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ABSTRACT

Sexual orientation-based discrimination in schools has evolved from primarily blatant, overt forms to include subtler and ambiguous forms. Recent research has found that same-gender-attracted youth are more resilient in managing school-based discrimination than previously reported. Within the framework of Symbolic Interactionism, this dissertation used a basic qualitative approach, influenced by Grounded Theory methods, to investigate sexual orientation microaggressions in high schools, strategies employed by same-gender-attracted students in managing sexual orientation microaggressions, and the relationship between microaggressive experiences and sexual identity. Fourteen adolescents, ranging from ages 16 to 19, from seven separate schools, who self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer, were interviewed. Race/ethnicities of the participants included African American/Black ($n=2$), multi-racial ($n=3$), White/Native American ($n=1$), and White ($n=8$). Results showed that high school youth experienced incidents of subtle discrimination that were both consistent with current literature based on adult samples and specific to the high school environment. Distinct strategies employed by students in managing microaggressions and a relationship between experiences with sexual orientation microaggressions and identity were also found. The results of this study, which are discussed within the framework of identity negotiation theory, provide increased awareness of the types of sexual orientation-based subtle discrimination to school counselors, faculty, and administration, allowing them to be better equipped in facilitating an inclusive environment in schools

Keywords: sexual orientation microaggressions; high school; same-gender attractions; managing microaggressions; sexual identity; identity negotiation

Dedication

"Well, I must endure the presence of two or three
caterpillars if I wish to become acquainted with
the butterflies. It seems that they are very
beautiful."

– Antoine de Saint-Exupèry
The Little Prince

Over the past two years, fourteen young men and women willingly told their

stories to some random woman, me. As they shared the joy and the pain of the most

intimate details of their lives, I felt both privileged and humbled to be in their company.

These young adults, the faces of our future, are destined to leave positive, indelible marks

on our world. So, it is to you, *Princeton, Nancy, Rae, Mary, J.C., Lizzy, Warren, Kyle,*

Bernadette, Amelia, Ann, Kelhani, Alex, and Alice, who are teaching us all, and so

beautifully, how to navigate the caterpillars so that we might become acquainted with the

butterflies, that this dissertation is dedicated. Thank you for making our world a better

place.

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I am cognizant of the fact that I have not been on this journey alone. So many have been with me. To my children, Cj, Chris, Bri, and Brice, yes, you are right. When I returned to school I abandoned all motherly duties. Only the four of you could reframe my missing games, shows, events, and dinners through humor. Thank God for Dad. Because John, you picked up the slack without missing a step, never complaining and always supporting, as only you can do. How did I get so lucky to have you all in my life? Thank you doesn't even come close.

And then there are my colleagues, who have provided endless support, encouragement, and laughs. As I go forward, I find comfort in knowing that we have formed life-long friendships and that you will remain with me. To Brenda and to the Wolf Pak (Laura, Courtney, Julie, and Kate) please know how much I appreciate the part that each of you has played.

Finally, my dissertation committee. Dr. Nelson and Dr. Taylor, each of you must be on a zillion committees and I feel so lucky that you agreed to be part of mine. Dr. Althof, you invited five unlikely suspects into your home to study qualitative research. It was the best experience of my education. Thank you for the kindness you showed and the guidance you provided during our Qual III meetings and beyond. And to Dr. Kashubeck-West, I simply would not be here today if it weren't for you. You not only inspired me to begin, but you also encouraged me to finish. Not a meager task, admittedly. I will miss our talks dearly.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Sexual minorities are frequent targets of sexual orientation microaggressions (Linville, 2014; Nadal, Rivera, & Corpus, 2010; Sue, 2010; Wright & Wegner, 2012); however, the available scholarship on sexual orientation microaggressions is void of the perspectives of high school students (e.g. Nadal, Issa, et al., 2011; Nadal et al., 2010). Two studies specifically addressing sexual orientation microaggressions among adolescents were found among the literature. Of those, one drew from a predominately adult sample and did not address the school environment (Nadal, Issa, et al., 2011). While the second study, by Linville (2014), did utilize a sample comprised of high school adolescents, the questionnaire for this study was developed based on the findings from focus groups, in which the mean age was 25.7 years, as reported by Nadal, Issa, et al. (2011). Notwithstanding the value these studies added to the existing literature, the experiences of youth in a high school environment could differ starkly form those of adults. In addition, fitting data to pre-existing categories based on a theoretical typology of sexual orientation microaggressions could provide different results than building categories from the ground up, as reflected among the data (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The current study used an inductive, qualitative approach to investigate sexual orientation microaggressions among high school students.

The literature provides contrasting views on the relationship between adolescent sexual identity and discrimination (for a review see Cohler & Hammack, 2006). Earlier perspectives held that encounters with messages stigmatizing same-gender-attracted relations were debilitating obstacles to the construction of a positive sexual identity for sexual minorities (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994; Troiden, 1989). More recently, scholars

have suggested that youth are less constrained in their sexual expression and less affected by disapproving others. According to this view, although some youth do become debilitated by encounters with stigma, most same-gender-attracted high school adolescents develop a positive sexual identity with positive environmental support (Cohler & Hammack, 2006; Hammack, Thompson, & Pilecki, 2009).

Research on the ways same-gender-attracted adolescents manage subtle discrimination is limited. In spite of evidence of individuals exercising agency in managing discrimination in social interactions (Goffman, 1959, 1963; Strauss, 1959), the available research on ways that same-gender-attracted youth respond to discrimination has focused on coping (see e.g., Madsen & Green, 2012). Unique strategies employed by youth specific to managing sexual orientation microaggressions are nonexistent among the literature. Within the framework of symbolic interactionism, which purports that individuals engage in a process of defining self through the meaning they attribute to social interactions, this qualitative dissertation utilized a basic qualitative research methodology to investigate sexual orientation microaggressions that occur in high school. The extent to which microaggressions are experienced was explored. Also, the kinds of sexual orientation microaggressions were identified, along with the ways in which these students responded during social interactions. Finally, the relationship between microaggressive experiences and the sexual identity of same-gender-attracted high school adolescents was investigated.

Sexual Identity Development

During adolescence, youth navigate a multitude of developmental changes (Ginsburg & Opper, 1988; Graber & Archibald, 2001; Santrock, 2007). Erikson

(1959/1980, 1968) noted that during adolescence, youth strive to establish a positive identity by moving away from innate narcissistic tendencies, establishing trust, and ultimately learning to establish an autonomous identity in the world. Positive appraisals from others can be critical for youth developing a same-gender-attracted sexual identity (Mohr & Fassinger, 2000), who, in addition to the developmental stressors common among most adolescents, face the added difficulty of establishing a sexual identity that is contrary to social expectations (D'Augelli, 1994; Hunter & Mallon, 2000; A. Martin, 1988).

Earlier models of sexual identity development depicted a process of developing a sexual identity that was marked by stages (e.g., Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989). Positive identity development was achieved through meeting the stage requirements, while successfully managing stigmatizing messages regarding same-gender-attractions. A positive same-gender-attracted sexual identity was equated to the ability to live openly as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Indeed, the inability of youth to manage the stigma of same-gender-attracted identity has been associated with psychological and behavioral dysfunctions (e.g., Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, & Azrael, 2009).

More recent scholarship has suggested that a static, linear approach to sexual identity development is not representative of today's youth. Cohler and Hammack (2006) and colleagues (Hammack et al., 2009; Savin-Williams, 2011) noted that the journey to sexual identity is unique to each youth; these journeys may or may not include debilitating oppression as assumed in earlier models. Today's youth are less likely to be encumbered in their sexual expression or to ascribe to the ideology of claiming a dichotomous sexual identity label (Cohler & Hammack, 2006; Savin-Williams, 2005).

Research has shown that a considerable percentage of youth reported identifying as

"mostly heterosexual" (29%) when an option beyond "exclusively heterosexual" is

provided (Vrangalova & Savin-Williams, 2010, 2012). Additionally, sexual identity is

not always consistent with sexual experience; youth reporting same-gender sexual

experience have also reported identifying as "exclusively heterosexual" (Igartua,

Thombs, Burgos, & Montoro, 2009).

This recent perspective assumes that sexual identity, consistent with symbolic

interactionism, is socially constructed, making identity development an evolving, fluid

process as opposed to a single, fixed event (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004). Goffman (1963)

and others (Burke, 1991; K. Plummer, 1996; Strauss, 1959) noted that individuals have

multiple identities and approval from others of the most salient identity is sought during

social interactions. Further, Goffman (1959, 1963) argued that as people engage with one

another, they determine which identity is most salient in that context. Through a series of

negotiations (actions), people negotiate the meaning and status of a given identity.

Variations in environmental factors, such as cultural beliefs and the level of inclusiveness

represented in political structures, provide contextual differences that influence social

interactions (Goffman, 1959, 1963) and create differentiation in the paths to developing

and accepting one's sexual identify (Cohler & Hammack, 2006).

Sexual Orientation Microaggressions

In contrast to overt discrimination, common in previous years, contemporary

types of discrimination are often subtler in form (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, &

Hodson, 2002; Dudas, 2005). These subtle forms of sexual orientation-based

discrimination are referred to in the literature as sexual orientation microaggressions

(Nadal et al., 2010; Sue, 2010). Sexual orientation microaggressions occur so frequently that they are typically unnoticed and undetected by bystanders (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007). In addition, though the perpetrator may perceive them to be harmless, scholarship has found otherwise (Nadal, Griffin, Wong, Hamit, & Rasmus, 2014). Continual exposure to subtle discrimination has been found to be damaging to the recipient and related to further stigmatization of his or her same-gender-attracted sexual identity (Burn, Kadlec, & Rexer, 2005; Cox, Dewaele, van Houtte, & Vincke, 2011; Nadal, 2013). Sexual orientation microaggressions are rooted in societal beliefs about same-gender relationships (Nadal, 2013; Sue, 2010), making them pervasive and inescapable (Deitz, Hart, Baricevic, Kashubeck-West, & Schubert, 2016)

This trend toward covert forms of discrimination targeting same-gender-attracted youth is evident in statistics on school climate. Although reports of overt discrimination have declined in schools (Kosciw et al., 2012), subtle messages, such as pejorative language and non-inclusive curricula, that denigrate same-gender-attracted youth are still common (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009; Chesir-Teran, 2003; D'Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002). The Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) polled 8,584 students between the ages of 13 and 20 from 3,224 school districts across the country. The survey results of this 2012 poll showed 91.4% reported hearing homophobic epithets at school (Kosciw et al., 2012).

Cultural Factors Supporting Microaggressions

Heterosexism refers to the social elevation and preference for heterosexual relationships over same-gender relationships. Scholars have found that a heterosexual identity is both preferred and expected in the United States (Herek, 2009; Phelan, 2001).

Fifty-one percent of the 1,015 people polled by Gallup in 2012 reported feeling satisfied with the level of acceptance provided to same-gender-attracted persons. Seventy-seven percent of the mostly heterosexual respondents reported that discrimination against individuals with same-gender attractions was not a serious problem (Jones, 2012). Kosciw et al. (2012) found that, in schools, same-gender-attracted persons are verbally denigrated more frequently compared to gender and racial identities. Students with same-gender attractions have reported routinely hearing disparaging comments from peers, who only infrequently experience consequences for their behavior (Kosciw et al., 2012; Watch, 2001; Young, 2010). In addition to peers, students have reported hearing disparaging comments from faculty and staff (Kosciw et al., 2012; Watch, 2001).

A positive relationship between the psychological well-being of same-gender-attracted adolescents and affirming school climate has been established in current research (Aerts, Van Houtte, Dewaele, Cox, & Vincke, 2012; Craig & Smith, 2011; Kosciw et al., 2012). Since student behavior has been found to be a reflection of prevalent school beliefs and practices (Chesir-Teran, 2003), students attending schools whose climates are not inclusive are more likely to target same-gender-attracted peers for homophobic bullying (Aerts et al., 2012; Kosciw et al., 2012). Same-gender-attracted students who are targets of school bullying are more likely to be excessively absent and to report feeing unsafe or disconnected from school (Aerts et al., 2012; Almeida et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2012), all of which contribute to lesser psychological well-being.

Managing Sexual Orientation Microaggression

Scholarship on sexual orientation-based victimization of high school adolescents has predominately focused on psychological and behavioral outcomes (e.g., Aerts et al.,

2012; Almeida et al., 2009). In fact, relationships between incidents of victimization of these youth and rates of depression, suicidal ideation, and substance abuse have been established in the literature (Burton, Marshal, & Chisolm, 2014; Diamond et al., 2011; Espelage, Aragon, Brickett, & Koenig, 2008). However, the negative association between school-based discrimination against same-gender-attracted youth and adverse effects suffered by them has been called into question (Savin-Williams, 2005). Scholars have suggested incidents of victimization have been over-reported and misconstrued. Savin-Williams (2005) maintained that many studies used select samples, commonly drawn from mental health clinics, which could lead to the over-reporting of lesser well-being. The samples of these studies disproportionately represent gender non-conforming youth, who are more frequently and severely targeted for harassment in school. Because of the increased intensity of harassment, gender nonconforming youth are more prone to suicidal ideation and mental health disparities, and more likely to seek mental health services. When this subset of youth is disaggregated from the data, findings show that the mental well-being of same-gender-attracted youth is comparable their heterosexual peers. Also, some contend greater resiliency among same-gender-attracted adolescents than has been reported (Rieger & Savin-Williams, 2012).

Targets of discrimination have been viewed as passive recipients of the slights directed toward them (Swim, Cohen, & Hyers, 1998). Pursuant to this, the available research on responding to sexual orientation-based discrimination has predominately focused on ways of coping (Madsen & Green, 2012; Saewyc, 2011) or the benefits of school-based alliance organizations (Kosciw et al., 2012), friends, and family (Doty, Willoughby, Lindahl, & Malik, 2010). However, research has shown that individuals take

active roles and engage in a variety of strategies in managing their discriminatory interactions (Fuller, Chang, & Rubin, 2009; Goffman, 1963; K. Plummer, 1996; Speer & Potter, 2000; Strauss, 1959; Swim et al., 1998). For example, Goffman (1963) suggested that people with devalued identities negotiate their status during social interactions, through which they accept or reject the stigma assigned to them. Other scholarship has found that individuals engage in protective strategies, such as refraining from disclosing a same-gender-attracted identity (passing), to escape discrimination and to gain heterosexual privilege (Carvallo & Pelham, 2008).

Taken in total, the differing perspectives on sexual identity development and the resiliency of same-gender-attracted adolescents call for an exploration into this phenomenon. Understanding this relationship also requires an inquiry into the types of negative messages youth receive and how they manage their responses when interacting with others within the context of the school environment. Within the framework of symbolic interactionism, this qualitative dissertation utilized a basic qualitative research methodology, informed by Grounded Theory, to investigate sexual orientation microaggressions in high school. Specifically, the kinds of sexual orientation microaggressions were identified, along with the ways in which these students responded during social interactions. Finally, the relationship between microaggressive experiences and the sexual identity of same-gender-attracted high school adolescents was investigated

Statement of Problem

Due to the subtle nature of sexual orientation microaggressions, these ubiquitous and potentially harmful forms of discrimination might be undetected in the school environment. In spite of research-based evidence of the potentially detrimental effect on

the recipients of sexual orientation microaggressions, the prevalence, strategies for managing, and the relationship of these experiences with sexual identity for same-gender-attracted youth is absent among the literature.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate sexual orientation microaggressions in high school. In addition to identifying the types of microaggressions experienced by these youth, management strategies and the relationship between sexual identity and microaggressive experiences was explored. This study supplements the literature on sexual orientation microaggressions by providing insight into these experiences in the day-to-day lives of same-gender-attracted adolescents in high schools. The results of this study may also benefit high school counselors, administrators, and faculty who are striving to create a supportive and inclusive school environment for all students, including those with same-gender attractions. Finally, the identification of the effective strategies employed by same-gender-attracted adolescents in managing sexual orientation microaggressions, as identified in this study, can assist mental health professions working with these youths in providing them with tools to manage discrimination experienced when socially interacting with others.

