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Hegemonic Masculinity during Parent-Child Sex Communication with Sexual Minority Male Adolescents

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INTRODUCTION

Starting at a very young age, children are socialized into a heteronormative culture, one that puts a premium on heterosexuality and reinforces binary understandings of sexuality and gender identity. Heterosexuality is often assumed, enforced, and rewarded at the personal, social, and institutional levels (Meyers & Raymond, 2010; Wilkinson & Pearson, 2009). This heteronormativity, “the mundane, everyday ways that heterosexuality is privileged and taken for granted” (Myers & Raymond, 2010, p.190) is socially constructed. This hegemonic, deeply rooted, and pervasive structure of our societies and cultures significantly influences dominant institutions such as family, marriage, religion, and educational systems (Herz & Johansson, 2015; Ward, 2009). Similarly, gender and gender norms are dictated by societal understanding of a binary hierarchical construction of man/woman, masculinity/femininity (Budgeon, 2014). While sexuality and gender represent different social constructs, they are deeply interconnected, and researchers have shown that traditional gender norms and heterosexuality are learned very early in childhood (Myers & Raymond, 2010). These hegemonic practices and reinforcement of normative expressions of gender and sexuality have negative effects on the well-being of those who don’t identify as heterosexual (aka sexual minority youth), including, but not limited to substance use, psychological distress, depressive symptoms, low self-esteem, and poor academic performance

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Ethical Approval

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

(Bauermeister et al., 2017; Hall & LaFrance, 2012; Russell & Fish, 2016; Wilkinson, Lindsey, & Pearson, 2009).

Recent changes in societal acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) identities have been accompanied by a younger age of coming out (around 14); however this age is also accompanied by a developmental period of parental, peer, and social regulation of gender and sexuality (Bauermeister et al., 2017; Russell & Fish, 2016). Communication about sex and sexuality between parents and children during this developmental period is crucial in shaping the sexual attitudes and behaviors of youth (Flores & Barroso, 2017). Excluding specific information and concerns faced by sexual minority youth negatively influences their sexual socialization and overall wellbeing. This paper will identify the ecological factors that affect socialization of sexual minority youth through parent-child sex communication. The informational needs of gay, bisexual, and queer (GBQ) cisgender -- those whose gender identity matches the sex assigned at birth -- adolescent males are especially crucial to study given that they are disproportionately at risk for negative sexual health outcomes and that behavior formed during adolescence can determine risky sexual behavior during adulthood (Cordova, 2018).

Parent-Child Sex Communication

Four decades of parent-child sex communication research has identified various mechanisms that positively impact adolescent sexual health outcomes (Widman et al., 2016). Evidence-based interventions have shown that parents can be central to the sexual socialization of their heterosexual children (Sutton et al., 2014). When done effectively, sex communication can enhance youth's condom use self-efficacy, the ability to resist pressure to have sex, the initiation of conversations about HIV/STI prevention before sex, and access to reproductive and sexual health services (Sutton et al., 2014; Widman et al., 2016). While the interventions have been shown as effective, none of this research has been extended to sexual minority males who are most at risk for HIV infection. The role parents have in educating GBQ sons has received only minimal attention in the last few years (Flores & Barroso, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory provides a comprehensive framework to understanding the multiple factors of the larger ecological system that can influence sex communication at home (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The bioecological theory posits that relations between an active individual and their active and multilevel ecology constitute the driving force of human development (Lerner, 2005). These multiple factors are the nested set of environments for which the bioecological theory is best known (Figure 1). This study explored how the microsystem (siblings, peers), mesosystem (school, religion), exosystem (politics, media), and macrosystem (cultural context) level factors interact and influence parent-child sex communication. Through these interactions, these proximal processes, individuals and their environment act on and shape each other, enabling individuals to situate themselves in the world and their roles in responding to the prevailing order while simultaneously fitting into the existing one (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009).

Sexual minority adolescent males develop and thrive across contextual systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; D'Augelli & Grossman, 2006), including the home, school, and community, and yet their same-gender sexual attraction and activity are not always supported by these systems (Harper & Riplinger, 2013). Throughout these ecological systems, positive and negative factors that affect LGBTQ youth's well-being have been associated with families, schools, religion and their larger communities (Higa et al., 2014). Thus, sexuality researchers must first investigate how the varying levels of the ecological system contribute to the misinformation of GBQ adolescent males through its direct and indirect perpetuation of heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity.

