Sexual and Ethnic Identity Development among Gay/Bisexual/ Questioning (GBQ) Male Ethnic Minority Adolescents

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Abstract

Identity development is a critical task of adolescence and occurs across multiple areas of self identification. Though research on the identity development process among individuals who are ethnic and sexual minorities has been conducted for individuals who have one minority status or the other, few studies have examined these processes in persons who are both ethnic and sexual minorities. This qualitative study examined the dual identity development processes related to ethnic and sexual identity among gay/bisexual/questioning (GBQ) Latino and African American male adolescents. Results indicated that the processes associated with the development of sexual orientation and ethnic identity occur concurrently. However, the actual processes involved with the development of each identity not only differed, but seemed to be independent of each other since neither process was referenced in the development of the other. Overall, the process of ethnic identity development involved the process of becoming aware of one's ethnic and cultural heritage, while sexual identity development involved finding one's own personally relevant sexual orientation label and connecting to that community. The implications of these findings for the development of interventions to assist in the healthy development of GBQ adolescents are discussed.

Introduction

Identity development during adolescence

Adolescence has been characterized as a time when the bulk of one's identity is developed (Adams, Gullotta, & Montemayor, 1992; Erikson, 1980; Marcia 1966). During adolescence, a person is faced with the important challenge of developing a sense of identity in her/his occupation, sex roles, politics, and religion (Erikson, 1980). Development of one's identity requires creating a self-image from one's experiences that is meaningful within the community in which one lives. Much of the adolescent's future, therefore, is carved with her/his experiences and development during adolescence. Consequently, research indicates that youth who fail to develop a healthy adult identity are more likely to use illicit drugs at higher rates (Jones & Hartman, 1988), are more susceptible and influenced by negative peer pressure (Adams, Ryan, Hoffman, Dobson, & Nielson, 1985), are less likely to be self-accepting (Rasmussen, 1964), and have lower self esteem (Marcia, 1966).

This concept of identity development is multifaceted and complex. Although much identity research has focused singularly on one's adult identity, this overall sense of self includes the development of several distinct and unique identities. Therefore, adolescents who belong to various identity groups, such as those who are ethnic *and* sexual minorities, must develop both their ethnic and sexual identities as they develop their overall adult identity (Chung & Katayama, 1998). In addition, because it has been posited that the process of identity development differs by gender (Gilligan, Ward, Taylor, & Bardige, 1988; Lyons, 1983), the lens of gender may color experiences of sexual and ethnic identity development accordingly. Therefore, the current study is focused on examining two specific identity development

processes—ethnic identity and sexual identity—among a group of gay/bisexual/questioning (GBQ) male youth of color utilizing in-depth qualitative interviews.

Previous literature has suggested that due to heterosexism in ethnic minority communities, the sexual identity development of sexual minority youth of color may be delayed or hindered (Díaz, 1998; Savin-Williams, 1996; Stokes & Peterson 1998). However, when Dube and Savin-Williams (1999) examined the timing of sexual identity development milestones for lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) youth (such as "age of awareness of same-sex attractions," "disclosure of sexual identity to others," and "first same-sex sexual encounter"), they found that regardless of ethnicity, all participants met their sexual identity development milestones at developmentally appropriate ages, with differences noted in the ages of their first sexual experiences and identification as LGB.

Rosario, Scrimshaw, and Hunter (2004) found similar results, reporting no differences in the timing of identity development milestones, sexual orientation, sexual behavior, or sexual identity among LGB youth regardless of ethnicity. However, they found differences in other factors related to identity development, in that when compared to White youth, African American youth participated in fewer social activities within the gay community. Additionally, both African American and Latino/a youth disclosed their sexual orientation to fewer people compared to White youth. Parks, Hughes, and Matthews' (2004) research with adult lesbians revealed similar ethnic differences, with Latina and African American women reporting that they delayed their sexual identity development milestones and disclosed their sexual orientation to fewer individuals than White participants.

Though previous empirical research has examined the timing of LGB youth of color's sexual identity development milestones, there is limited research on the specific processes by which youth develop this identity. Additionally, research has not examined the timing of ethnic identity development milestones for LGB youth of color. In theoretical writings, LGB ethnic minority adolescents are hypothesized to experience a delayed timing of labeling their ethnic and sexual identity (Manalansan, 1996) and disclosure of their identity to others (Savin-Williams, 1996). These delays may be due to factors such as lack of support resources, perceptions of rejection, and internalized homophobia (Manalansan, 1996; Savin-Williams, 1996).

No published empirical research has examined the specific processes of both ethnic and sexual identity development among gay youth of color. The current study utilized in-depth qualitative interviews to explore these two separate identity development processes among a group of adolescents who have received little empirical attention—ethnic minority GBQ youth. For the purposes of this paper, ethnic identity development is defined as the process through which an adolescent develops his/her sense of being a member of a specific ethnic group, and learning about culturally-specific values, symbols, practices, and history (Jones, 1997). Sexual identity development is similarly defined as the process through which an adolescent develops his/her sense of sexual orientation and becoming a member of a specific sexual orientation group, and learning about culturally-specific values, symbols, practices, and history (Harper, 2007).

Theories of ethnic identity development

Ethnic identity development has been conceptualized using both stage and fluid theories. Many of the stage theories identify an initial ignorance regarding the existence and impact of racism and of an individual's own ethnicity, a state that is challenged when the individual personally experiences oppression or racism (Atkinson, Morten & Sue, 1979; Kim, 1981; Helms, 1990). Many stage theories also stress the importance of a search for one's ethnic identity, which occurs after one is first made aware of her/his identity, and involves a (physical or emotional) withdrawal from the larger White community and cultural immersion into learning more about

one's ethnic community (Atkinson et al., 1979; Phinney, 1989; Helms, 1990; Smith 1991). These theories also propose a later integration phase where the individual incorporates her/his ethnic identity into her/his holistic self image, and values both members of their ethnic community, as well as members of the larger White community (Atkinson et al., 1979; Kim, 1981; Phinney, 1989; Helms, 1990).