Research Questions

The following research questions were examined in this study:

1. To what extent and in what ways do adolescents with same-gender attractions experience sexual orientation microaggressions while at school?

2. In what ways do these students manage sexual orientation microaggressions in social interactions while at school?

3. In what ways do experiences with sexual orientation microaggressions at school

   affect the sexual identity of adolescents with same-gender attractions?

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter provides the framework supporting the research questions for the proposed study. Initially, a description of the theoretical perspective underlying this proposal is delineated. Next, because this study explores the relationship between microaggressions and sexual identity, a review of the literature on sexual identity development is provided. A review of literature on sexual orientation microaggressions is provided to substantiate the lack of research in this area specifically pertaining to high school adolescents. Finally, after a review of discrepant findings on the prevalence of subtle discrimination in high school and the resilience of youth in managing discriminatory encounters, an argument for further inquiry specific to the research questions is presented.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism frames this dissertation. Symbolic interactionism (SI) was coined by Herbert Blumer (1969) to further the works of George Herbert Mead, which examined the contributions of people in the construction and maintenance of social order. In contrast to positivist ideologies of social behavior, which depict people as reactive agents whose behaviors are causative, Blumer proposed that human nature is comprised of a succession of interpretative interactions. People's actions are at the crux of SI; individuals, collectively, singly, and in representation of other social entities (such as organizations or group membership) define and maintain the social culture through their actions. To provide a foundation for SI, Blumer proposed three main premises: (1) People act towards objects (e.g., people, social structures, culture) based on the meaning things have for them; (2) The meanings of objects develop through social interactions

with others; and (3) People engage in an interpretative process to identify, manage, and modify the meaning of things through self-interaction. Thus, there may be various meanings regarding the object at the focus of the interactions, including the social status and identity of the actors involved (Goffman, 1963; Mead, 1934). Common meaning is established through a series of exchanges with one another, including assigning status (Strauss, 1959) and defining the roles (Goffman, 1959, 1963) of self and others.

For example, Mead (1934) averred that the fundamental structure of social exchanges, the social act, resembles a triadic relationship. Through gestures, the actor sends signals to other informing them on what they are expected to do. The other then provides a response indicating what he or she is planning to do. Finally, the actor and the other construct a definition of the situation, which is the agreement between them on a joint action. Mead (1934) also posited that people have the capacity to perceive themselves as objects (i.e., they are self-reflective) and take the perspective of others in social interactions. This process of self-interaction and role-taking allows people to define themselves, others, and the situation by ascertaining the meanings others hold and comparing them with personal meanings to formulate a response (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic interactionism recognizes that not all interaction is symbolic. Many interactions, such as the ritualized greeting of, "How are you?" are routine and repetitive. It is only when a new or unexpected response, such as "Not well," arises that situations become fodder for symbolic interpretation. Through symbolic interactions, those in which people are moved to cognitively engage, meaning is constructed (Mead, 1934; Strauss, 1959).

Blumer (1969) contended that that the nature of the empirical world is unyielding. As such it can sustain questioning, inquiry, and interpretation as individuals construct the meaning of an object. Reality exists in the present and is in a continual state of flux as people strive to negotiate the meaning of newness. In addition to individual actions, symbolic interactionists recognize collective life. For example, the collective actions of people uphold and maintain social organizations, normative behaviors, and cultural beliefs. Previous actions lay the foundation for current actions; however, all are subject to modification through social interactions at both the individual and collective levels. As people encounter new social experiences, beliefs can evolve. In addition, the collective actions of people facilitate change in the existing social order of the seemingly inflexible world. Adolescents are navigating a path to identity (Erikson, 1959/1980) and acceptance (Erikson, 1959/1980; Mead, 1934). A symbolic interactionism approach lends itself to understanding how these youths negotiate microaggressive interactions and redefine the meaning of a same-gender-attracted identity across contexts of a world that is rapidly becoming more affirming of same-gender relationships (Kosciw et al., 2012; Newport & Himelfarb, 2013).

The Same-Gender-Attracted Adolescent

Adolescent Development

Since the high school adolescent and the period of adolescence are at the center of this dissertation, it is also important to distinguish between these terms. Scholars have found specific developmental processes (e.g., physical, cognitive, and sexual development) to be commonly experienced by youth during adolescence (Santrock, 2007). Adolescents refer to youth roughly between the ages of 10 and 19 (Sacks, 2003;

Santrock, 2007). The term adolescence is used to refer to the developmental period experienced by adolescents. For the purposes of this study, reference to adolescents is limited to youth who are in high school, irrespective of age. This section provides a review of the literature of adolescent development to provide background on the same-gender attracted adolescent.

Adolescence is a critical period of transition for youth (Cox et al., 2011; Erikson, 1959/1980; Ginsburg & Opper, 1988; Graber & Archibald, 2001; Santrock, 2007) that requires an amalgamation of multiple life changes (Graber & Archibald, 2001) into one solidified self-identity (Erikson, 1959/1980, 1968). In addition to biological (Graber & Archibald, 2001; Santrock, 2007) and cognitive (Ginsburg & Opper, 1988) development, this period is marked with a search for self (Erikson, 1959/1980; S. Swann & Spivey, 2004) and a movement toward independence from parents (Erikson, 1959/1980; Graber & Archibald, 2001; Santrock, 2007). Erikson (1959/1980, 1968) noted that during adolescence youth are driven to explore who they are while striving to establish an autonomous self and find a place in the external world. Similarly, Troiden (1989) suggested that scholars typically view adolescence as a benchmark. Troiden suggested that, instead, it is more closely akin to a transition process through which youth strive to reconcile their behavior with perceptions of social expectations of appropriate adolescent behavior. The inability to freely explore alternatives with positive support while constructing an identity could negatively impact youth (Erikson, 1959/1980; Meeus, 2011; S. Swann & Spivey, 2004), often leading to increased rebellion, and, in some cases, neurosis, which could ultimately carry over to adulthood (Erikson, 1959/1980).

Scholars have also noted the potential for increased conflict to coincide with entering adolescence (Arnet, 1999; Erikson, 1959/1980, 1968; Graber & Archibald, 2001; Santrock, 2007). As adolescents navigate life changes, relationships with family, friends, and society at large can become tenuous (Graber & Archibald, 2001; LaSala, 2010). Amid bodily and hormonal changes (Graber & Archibald, 2001; Santrock, 2007), the adolescent begins to emerge as a sexual being (Erikson, 1959/1980; Graber & Archibald, 2001). Because of parents' discomfort with discussing sexuality with adolescents, this can be a source of anxiety within families (Calzo & Ward, 2009; Graber & Archibald, 2001; Horn & Heinze, 2011). For instance, tension within the family can increase as parents reexamine and restructure parent-child relationships and expectancies and monitor the child's sexual behavior more closely (D'Augelli, 1985; Graber & Archibald, 2001). Simultaneously, the adolescent strives for greater freedom of self-expression, including exploring sexual intimacy while crafting a sexual identity (Erikson, 1968; Graber & Archibald, 2001). Bandura (1969) suggested that the transmission of social values regarding sex and gender are inherent in the socialization of children, noting that the process of indoctrinating children into sex roles begins at birth. Similarly, A. Martin (1988) suggested that through social scripts and subtle messages, children are socialized to develop as sexual beings, thus making sexual identity central to adolescent development.

Although a positive sexual identity development is critical for all youth (Kroger, 2006; A. Martin, 1988), researchers have argued that this period of sexual exploration can be particularly troublesome for the adolescent experiencing same-gender attractions. These youth are striving to develop a positive self while simultaneously receiving

negative social messages regarding same-gender relationships (D'Augelli, 1985; Hunter & Mallon, 2000; A. Martin, 1988; Savin-Williams, 1989). During this period, youth in general have been characterized as being overly sensitive to the perceptions of others and preoccupied with their self-image (Erikson, 1959/1980, 1968) as they develop a social self. S. Swann and Spivey (2004) argued that the self is most vulnerable to others' perceptions during the initial exploration of a sexual identity when it is less stable. Overall, scholars agree that youth receive prejudicial messages regarding pr3scribed gender scripts and regarding same-gender attractions being a cultural taboo from a myriad of sources, including family (Bos, Picavet, & Snadfort, 2012; Calzo & Ward, 2009; Degner & Dalege, 2013), educational systems, (Aerts et al., 2012; Chesir-Teran, 2003; Cox et al., 2011), and school peer groups (Calzo & Ward, 2009; Poteat, 2007). According to the literature, for the same-gender-attracted youth striving to develop positive self-worth, negative messages from others could affect their willingness to disclose their sexual orientation (Burn et al., 2005; LaSala, 2010; Nadal, Issa, et al., 2011; Savin-Williams, 1998) and lead to mental health disparities (D'Augelli, 1985, 1994).

The Developing Self and Self-Worth

Mead (1964, 2003) and others (Cooley, 2003; Goffman, 1959; Strauss, 1959) maintained that the self is constructed through a series of social interactions comprised of actions toward, and responses from, others. Since social interactions are ongoing processes across the life-span and life domains, and comprised of a culmination of both past and present experiences, the self continually evolves (Cooley, 2003; Mead, 1934; Strauss, 1959). Central to the developing self are individuals' evaluations of how they believe others perceive them. Cooley (2003) referred to this tendency to self-evaluate

based on the appraisals of others as the "looking – glass self," writing that, "The thing

that moves us to pride or shame is not the mere mechanical reflection of ourselves, but an

imputed sentiment, the imagined effect of this reflection upon another's mind" (p. 152).

Evaluative mental images are internalized as one's sense of self and become the yardstick

for perceived self-worth (Cooley, 1902; Strauss, 1959). Erikson (1968) described

adolescents as having the potential to be "clannish" (p. 132). Erikson further averred that

adolescents are overly critical of others whose characteristics are outside of the group

norm. Persistent negative appraisals from others can also lead to identity confusion,

further complicating the development of a positive identity (Erikson, 1968). Scholars

have noted that youth receiving negative appraisals from others are more likely to

experience a devalued sense of self, (Mohr & Fassinger, 2000), an erosion of self-worth

(Mead, 1964; Pachankis & Hatzenbuehler, 2013), and a decreased sense of belonging

(Erikson, 1959/1980). Some have argued that to avoid negative appraisals from others,

same-gender-attracted youth may even change their behavior to be in line with

heterosexual peers (Hunter & Mallon, 2000).

For example, in a mixed methods' study of middle school adolescents, Harter,

Stocker, and Robinson (1996) examined the direction of the relationship between the

perceived approval of others and individual self-worth. Researchers asked students to

select one of three orientations relating to the peer approval and self-worth (e.g., peer

approval is the basis of self-worth, self-worth determines peer approval, and there is no

relationship between the two) and rate the level of preoccupation with peer approval and

self-approval on a five point Likert-type scale. In addition, students provided a

descriptive example of their selected orientation. The results of separate ANOVAs

revealed that perceived negative approval of others appeared to affect adolescents'

academic and behavioral performance. Students who based their self-worth on peer

approval reported a higher likelihood of perseverating on, and being more sensitive to,

variations in the approval of others when compared to students selecting other

alignments. A content analysis of the descriptive responses indicated that participants

most commonly perceived peers to base acceptance of others on evaluations of the

individual's personality or behavior (65.1%) followed by physical appearance and dress

(25.9%). For the adolescent who perceives negative evaluation by others based on sexual

orientation alone, repercussions occur; these youth are more likely to report symptoms of

emotional distress, such as suicide ideation and depression (Almeida et al., 2009).

   While there is consistency among the literature regarding the relationship between

a positive sexual identity and sense of self (Mohr & Fassinger, 2000) and mental health

disparities associated among same-gender attractions (Almeida et al., 2009; D'Augelli et

al., 2002; Kosciw et al., 2012; Saewyc, 2011), scholars are at odds regarding ideologies

on the pathways leading to the development of a sexual identity (Cohler & Hammack,

2006; Saewyc, 2011). Summarized below are the prevailing perspectives on sexual

identity development.

Sexual Identity Development

   Defining one's sexual orientation is a central component of a personal identity

(Hunter & Mallon, 2000); however, scholars have suggested that this task is more

complex for same-gender-attracted youth (Floyd & Stein, 2002; Rosario, Schrimshaw, &

Hunter, 2011). Compared to youth developing a heterosexual identity, the same-gender-

attracted adolescent is with added challenges associated with developing a sexual identity

that is contrary to the expectations of his or her social environment. Unlike youth identifying as heterosexual, the sexual identity of same-gender-attracted youth is continually questioned by others, which can result in added stress to an already difficult process (Hunter & Mallon, 2000). D'Augelli (1994) suggested that developing a same-gender-attracted identity requires an additional step in the process of "becoming" (p. 313); youth must both cast aside a heterosexual identity, which society has attributed to them through socialization, and construct a new unsanctioned identity.

There are currently varying perspectives of the level of difficulty associated with adolescents with same-gender attractions developing a sexual identity. The following section provides and explains these perspectives in order to substantiate the need for further inquiry into the effect of subtle discrimination on the sexual identity development of same-gender-attracted adolescents.

{ TC "Sexual identity development stage model perspective"\l 3 }Sexual identity development stage model perspective. Traditional theories on developing a same-gender-attracted sexual identity have primarily offered a stage approach (e.g., Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1981; D'Augelli, 1994; Troiden, 1989). Broadly speaking, the stage perspective assumes that the process of sexual identity development is marked with milestones. Youth enter the process with confusion regarding sexual attractions to same-gender peers and exit when they accept and publicly acknowledge a same-gender-attracted identity. Although some scholars of earlier models claim that there are a finite number of stages, some have proposed a linear progression (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1981), allowing for forward and backward motion among stages (with backward motion being viewed as a setback). Others have suggested that sexual identity development is a more

fluid, nonlinear process (D'Augelli, 1994; Troiden, 1989). Theorists of the nonlinear

models postulated that individuals might enter and exit stages in any given level and in

any given order as dictated by contextual and situational influences, such as prevailing

sociocultural norms and interactions with others (Coleman, 1981; D'Augelli, 1994;

Troiden, 1989). Troiden (1989) argued that the sequence of progression was unique to

each individual, writing that "Progress through the stages occurs in back-and-forth, up-

and-down ways; the characteristics of stages overlap and recur in somewhat different

ways for different people" (p. 47-48). Like other stage models, however, development of

a positive sexual identity required transitioning through all stages.

From the stage model perspective, during sexual identity development individuals

are faced with navigating oppressive social messages of what it means to have same-

gender attractions (Graber & Archibald, 2001; Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000). The

degree to which one can successfully manage oppressive messages, remain committed to

accepting a same-gender-attracted identity, and openly live as being sexually attracted to

same-gender others, marks the successful path to emerging with a positive identity.

