 9.70$, $p < .01$) (H8). These analyses can be found in Table 5. There were no gender differences in mentioning these themes.

It is interesting to note that ANOVA indicated that sexual minority participants ($M = 118.97$, $SD = 157.62$) wrote more words in their responses to this question than heterosexual-identified ($M = 35.57$, $SD = 34.26$) participants did ($F(1, 352) = 36.12$, $p < .001$). There were no significant differences in the number of words written among sexual-minority-identified groups ($F(1, 352) = 1.01$, $p > .05$). This finding may serve as further support for the idea that given the compulsory heterosexuality in our society, individuals with heterosexual identities may adopt them as “default” sexual identities without engaging in a very effortful process of sexual identity questioning and commitment.

DISCUSSION

While Grotevant (1992) and Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990) suggested that having a minority identity could lead to “culture clashes” with the dominant culture and psychological difficulties that might impair identity development, our data do not support

Table 4
Multiple Regression Analysis With EOM-EIS Subscale Scores as Criterion

<i>Political Diffusion</i>			
Variable	B	SEB	β
Age	-.12	.03	-.23***
Same-Sex Physical/Sexual Preference	-.20	.13	-.15
Other-Sex Physical/Sexual Preference	.07	.14	.05
Same-Sex Emotional/Affective Preference	-.11	.11	-.07
Other-Sex Emotional/Affective Preference	.20	.13	.10

Note: $R^2 = .16$ ($N = 343$, $p < .001$).
*** $p < .001$.

<i>Political Foreclosure</i>			
Variable	B	SEB	β
Age	-.10	.02	-.25***
Same-Sex Physical/Sexual Preference	-.19	.10	-.19*
Other-Sex Physical/Sexual Preference	.03	.11	.02
Same-Sex Emotional/Affective Preference	-.11	.08	-.09
Other-Sex Emotional/Affective Preference	.05	.10	.03

Note: $R^2 = .16$ ($N = 342$, $p < .001$).
*** $p < .001$. * $p < .05$.

<i>Political Moratorium</i>			
Variable	B	SEB	β
Age	-.07	.02	-.16**
Same-Sex Physical/Sexual Preference	-.24	.11	-.22*
Other-Sex Physical/Sexual Preference	.04	.12	.03
Same-Sex Emotional/Affective Preference	.05	.09	.04
Other-Sex Emotional/Affective Preference	.04	.11	.03

Note: $R^2 = .09$ ($N = 342$, $p < .001$).
** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$.

(Continued)

Table 4 (Cont.)

<i>Political Achievement</i>			
Variable	B	SEB	β
Age	.04	.02	.12*
Same-Sex Physical/Sexual Preference	.22	.08	.28**
Other-Sex Physical/Sexual Preference	.08	.09	.10
Same-Sex Emotional/Affective Preference	.01	.07	.01
Other-Sex Emotional/Affective Preference	-.08	.08	-.07

Note: $R^2 = .08$ ($N = 339$, $p < .001$).
 ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$.

<i>Religious Foreclosure</i>			
Variable	B	SEB	β
Age	-.10	.02	-.21***
Same-Sex Physical/Sexual Preference	-.35	.10	-.30**
Other-Sex Physical/Sexual Preference	.18	.12	.13
Same-Sex Emotional/Affective Preference	-.19	.09	-.13*
Other-Sex Emotional/Affective Preference	-.01	.11	-.01

Note: $R^2 = .31$ ($N = 342$, $p < .001$).
 *** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$.

<i>Occupational Foreclosure</i>			
Variable	B	SEB	β
Age	-.06	.02	-.15**
Same-Sex Physical/Sexual Preference	-.10	.09	-.11
Other-Sex Physical/Sexual Preference	.03	.10	.03
Same-Sex Emotional/Affective Preference	-.08	.08	-.08
Other-Sex Emotional/Affective Preference	.01	.09	.01

Note: $R^2 = .07$ ($N = 342$, $p < .001$).
 ** $p < .01$.

(Continued)

Table 4 (Cont.)

<i>Occupational Moratorium</i>			
Variable	B	SEB	β
Age	-.08	.03	-.17**
Same-Sex Physical/Sexual Preference	-.22	.12	-.19
Other-Sex Physical/Sexual Preference	-.21	.13	-.16
Same-Sex Emotional/Affective Preference	-.09	.10	-.06
Other-Sex Emotional/Affective Preference	-.09	.12	-.05

Note: $R^2 = .05$ ($N = 345$, $p < .01$).
** $p < .01$.