Ecological Influences on Sex Communication

Parents can act as both a source of stress and a source of support to LGBTQ youth (Bouris et al., 2010; Soler et al., 2017). For example, parental rejection, lack of support, negative parental responses, and gender policing during childhood can lead to adverse health outcomes in adulthood (Bauermeister et al., 2017; Bouris et al., 2010); on the other hand, less parental rejection and more sexuality-specific social support are associated with lower internalized homophobia, psychological distress, and suicidal ideations among LGBTQ youth (Bregman et al., 2013; D'Amico & Julien, 2012). Parent-child sex communication reflects and is influenced by broader pressures of heteronormativity within the larger ecological system (Martin, 2009; Solebello & Elliott, 2011). For instance, while fathers see themselves as important in the sexual education of sons, hegemonic masculinity dictates that they prefer sons to grow up "as heterosexual as possible" (Solebello & Elliott, 2011). Despite the stress of having to conceal their identity at early ages, GBQ adolescent males have identified parents as their preferred source of sex information (Flores, Docherty, Relf, McKinney, & Barroso, 2018). Having awareness at an early age that their same-sex attractions and behaviors are not supported by the larger ecological system, GBQ adolescent males hope that parents, who are most familiar with them, will engage in more inclusive sex discussions.

From studies involving heterosexual youth, siblings have been identified as confidants, sources of support and mentors (Killoren & Roach, 2014). In particular, older siblings serve a protective function in facilitating more frequent family discussions about safe sex (Kowal & Blinn-Pike, 2004). The influence of siblings on family discussions about sex among LGBTQ youth has not been published.

Peer networks have been identified to have more positive than negative influence on LGBTQ youth (Higa et al., 2014). LGBTQ youth commonly experience bullying and victimization by their peers at schools, which contributes to deteriorating health and school-related outcomes (Kosciw et al., 2015; Sterzing et al., 2017); however, friends and community support have been reported to be strong predictors of positive outcomes among LGBTQ youth, including acceptance, disclosure of sexual orientation, and improved self-esteem (Shilo & Savaya, 2011; Snapp et al., 2015).

In the last four decades, there has been widespread implementation of school-based sex education programs; however, only eight states in the U.S. mandate instruction to be inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity (Hall et al., 2016). The percentage of

schools that provide curricula that include HIV, sexually transmitted infections, or pregnancy prevention information that is relevant to LGBTQ youth range from 11.0% to 56.4% across states (Demissie et al., 2015). Examples include having curricula or programs that use inclusive language and terminology, identifying safe spaces at school, prohibiting harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity, encouraging staff to attend professional development on inclusive and safe environment, and facilitating access to LGBTQ-inclusive social, psychological and healthcare services (Demissie et al., 2015). The National School Climate Survey reported that in 2015, fewer than 22% of LGBTQ students reported that their health classes had included positive representations of LGBTQ-related topics (Kosciw et al., 2015). The significant variation and dominant lack of LGBTQ-inclusive sex education at schools is also accompanied by heteronormative school climates that create hostile environments for LGBTQ youth.

Sex communication is similarly impacted by non-accepting tenets of major religious groups (Newman et al., 2018). Especially among certain subpopulations of LGBTQ individuals, the influence of religion through internalized homonegativity results in concealing same-sex attractions and conforming to heteronormative behaviors (Quinn & Dickson-Gomez, 2016). This internalized homonegativity perpetuates negative feelings about their identity (Smallwood et al., 2017) and inhibits LGBTQ adolescents from opening up to their parents about their emergent questions regarding health and sexuality.

The accessibility of the internet as a new media resource, including through mobile technology, brings with it both positive and negative effects for LGBTQ adolescents' sexual socialization. Due to their inability to openly discuss their emergent sexual orientation with parents, LGBTQ adolescents commonly turn to the internet to learn more about themselves, find support, and safely consider the coming out process (Harper et al., 2016). While fear of HIV/STI infection fueled online searches for sexuality-specific information, sexual minority youth also reported multiple reasons for not conducting broader sexuality inquiries online including fear of being caught accessing such information, mistrust of available online information and thinking that health information was not relevant for them (Magee et al,, 2012). Nevertheless, the lack of resources offline, including from parents, motivates LGBTQ youth to go online to fill in those gaps (DeHann et al., 2014).

Indeed, parent-child sex communication is influenced by several direct and indirect components of the larger ecological system beyond the home. The parent-child factors during sex communication are well-documented in the literature (Flores & Barroso, 2017), but little is known about the influence of the larger ecological system on parent-child sex communication and the representation of heteronormativity in these systems. Findings from the main study have reported on the nature of sex talks (Flores, Docherty, Relf, McKinney, & Barroso, 2017) and the topics discussed and recommended for sex talks with future generations of GBQ adolescent males (*under review*). The aim of this current paper is to identify from the perspectives of GBQ adolescent males how other components of the larger ecological system impact conversations about sex, gender, and sexuality at home.

METHODS

Design, Setting, and Participants

This study followed a qualitative interpretive approach to understand perceptions of sex communication with cisgender males who self-identify as gay, bisexual, or queer youth (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The study interviewed thirty participants using a semi-structured interview guide and asked them to share their experiences and recollections of sex communication with their parents. The interview questions were developed based on the principles of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory and aimed at better understanding the influence of the different constructs in the ecological system on sex communication. Audio-recorded interviews were conducted at a location based on the participants' choice, including in secure offices at university LGBTQ student centers or youth-serving community spaces. Most of the interviews lasted between 60 to 90 minutes each and were all conducted in English.