Earlier scholars on sexual identity development recognized that same-gender-attracted

identity labels (i.e., gay, lesbian, and bisexual) are socially constructed and thereby

responsive to social attitudes regarding same-gender attractions (D'Augelli, 1994;

Troiden, 1989). Although these models predicted that social negativity regarding same-

gender-attracted individuals would fluctuate over time, social stigma and oppression were

perceived to be persistent, major impediments to embracing and disclosing a same-

gender-attracted identity (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994; Troiden, 1989). Scholarship has

found, in fact, that the inability to manage stigma and oppression has a potentially

deleterious impact on the same-gender-attracted individuals (Hatzenbuehler, 2009;

Hatzenbuehler, Corbin, & Fromme, 2008; Meyer, 2013).

Repetitive incidents of oppressive experiences have been found to lead to

increased stress (Meyer, 2013), emotional distress (Almeida et al., 2009) and overloaded

psychological processes required in regulating emotions (Hatzenbuehler, 2009) among

same-gender-attracted persons. Consequently, the individual is at a higher risk for

responding ineffectively to negative life events when compared to heterosexual peers.

Incidents of substance abuse (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2008), depression, and suicidal

ideation (Almeida et al., 2009) have been found to be higher among adolescents with

same-gender attractions. Hatzenbuehler et al. (2008) suggested that the added task of

negotiating a sexual identity to the already problematic process of adolescent

development promotes increased alcohol use among same-gender-attracted youth when

compared to heterosexual peers. In a five-year longitudinal study of youth between the

ages of 17 and 19 ($n = 2,220$), Hatzenbuehler et al. (2008) examined patterns of alcohol

use of youth transitioning from high school to college. Hatzenbuehler et al. assessed the

patterns of students' alcohol usage during the summer immediately after high school

graduation, and again each following spring during college. Findings showed that

increased rates of high-risk drinking (i.e., drinking until intoxicated) among high school

females ($ps < .01$) and males ($ps < .01$) compared to heterosexual students. Also found

were interesting differences. While high school consumption was significantly higher for

same-gender-attracted females than heterosexual females, differences in consumption

through college were not significant. On the other hand, male same-gender-attracted

students' usage was not significantly different from heterosexual males during high

school, but significantly increased during college. From this, Hatzenbuehler et al. (2008) found a relationship between where the student was in the process of developing a same-gender-attracted identity and spikes in alcohol consumption.

Recently, scholars have begun to question the validity of sexual identity stage models. Savin-Williams (2005) argued that stage models described the journey to coming out rather than sexual identity development, adding that the process of deciding to disclose a sexual identity is separate from developing a same-gender-attracted identity. Savin-Williams and others (Cohler & Hammack, 2006) further suggested that disclosing a sexual identity is not necessarily a common goal among same-gender-attracted youth. Common among the stage model approaches is the assumption that oppression negatively affects sexual identity. This perspective was rooted in scholarship finding lessened psychological well-being among same-gender-attracted individuals (see D'Augelli, 1985; Hatzenbuehler, 2009; Hatzenbuehler et al., 2008; Meyer, 2013). Cohler and Hammack (2006) and Savin-Williams (2005) argued that these models are outdated and do not provide a complete picture of sexual identity development for the present-day adolescent. In comparison to the cultural climate during the time early models were constructed (between 1979 and 1994), today's climate is more accepting of same-gender attractions (Cohler & Hammack, 2006; Herek, 2000; Kosciw et al., 2012). Increased levels of acceptance have facilitated increased visibility of same-gender-attracted youth (Aerts et al., 2012; D'Augelli, 1985). As a result there has been a decrease in the level of stigma attached to a same-gender-attracted identity, which has moved youth to publicly identify as having same-gender attractions more freely (Cohler & Hammack, 2006; D'Augelli, 1985; Savin-Williams, 1998, 2005, 2011). Cohler and Hammack (2006) argued that the

stage approaches assumed shared patterned transitions specific to "generational units,"

without consideration of individual contexts or variation in the responses to existing

cultural attitudes within or among cohorts (Cohler & Hammack, 2006, p. 49). Further,

current literature on same-gender-attracted adolescents finds that, unlike samples of

earlier studies, today's youth are frequently less inhibited in sexual expression and are

disinterested in self-labeling (Cohler & Hammack, 2006; Hammack et al., 2009; Savin-

Williams, 1998, 2005).

       { TC "Sexual identity development and present-day adolescents" \l 3 }Sexual

identity development and present-day adolescents. Savin-Williams (1998, 2005) and

others (Bedard & Marks, 2010; Cohler & Hammack, 2006; Floyd & Stein, 2002; Rosario

et al., 2011; Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000) have argued against stage models,

averring that a one-size-fits-all model of sexual identity fails to acknowledge the diversity

among the pathways to self-labeling as a sexual minority. Savin-Williams and Diamond

(2000) also suggested that previous models were overwhelmingly based on data from

male samples, thereby not giving voice to females (see e.g., D'Augelli, 1985; Troiden,

1989). Male and female adolescents share both significant differences and similarities in

sexual identity development. To ignore these would result in an incomplete picture of

adolescent sexual identity development. For instance, Savin-Williams and Diamond

examined the trajectory of sexual identity development of 164 adolescent male ($n = 86$)

and female ($n = 78$) same-gender-attracted youth (ages 17 to 25) to identify the timing of

meeting four significant developmental milestones. Specifically, the milestones were: (1)

first same-gender attractions; (2) first sexual contact with a same-gender peer; (3) initial

self-labeling as same-gender-attracted, and (4) the first time disclosing same-gender

attractions to another. The results revealed gender differences in self-labeling among participants. Males were more likely to self-label based on sexual attraction and sexual experience when compared to females, who were more likely to self-label based on relationships and emotions. In addition, males were more likely than females to have same-gender sexual contact before self-labeling than females, who showed a pattern of self-labeling before having sexual contact.

Savin-Williams (1998) provided evidence of the unique pathways to sexual identity among youth and argued that the persistent oppression assumed in stage models is not a given for all same-gender-attracted youth. Savin-Williams examined the trajectory of developing a same-gender sexual identity in a three-sample qualitative study with 180 male youths between the ages of 15 and 25. Results showed that although there were some consistencies among youths in the journey to self-identification, very few followed a linear progression as suggested in the stage models. A small percentage of participants reported a lack of self-doubt and struggle in self-labeling and disclosing to others and, instead, reported relief in self-defining as gay. The number one response regarding the decision to self-label was, in fact, reported to be, "it just clicked" and, "I just knew" (Savin-Williams, 1998, p. 124), leading Savin-Williams to conclude that, for some, "[b]eing gay/bisexual was not a handicap or a disability but an extension of living a new life filled with exhilarating prospects for homoeroticism and romantic relationships…" (p. 124). Though 25% of the participants did report experiencing anxiety, confusion, and fear when their attractions to same-gender others did not dissipate over time, these findings are in contrast to the path depicted by earlier scholars of youth as being distraught across the board (see Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994; Troiden, 1989).

Because of the variation found among youth in defining sexual orientation, Savin-Williams (1998, 2005, 2011) suggested that sexual identity development should be viewed from a perspective that recognizes the multiplicity of pathways to identity of same-gender-attracted youth and the individuality of each journey. The aforementioned critical milestones are both common among same-gender-attracted youth and experienced uniquely by each youth (Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter, & Braun, 2006; Rosario et al., 2011; Savin-Williams, 2005; Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000). In addition to previously noted gender differences, scholars have argued that disclosing a same-gender-attracted identity is not a one-time experience but repetitive across one's lifespan, and that each disclosure is distinct (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004). Henceforth, these milestones can be experienced at multiple points during the course of life and are influenced by a many factors, including the individual's past experiences (Goffman, 1959, 1963; Mead, 1934; D. C. Plummer, 2001; Strauss, 1959), fluctuations in both social and cultural factors (Cohler & Hammack, 2006; Hammack et al., 2009), biology, and psychological factors (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004). Though same-gender-attracted youth may experience unique psychological difficulties when compared to heterosexual youth, scholars have argued that, similar to their heterosexual counterparts, these youth ultimately overcome them and live productive and satisfying lives (Rosario et al., 2011; Saewyc, 2011; Savin-Williams, 2005).

Cohler and Hammack (2006) suggested that as the social climate changes, adolescents respond accordingly. While authors of the stage models did indicate the potential for cultural change regarding levels of social acceptance, admittedly absent from this scholarship is the impact of this change on the overall discourse of the meaning

of same-gender attractions in contemporary society (Cohler & Hammack, 2006; London, Ahlqvist, Gonzalez, Glanton, & Thompson, 2014; Savin-Williams, 2005). Hammack et al. (2009) and Cohler and Hammack (2006) suggested that sexual identity development should be considered from a life-course perspective. Scholars have posited that individuals construct a biography (Goffman, 1963; Strauss, 1959) or narrative (Cohler & Hammack, 2006; Hammack et al., 2009), unique to each, which frames his or her developmental life experiences. Regarding sexual identity development, and considering the current cultural climate, narratives of today's youth are one of struggle and success or of emancipation. Cohler and Hammack (2006) and colleagues (Hammack et al., 2009; Savin-Williams, 2005, 2011) have argued that stage models pathologize same-gender-attracted youth by depicting a persecuted individual struggling to ultimately arise with a positive sexual identity. These models are reflective of a struggle and success narrative. This narrative emphasizes that stress and stigma are obstacles to developing a positive same-gender-attracted identity (see e.g., Cox et al., 2011; Meyer, 2013). The struggle and success narrative also emphasizes the potential deleterious consequences of identifying as having same-gender attractions (see e.g., Almeida et al., 2009; Burn et al., 2005; D'Augelli, 1985; D'Augelli et al., 2002; Hatzenbuehler, 2009).

While this narrative does speak to the experiences of some youth, it does not capture the experiences of all youth (Cohler & Hammack, 2006; Hammack et al., 2009). A requirement for positive identity development from the stage model perspective was embracing and publicly disclosing a gay identity (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994; Troiden, 1989). These goals are not necessarily consistent with the values of present-day youth (Cohler & Hammack, 2006; Savin-Williams, 1998, 2005, 2011). Present-day adolescents

are more at ease with their sexuality and less constrained regarding sexual exploration

(Cohler & Hammack, 2006; Savin-Williams, 2005). Same-gender sexual exploration is

common among youth, same-gender-attracted, and heterosexual alike. Data from the

National Center for Health Statistics revealed that 2.5% of males and 11% of females

between the ages of 15 and 19 who reported having had sexual experience, also reported

having sexual experiences with a same-gender peer (Chandra, Mosher, Copen, &

Sionean, 2011). In addition, environmental supports such as gay-straight alliances

(Toomey & Russell, 2011) and heightened awareness of the concerns and needs of same-

gender-attracted youth (Kosciw et al., 2012) are indications of a progressive and

affirming society. In all, this provides support for a narrative of emancipation.

Considering sexual identity development from a life-course perspective of emancipation

removes the pathology commonly assumed in same-gender-attracted sexual identity

development and replaces it with a discourse of normalcy (Cohler & Hammack, 2006).

Earlier models also assumed that successful same-gender-attracted identity

development required a sole identification among three discrete nonheterosexual

categories of sexual identities: gay, lesbian, or bisexual (see Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994;

Troiden, 1989). Present-day youth find this limiting and not always indicative of how

they identify sexually (Cohler & Hammack, 2006; Savin-Williams, 1998, 2005, 2014a).

Though Troiden (1989) acknowledged that sexual identity may span a spectrum beyond

three identities, data for the Troiden model were drawn exclusively from individuals who

were committed to ultimately emerging with a positive lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity.

More recent research on sexual identity has found that distinct categorization of sexual

identities is insufficient in capturing the sexual identities, attitudes, and patterns of sexual

behavior of today's youth (Igartua et al., 2009; Savin-Williams, 2014a; Vrangalova &

Savin-Williams, 2012).

For instance, Vrangalova and Savin-Williams (2012) found support for

considering sexual identity along a continuum of five categories rather than three by

adding "mostly heterosexual" and "mostly gay/lesbian" to "lesbian," "gay," and

"bisexual" identity labels as sexual identity choices. Participants ($N = 1,631$) ranging

from 18 to 74 years of age selected a sexual orientation identity, rated same gender or

other gender attraction (using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *not at all* to *very*

much), and answered questions regarding sexual behavior. Descriptive statistics for this

sample revealed that the "mostly heterosexual" label was the most chosen

nonheterosexual label among both women (20%) and men (9%), with a significant

difference between men and women, $x^2(1, n = 1,631) = 40.58, p < .001$. To test the

distinctiveness of the newly added mostly heterosexual and mostly gay/lesbian groups,

Vrangalova and Savin-Williams conducted four planned comparison tests against a

separate ANOVA for each of the five identities presented. Using sexual orientation

identity as the independent variable, and other and same-sex attraction as the dependent

variables, the ANOVAs for both other-sex attractions and same-sex attractions were

found to be significant for both men and women, $F(1, 823) = 2364.56, p < .001$, and $F(4,$

$798) = 267.25, p < .001$, respectively). A linear decrease in other-sex attraction (from

heterosexual to gay/lesbian) and a linear increase in same-sex attraction (from

heterosexual to gay/lesbian) were also found, indicating more, but not complete,

exclusivity to exist on the polar ends of the spectrum. The planned comparisons revealed

that both men and women in the "mostly heterosexual" and "heterosexual" groups

reported comparable other-sex attractions, while mostly heterosexual men and women reported higher same-sex attractions than the heterosexual group.

Similarly, Igartua et al. (2009) found sexual identity among adolescents to be complex, also finding inconsistency among adolescents regarding sexual behavior, attraction, and sexual identity. One thousand fifty-one students in eight separate high schools completed a questionnaire for assessing youths' risky sexual behavior (QYRBS). Findings revealed that one in ten of the students surveyed identified as "mostly heterosexual"; however, students' responses regarding same-gender attractions were varied. For example, 7% identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, and 4% reported they engaged in same-gender sexual behavior. Igartua et al. (2009) noted, "...these groups were not concentric circles and no single question effectively identified most sexual minority youth." Half of the students who reported identifying as heterosexual also reported "nonexclusively-heterosexual" behaviors and attractions. In addition, scholars have found that some adolescents chose not to self-label at all in order to avoid the perceived restrictions of being pigeonholed into one sexual identity (Cohler & Hammack, 2006; Savin-Williams, 1998).

Since adolescence can be difficult for all youth (Arnet, 1999; Erikson, 1959/1980, 1968; Santrock, 2007), solely focusing on the difficulties experienced by youth developing a same-gender-attracted sexual identity does a disservice to both same-gender-attracted and heterosexual adolescents (Dillon, Worthington, & Moradi, 2011; Savin-Williams, 1998, 2005, 2011). For example, the absence of models of sexual identity development for heterosexual adolescents promotes a higher privilege status for heterosexual youth (Frankel, 2004). In fact, Savin-Williams (2011) noted that by solely

focusing on the effects of same-gender sexual attractions, scholars run the risk of basing "normal" sexual development on sexual orientation. This runs the risk of pathologizing the development of a same-gender attraction sexual identity. In addition, although the path to sexual identity for the same-gender-attracted adolescent is marked with unique points of distinction when compared to adolescents with other-gender attractions, some have found similarities in aspects of resiliency across sexual orientation labels (Busseri, Willoughby, Chalmers, & Bogaert, 2006). Scholars have, in fact, suggested that there are more commonalities in struggles across sexual orientation groups than within groups (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000).