<i>Occupational Achievement</i>			
Variable	B	SEB	β
Age	.10	.03	.21***
Same-Sex Physical/Sexual Preference	.03	.12	.02
Other-Sex Physical/Sexual Preference	-.01	.14	-.01
Same-Sex Emotional/Affective Preference	.01	.10	.01
Other-Sex Emotional/Affective Preference	.13	.13	.07

Note: $R^2 = .05$ ($N = 342$, $p < .01$).
*** $p < .001$.

these ideas. In this study, heterosexual-identified participants overall were less likely than sexual-minority-identified participants to have attained higher stages of global identity development. This finding is consistent with the notion that identity work in one domain, such as sexuality, facilitates identity development in other domains of identity (Grotevant, 1992) and with the notion that identity-relevant stressors may stimulate identity development (Grossman, Shea, & Adams, 1980). However, the causal direction of the relationship between sexual identity development and global identity development cannot be determined in this cross-sectional study, and further longitudinal analyses are needed to examine the temporal sequence of this relationship.

As Ellis (2000) suggested, this research challenges the idea often expressed by both the scientific community and popular culture that people who do not identify as heterosexual are psychologically deficient. A new view of sexual minority identity formation as a source

Table 5
 Presence of Themes (%) in Free Response Sexual Identity Question by Sexual Identity

Theme	Heterosexual-Identified (n = 157)	Sexual-Minority-Identified (n = 146)	$\chi^2(1)$
Process	5	51	50.61***
Identity	18	52	24.84***
Support	4	17	9.70**

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

of psychological growth stands in sharp contrast to previous conceptions of homosexuality in psychology and psychiatry, since homosexuality was classified as a mental disorder in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* until 1973 (Herman, 1995). Despite the removal of homosexuality from the DSM and a recent public statement by the American Psychological Association explicating the psychological harm often inflicted by reparative therapy designed to "cure" individuals of their homosexuality, this therapy is still practiced with many sexual-minority-identified people.

Participants with a heterosexual identity were more likely to be identity foreclosed. In light of the fact that most people are assumed to be heterosexual at birth (Rich, 1993), it is not surprising that heterosexual-identified individuals may maintain their default heterosexual identity without ever questioning it. It is interesting, though, that they may also be more likely simply to adopt the ideal identities that their immediate social network has prescribed for them in other aspects of their lives.

In this study, we are able to compare the analyses based on categorical measures of sexual identity with those based on continuous sexual preference scales. It appears that both having a sexual minority identity and expressing same-sex sexual preferences are related to greater identity achievement and lower levels of identity foreclosure and moratorium. Perhaps recognizing or acknowledging any level of same-sex sexual preference (regardless of whether one identifies as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or some other nonheterosexual identity), at least in the context of "compulsory heterosexuality," is sufficient to stimulate overall identity development. This idea is supported both by the similar results with the two measures and by the

fact that the only significant pairwise comparisons for identity status by sexual identity throughout this study were between heterosexual-identified and sexual-minority-identified participants. There were no significant differences among lesbian-, gay-, bisexual-, and “other”-identified participants.

Conversely, perhaps one’s level of same-sex sexual preference (not simply acknowledging the presence of any same-sex sexual preference) is actually a key predictor of identity status. In this case, subgroups of sexual minorities may be crucially different from one another, with heterosexual-identified individuals having the lowest amount of same-sex sexual preferences, followed by bisexual- and “other”-identified individuals with modest levels of same-sex sexual preferences, then gay- and lesbian-identified individuals with the greatest level of same-sex sexual preferences. This study was hampered in testing these kinds of predictions by small numbers in some sexual-minority groups.

The distinctive importance of same-sex sexual preference has been called into question by several studies demonstrating variance in sexual and emotional preferences within sexual identity categories (Golden, 1987; Hoburg et al., in press; Rust, 2000). For example, in surveying the participants in this current study, Hoburg and colleagues (in press) found that 27% of the heterosexual-identified participants expressed some degree of same-sex sexual attraction (reporting two or higher on the same-sex, physical/sexual preference scale). Before we can answer the question of whether the presence or absence of same-sex sexual preferences or the amount of same-sex sexual preferences more accurately predicts identity status, further research is needed to understand fully the nuances in individuals’ sexual preferences and how they correspond with various sexual identity labels. This study highlights one finding in which continuous sexual preference measures and categorical sexual identity labels produce similar results. We need more research that clarifies when this is and is not the case.