This study recruited from multiple LGBTQ centers and organizations, and community events such as Pride Festival in North Carolina, using a purposeful sampling technique to identify eligible participants (Mustanski, 2011). Fliers were posted at the recruitment centers in Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill and used snowball sampling. Eligibility criteria for participation included: English-speaking GBQ males between 15-20 years of age, and able to recall at least one conversation with their parents about sex.

This study received institutional review board approval from Duke University. All participants provided written consent before enrollment in the study. This study was granted a waiver of parental consent for participants younger than 18 years of age to allow the equal and safe participation of GBQ adolescent males who have not yet disclosed their sexual orientation to their parents (Flores, McKinney, Arscott, & Barroso, 2018).

Data Analysis

The focus of this paper is on the analysis of distal ecological processes involved in sex communication that might have influenced parent-child sex communication. To explicate these distal influences, the investigators conducted qualitative content analysis (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Sandelowski, 2009) of the interview transcripts using NVivo 11, a qualitative analysis software program, following multiple analytical steps that were sensitive to Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theoretical framework (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The analytical steps included: 1) reading the transcripts multiple times (Sandelowski, 1995); 2) developing first level codes that shared common meanings and second level codes that were based on thematic and conceptual structures (Saldaña, 2015); 3) rearranging codes into categories; and 4) generating the themes to link the underlying meanings of the categories (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). The findings are organized according to micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-system level factors.

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

Our final sample included 30 GBQ adolescents between the ages of 15 and 20 years. The majority of participants identified as gay (76.7%), and a few as bisexual (16.7%) or queer (6.7%). The participants were from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (multiracial, 3.3%; Asian, 13.3%; black, 13.3%; Latino, 33.3%; and white, 36.7%) and more than half (63.3%) reported being college students. When asked about their parent's awareness of their sexual orientation, the majority (86.7%) reported that their parents definitely knew of their GBQ self-identification.

Discrepant Influences

The data indicate that the varying ecological levels surrounding parent-child dyads impact sex communication in unique complementary or divergent ways. Beyond the parent and the GBQ child, these ecological factors sometimes support the inclusion of sexuality-sensitive information, yet on other occasions reaffirm gendered and heteronormative structures in society. Throughout all the ecological levels examined, there are dual and discrepant ways siblings, peers, schools, mass media, religion and the overall culture reinforces hegemonic masculinities during sex talks at home.

Supportive Siblings and Peers vs Reference for Heterosexuality—Prior to disclosing their sexual orientation to parents, many GBQ sons came out to their siblings and peers first. This disclosure provided participants a support system as their siblings and peers accepted their sexual orientations. Coming out to both siblings and peers first gave participants an opportunity to determine how best to disclose to parents. After disclosure, siblings served as a resource who enabled parents to learn how to talk about their sons' sexuality during the adjustment period that followed. Siblings served as advocates for the participants. Bentley (20-year-old, Asian, gay) remembers how his brother was a great resource when he came out:

> I told my brother a couple months prior. He's a really good ally. He helped a lot. [After disclosure] he called my dad and yelled at him for not reacting better in the beginning. I think it helped that he called and yelled at him for a while.

Many participants remembered how sex communication occurred in the home along with their younger or older siblings. In many cases, older siblings' developmental and social milestones triggered parents to include our GBQ participants during sex talks even if the younger child could not fully understand the issues being discussed. Most of these group discussions at home contained heteronormative assumptions that GBQ sons felt were exclusionary of their emerging identities. Years later, participants recalled how the group talks were limited in scope, especially when topics for siblings of the opposite sex were included. Alex (19 years old, Black, gay) said:

> I was like, "You know, I don't know if this all applies to me," but I was not going to bring that up! That would be too much. But I had in my mind, "This conversation is geared maybe more toward my sister," because they didn't bring up at all other

> sexualities…I was [seen as] heterosexual. So I definitely listened to it, and I understood it, but I was like, “I don’t know how much this applies to me.”

For our GBQ participants, siblings and peers were the people that parents used as role models for GBQ sons when reinforcing gender norms. Early discussions about masculinity usually invoked siblings. Charles (19 years old, Latino, gay) shared some of his mom’s constant source of consternation when he was younger:

> I would try to play with my sister because she would have these Barbies and My Little Ponies and I wanted one so badly but I couldn’t have one. So that was a big ordeal. I would [also] act just like my sister around the house or be dancing around and my mom would just get really upset about that. She’d say, “No. Be more like your brother.”

Finally, peers were identified as one of their enduring and main sources of sex information. Given the lack of awkwardness when talking to peers about these topics, GBQ males talk with their peers more than consulting parents. Among participants who could not broach sex issues with parents, their peers became their initial source for sex answers. James (19 years old, Black, gay) recalls:

> I remember being in 5th grade and just knowing that one of my friends was dating one of my other friends and they broke up, and it was this whole thing. And then I just remember someone saying, “Oh, it was because they started a rumor that they were having S-E-X.” We were even afraid to say the word. And that’s when it first came up, and that’s when I kind of asked “Oh, what is that?” because I didn’t know. And then my friends basically described what it is to me as when a guy and a girl are in a relationship and they use their private parts to get closer together.