For example, Busseri et al. (2006) investigated the relationship between sexual orientation and "successful development" (p. 564) among self-reported exclusively heterosexual (n = 3,594); mostly heterosexual (n = 124); bisexual (n = 122); and same-sex attracted (n = 36) high school adolescents. Students completed a questionnaire that assessed intrapersonal variables (e.g., sexual attraction, attitudes towards risk-taking, psychological functioning, and academic orientation), interpersonal variables (e.g. parental relationships, friendship, and victimization), and environmental variables (e.g., school climate, neighborhood quality, and demographic data). Sexual orientation groups were compared on each of the indices with the results showing that the ability to develop positive peer relationships, achieve academic success, and experience a positive school environment were common assets for heterosexual and same-gender-attracted groups in mitigating victimization at school. Similarly, in a meta-analysis of sexual orientation development among adolescents, Saewyc (2011) found that protective factors were equally effective across sexual identities. More specifically, factors such as school

connectedness, family relationships, and school safety, served as buffers and promoted psychological well-being among youth.

{ TC "Socially consgtructed stigmatized identity"\l 3 }Socially constructed stigmatized identity. Sexual identity development is a process common to all youth, regardless of sexual orientation. Scholars have argued that people have multiple identities that are each constructed through social interactions (Burke, 1991; Goffman, 1959, 1963; K. Plummer, 1996; Strauss, 1959). Because social interactions are ever changing and evolving, sexual identity is a fluid construct. Additionally, the salience of the sexual identity is contextual (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004; London et al., 2014; Savin-Williams, Joyner, & Rieger, 2012). K. Plummer (1996) posited that identities are constructed through interactions with others. Considering the influence of the reactions of others during social exchanges is critical to completely understand sexual identity development. Through social interactions, individuals strive to establish an identity that is consistent with the perceptions of others. The inability to do so increases the likelihood of experiencing stress. As individuals interact with others, their identity is continually evolving, thus making it a process of becoming (Burke, 1991; Troiden, 1989).

Goffman (1963) postulated that some identities are socially devalued because they deviate from the expectations of the larger society. A stigma is assigned to these identities because they are different. A stigma is an attribute that denigrates an identity and connotes a lack of social value. Goffman contended that stigmatized identities could be either discredited or discreditable. The stigma associated with a discredited identity is readily observable or otherwise disclosed to others. For example, regarding sexual identity, when others in the social interaction are aware of the actor's sexual identity, the

stigmatized identity is discredited. In contrast, a discreditable identity is ambiguous or unknown to others and can be discovered through social interactions. This may or may not be palatable to the actor whose sexual identity could potentially be discovered. Underlying the attribution of stigma is the assumption that the stigmatized are not fully human, thus justifying disparate treatment of those with stigmatized identities.

Goffman (1963) proffered that there are three types of stigma: (1) abominations of the body, (2) blemishes of individual character, and (3) tribal stigmata of race, nation, and religion (p. 4). The stigmatized status assigned to individuals with same-gender attraction is based on perceived blemishes on individual character. Stigma is based on others' perceptions, which may or may not reflect reality (Goffman, 1963; Herek, 2009; Link & Phelan, 2001). For instance, because of the potentially invisible nature of a same-gender-attracted identity, the identity status may not be obvious to others. As a result, people could incorrectly assign a sexual identity to the actor. When people encounter others who appear out of character, or who are unknown in a specific context, the non-stigmatized, or "normals," assess the other's attributes in determining categorization (Goffman, 1963). Additionally, it has been argued that stigma is assigned along a continuum, depending upon the context and the degree to which the identity deviates from social values.

For example, some have suggested that there are gender differentials in stigmatization of same-gender relationships, with lesbian females being less stigmatized than gay males in schools (Horn, Szalacha, & Drill, 2008; Kosciw et al., 2012). Horn et al. (2008) conducted a study investigating sexual prejudice in schools. High school adolescents at two separate schools ($N = 1,076$) were asked to complete three surveys designed to assess the judgments and justifications supporting their exclusion, teasing,

and evaluations of same-gender-attracted peers at school. Students also provide their beliefs about homosexuality. The results showed a higher acceptance of lesbian peers than gay males, girls were more accepting of same-gender-attracted peers than males. Additionally, it was more acceptable to target gay males for exclusion and bullying than it was to target lesbian peers.

Taken in total, sexual identity development is a critical task (Erikson, 1959/1980; Kroger, 2006; A. Martin, 1988; S. Swann & Spivey, 2004) that can be difficult for all youth (Erikson, 1959/1980; Savin-Williams, 1998). Earlier stage models provided a framework that pathologized same-gender-attracted identity development (e.g., Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1981; D'Augelli, 1994; Troiden, 1989). More recent scholarship has suggested resiliency among these youth who are freer in their sexual expression (Savin-Williams, 2005, 2014a), whose identities are more fluid than previously perceived (Savin-Williams, 2014a), and who actively construct their sexual identity through interactions with others (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004). Increased environmental supports (Toomey & Russell, 2011) and a more affirming cultural environment (Herek, 2004) call for a revision in the perspective for viewing same-gender sexual identities (Cohler & Hammack, 2006; Hammack et al., 2009; Savin-Williams, 1998, 2005, 2011). Recent scholarship has suggested that sexual identity development should be considered from the lived experiences unique to each adolescent (Cohler & Hammack, 2006; Hammack et al., 2009; Kaufman & Johnson, 2004; Savin-Williams, 2005), including their social interactions (Goffman, 1959, 1963; K. Plummer, 1996; Strauss, 1959).

D'Augelli (1985) and colleagues (Kosciw et al., 2012; Saewyc, 2011) have argued, however, that increased acceptance of same-gender attractions is akin to a

double-edged sword. While youth feel more liberated in disclosing same-gender attractions, increased visibility comes with increased exposure, making them more likely to be targets for victimization. The decrease in reports of discrimination of these youth notwithstanding (Kosciw et al., 2012), adolescents with same-gender attractions are still subject to persistent, subtle, and negative messages from others (D'Augelli et al., 2002; Espelage et al., 2008; Kosciw et al., 2012; LaSala, 2010). These subtle forms of discrimination are referred to in the literature as microaggressions (Sue, 2010).

Microaggressions

Although studies assessing school climates have provided conflicting reports on their frequency and overall impact (see Savin-Williams, 2001), that negative messages denigrating same-gender-attracted sexual identities are conveyed across high school campuses is well documented in the literature (Birkett et al., 2009; Espelage et al., 2008; Kosciw et al., 2012). Scholarship has found that rather than overt sexual orientation based discrimination, which has been declining in schools, discrimination is conveyed in subtler ways (Kosciw et al., 2012), through sexual orientation microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2010) . This section provides a review of the available research on sexual orientation microaggressions to show that this topic has not been adequately examined from the perspective of same-gender-attracted adolescents in the context of the high school environment. In order to provide a complete understanding of sexual orientation microaggressions, however, it is important to first review the background regarding the development of this concept.

The literature initially addressed subtle discrimination from the perspective of racism (Dovidio et al., 2002; Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Wills, 1977; Sue,

Capodilupo, et al., 2007). Dovidio et al. (2002) explained the persistence of subtle forms

of discrimination, writing that racism in the United States has evolved from an "old

fashioned," (p. 90) overt form to a subtler, more contemporary form. Upon the enactment

of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which defined racial discrimination as a violation of

basic human rights (Dovidio et al.), overt forms of racism went "underground" (Sue &

Capodilupo, 2008, p. 107). As such, majority status individuals still unconsciously hold

negative feelings toward marginalized groups (Devos & Banaji, 2005; Sue &

Capodilupo, 2008), while at the same time denying them and expressing discriminatory

feelings in unintentional and less explicit ways (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000; Dudas,

2005). Dudas (2005) averred that the enactment of civil rights laws both promoted

equality and mobilized conservative activists' resentment toward marginalized groups.

Dudas explained the backlash against the Civil Rights Act by asserting that conservative

activists perceived equal rights as being unearned "special" rights awarded to

marginalized groups. From this perspective, the majority's perceived fear of losing power

and privilege is disguised behind the justification of activism as a means of supporting

American values.

Contemporary racism has taken the form of aversive racism (Dovidio et al.,

2002). That is, in contrast to overt racism, which is an intentional, blatant expression of

prejudice against racial minority groups, aversive racism is conveyed more insidiously, is

commonly unintentional, and is communicated by well-meaning individuals who carry

self-perceptions of being unbiased and fair. Thus, aversive racism is expressed

unconsciously, covertly, and ambiguously; consequently, majority status individuals

enjoy a persona of being egalitarian, (Dovidio et al., 2002; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005;

Sue & Capodilupo, 2008) and politically correct (Dudas, 2005; Sue & Capodilupo, 2008), often basing discriminatory behavior on other contextual factors perceived to be culturally sanctioned (Dovidio et al., 2002; Dudas, 2005; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005). The literature has suggested that White people are so adept at denying personal bias and acts of subtle discrimination, aversive racist acts are often rendered invisible (Sue, Capodilupo, Nadal, & Torino, 2008). Due to the discrepancy between the perpetrator's conscious and unconscious beliefs, aversive racism is commonly reserved for situations in which the behavior can be justified through some means beyond race, and in which the acts will go unnoticed by the casual observer (Dovidio et al., 2002).

Scholars have concluded that as a result of the incongruence between Whites' expressions of equality (Dovidio et al., 2002) and resentment of perceived special rights (Dudas, 2005) awarded marginalized groups, communication between the offender and the recipient are frequently riddled with double messages. This ultimately leads persons of color to develop an unhealthy lack of trust of Whites and a lumbering sensitivity to signs of rejection or acts of discrimination (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005). Gaertner and Dovidio (2005) noted that discomfort and anxiety have replaced recognizable and expressed biases among Whites, causing Whites to avoid interactions with Blacks out of fear of acting inappropriately; this in turn perpetuates the incongruence between words and actions and further erodes racial relationships. Similarly, in a Presidential address to the Society of Counseling Psychology, Sue (2005) argued that this atmosphere of political correctness perpetuates a "conspiracy of silence" (p. 102) that not only protects the majority status of Whites, but also further divides people by race. Aversive forms of

discrimination have recently been referred to in the literature as microaggressions (Pierce

et al., 1977; Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008; Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007).

Racial Microaggressions

Microaggressions are similar to aversive racism in that sometimes well-

intentioned individuals perpetrate them. What sets them apart, however, is that

microaggressions examine the underlying meaning of human or environmental

interactions between the source and the recipient, as well as the consequences thereof.

Because of the insidious nature of microaggressions, the recipient is often left in a state of

cognitive conflict as he or she strives to make sense of the interaction and determine how

to respond (Sue, 2010). Coined by Pierce et al. (1977), microaggressions were originally

defined as the "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges which are put

downs of blacks [sic] by offenders" (p. 65). The Pierce et al. (1977) definition of

microaggressions has since been broadened by Sue, Capodilupo, et al. (2007) to include

slights and insults conveyed, intentionally or unintentionally, through verbal and

environmental exchanges that "communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial

slights and insults toward people of color" (p. 273).

Three forms of racial microaggressions are provided in the literature: a

microassault, which includes discrimination blatantly conveyed verbally, nonverbally, or

via the environment; a microinsult, which includes unconscious and insidious slights or

snubs conveyed verbally or nonverbally; and a microinvalidation through which the

perpetrator unconsciously, verbally, or behaviorally diminishes the recipient's identity

through excluding, dismissing, or negating the marginalized individual (Sue &

Capodilupo, 2008). Scholars have identified several types of microaggressions

experienced by people of color (Nadal, 2011; Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007). Nadal (2011) designed a measurement of racial and ethnic microaggressions (Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale; REMS) based on a taxonomy of racial microaggressions identified by Sue, Capodilupo, et al. (2007). Nadal (2011) used participants, who identified as African American/Black, Pacific Islander, Arab American, Latina/o, Asian American, and multiracial, to (1) confirm and assess the validity and reliability of the constructs, and (2) confirm the reliability and validity of the measure. Results indicated that the REMS adequately assessed racial microaggression on six subscales. These subscales include: (a) assumption of inferiority; (b) second-class citizen and assumption of criminality; (c) microinvalidations, (d) exoticization/assumptions of similarity; (e) environmental microaggressions; and (f) workplace and school microaggressions.

Recent scholarship on microaggressions has addressed microaggressions based on sexual orientation (McCabe, Dragowski, & Rubinson, 2013; Nadal, 2013; Nadal, Issa, et al., 2011; Nadal et al., 2010; Nadal, Wong, et al., 2011; Platt & Lenzen, 2013; Sarno & Wright, 2013; Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2013; L. C. Smith, Shin, & Officer, 2011; Sue, 2010; Sue & Capodilupo, 2008). Sexual orientation microaggressions share the theoretical underpinnings of racial microaggressions, except that the target groups are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals (Sue, 2010). Scholars have further suggested that microaggressions are experienced uniquely by each marginalized group (Sue & Capodilupo, 2008).

Sexual Orientation Microaggressions

Morrison and Morrison (2002) and colleagues (Jewell & Morrison, 2010; Morrison, Morrison, & Franklin, 2009; Sue, 2010) have argued that similar to racial

discrimination, discrimination against same-gender-attracted individuals has moved from overt to modern, more covert, forms. From 2001 to date, 22 states, plus Washington D. C. and Puerto Rico, enacted laws prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation (American Civil Liberties Union, 2015). Due to the increased provision of legal protection awarded to same-gender-attracted persons, coupled with the 2009 enactment of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Hate Crimes Prevention Act (Matthew Shepard Act), which made acts of physical violence toward sexual minorities based on hate a crime, the frequency of harassment and assault of LGB adolescents in schools has declined. According to the most recent report by the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN; Kosciw et al., 2012), the number of reported incidents of harassment and assault in schools during the 2011 school year was lower than for the previous two reports (i.e., 2007 and 2009). At the same time, discrimination against these youth persists and is expressed more insidiously through sexual orientation microaggressions (Sue, 2010).

Similar to racial microaggressions, perpetrators of sexual orientation microaggressions commonly deny being prejudicial and express discrimination in subtle forms based on context and with the assumption of fairness. Jewell and Morrison (2010) provided an example in a two-phase study exploring perspectives of perpetrators of anti-gay behaviors toward gay males. Two hundred eighty-six male ($n = 96$) and female ($n =190$) undergraduate students between 18 and 48 years of age ($M = 20.55$, $SD = 4.06$) completed measures assessing their attitudes and their self-reported behaviors toward gay males. The most frequently reported behaviors were subtle forms of discrimination, including telling anti-gay jokes (43%), spreading gossip (32%), and socially distancing

themselves from gay males (9%). A moderate correlation between anti-gay behaviors and attitudes toward gays was found ($r= .30, p = .01$), leading Jewell and Morrison to conclude that those exhibiting negative behaviors also held negative attitudes towards gay males. Students consenting to follow-up interviews ($n = 8$), however, excused their behaviors by explaining that they were not exhibited directly in front of the targets and professing that sexual minorities should be free to be who they are. Using interpersonal phenomenology analysis (IPA), Jewel and Morrison also found that these students expressed concerns about being perceived as intolerant or unaccepting of individuals with same-gender attractions.