Though the majority of the theoretical models for ethnic identity development are stage models, several models are fluid or non-linear models. Smith (1991) model of ethnic identity development is less defined by categories and stages, and instead focuses more on the fluidity of ethnic identity, specifically through the relationships one has with the majority and minority group members. Other fluid theories are similar to stage theories of identity development but depart from stage models in that they suggest that progression from stages (Atkinson et al., 1979) or statuses (Helms, 1990) is variable and may move in any direction from one stage to another. Parham (1989) also suggests that development is an ongoing process, suggesting that individuals may normally re-cycle through stages without implicating regression of identity development.

In addition to the variations in identity development represented through the different types identity development models, the processes may also differ based on the gender of the individual. It has been proposed that women may be more likely than men to engage in the search and immersion process of developing their identities, which may promote higher levels of identity achievement than in males (Phinney, 1990; Rotheram-Borus, Lightfoot, Moraes, Dopkins, & LaCour, 1998).

Theories of Sexual identity development

Research and theoretical literature regarding the development of a sexual identity has primarily been conceptualized as a process of progression through stages. Common to the most predominant theories is an initial stage where an individual experiences same-sex sexual attractions, with subsequent feelings of confusion since these attractions are different than those of her/his heterosexual peers (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Troiden, 1989). Following this stage, both Cass (1979) and Troiden (1989) identify a period where an individual becomes aware of the heterosexism present in larger society and withdraws from the heterosexual community. Exploration of the gay and lesbian community then follows, which involves personal contacts with publicly identified (or "out") gay or lesbian individuals (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989), as well as dating and romantic/sexual relationships with openly identified gay or lesbian individuals (Coleman, 1982). Once the individual has had positive contact with members of the gay and lesbian community and is able to accept and integrate one's sexual orientation as an element of her/his total identity, the individual has reached the final stage in sexual identity development (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Troiden, 1989).

Similar to ethnic and gender identity development, research has also suggested that the process of sexual identity development may also differ by gender. For example, Diamond (2005) found that women with same-sex attractions differed in the types of attractions they had toward other women, and that these attractions were not always consistent after an 8-year follow-up. Diamond and Savin-Williams (2000) also found that young women with same-gender attractions were more similar to heterosexual women than to young men with same-gender attractions with regard to desires for romantic relationships, use of sexual behavior, and relations with parents. Consequently, sexual identity development of lesbians and bisexual women has been proposed to differ from that of gay and bisexual men (Diamond, 2003; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995; Schneider, 2001).

Applicability of identity development theories for sexual minority youth of color

Though comprehensive, theories on the identity development process for sexual and ethnic minorities does not account for the challenges faced by individuals who are "multiple minorities," or individuals who are both sexual and ethnic minorities. For example, many ethnic identity development models state that part of the development of one's ethnic identity involves an immersion into their respective ethnic community (Phinney, 1989; Cross, 1978; Helms, 1990; Atkinson et al., 1979). However, for individuals who are sexual minorities, total withdrawal from the larger White community and subsequent immersion into their ethnic community may be difficult due to heterosexism and homophobia within their ethnic community (Tremble, Schneider & Appathurai, 1989; Chung & Katayama, 1998; Parks, 2001). Additionally, with regard to sexual identity, ethnic minority individuals may face ethnically-based oppression by other White sexual minority individuals which may prevent acceptance and integration into the gay and lesbian community (Díaz, 1998; Harper, Jernewall, & Zea, 2004; Martinez & Sullivan, 1998).

Identity development theories for either ethnic or sexual identity development may not be wholly applicable to the unique experiences of GBQ male youth of color. Although informative, studies examining the timing of sexual identity development milestones among GBQ male youth of color have not captured the specific *processes* involved in either sexual or ethnic identity development. The current qualitative inquiry sought to explore the two separate processes of ethnic identity and sexual identity among African American and Latino GBQ male youth via in-depth qualitative interviews. Barriers and facilitators to these identity development processes were also explored. Due to previous research highlighting the gender differences in ethnic and sexual identity development, the current inquiry only examines GBQ male youth.

Methods

Participants

Participants in this study are a subset of youth who participated in a larger mixed-methods investigation. Male youth between the ages of 16–22 who self identified as gay, bisexual, or questioning were recruited from seven different lesbian/gay/bisexual/questioning (LGBQ) community agencies located in a large metropolitan community. From the initial 97 participants who completed quantitative surveys, 39 were selected to participate in qualitative interviews based on various identity-related characteristics in order to create a stratified purposive sample representing different backgrounds and life experiences.

Since the analyses presented here focus on issues of ethnic and sexual identity development for GBQ youth of color, only the 22 interviews conducted with youth who reported an ethnic identity as either African American or Latino were included. The current sample of twelve Latino participants reflects nine individuals who are Mexican/Mexican American, two who are Puerto Rican, and one who identified as both Puerto Rican and Mexican. Among the Latino participants, seven identified as gay, four identified as bisexual, and one identified as questioning. All ten African American participants identified as having African American ethnic identities. Six of the African American participants identified as gay, three identified as bisexual, and one identified as questioning. Ages of participants ranged from 16 to 22 years (Mean= 18.8 years, SD = 1.9). All 22 participants were actively enrolled in schooling relevant to their age group (high school or college). Two of the 10 African American (20%) and 4 of the 12 Latino participants (30%) reported receiving at least one form of government support in their lifetime, including health care through a medical card, food stamps, or public aid checks.

Procedure

Potential participants were privately screened for eligibility and informed consent/assent was obtained. Participants then completed a survey which assessed their ethnic identity, sexual identity, and other behavioral and demographic factors. Based on their responses, participants were then selected to create a stratified purposive sample to participate in qualitative interviews.