Heteronormative Sex Ed vs Home-Based Sex Communication

Half of the sample recalled attending sex education classes around fifth grade and reported how these classes impacted sex communication at home in several ways. Some participants stated that the required consent forms triggered their parents to broach the sex talk with them that included providing alternative perspectives from the mostly abstinence-based model that the school was going to cover. After the sex education classes, some parents, in varying degrees, shared with sons their personal thoughts regarding specific topics. James (20 years old, white, gay) talked about how his stepfather acknowledged the sex education class:

> After Sex Ed, I told him what we did in school that day, and he basically told me “Oh, yeah, just don’t do it because someone’s going to get pregnant or you’re going to get a disease and you’re going to ruin your life.” That was the extent of the conversation.

For the participants who did not have any pre-sex education discussions or follow-up, this implied parental confidence in what the school system taught. Since no follow-up conversations occurred, sons viewed parents as relying on these classes for sex education. Bentley (20 years old, Asian, gay) recalled:

Bentley I think they figured, “OK, the school’s doing it so I don’t need to.” And they confirmed that recently because at a baby shower game they asked all parents questions, like “At what age did you have the sex talk?” And my parents were like “Never. The school does it for you.”

INT Ok. And what did you think of that?

Bentley I was like, “They should have said something!”

Furthermore, for some participants, the lack of pre- or post-sex education inquiries communicated to them parents’ expectation that should participants have further sex questions, they were assumed to know how to find the answers themselves. Gregory (16 years old, Caucasian, gay) stated:

> I feel like that they think that I know more than they do so they trust me. But whether that’s true or not, they don’t know because they don’t ask me so I think ever since then they just basically kinda trusted me to learn stuff on my own.

Religion’s Delimiting Reach

A third of the sample saw religion as a significant component in the ecological system that had both a direct and indirect impact on sex communication at home. For these participants, parents’ level of religiosity determined the content of the discussions about sex, and the attitudes they had about same-sex attraction.

First, parents’ engagement with their churches impacted the sex-related topics they broached with their sons. Abstinence from sex before marriage was the topic most often discussed by parents who were active in church. Participants recall that talks about where babies came from were framed in a religious perspective that included pronouncements against premarital sex. The sex talk, as recalled by Chance (17 years old, Black, gay), was scripture-based and prescribed what was deemed appropriate:

> It [sex communication] lasted really long because she took it way back to the bible. It was long and hectic. Like you’re not supposed to have premarital sex and you’re supposed to be married when you have sex. She just kept going on and on and on and on about how guys and girls are supposed to be together and then not guys and guy and then she was like, “And that’s how you got here.”

Second, religion also impacted parents’ approach to sexuality discussions as these were mostly shame-oriented. One participant considered this an impediment to learning about sex as he was growing up and came to regard the shame associated with exploring sexuality issues as a long-term repercussion of those early conversations. Conversely, two Latino participants volunteered that the only reason they were able to receive any type of guidance about sex was because their parents were not religious, which is not the norm in their community.

Third, several participants from varying religious traditions linked how their groups’ religious beliefs affected how they treated GBQ individuals, including how parents responded to their GBQ children. For these youth, parents who were more religious, when

compared to their friends' agnostic or non-religious parents, were more difficult to talk to regarding sexuality. Silence around sexuality from parents left GBQ sons wondering about why other family members and people outside their home treated them differently. Roberto (19 years old, Latino, gay) recalled the early bullying he endured because of how he sounded:

> I was six years old and I didn't understand why certain people felt a certain way toward me. That was one of the biggest things in my mind. I was just like, "Why do they hurt me like this?" And I remember my grandma would always take me to church every Sunday and the one thing that I always asked God for was if he would please change my voice because I thought it was my voice, the reason I was getting bullied. That's something I never forgot. Ever since I was a kid, that's the one thing I would ask God for. I was like, "Maybe if my voice was different it would all go away."

The Influence of Politics & Current Events

Political events at the local, national and even international level impacted sex communication primarily through the teachable moments they presented. First, the debate surrounding same-sex marriage in the U.S. inspired talks about the issue with parents, both prior and after coming out as GBQ. For many of them, hearing about the possibility of two men getting married to each other made them think more about their own sexual orientation. Among participants who have disclosed their sexuality to parents after the Defense of Marriage Act was overruled by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2015, the event also provided material they could discuss to either educate or counter parents' conservative views about marriage. Parents' reactions to the issue being discussed on TV determined their sons' comfort level in disclosing to parents or having conversations about their own attractions. A.V. (15 years old, Caucasian, gay) recalled:

A.V. I was eleven or twelve and realizing that I was not straight and then hearing gay marriage being banned in North Carolina. I was like, "Gay is like a relationship thing?" And then I asked my mom, "What is gay marriage? Why is it being banned?" And she was like, "Gay marriage is when two men get married." And I was like, "That can happen? That sounds amazing!"