Nadal et al. (2010) noted that what sets sexual orientation microaggressions apart from racial microaggressions is that sexual orientation microaggressions are: (a) often rooted in deeply held religious beliefs, (b) more widely accepted by society, and (c) more commonly experienced. Comparing students reporting to be often and frequently harassed, Kosciw et al. (2012) found that harassment based on sexual orientation (16.5% reporting often; 17.3% reporting frequently) is more than five times more likely to occur than harassment based on race (3.8% reporting often; 2.4% reporting frequently). An additional characteristic unique to sexual orientation is that because the same-gender-attracted identity is less visible than some of the identities of other marginalized groups, sexual orientation microaggressions place the recipient in a position of choosing whether or not to disclose his or her sexual identity in negotiating microaggressive interactions (Sue, 2010). Some students, in fact, choose not to disclose in order to avoid harassment (Kosciw et al., 2012).

Based on previous literature addressing microaggressions and other antigay prejudices, scholars have offered several taxonomies of sexual orientation microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2010; Platt & Lenzen, 2013; Sue & Capodilupo, 2008). Sue (2010) reviewed existing scholarship and found evidence of a variety of sexual orientation microaggressions common among the literature, including (a) oversexualization, (b) homophobia, (c) heterosexist language/terminology, (d) sinfulness, (e) assumption of abnormality, (f) denial of individual heterosexism, and (g) endorsement of heteronormative culture/behaviors (p. 191). Platt and Lenzen (2013) conducted an inquiry to confirm the Sue (2010) taxonomy. The data from two focus groups ($n = 12$), including individuals self-identifying as lesbian ($n = 6$), gay ($n = 1$), queer ($n = 2$), and bisexual ($n = 3$), confirmed all these, except for assuming abnormality and denial of individual heterosexism. Two additional types, undersexualization and microaggression as humor, were also found.

Through an analysis of current literature on subtle forms of discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered persons, Nadal et al. (2010) found eight themes of sexual orientation microaggressions. Using content analysis, Nadal, Issa, et al. (2011) examined transcripts from five focus groups ($n = 26$) of self-identified lesbian women ($n = 5$), gay men ($n = 11$), and bisexual women ($n = 11$), ages 18 – 55. Nadal et al. confirmed seven categories found in the Nadal et al. (2010) study and found an eighth category common among the data. The final taxonomy consisted of: (1) use of heterosexist terminology; (2) endorsement of heteronormative or gender normative culture/behaviors; (3) assumption of universal LGBT experience; (4) exoticization; (5) discomfort/disapproval of LGBT experience; (7) assumption of sexual

pathology/abnormality; and (8) threatening behavior. (Nadal et al., 2010) argued that, like

racial microaggressions, sexual orientation microaggressions fall into three types:

microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations.

Similar to the finding of racial microaggressions being experienced differently

across race (Nadal, 2011; Sue & Capodilupo, 2008), sexual orientation microaggressions

are experienced differently across sexual orientations. Sarno and Wright (2013)

investigated the experiences of sexual microaggressions of bisexual men and women

compared to lesbian women and gay men. One hundred and twenty self-identified gay,

lesbian, and bisexual individuals (54% gay, 34.2% lesbian, and 11.7% bisexual)

completed an online survey, including the Homonegative Microaggressions Scale (HMS;

Wright & Wegner, 2012) based on the racial microaggressions taxonomy developed by

Sue, Capodilupo, et al. (2007), and the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identity Scale

(LGBIS; Mohr & Fassinger, 2000), which measures the strength of a lesbian, gay, and

bisexual identity. Analysis of the variables, using a one-way ANOVA, revealed

significant differences in two microaggressions directed toward bisexual men and

women. Bisexual individuals were significantly more likely than their lesbian and gay

counterparts to experience the Alien in [Their] Own land microaggression, which refers

to the assumption that all individuals are heterosexual. Conversely, bisexuals were less

likely than their lesbian or gay counterparts to experience the microaggression Ascription

of Intelligence, which presumes a sexual minority skill set that is rooted in stereotypes of

LGB individuals. Similarly, the Nadal, Issa, et al. (2011) study summarized above found

that lesbians reported being treated as sex objects and sexually propositioned, while gay

males reported being perceived as sexual predators and as having HIV/AIDS.

Although scholars have recognized the potential for microaggressive experiences to differ across sexual orientations (Sarno & Wright, 2013), and contexts (Nadal, Wong, et al., 2011; Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2013; L. C. Smith et al., 2011), to date the unique experiences of adolescents in the context of the high school environment are underrepresented among literature. Though the aforementioned Nadal, Issa, et al. (2011) study provided insight into microaggressions experienced by youth, the broader context of the Nadal et al. study was the microaggressive experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals in everyday life as opposed to those experienced while at school. In addition, the term "youth" was broadly defined. The range of ages of the sample, predominately recruited from a public university, was between 18 and 55 years, with a mean age of 25.7 years. Considering the context of the high school environment and the developmental stage of the typical adolescent, it is argued here that the everyday lives of college students and adults between the ages of 18 and 55 could be dissimilar to that of high school adolescents.

McCabe et al. (2013) enriched the literature by examining microaggressions against same-gender-attracted students in the school environment. In this study, 292 working school psychologists across grade levels were surveyed to determine the frequency of observed sexual orientation microaggressions in their respective schools. Participants completed one of two surveys online. The only difference between the surveys was that one contained two questions; one asked for frequency of hearing "that's so gay," "homo," or 'faggot" by students and one asking for the frequency of these words heard by staff. Results showed that school psychologists reported fewer incidents of observing microaggressions than the reported incidents of hearing the designated

pejorative language. Although the McCabe et al. study provided valuable insight into the presence of sexual orientation microaggressions in the school environment, the study focus was limited to school psychologists' ability to recognize and respond to homophobic language in schools as opposed to examining microaggressions from the students' perspective within the unique context of school.

One study, by Linville (2014), was found that was reflective of high school experiences and did draw from a sample of high school adolescents; however, the data consisted of discussions of personal experiences among the same-gender-attracted high school participant researchers as well as subject-related Internet searches. Findings were then grouped and compiled into a Queer Q Sort. Rather than analyze the responses from the Q Sort, the Q Sort questions were grouped and aligned with the categories identified by Nadal, Issa, et al. (2011). While this study adds value to the existing literature, building categories from the ground up (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008), rather than using existing categories, might have yielded different results.

Some scholars have noted that even though discrimination is experienced across settings (D'Augelli et al., 2002); for adolescents with same-gender attractions the school environment is the most likely place (Bedard & Marks, 2010; D'Augelli et al., 2002). Indeed, subtle forms of discrimination against same-gender-attracted youth are persistent in schools (Aerts et al., 2012; Chesir-Teran, 2003; Espelage et al., 2008; Kosciw et al., 2012; McCabe et al., 2013; Poteat & Anderson, 2012). GLSEN (Kosciw et al., 2012) reported that of the 8,584 students polled, 84.9% of the students reported hearing "gay" used negatively, 91.4% reported hearing homophobic remarks, such as "dyke" or "faggot," and 56.9% heard homophobic and negative gender remarks from teachers or

other school staff. The question then becomes one of the effectiveness to which youth are able to navigate these experiences.

In summary, initially, microaggressions referred to subtle discriminatory messages toward racial minorities (Pierce et al., 1977; Sue, 2010; Sue, Bucceri, et al., 2007; Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008). More recently, this construct has been more broadly defined to include such incidents based on sexual orientation (Sue & Capodilupo, 2008). Scholarship on sexual orientation microaggressions has found evidence of eight common themes of sexual orientation microaggressions, which can be organized into one of three types (Nadal, Issa, et al., 2011). To date, however, the topic of sexual orientation microaggressions has predominately focused on experience of college students and adults (see e.g., Nadal, Issa, et al., 2011; Nadal, Wong, et al., 2011; Sarno & Wright, 2013), without the consideration of the unique experiences of adolescents (for an exception see, Linville, 2014)

A critical milestone of adolescence is developing a sexual identity (K. Martin, 2009). In fact, the same-gender-attracted adolescent typically discloses his or sexual identity to others during the high school years. D'Augelli and Hershberger (2002) found that male and female youth with same-gender attractions come out to others at the age of 16.7 and 16.9, respectively. The adolescent, who is newly navigating the identification journey, is at a different developmental phase compared to those in the adult samples utilized in previous research. Additionally, the high school environment, where the adolescent spends a great portion of his or her day, is more controlled when compared to day-to-day environments of college students and adults. Because of this, adolescents might experience different sexual orientation microaggressions or the same

microaggressions differently. This inquiry into adolescents' experiences with sexual

orientation microaggressions during school adds to this gap in the literature by providing

insight into these experiences.

Cultural Factors Supporting Microaggressions

Scholars have contended that microaggressions are manifestations of the cultural

beliefs of the larger society regarding the targeted group. It has been argued that cultural

beliefs can be so influential they promote the marginalization of, and discrimination

against, socially disfavored individuals and groups (Sue, 2010). This section reviews the

development of microaggressions theory, including the relationship between social

beliefs about same gender attraction and sexual orientation microaggressions. A closer

examination of these constructs will provide insight into the role that culture plays in the

perpetuation of subtle discrimination/sexual orientation microaggressions.

Bayer (1981) noted anti-gay sentiments have historically been so strong that in

1953 a same-gender sexual attraction was considered symptomatic of a mental disorder.

In fact, in the first edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychiatric

Disorders (DSM-I), homosexuality was categorized as a sociopathic personality

disturbance. Although reclassified in the subsequent edition as other non-psychotic

mental disorders, not until 1973 did the American Psychiatric Association declassify

homosexuality as a psychiatric disorder. It was not completely removed from the DSM

until 1994. Same-gender attractions remain socially devalued in contemporary society

(Herek, 2009; Phelan, 2001). A recent poll by Jones (2011), found that approximately

40% of the people polled ($N = 1,018$) considered same-gender relationships immoral.

Additionally, 42 % of the respondents reported believing that homosexuality is due to

upbringing or environmental factors and is a personal choice, thereby insinuating blame.

Scholars have argued that heterosexuality is both preferred and assumed by the larger

society, making it the social norm for all sexual behavior (Franklin, 1998; Pharr, 2000).

The presumption of heterosexual individuals' holding a superior social status to those

with same-gender attractions has been defined in the literature as heterosexism (Herek,

2009; Pharr, 2000). Because it is omnipresent, heterosexism is often undetected. Through

day-to-day life experiences, such as denigrating social messages and discriminatory

social structures, same-gender attractions are defined as abnormal (Herek, 1990).

The existence of prevailing sentiments against same-gender-attracted

relationships notwithstanding, some have argued that today's same-gender-attracted

youth are less vulnerable to social negativity than previous generations. During recent

times, cultural attitudes have shifted toward increased acceptance of same-gender-

attracted identities (Savin-Williams, 1998, 2005). For example, results from the General

Social Survey (T. Smith, 2011) indicated that in 1991 social attitudes broke in favor of

same-gender relationships, with increased support being found among younger cohorts.

When asked about beliefs regarding same-gender adult relationships, respondents

reporting, "Not Wrong at All" went from 12.3% in 1991 to 20.7% in 1992. The 2010 data

suggested a near even split between those favoring (40.6%) and those disfavoring

(43.5%) same-gender relationships, with most of the support coming from younger

respondents under the age of 30. Between 1999, when the current 16-year-old adolescent

was born, and 2013, support for same-gender marriage increased by approximately 25%

for persons aged 65 and older and by 36% for persons between the ages of 50 to 64. For

youth, ages 18 to 29, support has increased by 33% during this same period.

Contemporary adolescents have also seen, the first time, the recognition of the rights of same-gender spouses. In 2013, the United States Supreme Court ruled that Section Three of the Defense of Marriage Act, which allowed federal recognition of heterosexual spouses only, was unconstitutional (NPR, 2013). Additionally, from 2003, when Massachusetts became the first state to legalize gay marriage, to the present day, same-gender marriages is legal in 37 states (Human Rights Campaign, 2015).

The results of a 2012 Gallup poll (Mendes, 2015) found that as of the date of polling, support for same-gender-attracted relationships was at an all-time high, with 63% of Americans reporting that same-gender relationships should be legal. This same poll, however, drew attention to the cultural split in the United States regarding these relationships. For example, 49% of the people polled reported satisfaction with the acceptance of these relationships and 45% reported they were dissatisfied. This split was also evidenced in a poll sampling 1,015 by the American Press on the topic of discrimination against same-gender-attracted individuals. Only 23% of those polled reported this to be a very serious problem (Jones, 2012). A similar trend of increased, yet split, support of same-gender relationships has been in school climates, which are considered to be microcosms of the larger society (Young, 2010).

School Climate

The overall climate of the school environment has been linked to student well-being (Chesir-Teran, 2003; Kosciw et al., 2012; Poteat, 2008; Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012). Specifically regarding beliefs about same-gender relationships in schools, the results of a critical ethnography of a public school district, grades seven through 12, showed that 40% of the students polled ($N = 86$) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the

statement "I think that being LGBTQ is healthy and normal." Sixty percent of the

students agreed or strongly agreed that their peers would feel the same (Young, 2010).

Kosciw et al. (2012) reported that the most frequently cited reason for feeling unsafe at

school was sexual orientation. Research on the cultural climates of United States schools

has found that same-gender-attracted adolescents are frequently subjected to

microaggressive acts while at school, such as name calling or teasing relative to sexual

orientation (Espelage et al., 2008; Kosciw et al., 2012; McCabe et al., 2013; Poteat,

2007). Kosciw et al. (2012) found that out of all types of biased language in schools,

students reported that homophobic language was heard more frequently and at a higher

rate (61.3%) than disparaging comments regarding race (23.0%) and gender (31.3%).

Espelage et al. (2008) surveyed 13,921 high school students enrolled in 18 different

Midwestern high schools, also finding that same-gender-attracted students were

frequently the targets of bullying at school. Overall, current statistics that are

representative of youth across the United States show that non-heterosexual students

experience higher incidents of homophobic teasing and peer bullying while at school

compared to students identifying as heterosexual (Kosciw et al., 2012).

Negative messages regarding sexual orientation do not come from students alone.

In addition to being directed by students, disparaging comments have been reported to

come from faculty and staff as well (Kosciw et al., 2012). Students witnessing this

perceive that faculty and staff are conveying approval of such behavior (Watch, 2001).

Because students look to teachers to model acceptable behavior, students also perceive

that there will be no consequences for the perpetrators (Mikami, Lerner, & Lun, 2010).

Thereupon, a majority of victimizing acts goes unreported. Sixty-four percent of the

students polled in the GLSEN survey reported never informing school faculty of incidents of victimization. The most common justification provided by students was fear of retaliation by other students or that the teacher would make the situation worse (Kosciw et al., 2012). Some have reported that even when faculty witness the acts, they fail to intervene (Baiocco, Laghi, Di Pomponio, & Nigito, 2012; Kosciw et al., 2012; Yep, 2002). For example, Young (2010) found that only 5% of the 86 students polled reported that adults in their school intervened on a consistent basis when homophobic remarks were spoken. Fifty-six percent perceived that adults did not step up at all, thereby giving the impression they supported such behavior. Additionally, messages of same-gender-attracted identities being less valued than heterosexual identities are echoed in the school curriculum; inclusive policies and curriculum are absent in most schools (Chesir-Teran, 2003; Hiller et al., 2010; Kielwasser, 1993). Kosciw et al. (2012) found that when considering all of their classes, only 16.8% of the youth responding perceived topics relevant to same-gender attractions being positively presented during class. Youth also reported that when sexuality was discussed in schools, same-gender sexuality was omitted from instruction.