These findings are consistent with other empirical studies that do not find substantial gender differences in identity status. In all of the EOM-EIS comparisons, the only significant gender differences were that men had higher levels of both global and occupational diffusion. Considering the conflicting theoretical and empirical arguments about gender differences in identity status in previous research, it is not surprising that EOM-EIS scores were fairly similar for the

male and female participants in this study. Similarly, no gender differences were found in the themes raised by participants in the free-response question.

Additionally, interactions only were found between gender and sexual identity on global diffusion, global foreclosure, and political diffusion. The results for global foreclosure and political diffusion followed a similar pattern, with heterosexual-identified women scoring the highest, followed by heterosexual-identified men, sexual-minority-identified men, and sexual-minority-identified women. Perhaps sexual-minority-identified women are less likely to avoid identity issues, because their social identities as both sexual and gender minorities may be the cause of “double discrimination” and consequently more salient. Consistent with Grotevant’s (1992) idea that identity work in one domain may facilitate identity development in other domains, perhaps these participants found that their gender and sexual identities developed simultaneously while strengthening each other.

Returning to Rich’s (1993) idea of compulsory heterosexuality, women may adopt a sexual-minority identity for political reasons (i.e., “political lesbianism”), as a challenge to the patriarchal mandate for women to engage in heterosexual marriages. Rich wrote that she wished “to encourage heterosexual feminists to examine heterosexuality as a political institution which disempowers women” (p. 203). The sexual minority women in this study may have been less likely to be politically diffuse since they may explicitly link their sexuality with their politics.

The interaction results for global diffusion are more difficult to interpret because the pattern of scores was different from that revealed by other analyses (where sexual-minority-identified participants reported greater identity exploration and commitment). Sexual-minority-identified men scored the highest on diffusion, followed by heterosexual-identified women, heterosexual-identified men, and sexual-minority-identified women. Further investigations are necessary to determine if this interaction, as well as the main effect for gender on diffusion, has theoretical significance or is merely a spurious finding.

Data from the free-response question support the impression that sexual identity development is a more effortful and salient process for members of sexual minority groups. Considering the psychological stressors that many sexual-minority-identified individuals must

endure, these data also demonstrate that having support or modeling for their sexual identity is felt to facilitate the process of adopting a socially marginalized sexual identity. Perhaps having ample support for a nonmainstream sexual identity acts as a protective buffer against the “culture clash” and psychological difficulties that Grotevant (1992) and Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990) suggested may result from adopting a minority identity. This finding that support is valuable in developing a sexual minority identity is consistent with Grotevant’s (1992) theory that in order to reach identity achievement, individuals need an environment that provides both support and freedom to explore identity options.

While this study does provide initial support for our hypotheses, the generalizability of our results is limited by the constraints of our sample.⁵ Most notably, sexual identity and political activism may be confounded, as sexual-minority-identified participants were primarily recruited from student groups and conferences while heterosexual-identified participants were mainly recruited via classes. Consequently, the differences between sexual-minority-identified and heterosexual-identified participants on identity status (especially political and religious identity) in this sample may be larger than they are in the general population. Therefore, these results should be replicated in a sample less vulnerable to this possibility. Considering the homophobia in our society, it may be difficult to recruit sexual-minority-identified participants who are less open and activist about their sexual identity. A more viable solution to this sampling issue may be to recruit heterosexual-identified participants from other politically minded student organizations on campus (e.g., environmental groups, feminist groups, political party student groups, etc.).

This research should also be replicated with a more ethnically diverse sample, since the vast majority of participants in this study were Euro-American. Returning to Grotevant’s (1992) idea that identity development in one domain can facilitate development in other domains, it would be interesting to examine the intersections of ethnic identity, gender identity, sexual identity, and identity development in other domains. Since all of the participants in this study were college students, it is unclear whether these results generalize to more economically challenged individuals without the financial re-

5. Thanks to our reviewers and editor for their insights and suggestions regarding this issue.

sources to pursue higher education. Finally, these findings cannot be generalized to people in other stages of the lifespan. Assessing these results in other groups would allow for greater generalization and validity of these preliminary findings.

Combining both the quantitative and qualitative components of this study, we conclude that although developing a sexual minority identity often involves enduring a painful process of accepting one's identity in a society where this identity is frequently viewed as deviant, individuals often emerge with a more developed global identity. This process can be likened to the adage, "Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger." In the words of one participant,

"At age 12 I realized that the word gay applied to me, and I became very depressed. [Now] I work as a lobbyist...[and am] a radical queer activist...It's truly empowering!"

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