Interviewer Did you say those things?

A.V. No. (*laughs*) I was like "Okay."

Finally, repercussions of international policies also impacted sex communication directly. For example, U.S. engagement in the Middle East region required at least one father to be away from home. As explained by James (20 years old, Caucasian, gay), his father was very supportive when he came out and they had frequent discussions about his sexual orientation, but the multiple deployments and subsequent diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder affected how the son could discuss his high school relationship problems. After each succeeding deployment:

> He just didn't give robust answers. It probably had to do with him coming back from Afghanistan. He had trouble with that. It bothered me [son's relationship issues with then boyfriend], but I just didn't talk to him [father] about it.

The Ubiquity of New Media and Mobile Technology

The absence of sex communication at home or in school that was relevant to the participants' interests led many of them to search for information on their own. More than half of participants shared how exposure to sexually explicit media became early sources of sex information. In the course of looking up information about their identities online, many of them stumbled upon sexually explicit media which gave them a reference on a host of topics. According to A.V. (15 years old, Caucasian, gay):

> I googled and I looked up sex and I'm expecting like, "Ah, sex is the name for where babies come from," which I guess it kinda is. So then I got all these gigantic porn sites - they advertise so aggressively that I think it was a little bit much for my little eight year old mind…And so that I think is probably the most educational moment.

For most of the participants, early mention and representations of same-sex attraction on TV gave them a word and an idea they could identify with. While a few of them approached their parents to ask what being gay meant, most of the participants had an idea that the topic was taboo and thus began learning about the nature of same-sex attraction by themselves. For these youth, the ability to look up information without parental assistance established early reliance on themselves for answers to sexuality questions. Access to the internet at home provided youth the means to conduct online searches (Table 1).

According to most of the participants, instances when parents provided comments about LGBTQ issues triggered by news reports or images on TV were a source of frustration as parents often gave erroneous information. According to Ramos (18 years old, Latino, gay), aside from the idea of sons being GBQ themselves not appearing to cross parents' minds, they also extended problematic gender roles to faulty conceptions of same-sex relationships:

> Before 8th grade, a lot of stuff that I heard was from television. My mom would watch the Hispanic version of TV court shows and every once in a while there would be a case where there would be a gay man. And my aunt didn't really understand it. My mom said, "It's like two men that want to be together." And then my aunt was asking how that worked, and I remember my mom saying, "Well, they decide which one's going to be the woman, and he dresses up like the woman. And he does what the woman is supposed to do in the relationship."

Finally, with media and mobile technology being a ubiquitous presence in their lives, many participants voluntarily disclosed and talked about their sexual orientation with parents through various communication channels. Aside from face to face conversations, many came out to their parents through text messages, emails, tweets, Tumblr postings, and one via Facebook Messenger. John (18 years old, Latino, bisexual) shared his coming out story.

> I was in a Facebook chat with some people…and they started speculating as to whether or not I was gay. So I took to Twitter and tweeted "I'm bisexual". My

> mom, who happened to be checking my account from time to time, which I had no idea about, saw it and she texted me a screenshot of it. She was like, “John Smith, what is this??” And I was like, “Ooh, it’s just me speaking the truth.” Her responses were almost to a T of bad stereotypes about bisexual people that I once saw on YouTube. “You can’t know because you’ve never had sex with anyone before, right? How would you know that you’re sexually attracted to both people??” And then, “You can’t really be bisexual because if you get married to one then you’ll always be lusting after the other sex, right?” And this went on for a bit completely over text, ‘cause she was in Vancouver and she didn’t really feel like calling me at the time, I guess. So that went on for like 20 minutes and then finally I got frustrated and I was like, “Mom just don’t doubt me. That’s what I am,” and then I kinda shut her down.

Gendering and Unchallenged Hegemonic Masculinity

The majority of the participants recall early talks from parents that dictated societal standards about how boys were expected to act. A focus on masculine ways of acting was introduced at early ages. Conversely, many participants also heard messages about how society negatively viewed people with same sex attractions and their behaviors. These messages were based on stereotypes that cut across varying racial and ethnic lines. Joe (20 years old, Black, bisexual) remembers a lesson his stepfather gave him:

> The only sort of mention I can recall of him ever actually talking about anything regarding same-sex attraction was in regards to my handshake. He was from the school of thought where to prove your manliness you must have a really firm handshake. “Gotta make sure you have a firm handshake when you meet people or when you address people. Otherwise, people will think you’re a sissy or people think you’re weak.”

Notions of traditional masculinity also impacted sex communication through ideas fathers had about how men should express concern. For at least two sons, they remembered how their fathers viewed talking about sex with sons as appearing feminine, because it would entail verbalizing paternal affection. Additionally, when confronted by the possibility that sons may be GBQ, many participants recalled their fathers’ denial being framed within masculine standards. A.V. (15 years old, Caucasian, gay) recalls how his dad responded to his mom:

> He said, “Well, no. That’s my son. That’s my strong man. He’s not gay.”