Scholars have suggested a relationship between the school climate and levels of acceptance of same-gender relationships among students (Chesir-Teran, 2003). Students attending schools where the climate is more affirming of same-gender relationships are less likely to engage in anti-gay behaviors, and vice versa (Poteat, 2008). Wernick, Kulick, and Inglehart (2013) found that students who witnessed teacher intervention when homophobic bullying occurred were more likely to intervene than students witnessing teachers who failed to intervene. Additionally, the presence of inclusive

curriculum has been positively linked to an affirming school climate (Kosciw et al., 2012). Students with same-gender attractions who attended schools where the curriculum reflected lesbian, gay, transgender, and bisexual issues reported perceiving higher levels of acceptance and feeling safer at school (Kosciw et al., 2012; Szalacha, 2003; Toomey et al., 2012). Students also reported missing school less frequently in these schools compared to students attending schools in which these topics were not addressed (Kosciw et al., 2012). Thus, providing an inclusive environment for students is critical to student well-being. Inclusive school climates have been found to minimize microaggressive behavior and promote a sense of belongingness and connectivity at school (Aerts et al., 2012). In a study with 1,745 high school students (mean age = 15.97), Aerts et al. (2012) assessed the perceived discrimination, level of friendliness, and sense of belongingness in schools. Using separate ANOVAs to analyze the data, the results showed that students who perceived a supportive school climate also reported feeling more connected at school and freer in disclosing a non-heterosexual orientation compared to students perceiving an unsupportive school climate. These findings additionally highlight the importance of supportive school peers.

{ TC "School Peers"\l 3 }**School Peers.** The critical role of peers in adolescence has been noted. In fact, scholars have averred that during this time youth receive more information from peers than parents (Calzo & Ward, 2009). The influence of the peer group has been reported to gradually increase throughout childhood and peak during early adolescence when youth are most susceptible to peer rejection (Brown, 1986; O'Brien & Bierman, 1988). In a study assessing the perceptions of the influence of peer groups, O'Brien and Bierman (1988) reported that 5th grade students were perceived to be

less influenced by peers than their older counterparts, with 11th graders being most influenced when compared to 5th and 8th graders. O'Brien and Bierman conducted interviews with 24 male (n =12) and female (n =12) students each in grades 5, 8, and 11. Items included in the two-part interview protocol were designed to elicit perceptions of: (1) the distinct features of peer group influence, and (2) the emotional effect of acceptance or rejection by peers. The transcribed interviews were initially analyzed to identify categories and then coded for a quantitative analysis. Results of a 3 (grade) x 2 (gender) analysis of variance and a parallel analysis on frequencies and proportion scores revealed that as youth transitioned from 5th to 11th grade, not only did the degree of peer influence increase, but the scope of perceived influence also evolved. For example, participants in 5th grade most commonly described peer group influence in terms of activities and social behaviors (5th grade, 61%; 11th grade, 28%), while 11th graders most commonly described peers as influencing attitudes (5th grade, 18%; 11th grade, 47%). To assess the emotional effect of peer acceptance or rejection, a series of 3 (grade) x 2 (gender) ANOVAs were conducted on each emotional impact category. Overall, participants in each grade perceived value in the social support received from accepting peers; however, the emotional effects of peer rejection, including negative self-worth, increased with age. Students who reported their personal worth was impacted by peer assessment ($n = 46$) were also more likely to characterize peers in terms of attitude (70%). These students were also more likely to perceive peer influence as being global in effect (67%). Regarding the global effect, the influence of peers was reported to frame beliefs, attitudes, including choice of attire, and to "influence the establishment of one's sense of identity" (p. 6).

In addition to being a central source of social and emotional support, peer groups influence members' attitudes and behavior (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011; Eder & Nenga, 2003). This includes attitudes and behaviors toward same-gender relationships (Poteat, 2007). The influence of peer groups is most evident in schools. For example, Birkett and Espelage (2015) suggested that youth are more likely to mirror peer behaviors in the perpetration of anti-gay bullying and name-calling behaviors while at school than when away from school. It has been argued that peer group acceptance is based on conformity with peer norms (Mikami et al., 2010), which are maintained through the normative language of the peer groups. For instance, youth have been found to engage in bullying, teasing, and gossip to control others' behavior (Eder & Nenga, 2003; Poteat, 2007). In fact, the influence of peers on students' behavior is so strong that witnessing a peer intervene on behalf of victims of bullying has been found to be more influential in moving other students to intervene than witnessing adults do the same (Wernick et al., 2013).

Peer groups with stronger homophobic beliefs are more likely to use language denigrating same-gender attractions compared to peer groups who are less homophobic (Poteat, 2007, 2008). For example, Birkett and Espelage (2015) examined the influence of peer group attitudes on its members in a two-wave, eight-month, longitudinal study (N = 494). The findings showed that peer group attitudes contributed to the frequency of homophobic name-calling, and that the strength of this influence increased over time. Results also revealed an increase in the use of homophobic name-calling from 5th to 8th grade, and that peer group members exhibited homophobic behaviors to match peers, even when personal homophobic scores were lower than those of other members were.

Youth who do not conform to peer expectations are at higher risk of being rejected (Mikami et al., 2010).

On the other hand, peer support has been found to buffer the impact of sexual-orientation-based victimization. Baiocco et al. (2012) assessed 403 gay male ($n = 201$) and lesbian ($n = 202$) students between the ages of 14 and 22 in a study examining self-disclosure, friendship quality of best friends, and internalized stigma. Data were analyzed using bivariate and multivariate analyses and group differences. Baiocco et al. found that students who felt safe in disclosing their same-gender-attracted identity to at least one trusted heterosexual peer experienced greater well-being than those who did not. While gay and lesbian students were less likely to have a best friend than heterosexual students, those who did, and who had disclosed their sexual orientation to their best friend, showed lower levels of internalized stigma compared to those who did not disclose.

Recent reports on school climates regarding same-gender-attracted students have painted a brighter picture and have increased acceptance. For example, Kosciw et al. (2012) found that in spite of the prevalence of discrimination and harassment of same-gender-attracted students in schools, overall, these numbers have significantly decreased. The frequency of verbal harassment based on sexual orientation dropped from approximately 45% in 2007 to 32% in 2011. Student reports of available supportive staff have also increased, with almost 60% of the students reporting to know five or more supportive staff members in their school. This was an increase of nearly 25% from the same four-year period as above. Scholars have found that a common factor among schools with affirming climates is the presence of a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA). Szalacha (2003) investigated the effect of the implementation of a program designed to

reduce levels of sexual prejudice in schools' climates. Analysis of the data, drawn from a stratified random sample of 33 schools ($N = 1,646$) revealed that high school students who perceived school administration to engage in making the school environment more affirming also perceived to be affirmed by their school climate.

The school climate, in turn, was reflected in the attitude of the students. In fact, research has shown that the mere presence of a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) on school campuses has been proven to affect the school climate (Kosciw et al., 2012; Toomey & Russell, 2011; Walls, Wisneski, & Kane, 2013). Schools with a GSA have reported less sexual-orientation-based victimization and increased safety when compared to schools without one (Kosciw et al., 2012). For example, Walls et al. (2013) reported that having a student-led organization that is dedicated to decreasing discrimination and harassment of same-gender-attracted students in itself led to increased levels of acceptance in a school's climate. Perceived safety increased even more for students who were active GSA members. Walls et al. found that the climates of schools with a GSA were overall more accepting of all sexual orientations and gender nonconforming students. Gender nonconforming students who belonged to a GSA were less likely to report wishing their behavior conformed to the behavior of their peers (37.3% for nonmembers and 14% for members). Kosciw et al. (2012) estimated that as of 2011, based on the estimated marginal means of responses from adolescents in grades 6 through 12, a GSA was available in approximately 50% of Unites States schools.

Savin-Williams (2001, 2005) and others (Cohler & Hammack, 2006; Hammack et al., 2009) have contended that the cultural climate of schools is not as negative as reported in the literature. In addition to the increased availability of faculty and alliance

groups that provide support for students, research on the topic of same-gender-attracted adolescents has misrepresented the victimization of these youth in schools (Savin-Williams, 2001, 2005). For example, survey questions are structured to solicit information on behaviors that witnessed by students without efforts to ascertain the degree to which the behavior affected the targeted individual or the observer (see e.g., Kosciw et al., 2012). Scholars have contended that some of the pejorative language that has traditionally been considered offensive is now part of the current day adolescent nomenclature. Though students may have routinely heard these words or phrases (e.g., "that's so gay"), they may or may not have found them offensive (Savin-Williams, 2005). Savin-Williams (2014b) suggested that individuals with same-gender-attractions have successfully permeated the contemporary climate. Today's youth have witnessed public figures, such as athletes, musicians, and actors, identify as having same-gender attractions and gaining public support.

Additionally, the inclusion criteria for most studies on same-gender-attracted adolescents require participants to identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Though some adolescents have self-labeled or come out to others in high school, Savin-Williams (2005) argued a majority of students who self-label during adolescence are gender nonconforming, who are targeted for bullying more frequently compared to their gender conforming peers. Indeed, research has shown that victimization is not based on sexual orientation itself, but on behavior that deviates from prescribed gender scripts (D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2006; Payne, 2007; Rieger & Savin-Williams, 2012; Savin-Williams, 2005). For example, Payne (2007) examined the high school experiences of eight self-identified lesbian women using a life-story interview format. Regarding gender

prescribed behavior, participants reported that for a female to be popular in high school she had to be attractive to males and exhibit characteristics of the female prototype. These characteristics included being physically attractive, acting feminine, and making sanctioned female accomplishments. One participant expressed feeling ostracized by her school peers for playing the trumpet, which was traditionally considered an instrument reserved for males. Another perceived that her academic accomplishments went unrecognized because they were in an area designated for male domination. Savin-Williams (2005) also argued that adolescents exhibiting atypical gender behaviors frequently and prematurely disclose their sexual orientation due to excessive bullying by peers. Thus, statistics on victimization of same-gender-attracted youth more accurately depict the experiences of students with gender non-conforming behaviors than students with same-gender-attractions.

In sum, school climates that are not inclusive facilitate discrimination against adolescents with same-gender attractions (Aerts et al., 2012; Kosciw et al., 2012; Poteat, 2008). In fact, research has found that schools are the most likely place for same-gender-attracted adolescents to be exposed to persistent denigrating messages regarding their sexual orientation (Hiller et al., 2010). In addition to pejorative language, students with same-gender attractions have reported being bullied and socially excluded while at school (Bos et al., 2012; D'Augelli, 1985; Kosciw et al., 2012). Examinations of school climates have shown cultural fluctuations across school environments (Szalacha, 2003; Toomey et al., 2012). Additionally, the level of acceptance of same-gender-attracted identities inherent in school climates has been shown to manifest in the students' behavior (Chesir-Teran, 2003). When students witness positive role modeling at school, such as faculty

intervening in incidents of discrimination or bullying, they are more likely to engage in those behaviors as well (Wernick et al., 2013). Overall, students attending schools with lower homophobic climates reported increased acceptance of same-gender-attracted peers, who in turn have reported increased satisfaction and safety in their school experiences (Chesir-Teran, 2003; Kosciw et al., 2012; Toomey et al., 2012; Toomey & Russell, 2011).

Recently, scholars have suggested that the negative school experience and victimization of same-gender-attracted adolescent has been overstated (Savin-Williams, 2005). Increased visibility and cultural acceptance have reduced the stigma previously associated with same-gender-attracted relationships (Savin-Williams, 2014b). Also, efforts by school administration to improve school climates have facilitated feelings of belongingness and increased safety for same-gender-attracted youth (Szalacha, 2003). A reported increase in the number of schools hosting GSAs has facilitated increased support for all sexual orientations within schools (Kosciw et al., 2012; Toomey et al., 2012; Toomey & Russell, 2011). Scholars have also suggested that research on victimization does not accurately capture what is taking place in schools. Savin-Williams (2005, 2014b) suggested that researchers might have inadequately assessed how reported behaviors affected the targets, thereby assuming negative consequences when there were none. Consequently, it is plausible that contemporary school climates may not be as damaging to youth as previously determined. A closer examination of the extent to which microaggressions permeate school climates is required to provide a clearer picture of the school environment and same-gender-attracted adolescents.

Managing Sexual Orientation Microaggressions.

The literature has predominately focused on the psychological and behavioral

impact of victimization of same-gender-attracted adolescents (see e.g., Aerts et al., 2012;

Almeida et al., 2009; Burton et al., 2014; D'Augelli et al., 2002; Diamond et al., 2011;

Espelage et al., 2008; Kosciw et al., 2012; Rieger & Savin-Williams, 2012). Overall,

scholars have reported less well-being among these youths. For example, research has

found a higher prevalence of suicidal ideation (Diamond et al., 2011), depression (Burton

et al., 2014; Espelage et al., 2008) and substance abuse (Espelage et al., 2008;

Hatzenbuehler et al., 2008) among same-gender-attracted adolescents when compared to

their heterosexual counterparts. Additionally, these youth are at increased risk for teenage

pregnancy (Saewyc, 2011), and feel disconnected from school (Kosciw et al., 2012).

Research shows that because they are targets for homophobic bullying, adolescents with

same-gender attractions are absent from school more frequently (Burton et al., 2014;

Kosciw et al., 2012), have lower academic aspirations (Kosciw et al., 2012), and a lower

sense of self (Grossman & Kerner, 1998) compared to heterosexual peers. In a six-month

longitudinal study, Burton, Marshal, Chisolm, Sucato, and Friedman (2013) examined

school-based victimization, depression, and suicidality among 197 adolescents (male =

30%; female = 70%), ages 14 – 19 ($M =17$) recruited from medical clinics in two

Midwestern states. Using a mediation model for data analysis, results showed that

victimization based on participants' sexual identity mediated the relationships between

sexual minority status and both depression and suicidality; participants with same-gender

attractions reported higher levels of victimization, which was associated with higher

levels of depression and suicide.

Recently, scholars have suggested that like the incidents of victimization discussed above, the negative outcomes of victimization are over-reported in the literature as well (Savin-Williams, 2005). Some researchers have argued that inadequate recruitment procedures, inconsistencies among the definitions of sexual orientation, and variations in the measures used in studies examining issues related to same-gender attractions among adolescents (Saewyc, 2011; Savin-Williams, 2001, 2005) make comparing results across studies difficult, if not impossible (Savin-Williams, 2005). Rieger and Savin-Williams (2012) argued that samples used for studies on the impact of being targets of anti-gay bullying are often drawn from mental health clinics or homeless shelters and thus only include youth with decreased psychological well-being. Consequently, experiences of students who are successfully negotiating discrimination with positive support and well-being are not reflected in these studies. Also, while acknowledging the negative effect of victimization, Savin-Williams (2001, 2005) suggested that statistics on the relationship between victimization and poor psychological well-being of same-gender-attracted youth fail to separate gender nonconforming youth, who, as previously mentioned, have been found to experience increased victimization and decreased psychological well-being when compared to their gender conforming peers (D'Augelli et al., 2006; Rieger & Savin-Williams, 2012). When gender nonconforming adolescents are removed from the analyses, levels of mental health of sexual minority and heterosexual youth are comparable (Savin-Williams, 2005).