Qualitative interviews took between approximately two hours to complete, and participants were given $35 for their participation. Interviewers received extensive training in qualitative interviewing techniques. All interviewers identified as gay or lesbian, and consisted of four men (one White, two Latino, and one Pakistani-American) and one woman (Biracial). Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcribed interviews were entered into NVivo software (QSR NUD*IST Vivo software; Qualitative Solutions & Research) to assist with analysis. Once codes were assigned to appropriate portions of the transcripts, the NVivo software assisted with classifying, sorting, and retrieving coded text in order to facilitate the analysis process.

Interview Guide

A semi-structured qualitative interview guide was created specifically for this study during a three month development process by a team of researchers who had extensive experience working with GBQ youth. The interview guide was grounded in phenomenological and constructivist frameworks, which provided a general structure for discussion but required participants to provide their own definitions based on their life experiences and perceptions. Thus for each identity, participants were first asked to define their identity using their own words and conceptualizations, and then were guided through an in-depth exploration of factors that have influenced each specific identity development. Several areas within the interview protocol covered important areas of identity development which were established in previous literature, including personal meaning, awareness of identity, connection to community, and presence of facilitators/supports. Within in these areas youth provided accounts of their own experiences, but were also encouraged to discuss additional information that was not covered in the interview guide but that seemed personally relevant in their identity development. By using their own lived experiences and definitions rather than imposing definitions upon participants based on prior research, the interview guide was grounded in the inductive nature of phenomenological inquiry. This course of inquiry assessed important connections and developments over time; however, this did not provide a developmental narrative trajectory of identity development from conception to current identity.

Data for the current analysis were primarily extracted from two sections of the interview, namely ethnic identity development and sexual identity development, but the complete texts of the interviews were analyzed and relevant data were revealed in other sections of the interviews as well. Sample questions from the interview guide are provided in Table 1. Questions regarding each identity development were identical in format across ethnic and sexual identity development.

Analysis

Analyses were conducted with a psychological phenomenological focus. This entails concentrating on participants' life experiences in order to ascertain the meaning of a phenomenon; which in this study is sexual and ethnic identity development among GBQ ethnic minority youth. By understanding each individual's experiences and how they converge with similar participants, the researcher can determine the larger framework to describe the structure (or "essence") of the phenomenon (Schutz, 1970).

Prior to data analysis, the research team examined the research on ethnic and sexual identity development, and identified key shared factors across both identity development processes to serve as initial codes. These *a priori* codes, such as "identity awareness," "identity connection," and "identity comfort" served as the general framework to which further codes were added during the iterative analysis process. After the entire transcripts were initially read, additional codes were created and/or clarified based in a phenomenological framework. For example, participants made clarifications between different types of media that influenced sexual identity development, such as magazines, movies, books, and the internet. These distinctions were then accommodated into the coding system as various sub-codes under a larger "Media" code. Throughout this process, the transcripts were read in their entirety multiple times to capture all relevant information related to the multiple identity development processes. After creating the comprehensive list of initial codes and sub-codes, pattern codes were then created to connect subsequent concepts under larger headings. Examples of pattern codes were "Barriers to Identity Development," "Facilitators to Identity Development," and "Oppression." Since the primary focus was to explore the separate identity development processes of ethnic and sexual identity among GBQ male youth of color as a collective group, comparative analyses between the African American and Latino participants were not conducted.

In order to assure the quality and credibility of the emergent themes from the qualitative interviews, several validation checks were enacted. The first validation check involved "member-checking" interviews (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) with three GBQ male youth. These occurred after approximately half the qualitative interviews had been conducted and involved youth responding to initial interview themes and identifying additional areas for inquiry. The second check was "peer debriefing" interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) with three adult "experts" that occurred at the same time as the initial "member checking" youth interviews. These "experts" had extensive experience working with GBQ ethnic minority youth, and were asked to independently verify the emergent themes from the qualitative analyses. The third validation check consisted of two focus groups, where interview participants returned after all interviews were completed to verify patterns and themes revealed in analyses.

Results

In examining the key developmental concepts that arose from the participants' descriptions of their sexual and ethnic identity development processes, four overarching themes emerged across both processes: (a) timing and contexts of identity awareness, (b) process of identity development, (c) different experiences of oppression, and (d) connection to the community. For the following section, themes will be discussed independently, and differences and similarities between sexual and ethnic identity will be detailed according to each theme. Within the discussion of each theme, quotes from interview text are provided, with responses from interviewers in italics and those from participants in regular font. To ensure participant's confidentiality, pseudonyms were used and identifying names of companies or agencies were removed.

Timing and Contexts of Identity Awareness

Youth stated that they were made aware of their sexual and ethnic identities during the period between elementary school to high school. Awareness in these contexts involved an awareness that they were different from their peers, which involved being ethnically different or having a non-heterosexual sexual orientation. Youth did not indicate specifically whether awareness of these identities occurred simultaneously; however, given that their development typically spanned several years, it can be safely assumed that the ethnic and sexual identity development processes that followed initial awareness overlapped for many youth. Though the timing of

sexual and ethnic identity development occurred during similar time periods, the contexts within which this awareness occurred differed greatly for the participants.