Early communication from parents not only informed sons of traditional masculine standards, these talks also reinforced the gendered roles they were expected to fulfill at later ages. Many participants shared stories of mothers fretting over which girl their sons would take to the prom or the wife they were supposed to marry. James (20 years old, Caucasian, gay) shared:

> She’s always told me, “Oh, when you get married you need to find a wife that’s this,” or “Your wife needs to do this or be like this.” Not just sticking to the whole ‘You’re Going to Marry a Woman,’ but also sticking to the gender norms of what the woman and the man are supposed to be following. “The man is the one that’s

> the breadwinner. He's the one that works. And then the wife stays at home. She takes care of the kids..."

Finally, these deeply ingrained expectations that parents held on to subsequently affected parents' capacity to respond to their sons' disclosures as GBQ. Even among those with very accepting parents, participants talked about how lifetime expectations were shattered after disclosure. The shock of disclosure or confirmation of having a GBQ son affected parents' initial ability to communicate acceptance or relay concern over their sons' futures. According to Gauis (18 years old, Black, bisexual), his mother's ability to converse with him changed after he came out as bisexual:

> She won't call me and talk to me about my relationships anymore. She won't say "Oh, do you have a girlfriend?" or "Do you have a boyfriend?" She won't even ask if I have a girlfriend. She'll just call me and ask me how my day went, ask me what I did with my weekend, and stuff like that. She doesn't ask me those questions anymore.

DISCUSSION

The distal components of the ecological systems that GBQ sons and parents navigate present both hindrances and opportunities for inclusive sex communication. In the microsystem, siblings and peers have emerged as support groups for GBQ adolescents and have a net positive effect on encouraging inclusive sex communication within the family. On the other hand, politics and current events, media and mobile technology, and the larger culture require a closer inspection due to the negative influences they exert on inclusive sex communication. From our study, ecological factors affect the road to open communication about sex early while also simultaneously paving the way to silence and self-censorship among GBQ youth at similarly early ages. The resulting tension between all of these cultural expectations of masculinity and gendered roles, along with a young GBQ adolescent males' realization of being different, caused turmoil that made participants averse to heteronormative discussions about sex and their own future gendered roles.

From the data, both younger and older siblings and peers were presented in a positive light. The stories from participants did not identify peers' and siblings' actions as having a negative impact on sex communication. While there were stories of how GBQ sons were compared to siblings and peers to reinforce gendered expectations, these were parent-initiated actions which were not blamed on siblings and peers. For instance, given that there are relationship strains between GBQ sons and parents after coming out (Newcombe et al., 2018), heterosexual siblings emerged as advocates for our GBQ participants. They are instrumental in getting parents to talk about their GBQ sibling's same-sex identity that paved the way for resumption of communication with parents after the initial disclosure as GBQ. Similarly, but outside of the home, peers functioned in a variety of ways that enable GBQ males to have another source of support. Since peers are usually the first people GBQ individuals come out to, they can provide a venue for their friends to begin verbalizing issues they previously had to contend with by themselves. The support received from the participants' siblings and peers supports the trend of growing LGBTQ acceptance among younger people (Pew Research Center, 2013).

This study identified parents broaching family group sex discussions that included children of varying ages and different developmental stages. This practice highlights the provision of sexual health guidance even when some of the children were not developmentally capable to process information. The practice of including younger children in family talks as triggered by an older sibling's physical or social milestone leaves GBQ males at an information disadvantage. From their recollection, they felt they were too young to process the information being discussed. For those who had an early awareness of having same-sex attractions, the lack of topics that interested them also conveyed that their concerns were taboo.

It is notable that from an early age, sons who asked and received factual information about LGBTQ issues were from families that did not strictly adhere to or observe religious traditions. At four and eight years old, two participants whose parents were not religious could seek details from their parents about who and what gay people were. On the other hand, participants from more religious backgrounds, mostly Hispanic/Latino and Black households, did not press for anything LGBTQ-related from their parents when they were young even if they had questions or already knew that they found other males attractive. These soon-to-be self-disclosing GBQ sons from religious households did not want to draw attention to their curiosities or attractions at a young age.

Since traditional venues for sex education do not include same-sex topics, GBQ youth turn to online resources for answers (Harper et al., 2016). Of all the components of the ecological system, media through mobile technology appears to be the most salient factor that impacts sex communication at home. Access to online resources by GBQ males puts these youth in charge of their own learning and allows them venues to explore their sexualities without parental supervision (Arrington-Sanders et al., 2015; Nelson, Golden, & Glick, 2015). This access to information renders sex communication with parents optional, if not entirely unnecessary.