Regarding suicidality, Savin-Williams (2005) argued that researchers have failed to differentiate among suicidal ideation, suicide completion, and attempted suicide. Same-gender-attracted youth are commonly reported to be at an increased risk for

suicidal ideation; however, suicidal ideation is common among all youth and is separate from an intention to act on these thoughts. For example, Rieger and Savin-Williams (2012) conducted interviews with 475 high school students to examine the relationship between psychological well-being, gender-non-conformity, and sexual orientation. Students were asked to complete three 6-point Kinsey-type scales (one each to measure sexual attractions, sexual fantasies, and sexual infatuations), a measure to assess gender conformity, and two measures to assess well-being. Rieger and Savin-Williams (2012) found that while youth commonly reported thinking about suicide, rarely did they report attempting suicide. In addition, for both heterosexual and same-gender-attracted youth, those exhibiting gender-atypical behavior were more likely to report mental health problems than similarly situated youth with gender typical behavior.

Saewyc (2011) and Savin-Williams (2001, 2005) suggested that sexual orientation, as such, is not what leads to poor well-being, but rather the reactions from others. Solely focusing on the negative impact of a same-gender-attracted sexual identity perpetuates the pathologies present among some of these youth and overlooks the resiliency. Cox et al. (2011) examined resiliency among sexual minority youth in an investigation of the role of coming out and internalized homonegativity on strength-related growth. Five hundred and two youth (average age 19.1) identifying as lesbian, gay (combined $n = 331$), and bisexual ($n = 171$) responded to questions measuring internalized homonegativity, environmental acceptance, the coming out journey, and perceived stress. Results revealed that overall, when youth felt that significant reference groups accepted their sexual identity and perceived higher positive regard from others, they scored higher in strength-related growth and scored lower on internalized

homonegativity. Cox et al. (2011) also found that youth who were socially connected to other same-gender-attracted youth were more likely to realize personal growth because of experienced stress. The process of self-defining as same-gender-attracted was perceived by participants to be positive, leading Cox et al. to highlight the value of positive social interactions with others.

The discourse that has highlighted the resilience among youth in managing subtle discrimination has mainly been examined from the broader perspective of coping (Madsen & Green, 2012) or the role of environmental support, such as GSAs (Kosciw et al., 2012; Mayberry, 2013; Toomey & Russell, 2011; Walls et al., 2013), family, or friends (Doty et al., 2010; Shilo & Savaya, 2011). For instance, in a study of 98 youth (lesbian =16%, gay = 60%, and bisexual =19%), ages 14-21 (M = 19.5), Doty et al. (2010) asked participants to complete an orally administered questionnaire assessing for emotional distress, sexuality-related social support, and non-sexuality related social support. Using a MANCOVA to examine support across these domains, results showed that same-gender-attracted adolescents relied on the support of family and friends to cope with problems relating to sexual orientation, with support from peers to be most influential. Doty et al. also found that although support for non-sexuality problems was more available from families than support for problems related to sexuality, sexual minority friends were equally supportive of all problems. Doty et al. also reported that compared to family members, heterosexual friends were more supportive of sexuality problems. In all, support from others was found to be an effective mechanism for coping with emotional distress; youth who experienced support specifically related to their sexuality also experienced increased emotional well-being.

Goffman (1963) argued that understanding the relationship between stigma and socially devalued identities requires examining the social interactions in which stigma is managed rather than the attributes of the stigma itself. Little research could be found, however, which considered the individual agency of same-gender-attracted adolescents in managing discrimination during social interactions (for exceptions see Kaufman & Johnson, 2004; Lasser & Tharinger, 2003; Madsen & Green, 2012; Savin-Williams, 2005). Yet, scholars have noted resilience through the employment of protective strategies in managing denigrating experiences (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004; Savin-Williams, 2005; Swim et al., 1998). Researchers have suggested that targeted individuals are more than merely reactive agents who are controlled by the perpetrator when responding to prejudice and discrimination levied against them (Swim et al., 1998). Goffman (1959, 1963), K. Plummer (1996), and Strauss (1959) conjectured that during social interactions, individuals actively manage stigma and noted the cognitive processes at play in responding to denigrating actions of others (Goffman, 1959, 1963; Kaufman & Johnson, 2004; London et al., 2014; Strauss, 1959; Sue, 2010).

Individuals are faced with resolving four psychological dilemmas when managing microaggressions: namely, (1) determining if the behavior was a microaggression or misinterpreted by the targeted person; (2) making the perpetrator aware that a microaggression was committed; (3) conveying that the act was harmful when the perpetrator may have been unaware of the harm caused, and (4) determining how to respond. In formulating a response, the target is in a "catch 22" (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007, p. 279). Considering that the perpetrator is commonly unaware of the offense, the targeted individual assesses the value of responding in terms of potential or gain and the

ability to resolve the psychological dilemmas. On the other hand, failure to respond can

lead to poor psychological well-being. Although the framework of the psychological

dilemmas contributes to the literature by providing insight into the additional burden

placed on same-gender-attracted individuals experiencing microaggressions, "What is

lacking is research that points to adaptive ways of handling microaggressions" (Sue,

Capodilupo, et al., 2007, p. 279).

Goffman (1959) and others (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003; K. Plummer, 1996) have

noted the dilemma of individuals with stigmatized identities during social interactions. A

stigmatized status disclosed in one encounter may be undisclosed in others, thus making

identity disclosure continual and based on context. The broader cultural climate across

societal levels influences merge with the immediate circumstances in social interactions

as well. As individuals enter into social interactions, the values of their significant others,

reference groups, and the larger society have an invisible presence, which ultimately

shapes the interactions (Goffman, 1963; Strauss, 1959). The level of acceptance of same-

gender-attracted relationships in one context may be higher or lower than in another

(Jackson, 2006; Kaufman & Johnson, 2004; Szalacha, 2003; Toomey et al., 2012). For

example, Wilkinson and Pearson (2003) found varying levels of acceptance across

schools. Wilkinson and Pearson also found acceptance levels were moderated by such

factors as the geographic location of the school, the prevalence of sports in the schools,

and level of religiosity among students. Schools that were situated in rural areas, schools

whose students were more actively involved in sports, and schools whose students scored

higher in religious beliefs were less accepting of students with same-gender attractions

compared to urban, less athletic, or less religious peers. The potential for variations in

social norms between subcultures has also been noted (Fine, 2001). In addition to variation among schools, for example, beliefs regarding, and behaviors toward, same-gender relationships have been found to be diverse among students and faculty (Kosciw et al., 2012). Thereby, students with same-gender attractions frequently encounter differences among subgroups; what is acceptable in one group may be less tolerated in others (Mikami et al., 2010; Poteat, 2008; Poteat, Espelage, & Green, 2007).

Individuals have multiple identities (e.g., male, female, mother, father, student, etc.), and the salience of each identity, including a stigmatized identity, is contextual (Goffman, 1963). For example, one's sexual identity may be less salient in the role of customer than in initiating a same-gender relationship. To determine which identity to reveal during social interactions, individuals assess the content of the interaction (K. Plummer, 1996) along with the intent, status, and role of self and others in formulating a response and deciding which identity to reveal (Goffman, 1959, 1963; Strauss, 1959). Goffman (1959) posited that when interacting with others, the presentation of identity is central during social interactions; individuals are motivated to present themselves in the most positive light. So, social interactions are constituted of a series of actions that are, guided by the norms of the larger society and significant reference groups, either consciously or unconsciously. Through negotiations with one another, individuals make their intentions and expectations of the encounter known as they strive to define the situation (Goffman, 1959; Strauss, 1959). In doing so, actors consider the context and acquire information about one another based on preexisting knowledge, such as stereotypes, and signs or clues expressed by the other. When individuals define the situation, they also proclaim their status and assign a status to the other(s) (Goffman,

1959, 1963). When there is a status discrepancy, for example, if individuals are assigned a lower status than they perceive themselves to hold (Burke, 1991; Strauss, 1959) or if individuals are unable to mutually define the situation (Goffman, 1959, 1963), the actors engage in negotiations. Negotiations require exchanging a series of claims until agreement is reached. Goffman (1959) and others (Burke, 1991; Speer & Potter, 2000) averred that as interactions progress, actors may redefine the situation by modifying the definition or redefining their position.

Individuals employ specific strategies in managing heterosexist identities during interactions. For example, in a study examining the social construction of attitudes, Speer and Potter (2000) used discourse analysis to examine transcripts of conversations on sexual orientation from interviews, television broadcasts, and focus groups. Analysis of the transcripts revealed that when actors perceived the other to become sensitive to the topic they engaged in a series of exchanges to redefine their position, and thus the situation, in a way that was mutually acceptable in order to avoid being perceived as heterosexist. Similarly, Carvallo and Pelham (2008) assessed the relationship between perceived gender-based discrimination and the need to belong on 41 female undergraduate students, ages 18 to 43. Participants, who were presumably working with an interactive male partner located in another room, were asked to complete assessments on their need to belong, expectations of stigma, and impressions of the partner's importance in relationship to self. Participants also received a picture and biography of their partner, which included his age, marital status, and sexist beliefs towards women (e.g., men should make more money than women doing the same job, women should not take jobs away from men). Results revealed that women scoring high on the need to

belong, and who perceived the possibility of connecting with their counterpart, were more likely to avoid defining the situation as discriminatory, even after receiving low evaluations on their respective projects from their presumed male partner.

For individuals with a stigmatized sexual identity, social interactions commonly involve employing strategies, such as falsely identifying to others (e.g., a same-gender-attracted person claims heterosexual status) or advocating for self (e.g. defending status or confronting oppression) to manage stigma associated with being discredited or to avoid being found out (Goffman, 1963). Fuller et al. (2009) conducted nine focus groups ($n = 48$), including gay men ($n = 12$), lesbian ($n = 11$), bisexual/queer men ($n = 10$), and bisexual/queer women ($n = 15$), ages 18-61, to examine members' definitions of passing and the contexts in which they passed. The results of a Grounded Theory data analysis showed that participants engaged in passing to preserve their identity or to benefit in some other way. For example, participants differentiated between intentional and unintentional passing, with unintentional passing being the result of mistaken assumptions of others in the interaction. Some reported examples of reasons for engaging in intentional passing were to benefit from accessing heterosexual privilege, to avoid rejection or discrimination, to belong, and to avoid making others uncomfortable. For bisexual and queer participants, passing as lesbian or gay was a method of gaining acceptance from the LGBTQ community.

While insightful, these study results were based on adult samples. Speer and Potter (2000) provided examples of how individuals negotiate the definition of the situation, although in their study the ages and sexual identities of the participants were unspecified. Fuller et al. (2009) did study managing stigma associated with a same-

gender-attracted identity; however, the sample in this study ranged from 18 to 81, and none of the participants attended high school. Carvallo and Pelham (2008) showed that stigma management strategies could include overlooking discriminatory messages received in social interactions in order to meet the personal need to belong; however, the sample in this study consisted of undergraduate students and, while valuable, the study examined gender-based discrimination.

Three studies were found that addressed managing discrimination using adolescent samples. Roschelle and Kaufman (2004) examined social interactions to identify strategies for managing a stigmatized identity in an ethnography of homeless adolescents. Through informal interviews and field observations, Roschelle and Kauffman found that homeless adolescents engaged strategies of inclusion and strategies of exclusion when interacting with others. Though these results do provide insight into how adolescents manage stigma when interacting with others, the social value of being homeless could differ from that of having same-gender attractions. Additionally, the demands of the environments of homeless youth who are not attending school could significantly differ from those of adolescents who are confined to a school environment throughout the day.

In one study, Madsen and Green (2012) investigated strategies for coping with sexual orientation-based discrimination across a variety of contexts, including school, family, and peers. Madsen and Green interviewed eight male high school students, ages 15-18 ($M=16.6$). The data, which were analyzed using a theme-centered analysis, indicated that confronting the perpetrator and becoming involved in LGB activism efforts in promoting equality were discrimination management strategies used by participants.

However, the Madsen and Green study sought to identify broader coping strategies. A focus of the current study was to investigate strategies for managing social interactions that included sexual orientation microaggressions.

In another, Lasser and Tharinger (2003) conducted a Grounded Theory investigation into the identity management strategies employed by same-gender-attracted high school students. Data from interviews with 20 same-gender-attracted youth were showed that participants intentionally managed the visibility of their sexual identity by modifying verbal and nonverbal communication, as well as their dress. Lasser and Tharinger also found that the degree of sexual identity visibility allowed by the participants was determined by the relationship between the individual and environmental factors, such as familial or school support. While their study provided valuable information on responses to stigma and identity management, specific management strategies for stigmatizing events, such as microaggressions, were not identified. Regarding the lack of research on strategies employed by adolescents when managing stigmatized identities in social interactions, Roschelle and Kaufman (2004) argued that the literature has neglected the experiences of this population.

In summary, research has predominately portrayed adolescents with same-gender attractions as victims of discrimination who experience higher rates of pathology compared to heterosexual youth (see, e.g. Aerts et al., 2012; Almeida et al., 2009). Scholars have suggested, however, that individuals with stigmatized identity statuses are actively managing threats to their identities in social interactions (Burke, 1991; Fuller et al., 2009; Goffman, 1959, 1963; Lasser & Tharinger, 2003; K. Plummer, 1996; Strauss, 1959; Swim et al., 1998). In spite of the growing amount of literature assessing resilience

in responding to sexual-orientation-based-discrimination in schools (Busseri et al., 2006; Doty et al., 2010; Kosciw et al., 2012; Madsen & Green, 2012; Mayberry, 2013; Shilo & Savaya, 2011; Toomey & Russell, 2011; Walls et al., 2013), few have considered the perspective of how adolescents are active agents in managing their responses to discrimination at the individual level during social interactions. In addition, the available scholarship on this topic has predominately been based on adult samples (Fuller et al., 2009; Speer & Potter, 2000), or has focused on an unrelated topic (Roschelle & Kaufman, 2004). Only two studies could be found that addressed agency in managing discrimination among same-gender-attracted adolescents in high school. One study examined management from the broader perspective of coping and was limited to male participants (Madsen & Green, 2012). The focus of the other was sexual identity disclosure at school (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003). Because there are differing perspectives on the resilience of these youth (see Saewyc, 2011 for review), and a lack of research examining ways in which these youth manage discrimination while interacting with peers in school, an investigation into these strategies was warranted.

Summary

To summarize, during adolescence, the most salient period in youth development (A. Martin, 1988), youth experience biological and cognitive changes (Ginsburg & Opper, 1988; Graber & Archibald, 2001) as they strive to establish independence and emerge as sexual beings (Erikson, 1959/1980; Graber & Archibald, 2001; A. Martin, 1988). Some have argued that same-gender-attracted youth additionally can be burdened as they carve out a sexual identity amid disapproving messages from significant others and from society (D'Augelli, 1985; Hunter & Mallon, 2000; Savin-Williams, 1989).

Scholars have found that negative appraisals from others regarding sexual orientation are associated with difficulties in the development of a positive sexual identity (Almeida et al., 2009).