Ethnic Identity—For ethnic identity, participants noted that they were aware of their ethnicity through experiences of racism, positive ethnic experiences, and an experience of being ethnically dissimilar from others. Participants identified negative racist interactions with individuals and groups as defining moments in awareness of their ethnic identity. Some reported being aware of their ethnic identity after hearing racial slurs while in a predominantly White neighborhood. Others were accused by other ethnic minority group members of being too assimilated into the dominant U.S. (White) society. Though verbal forms of racism were most salient and visible to the participants, they also indicated that non-verbal negative experiences also initiated a sense of ethnic identity awareness, such as being glared at and experiencing differential or poor treatment due to their ethnicity. The following text illustrates the institutional barriers placed on ethnic minority youth in an academic setting:

> Hum. The first time was probably when we got here from Puerto Rico. And I got held back from I think it was like first grade or second grade or something because I didn't know English. So they said oh he's Puerto Rican, put him in the English as a second language classes. When I learned English and I was going off the charts in English, they kept me in those classes. … It said to me that my language was inferior to this language. And for that I had to be punished. (Donován, Latino, 22 y/o)

In addition to negative interactions, positive experiences with other individuals and groups prompted awareness of participants' ethnic identity. Most youth described this interaction as consisting of a family member telling them of their ethnic identity, which also entailed the family member providing a brief description of their identity (e.g., descriptions of history and heritage). Others were made aware of their ethnic identity through interactions with friends who were members of their ethnic group, as well as through positive interactions with ethnically dissimilar peers. Finally, many participants stated that experiences in which they were the minority or felt "other-ness" prompted a sense of ethnic awareness. This typically occurred in school settings, where participants were placed in classrooms where they were the only member of their ethnic group.

Sexual Identity—With regard to sexual identity, participants experienced awareness primarily through having sexual/romantic fantasies of other men, through sexual experiences with other young men, and through an analysis of relationships and attractions. First, participants indicated awareness of their sexual identity, or of their attraction to members of the same sex, through romantic or sexual fantasies of other men. Some participants refer to these attractions in the form of "crushes" on other men whom they found attractive, stating that they had strong emotional attachments to these other men. Other participants indicated that other males evoked a physiological response, either in the form of an erection, or in a generalized state of arousal. Several other youth had sexual fantasies of other men while masturbating.

> But then sophomore year kicked in and I don't know, it was like something was totally different, because I started like checking out the like guys a lot and it was like I started getting like, like thinking of sex. But when I thought of sex it was like with a GUY. Or when I see someone that was hot, I would be like, I wasn't trying to like totally stare at them or anything, but it's like the vision of them would just keep repeating itself in my head or whatever. (Bernard, African American, 22 y/o)

Some youth indicated an awareness of their same-sex sexual attractions through sexual experiences with other young males; and of these youth, many mentioned an absence of attraction to males prior to the sexual activity. However, these sexual activities were initiated

with their sexual partner without disclosing to one another their sexual orientation or attractions. For these youth, it appeared that there was a shared understanding of a common sexual attraction to one-another.

> We went to Boston for eighth grade. We were on the bus, I sat next to this guy name J. He was, we were really cool friends. …when we got to the hotel and we were all sleeping, … Like he just turned my head and like all of a sudden we started kissing. I'm like, like if a gay guy went up to a straight guy and started kissing him. Ugh. He's gonna get it beat down. But like I really didn't do anything. I just went along with it, so that's when I first started, that's when I first had my first kiss. (Antonio, Latino, 16 y/o)

Finally, several of the youth reported being engaged in same-sex sexual relationships, but not identifying their relationships or themselves as gay or bisexual until a period of time elapsed, which ranged from several months to several years. Participants reported an instance where within the relationship, they discussed with their romantic partner that a possible label for their relationship may be a "gay" relationship, and that they were in fact each other's "boyfriends." Most participants mentioned that this discovery of the label led to a mutual agreement to adopt such labels for the relationship.

Process of Identity Development

After discovering an initial awareness of their identities during similar time periods, the youth then developed their sexual and ethnic identities in ways that followed divergent paths. Overall, youth developed their ethnic identities utilizing resources within their immediate community, while youth developed their sexual identity through actively searching and connecting with a "gay community."

Ethnic Identity—In order to explore their ethnic identity youth utilized an array of resources within their own immediate surroundings, which included forms of cultural expression, family members, and peers. A majority lived in neighborhoods with ethnically similar peers, and therefore their immediate social networks were primarily with individuals of their ethnic group, and could therefore be utilized as resources for ethnic identity development.

Many youth identified elements within their culture as facilitative in the development of their ethnic identity. Most participants stated that staples of their culture, such as food and music, were perceived as positive elements of their culture.

> In all honesty, all Mexican food is great. I do like Mexican, some Mexican foods, but I'm, when it comes to spicy foods I don't do spicy foods. Which eliminates about 98 percent of Mexican foods… I love Spanish dancing. It's something that all started with my freshman year of high school, which goes back a long way, but one of the positive things, I'll explain about that later, more of the positive things, um, just being able to dance Spanish dances. (Alfonso, Latino, 19 y/o)

Participants indicated a strong sense of pride with these cultural elements, especially related to ethnic-specific food. One participant stated that the "style" of the culture was unique, while another stated that the culture had "fun customs and exciting ways of doing things." Participants therefore viewed how these cultural elements were expressed in festivals, holidays, customs, and in everyday living with high favor and pride.

Youth also identified members of their immediate and extended family as facilitators in their comfort with ethnic identity. Family members were seen as transmitters of culture to the participant by teaching language skills, cultural elements (e.g., food, dance), and generalized concepts of how to be a member of their ethnic group (e.g., "how to be Mexican"). Additionally,

participants stated that their family reminded them to be constantly aware of their ethnic identity (e.g., "never forget you're a Puerto Rican"), and imbued them with a sense of pride in their ethnic identity and culture. Participants also identified peers as facilitative in the development of their ethnic identity. Peers served as transmitters of cultural elements and traditions, but also emboldened the participants with a sense of pride and appreciation for their ethnic identity.

Sexual Identity—On the other hand, participants utilized community-based organizations (CBOs), peers, and the internet as their primary sources of information for development of their sexual identity. First, CBOs that catered to the needs of LGB youth were identified as being supportive in participants' sense of comfort with their sexual identity. Many youth indicated that these organizations helped them identify their sexual orientation, and understand many issues concerning individuals who publicly identify as GBQ. These included managing heterosexism, connecting and thriving within the gay community, among others. Participants also stated that the youth and staff members present in the organizations were able to normalize being GBQ, by facilitating and engaging in discussions of sex and sexuality. Staff members were also identified as being positive role models, who often talked about their personal lives and gave participants insights into how their lives can be "normal" as a sexual minority.