While the internet plays multiple functions in assisting youth in their sexual identity formation such as learning about and communicating with other GBQ youth (Harper et al., 2016), the internet also leads to exposure to sexually explicit media which normalizes risky sexual behavior (Flores, Blake, and Sowell, 2011). A review of empirical data from 2003 to 2013 revealed contradictory evidence that attributed use of social media with increased self-esteem and social support while also finding evidence of harm, social isolation and cyberbullying (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2014). However, rather than viewing the internet and mass media as competition for GBQ sons' attention, parents can be assisted in teaching sons how to become discerning consumers of online information and develop media literacy which is a crucial element for sexual health (Nelson & Carey, 2016). Parents can guide sons in developing this competency by finding correct information online, along with regulating and negotiating their use of the internet as they explore their initial GBQ identities. Because of the ubiquity of new media, further investigation on the interplay between online media use and parent-child sex communication is recommended.

With the preponderance of communication media at their disposal, distinct nonverbal cues may be missed when parents and sons send text or Facebook messages, when compared to

face-to-face interactions. Given the awkwardness of the sex communication process as it is, parents and children may face unique communication challenges when pursuing sex communication through these non-traditional media. Research on these emergent issues will be beneficial not just for sex communication with GBQ sons, but with all adolescents.

Parents' concerns about having sexual minority children is influenced by their perception of their own gender roles (Jadwin-Cakmak et al., 2015). From our study, parental adherence to societal roles based on a gender binary appears to limit their capacity to consider GBQ sexual orientations during sex communication. This team reported elsewhere that while more mothers than fathers were noted to have talked with sons (Flores, Docherty, Relf, McKinney, & Barroso, 2018), fathers and other male figures in the family were used by mothers as exemplars whom sons should emulate. At early ages, boys received instructions about adhering to notions of traditional masculinity. This finding supports prior literature that identified fathers favoring sons to grow up "as heterosexual as possible," (Solebello & Elliott, 2011). Conversely, traditional parenting scripts which designates sex communication as part of mothers' responsibilities (Flores & Barroso, 2017) was also supported by our findings since fathers used that as rationale for not talking more with sons about sex and sexuality.

Implications

The ability of parents and GBQ sons to have conversations about inclusive sex and sexuality are affected by multiple and oftentimes conflicting factors external to the home. Parents lack knowledge about LGBTQ-specific topics (Rose et al., 2014) and this deficit in understanding is simultaneously supported and confronted by contrasting ecological factors. Parents are also under the influence of societal expectations and gendered norms that equate parental effectiveness to successfully raising heterosexual children (Solebello & Elliott, 2011). Hegemonic masculinity in the macro- and exo-systems must be addressed to foster more inclusive discussions with GBQ sons at the home. Furthermore, specifically assessing and providing resources to parents is essential as parents themselves may not have disclosed having a GBQ son to family and friends, have internalized stigma about the issue, and therefore require assistance. For parents who may be resistant to the idea of providing sexuality-inclusive guidance to GBQ sons, identifying the root causes and perpetuating factors of these barriers is crucial. Referring parents to family therapists, sexuality educators and similar specialists may be the first step to fostering a more accepting parenting style.

Our findings suggests that parents can take active steps to minimize the direct interaction of the identified problematic areas in a family's ecological system with a GBQ son. Whether it is a more conservative family member or a non-affirming church to which they may belong, parents are in a position to counter negative sexuality-related messages and offer alternatives to sons who may be excluded or even ostracized. As was suggested by the participants, even simple language that goes beyond a gender binary recognizes members of the LGBTQ community and socializes parents to a more inclusive worldview. Further, leveraging siblings' and other family members' support and acceptance of a GBQ child goes a long way in furthering positive sex discussions at home. Future intervention work must consider extended family members' roles in the sexual socialization of their GBQ members.

Educators working in the public school setting also have an opportunity to advocate for comprehensive and LGBTQ-inclusive sex education. Since the majority of public school sex education programs include a parental notice requirement, the explicit inclusion of LGBTQ content may sensitize parents to the idea that some adolescents do develop same-sex attractions and typically explore their sexual orientation during adolescence and early adulthood.

Limitations

While the qualitative nature of this study made it possible to unearth previously unreported findings regarding hegemonic parent-child sex communication, our results must be examined within the limitations of a cross-sectional design. As an inquiry of GBQ adolescent males' thoughts about factors that impact parent-child sex communication, our sample did not include parents and how they perceive the same process. Our findings are restricted to mostly school-going participants which does not represent youth not in school settings and who may be more in need of sexual health information. More research with non-cisgender males is also required to fully capture the ecological factors that impact sex communication with all sexual minority males. Despite our inclusion of 15- to 17 year old youth who still live at home, the retrospective nature of our study is subject to recall bias. A longitudinal study with family dyads that include pre-adolescent youth is recommended, especially those who report early self-identification as GBQ.