> Uh, one of the counselors, like he has a boyfriend and they live together and everything like there. And I asked them like um, how they worked it, like how did you guys meet and it's like, okay, we're gonna be steady and start living together and try to be a couple in the real world…And I said like wasn't it hard, like searching for an apartment together and stuff? And they talked to the landlord or the superintendent and they had to see, like both names in the contract, like explain it? And they said, no, people just don't care nowadays. They just say, if they're paying the bills, so it's all that matters. And I figure it was so easy for them, and eventually if I want to stay with a guy, which I might, then I just asked them if there are, anything they could teach me or show me that they've overcome. (Trevor, African American, 18 y/o)

Participants also indicated that peers provided support in their sense of comfort with their sexual identity. Many participants indicated finding supports in heterosexually-identified peers, both males and females. Most of these peers were individuals from their schools who were also members of their ethnic group. Participants also identified LGB friends as being facilitative in their sense of comfort with their sexual identity. Through their shared experience of marginalization due to their sexuality, male youth were able to connect with other sexual minority youth, regardless of gender. Many of these friends introduced the participant to LGB-specific neighborhoods, activities/events, and CBOs. Additionally, these LGB friends provided participants with social support, either in explicitly giving advice to the participant, or in being positive role models.

Though these youth of color navigated venues and peer networks which varied in their ethnic composition, youth considered these diverse multiple geographical areas as part of their personal "gay community." For example, youth indicated that some elements of their "gay community" represented primarily members of one ethnic group, while others reported socializing in predominantly White venues. However, none segmented their communities as comprising a "White gay community" or a "Black gay community," rather all areas that they were involved in, regardless of ethnic composition, represented their "gay" community.

Finally, several participants described using internet message boards and chat rooms which were specifically oriented to African American or Latino GBQ men as a means to connect and find support with other individuals. This was seen as a way to anonymously explore their sexual identity, but also to find mentorship and support with ethnically similar GBQ men. The following quote illustrates how use of the internet allowed one youth to learn about being gay before officially "coming out":

Helpful and supportive? Um, well, at 14, when I came out, um, I would say Internet discussion boards, like forums and chat rooms, just hearing other people's experiences and stuff like that. And reading what they had to say um, really helped me. Um, to I don't know, come into acceptance.

Okay. Okay. That's very interesting. How did they help you?

Just like seeing their stories and like giving me advice and stuff. What to do and safety tips and stuff like that. (Malcolm, African American, 19 y/o).

Different Experiences of Oppression

In addition to developing their ethnic and sexual identities along different developmental trajectories, the types of oppression faced in the development of these identities differed. For ethnic identity, they primarily faced racism from the larger White community, while for sexual identity they faced heterosexism from both the larger White heterosexual community and their ethnic community.

Ethnic Identity—With regard to their ethnic identity, youth identified experiencing continual indirect and direct experiences of racism after first becoming aware of their identity, which were manifested in the forms of discrimination and hate crimes. Several participants described not being able to find jobs because of their ethnicity. For those who did find jobs, one reported being fired for a minor offense because of his ethnicity:

Like I would get a job, and the job just wouldn't work out. One job, like I was working for [Company Name], I got fired from there, I don't know why I was being fired, but to me there was a lot of discrimination, and I understood it. It's all White store. I was the only Black man in there. (Ashani, African American, 21 y/o)

One participant stated that this widespread lack of availability of jobs often leads young GBQ African American men to prostitution or hustling.

Other participants described experiencing more ambiguous or covert forms of discrimination. For example, one youth stated that he was often mistreated while shopping in affluent neighborhoods. Another participant stated that while his family was living in an all-White neighborhood, none of his neighbors talked to his family and refused to socialize with them in neighborhood events.

Some participants recalled experiencing hate crimes or overt forms of racism as a challenge in developing their ethnic identity. Several youth were assaulted by hate speech and intolerant comments. Additionally, several participants reported being attacked by groups of White individuals, often while venturing into neighborhoods which were predominantly White. The following illustrates how one participant was attacked:

But then like we was just standing in the liquor store and it was like we just turned around and it's like all these rednecks, talking about the skin. And see very much I turned around, and I said, "Hey, what you gonna do? Because I fear no man, for what? He bleed just like me." And luckily by the time the altercation had really got out of hand, that the police came. (Taji, African American, 22 y/o)

Sexual identity—With regard to their sexual identity, some participants reported experiencing some form of heterosexism in both direct and indirect ways. A number or participants mentioned being fired from their jobs or mistreated in a variety of settings shortly after disclosing their sexual orientation. For other participants, however, their oppression was overt, and many reported being either verbally harassed or physically assaulted in a variety of settings, including their neighborhood, their school, or at home.

> They'd judge like, wow, damn, he's gay and, and some people probably want to fight.
> That's for serious. Some people want to fight, because that's what people -that's
> homophobic [do]. (Cameron, African American, 19 y/o)

Additionally, many participants also mentioned having to navigate environments that were
neither tolerant nor inclusive of LGB individuals. This intolerance was manifested either
through heterosexual people not accepting the youth's identity or in attempts to change the
youth's sexual orientation. Participants who experienced oppression in the home reported
experiencing particularly high levels of distress. Oppression in these various settings therefore
impacted many different aspects of their lives.

Connection to the Community

In addition to the varying processes of identification and development of identity, youth
identified many different ways in which they connected with their respective communities
throughout these processes. Akin to the divergent developmental pathways of identity
development for ethnic and sexual identity, the types of connections used for both identities
also differed. Youth were able to connect to their ethnic identity through an array of readily
available resources, while youth connected to their sexual identity community through more
artificial and distant sources.

Ethnic Identity—With regard to ethnic identity, youth stated that they were connected with
their ethnic identity through a variety of physical locations and spaces. Many participants
described these geographic spaces as ethnic-specific neighborhoods, and described feeling a
connection with their identity through a variety of actions in these neighborhoods, varying
from working in the community, having friends in the neighborhood, participating in "block
parties," and patronizing stores in the neighborhood. One youth describes how he connected
with his community through growing up in a predominantly African American neighborhood:

> The community I grew up in was …Basically all Black, yeah, all Black, but middle,
> I mean, basically middle class. I mean, basically we trying to come together and make
> the neighborhood better, but um, we still got the gangs and people hanging on the
> street. (David, African American, 19 y/o)

Participants also stated that organizations and clubs at school were a means of connecting with
their ethnic community. Many participants enjoyed cultural events hosted by these clubs, which
included traditional ethnic-specific holidays and festivals. Additionally, the Latino participants
of Mexican ancestry indicated benefiting from school-based groups which discussed current
topics concerning the U.S. and Mexico. Other participants indicated that these organizations
were facilitative in developing new friendship networks, due to a shared identity and heritage,
and that these connections and friendships were long-lasting. Participants also identified
ethnically similar peers whom they met at these organizations as being connections with their
ethnic identity.

Since many youth were connected to their ethnic identity through learning about their culture,
heritage, and ancestry through family members, they were able to honor and practice their
ethnicity with their family. One participant whose extended family was in Mexico was able to
connect with his identity and heritage through his immediate family. Other participants felt
connected through the experienced history of other family members, which impacted their
current worldview. One participant stated that his grandmother's history surviving oppression
during the civil rights movement made him connect with his ethnic identity, but also impacted
his own resilience toward current experiences of oppression.

Sexual Identity—Concerning connection with their sexual identity, CBOs assisted youth
with learning how to successfully navigate gay, White, and ethnic communities as a GBQ

person of color. In addition, they obtained self confidence, support, and met other friends which fostered new connections with the gay community.

> Yeah, first, after I started going to like say for instance groups like [Group Name] or [Group Name] or anything like that, you started to fit in like, hey, this culture is funny, to me it's like, it's culture. This culture is funny and man, I love to be a part of this, this is funny. (Cameron, African American, 19 y/o)

Participants noted that friendships with individuals who they met at organizations endured after they stopped utilizing services at the organization.

Youth also formed connections with GBQ individuals through other venues, and identified these individuals as connections with their sexual identity. One participant described being connected through co-workers who identify as gay.

> So with the gay community that you're connected to now, in person, can you tell me a little bit more about how you developed this connection?

> Mainly through moving to the North Side and working in like a retail store, it's a lot of gay males. (chuckles) (Sergio, Latino, 19 y/o)

Many participants also identified bars and clubs as their current connection to their sexual identity community. This included LGB-specific bars and clubs ("gay bars") and also bars and clubs which cater to other sexual identities, such as "down low" clubs or "parties" or LGB-oriented events at heterosexual bars and clubs.

Several participants identified the internet as a means to connect with their sexual identity community. Participants utilized chat rooms and internet message boards to explore their sexuality and to communicate with other sexual minority youth. Youth met other peers through the internet, peers whom the individual later met in person in physical locations. Also, through the internet, youth could connect with similarly identified individuals without having to visit gay-specific neighborhoods or locations.

> I'd say the Internet was just a way of getting close without really meeting anyone. It was like I was scared, but not scared enough, and then now it's like I'm not, I'm not afraid to actually like talk to someone. So I'd say in person.

> Okay. So it sounds like the Internet community made it, was kind of like a bridge?

> Yeah, like a stepping stone. (Sergio, Latino, 19 y/o)

Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to examine both sexual and ethnic identity development among GBQ male African American and Latino youth, and to examine how these processes differed from one another. This study offers valuable insight into these critical identity development processes by listening to the voices of GBQ youth of color as they are currently experiencing these transitions. Such information is especially valuable regarding the sexual identity process since previous literature in this area has primarily relied on retrospective accounts of White adults (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989). Overall, the data suggest that the development of sexual identity and ethnic identity are very different processes despite often occurring simultaneously.

Our findings reveal that both sexual and ethnic identities are forming during early to late adolescence, a time when youth are developing their unique adult identities (Adams, Gullotta, & Montemayor, 1992; Erikson, 1980; Marcia 1966). Contrary to what Manalansan (1996) hypothesized, youth did not experience delays in the timing of specific stages in their identity

development processes due to being both ethnic and sexual minorities. Instead, these two identity development processes occurred at similar time periods, and for most youth, occurred concurrently. This is consistent with Chung and Katayama's (1998) hypothesis that ethnic and sexual identity development occur simultaneously for LGB youth of color.

The differences between our findings and prior theoretical literature may be due to more recent advancements in Western society's acceptance of people from sexual minority groups. Such a shift in societal perceptions of sexual minority people may have created more positive environments that allowed youth in our sample to develop their identities in ways that differed from projected courses described in theoretical writings. In addition, our participants were recruited primarily through GBQ community-based organizations where they often engaged in interactions with other sexual minority individuals, thus they may reflect a different subset of youth compared to those represented in previous theories. All of the youth reported some level of connection to other individuals in their own identified gay community, therefore indicating some level of support from other sexual minority individuals which may have facilitated their identity development. Further, youth in this study live in a large urban metropolitan area where there are "gay friendly" neighborhoods and socializing venues, as well as ethnic specific neighborhoods and venues. These exist both in physical spaces and also in cyberspace. Consequently, these youth are not only already connected to resources, but also have more access to additional resources they may need during their future development.

The characteristics of each identity development process and the resources that youth accessed to assist in each type of development differed. Additionally, participants did not discuss consciously utilizing resources or knowledge garnered during one development course in the advancement of the other. For example, distinct differences existed in the triggers which prompted the ethnic and sexual identity development processes, thus experience with one type of trigger event did not assist or inform the other. Ethnic identity awareness and exploration was typically triggered by actions of others, whereas sexual identity awareness was typically triggered by the young men becoming aware of their internal feelings and attractions.