CONCLUSION

This report delineates how ecological factors beyond the home can affect sex communication between parents and sexual minority adolescent sons and paves the way for further studies including future intervention work. Our findings have brought to light the distal ecological factors that have a crucial effect on parents' and sexual minority adolescent sons' discussions about sex that is beyond the typical concerns of heterosexual parents with heterosexual adolescents. In order to address the anticipated needs of GBQ adolescent males, parents must be assisted in countering heteronormative language and ideas produced and perpetuated by hegemonic masculinity. Sexual minority adolescent males need relevant information as they transition into adulthood. With an embrace of inclusive sex communication practices, parents can buffer heteronormative ecological forces and be partners in the inclusive and non-gendered sexual socialization of their sexual minority adolescent sons.

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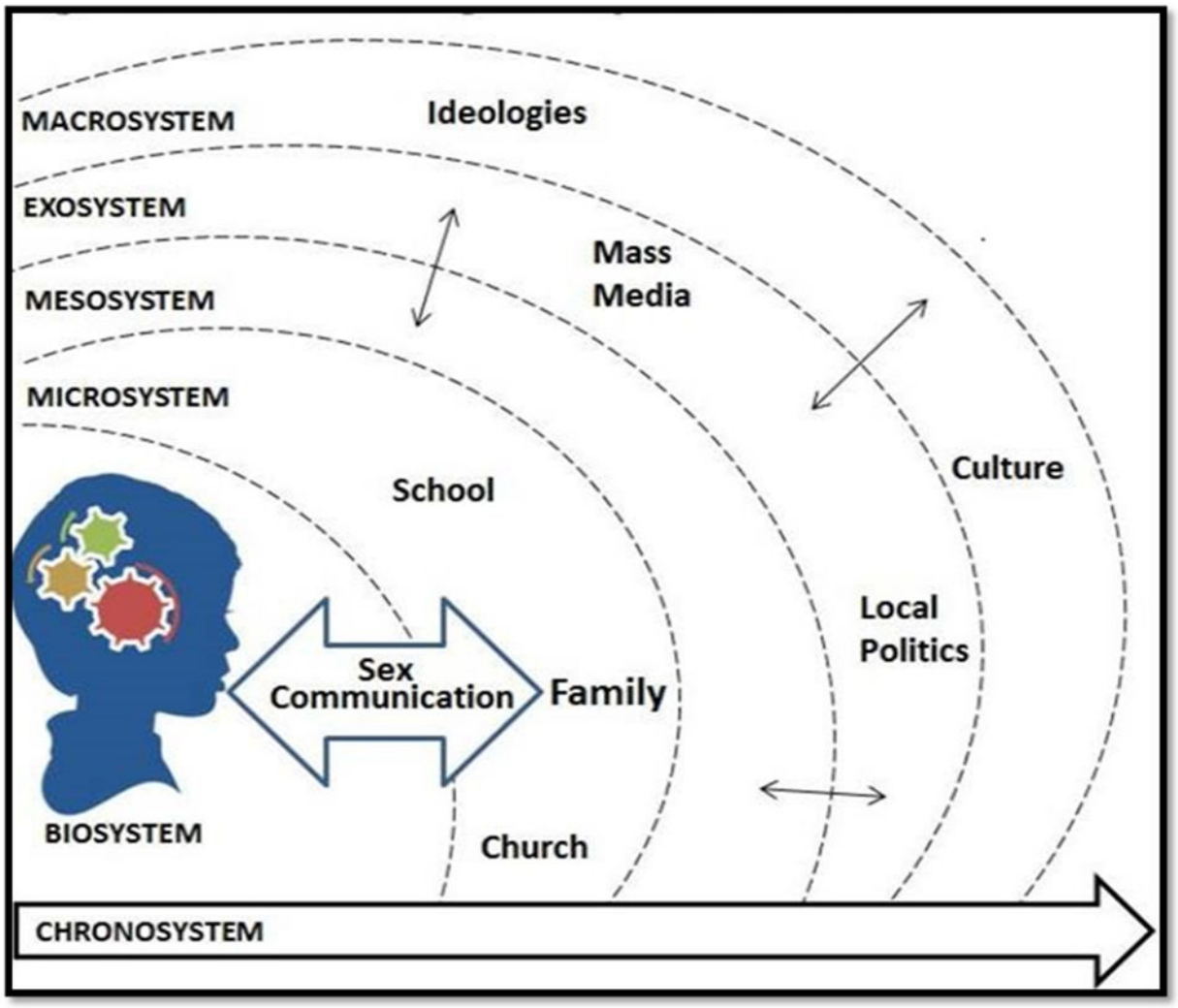

Figure 1.
Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory

Table 1:

Google and Initial Sexual Orientation Queries

Sample Recollections	Approximate Age
Dan: I think at some point I definitely Googled “How do gay people have sex?”	15 years old
Alex: I just Googled “same-sex attraction”.	11.5 years old
Roberto: I would just Google things. You know, like the typical “What does gay mean?”	11.5 years old
Marley: I typed "Define gay"	12 years old
George: I either Googled “gay” or “Am I gay?” or like homosexuality or something like that.	14 years old
James: Really innocuous questions like stuff like “What’s it like being gay?” or something like that.	17.5 years old