The triggers reported by youth in this study demonstrated both similarities and differences with prior literature. Participants recalled that they were typically made aware of their ethnicity by others, through experiences of racism, positive experiences with ethnically dissimilar individuals, or through being in an environment where they were the only individuals who belonged to a particular ethnic group. These awareness-initiating moments are echoed in previous literature on ethnic identity development, such as Cross' (1978) and Helms' (1990) stage/status Encounter, and Kim's (1981) stage of Awakening to Social Political Awareness.

On the other hand, sexual identity awareness was triggered internally, through youth recognizing their sexual or romantic attractions for members of the same sex. This notion of first awareness of one's sexual identity by solely being aware of sexual or romantic attractions has not been previously reported in the literature. Instead, Cass (1979) suggests that although youth are aware that they are different from their heterosexual peers in some way, they are not yet aware of their same-sex attractions. Troiden (1989) states that youth develop a monolithic concept of gay or lesbian people first, and then compare their sexuality to this concept as part of their sexual identity development. In our study, youth identified their same-sex attractions first and then subsequently attached a label to this identity.

From these different means of gaining awareness regarding ethnic and sexual identity, youth then developed their identities along different pathways. Since ethnic minority youth are often connected from birth to their ethnic identity through ethnically-similar family and peer networks, they were able to consult resources within their immediate communities to develop their ethnic identity. This experience of looking inward to one's own community has been

encapsulated in Phinney's (1989) stage of Ethnic Identity Search, and Cross' (1978), Helms' (1990), and Atkinson, Morten, and Sue's (1979) stages/statuses of Immersion-Emersion. During these stages or statuses, the individual removes oneself from the dominant culture and develops her/his identity through an immersion into her/his respective communities.

In our study, youth did not wholly immerse themselves into systematically investigating and understanding their ethnic communities. Instead they turned to these communities as resources to casually explore when they wanted to learn about their identity, and did so without apparently neglecting other aspects of themselves. Youth gained assistance and strength from community resources such as family and peers, as well as from cultural practices. By drawing upon the visibly positive aspects of their ethnic communities, participants were able to develop affirming ethnic identities without encountering hostile responses from community members who do not support their sexuality. Overall, the ethnic identity process was a visible and public affair which was recognized by individuals within the youth's ethnic community.

In contrast, the process of sexual identity development was for the most part a private and solitary process. For our participants, developing their sexual identity involved a search for specific individuals who identified as GBQ, both those who were ethnically similar as well as dissimilar, and for organizations that catered to the needs of GBQ youth. Some youth were able to safely navigate their burgeoning sexual identity and develop connections to other GBQ individuals through the internet, which served as an anonymous venue to explore their identity.

This process of investigating one's sexual identity is markedly different from previous theories of sexual identity development (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Troiden, 1989), which suggest that individuals link with more adult-oriented gay or lesbian venues, such as bars and clubs. These theories do not account for youth who may not have geographical access to gay or lesbian bars and clubs, or who may not meet the age requirements to enter such establishments. Additionally, these previous theories do not account for those who are developing their identity while living with parents who may disapprove of their sexuality and who may punish youth by removing financial and/or housing support (Ryan & Futterman, 1998). As a result, much of the youth's exploration reported in the current study was covert, and often did not involve more public exploration reported in previous literature.

During ethnic and sexual identity development, youth from the current study identified contrasting experiences of oppression. Regarding their ethnic identity, youth indicated that they experienced both direct and indirect forms of racism from the larger White community. They also experienced oppression in the predominately White gay community in the form of eroticization and objectification due to their ethnicity, and a general lack of inclusion and acceptance. In contrast, youth experienced heterosexism from the larger heterosexual community, in addition to specific acts of oppression from family members, peers, and people in their neighborhood. As a result, youth of color reported facing oppression from a variety of sources, including groups and individuals who may have been able to play a supportive role in one of their identity development processes. This notion of multiple forms of oppression for LGB people of color from multiple sources is consistent with prior research (Bonilla & Porter, 1990; Herek and Capitiano, 1995; Washington, 2001; Diaz, Ayala, and Bein, 2004).

Participants indicated that they remained connected to both their sexual and ethnic communities throughout their identity development processes by embracing the resources that supported their development. For example, youth stated that they maintained connections to their ethnic communities through cultural traditions and elements, as well as family and friends. Youth also indicated that they felt connected with their sexual identity through organizations, social events, and the internet. Youth were able to maintain these connections to their ethnic and

sexual identities amidst experiences of oppression from both communities. This contrasts Dube and Savin-Williams' (1999) assertion that sexual minority male youth of color often have to choose between either their sexual or ethnic identity. On the contrary, youth in the current study were able to manage both identities in creative and adaptive ways.

Implications

Interventions and therapeutic treatment modalities that support the mental health and well-being of GBQ young men of color will benefit from addressing the different needs associated with each identity development process. Interventions should attend to elements which may facilitate the development of one identity but hinder the other, and assist youth in identifying and overcoming such potential obstacles. In addition, the current study demonstrated that positive interpersonal relationships, particularly with peers and family members, are essential to a healthy sense of ethnic and sexual identity. Therefore developing and maintaining positive and supportive relationships should also be a focus of interventions for GBQ youth of color. Other more structural interventions may focus on assisting various types of youth service providers in becoming more sensitive and supportive to the identity needs of GBQ youth of color, especially for youth who may not have supportive peer or family relationships. Barber and Mobley (1999) suggest that providers engage in a self-reflective and exploratory process to increase their own sensitivity to GBQ male youth of color's needs.

Connecting youth with other GBQ male youth of color may be a beneficial form of intervention. This may serve to build solidarity and to provide a forum for collectively strategizing about how to best address the challenges associated with developing two unique identities that represent communities that may be at odds with each other. Supportive connections with GBQ peers may also serve as a way for young men to see that they are not alone in their developmental journey. Intervention programs may also benefit from building a range of supportive connections between youth and ethnic minority GBQ adults. Some of the youth in the current study reported benefiting from interactions with community agency staff members who were GBQ persons of color, as these individuals often served as informal role-models whom the youth could turn to for advice. Hearing testimonials regarding the ways in which ethnic minority GBQ adults were able to integrate their ethnic and sexual orientation identities, and succeed in various aspects of their life (e.g., family, career, community) could serve as a useful adjunct to interventions. In addition, a more formalized mentorship program for GBQ male youth of color could provide a continual form of support and would be invaluable to youth as they develop their multiple identities.

Youth must also be equipped with means of coping with different types of oppression from multiple sources, and interventions should teach youth how to navigate potentially oppressive communities. Successful intervention may involve the identification and utilization of coping resources, such as supportive physical locations, educational materials, and internet websites and message boards. Although the Internet can provide GBQ youth with a way to cope by creating their own communities, exploring their identities, and creating social change as they connect with one another (Russell, 2002), youth may need guidance in using this resource in a safe manner given the potential for exploitation and connection with negative peers.

In addition, youth can be taught the skills needed to combat oppressive societal forces, by engaging in social action activities such as community organizing and political activism. Interventions may help to increase youths' sociopolitical awareness related to oppressive actions aimed at both their ethnicity and sexual orientation, and engage youth in social and political activities such as letter writing campaigns to elected officials and fund-raising events to support affirming community organizations (Harper, 2007).

Data from the current study suggest that the identity development process is very personal and involves reflection and integration of many societal and cultural messages and concepts. The process of participating in research itself can be a validating and enriching experience for participants, especially for LGB youth (Harper, Jamil, & Wilson, 2007). Consequently, based on observations from the data and the manner in which participants reacted to the data collection process, a personal reflective component is recommended for interventions. This may involve journal-writing, projective drawings, story-telling, or exercises involving calm and collected thought, such as meditation or deep breathing. This independent and reflective process is particularly important and beneficial for individuals such as GBQ ethnic minority youth, who may appreciate a space to reflect independently amid stresses associated with their various identities. Additionally, youth may benefit from an opportunity to be validated through expressing their stories and experiences afterwards with other peers in a group setting.

Strengths and Limitations

One strength of the current study was that it examined identity development from the perspective and voices of participants during their adolescence, as opposed to relying on retrospective reports from adults. Therefore, youth could more easily access important or relevant steps in the identity development process. The phenomenological framework which guided the interview process was another strength since this allowed youth to define and describe their identity using their own words and conceptualizations, and then interviewers guided them through an in-depth exploration of factors that influenced each specific identity development. This interview approach avoided the use of pre-determined heteronormative sexual orientation and ethnicity labels, that may have restricted participants' responses. Another strength was the study's purposive sampling method, which ensured that participants who were interviewed reflected a variety of diverse experiences and backgrounds. The rigor of the validation procedures was another methodological strength, which involved multiple levels of feedback from youth and adult experts working with youth.

A potential limitation of the current study is that participants were only recruited through community agencies that serve LGBTQ youth. Therefore, participants were already accessing connections with their sexual identity community, which may be associated with a positive sense of identity. It may be that those youth who have not accessed community agencies have a different identity development trajectory. It is clear through the breadth of responses provided that factors other than community agencies did facilitate sexual identity development. As a focused qualitative phenomenological study, the results provided here can direct future and more comprehensive research on this topic, which may capture the experiences of those not interviewed in this study.

Another limitation was that the interview guide did not ask participants to discuss the specific steps in their ethnic and sexual identity development process. Furthermore, participants were interviewed at only one time point, and subsequent interviews were not conducted with youth over time as they developed their identities. Also, because the current study focused on two ethnic groups, the findings cannot be generalized to youth from other ethnic minority groups. Additionally, for purposes of parsimony in the data analysis process, between-group differences among African American and Latino participants were not investigated; however overall the development processes were similar.

Directions for Future Research

The current study provides a beginning framework for understanding the ethnic and sexual identity development processes of GBQ male adolescents. Future research may benefit from a more detailed account of the historical events associated with the identity development process. This may take the form of a more in-depth interview focused exclusively on each

identity development process, possibly occurring across multiple sessions. A longitudinal design may also be more beneficial to encapsulate the specific identity development stages as they are occurring for these youth. Additionally, a longitudinal design may provide youth with the opportunity to expound or reflect on previously voiced material in later interview sessions.

Future research may also investigate identity development processes by interviewing individuals recruited from a variety of venues, such as through the internet, GBQ-oriented clubs, or through peer networks. Such studies may also investigate the identity development process as it occurs for other ethnic minorities or individuals in different geographic regions. Comparisons across various ethnic groups are also important, as the processes may vary significantly depending on specific ethnic and cultural factors. Future research may also investigate the identity development process as it occurs for individuals who are part of older age groups, as well as among female youth

Acknowledgments

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Table 1

In-Depth Interview Sample Questions for Sexual Identity and Ethnic Identity

Topic	Sample Questions
Meaning:	What messages do you get about being [identity]?
	Tell me some of the positive things about being [identity]?
	Tell me some of the negative things about being [identity]?
	What are the specific roles and responsibilities of being [identity]?
Self-Identification	You have just told me a little bit about what it means to be [identity]. How do you fit into this? What is that like for you?
	How are you different than the things you told me about being [identity]?
Awareness	Describe for me when you first realized that you were a [identity]?
Community	Do you feel that there is a [identity] community? Describe this community to me.
	How do you fit into this?
	In what ways are you connected with a [identity] community?
	How did you develop this connection?
Facilitators/Supports	What has helped you in the process of seeing yourself as a/n [identity]?
	Which people/institutions/resources have helped you?