Earlier research on sexual identity development portrayed youth as navigating a path to sexual identity development that was fraught with oppression and varying levels of success (see e.g., Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1981; Troiden, 1989). More recent scholarship has found that youth construct narratives of their personal journeys to self-define sexually, unique to them, which are influenced by interactions with others. As opposed to the narrative of struggle and success, which is typical of earlier, stage models, the narrative of emancipation is more compatible with today's youth, who are freer in their sexual expression and who live in a contemporary, more affirming culture (Cohler & Hammack, 2006; Hammack et al., 2009). Scholars have also argued that sexual identity is socially constructed through interactions with others (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004). Because interactions are ever changing, establishing a sexual identity is not a one-time event. Instead, it is continually established across contexts (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004; K. Plummer, 1996) and frequently redefined (Goffman, 1963; K. Plummer, 1996).

Despite many same-gender-attracted youth feeling unencumbered by their sexuality and an increase in the availability of environmental supports (Mayberry, 2013; Toomey & Russell, 2011), scholars have noted that along with same-gender sexual expression comes increased visibility and increased risk for being targets of discrimination for high school adolescents (D'Augelli, 1985; Kosciw et al., 2012; Saewyc, 2011). Youth with same-gender-attracted identities could be vulnerable to these negative messages from others (Goffman, 1959, 1963; Kosciw et al., 2012). Negative

messages regarding same-gender attractions are commonly communicated through sexual orientation microaggressions, which are subtle, often ambiguous, denigrating messages, commonly, but not always, conveyed unconsciously to same-gender-attracted individuals (Sue & Capodilupo, 2008).

To date, the literature regarding the experiences of sexual orientation microaggressions against same-gender-attracted adolescents is both lacking and void consideration of the context of the school environment. In light of the fact that youth spend a large portion of their day in a school environment, and with varying levels of support, generalizing results drawn from adult samples (see e.g., Nadal, Issa, et al., 2011; Nadal, Wong, et al., 2011) could yield an inaccurate depiction of the microaggressive experiences of same-gender-attracted youth. Exploring ways in which same-gender-attracted youth experience and manage subtle discrimination while at school will provide information to benefit school counselors working with these youth, as well as assist school administrations striving to create more accepting school environments.

Sexual orientation microaggressions are manifestations of the beliefs of the larger social culture (Sue, 2010). While the overall climate has become more affirming (Herek, 2002; Jones, 2011, 2012; Mendes, 2015; Newport & Himelfarb, 2013), the stigmatization of same-gender relationships, which is ubiquitous and resistant to complete suppression, is deeply rooted in American culture (Jackson, 2006). Negative messages of the larger culture are frequently mirrored in the school environment (Chesir-Teran, 2003; Kosciw et al., 2012; Poteat, 2008; Toomey et al., 2012). In spite of reports on the frequency of school-based victimization of same-gender- attracted youth (see Burton et al., 2014;

D'Augelli et al., 2002; Hatzenbuehler et al., 2008), recent scholarship has found that previous studies have been misinterpreted and overstated.

Recent scholarship has also found youth to show greater resilience in responding to discrimination (see Cox et al., 2011; Madsen & Green, 2012; Savin-Williams, 2005). Some scholars have argued that individuals are active agents in managing victimizing actions against them as opposed to being passive recipients (Goffman, 1959, 1963; Strauss, 1959; Swim et al., 1998). Existing studies on managing discrimination have been conducted from the broader perspective of coping (Madsen & Green, 2012). Additionally, results have been based on adult samples (Fuller et al., 2009), or solely focused on disclosing sexual identity at school (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003). No studies could be found that specifically addressed ways in which same-gender-attracted adolescents negotiate microaggressions at school on the individual micro-level, in social interactions.

Finally, literature specifically linking managing microaggressions with sexual identity could not be found. Burton et al. (2013) and Savin-Williams (2001) argued that studies on victimization of same-gender-attracted youth solely focus on the negative impact and overlook the resilience of these youth. Burton et al. (2013) called for an inquiry into resilience factors in order to supplement the literature on effective interventions for this population. Considering that during adolescence youth are actively constructing their sexual identity (Erikson, 1959/1980; Graber & Archibald, 2001; A. Martin, 1988) while managing subtle discrimination regarding same-gender attractions (Kosciw et al., 2012), and in light of the conflicting research on the relationship between discrimination experienced by youth with same-gender attractions and sexual identity

development (see Cohler & Hammack, 2006 for review), an inquiry into these constructs would be beneficial to professionals providing services to these youth.

This chapter reviewed the literature to make a case for a qualitative exploration guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent and in what ways do adolescents with same-gender attractions experience sexual orientation microaggressions while at school?

2. In what ways do these students manage sexual orientation microaggressions in social interactions while at school?

3. In what ways do experiences with sexual orientation microaggressions at school affect the sexual identity of adolescents with same-gender attractions?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter delineates the research design, methods, and procedures conducted in this qualitative inquiry into sexual identity development and experiences of microaggressions against high school students with same-gender attractions. This study addressed the following research questions:

1. To what extent and in what ways do adolescents with same-gender attractions experience sexual orientation microaggressions while at school?

2. In what ways do these students manage sexual orientation microaggressions in social interactions?

3. In what ways do experiences with sexual orientation microaggressions affect the sexual identity of adolescents with same-gender attractions?

Research Design

The study design was driven by the research questions (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2008; Marshall, 1996) and purpose (Patton, 2002). As opposed to quantitative designs that seek to know "how much" or "how many," and use units of analysis consisting of numbers, a qualitative design is appropriate for studies designed to answer the questions of "why" or "how" regarding a given phenomenon.(Marshall, 1996; Merriam, 2009). In qualitative research, data consist of words, artifacts, or pictures (Merriam, 2009). The data are "systematically evaluated" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 5) to uncover the meaning individuals attribute to experiences within a given context of their lives (Merriam, 2009). Considering that the goal of the current study was to explore the worlds of adolescent high school students with same-gender attractions, a qualitative design was appropriate. While the design establishes the basic structure of a study (Merriam, 2009),

the methodology informs the data collection and analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriam, 2009). This study employed a basic qualitative research design and utilized Grounded Theory method of data analysis.

Basic Qualitative Research

Patton (2002) referred to qualitative research as a "naturalistic inquiry" (p. 39), because it is conducted against the backdrop of the participants' worlds. Rooted in constructivism, basic qualitative research is an investigation into how people construct their realities when interacting with others. The goal of a basic qualitative study is to uncover "(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning their attribute to their experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 23). The tenets of basic qualitative research methods underlie all methods of qualitative research; however, unlike basic qualitative research, other methods include an additional dimension. (Merriam, 2009). For example, the goal of ethnographic qualitative research is to conduct an inquiry into the activities, behaviors, and dogmas that delimit the culture of a social grouping. A case study is an inquiry into a single case. The goal of a Grounded Theory study is to construct a theory about a process at play considering a given phenomenon, and a phenomenological study focuses on identifying the lived experiences of the participants (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015). Percy et al. (2015) noted that a basic, or generic as they referred to it, qualitative study is appropriate when the researcher has previous knowledge of the topic under study and a desire to add to the knowledge base. Since the goal of this study was to differentiate between the sexual orientation microaggression experiences of high school adolescents and those of adults,

and considering microaggressive experiences have already been identified in the

literature, a basic qualitative research approach was appropriate for the current study.

Procedures

Sites

In their classic work on qualitative analysis, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested

that collecting data from the sites where the interactions occur allows the researcher to

gain insight into the culture of the topic under study. To this end, data were collected

through face-to-face interviews with students who were recruited from multiple sites

where same-gender-attracted students were found. Requests for permission from the

respective schools, university, or community organization administrators were sent via

email along with a formal invitation to participate (Appendix A). This letter provided a

self-introduction as well as a delineation of the study goals and expectations for

participants. The emails were followed up with a personal telephone call to the

appropriate administrator. A formal application was made to each of the school districts

($n=3$), or organizations ($n=1$) requiring them. For sites agreeing to participate, copies of

all permission documents that would be provided to participants were provided to the

administrator. Specifically, these documents consisted of an introduction letter to parents

(Appendix B) and a copy of both Informed Consent (Appendix C), to be completed by

parents or guardians for students under the age of 18 who were not legally emancipated,

and Assent forms (Appendix D), which were completed by all students. In total, eight

school districts, six organizations, 20 individual high schools (two from the same

district), and 2 universities were contacted via email ($n=2$) or a face-to-face meeting

(*n*=1). Follow-up phone calls requesting permission to invite students to participate were then made.

For schools requiring district approval, all requests made at the district level were either declined or the request went unanswered. The organizations contacted were community-based organizations supported of sexual minority youth. While all three organizations accepted the invitation (or approved the application in the case of the national organization), youth from only one organization responded. I was invited to attend a meeting and speak directly to the youth at this organization. Finally, from the high schools requiring permission by the school administrator, four agreed to allow students to be invited to participate in the study. At three of the schools, I was invited to speak at the school's GSA and at the fourth a counselor posted flyers around the high school. In sum, seven separate schools were represented among the data. While the universities contacted granted permission, no students responded to an invitation sent out via the advisor of the university's GSA or to locally posted flyers. Local organizations affiliated with the national organization that approved the study made social media postings regarding the study; however, there were no responses to these postings.

The high schools attended by the participants represented a range of settings, including urban (*n*=2), suburban (*n*=4), and rural (*n*=1). A wide range of socioeconomic areas were represented among the schools, as indicated by the amount of students eligible for free or reduced lunch at each school (15.1% to 92.5%), as well as varying levels of racial diversity within the schools. Finally, the high schools represented in the study included one private religious school, 5 public schools, and 1 charter school. A complete summary of demographics of the participants' schools' can be found in Table 3.1.

The interviews took place at a location mutually agreed up between me and each participant. One school, School D, provided permission for the interviews to be held on the school's campus. Other interview locations included coffee houses convenient for the participants and in one case, the student's home. In addition to the interview data, participants were asked permission to be contacted at a later date for confirmation or clarification of the data. This supplementary information allowed for a more comprehensive understanding (Patton, 2002).

Table 3.1
Site Demographics

	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	School F	School G
Total Enrollment	342	599	875	1,964	973	1,371	2,511
Racial Breakdown %							
Asian	*	1	12.1	.9	0	*	2.6
Black	60.8	1	20.9	10.6	88.8	*	19.6
Hispanic	*	0	*	16.5	1	*	4.5
Indian	*	**	*	NL	NL	*	**
Multi-race	*	0	**	3.6	.3	*	6.5
Pacific Islander	*	0	**	.1	.1	**	.1
White	28.7	96	62.7	68.1	9.8	96.1	66.5
Native American Indian	**	0	**	.2	0	**	.2
Free or Reduced %	62.5	**	15.1	51.8	92.5	72.0	24
4 Yr. Graduation %	**	100	97	77.4	71.3	87.57	94
Public			X	X	X	X	X
Private (Religious)		X					
Charter	X						
Urban	X				X		
Rural						X	
Suburban		X	X	X			X

* Sample size too small to estimate
** Not listed

Sampling Methods

Sample selection in qualitative research is crucial to the credibility of the study results (Coyne, 1997). Unlike quantitative studies, which often utilize random samples

from a population whose characteristics are both known and normally distributed (Marshall, 1996), nonrandom samples are more appropriate for meeting the goals of qualitative studies (Marshall, 1996; Merriam, 2009). Because the characteristics of the population are unknown to the researcher, quantitative strategies are ineffective tools for sample selection (Marshall, 1996; Patton, 2002). Qualitative samples are also significantly smaller than quantitative samples. Regarding using a small sample in quantitative studies, "the sampling error of such a small sample is likely to be so large that biases are inevitable" (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). Purposeful sampling is recommended for qualitative studies (Coyne, 1997; Marshall, 1996; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Although all thoughtful sampling in qualitative research is purposeful (Patton, 2002), various purposeful strategies are available to the researcher for sample selection (Coyne, 1997; Marshall, 1996; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). In the current study, purposeful strategies were used, including typical sampling and snowball sampling.

  { TC "Non-random Purposeful Sampling"\l 3 }In the initial stages of data collection, through non-random purposeful sampling, some participants were selected based on my understanding of whom to interview given the study topic (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2008). Coyne (1997) explained that initially, the researcher knows where to collect, although not necessarily what to collect or where data collection will lead. As a result, a non-random purposeful sample is selected, one in which the researcher perceives the participants to have experiences related to the topic of the research study and where rich data can be collected (Cutliffe, 2000). In order to assure that the students' experiences were accurately depicted, using typical sampling, students identifying as having same-gender attractions and experiences were purposely selected and invited to

participate in the study. Typical sampling is used when the researcher's goal is to provide a representative depiction of individuals in a particular setting (Patton, 2002).

{ TC "Theoretical Sampling"\l 3 }As concepts and categories began were identified during data analysis, hypotheses about what was going on in the data were noted. At this time, participants with experience consistent with the developing theory were sought out (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Corbin and Strauss (1990) noted that it is the events that become central to data sampling, rather than the participants themselves. The focus of data collection moved away from participant experiences with the given topic, per se, and toward the developing categories, properties, and dimensions (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

During the initial phases of data collection and analysis, it became apparent that the sample was exclusively female and only suburban high schools were represented. At this time, participants and participants from urban schools were specifically sought in order to gain a wider perspective that included diversity of gender, race, and school setting. Proceeding in this way also allowed for a more precise understanding of the phenomena (Charmaz, 2014) and allowed me to follow up on and seek out cases that were unexpected or counter indicative to initial findings (Morse, 2012). Additionally, snowball sampling was used throughout the data collection process.

{ TC "Snowball sampling"\l 3 }Snowball sampling is a technique used to recruit future participants through current study participants; participants are asked to refer others to the researcher (Merriam, 2009; Noy, 2008; Patton, 2002). This form of sampling lends itself to soliciting participants rich in experiences (Noy, 2008; Patton,

2002) who might initially feel reluctant, or who might be uninformed about the research project (Noy, 2008). Study participants indicating willingness to refer to others were provided a flyer detailing the study purpose, participation requirements, and researcher contact information. Three participants were obtained via snowball sampling.

Sample Size

The question of sample size in qualitative research has been debated largely among scholars (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Marshall, 1996; Merriam, 2009; Sandelowski, 2009). The quantitative researcher strives to select a sample that is demographically reflective of the larger population from which the sample is drawn (Hood, 2012) and that is large enough to yield high statistical power (Patton, 2002). An adequate sample size in quantitative research can easily be determined by probability (Patton, 2002); however, determining an adequate sample size in qualitative research has been considered somewhat of an enigma (Guest et al., 2006; Morse, 2000; Sandelowski, 2009; Thorne, 2000). Quantitative research derives results that can be generalized to the larger population (Marshall, 1996; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002).

In qualitative methods, however, the researcher seeks to explore and uncover the unknown (Merriam, 2009). Morse (2000) and colleagues (Patton, 2002; Sandelowski, 2009) proffered that adequate sample size reflects the richness of the data. Others have argued that attending to the number of participants over richness of data could lead to a sample size that is too large, thereby risking the accuracy of the data analysis (Charmaz, 2014; Sandelowski, 2009). On the other hand, a sample size that is too small will result in underdeveloped categories (Charmaz, 2014). Taken in total, data that are more exhaustive and provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon will result in saturation with

fewer participants than data that lack depth and only narrowly capture what is going on (Morse, 2000). Saturation in qualitative research is achieved when the categories are fully exhausted. That is, when no new relevant data are collected and when the categories are thoroughly defined by their associated properties and dimensions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008)

Recently, the topic of saturation has received increased attention in the literature (Guest et al., 2006; Mason, 2010; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). Insufficient guidelines (Guest et al., 2006), lack of transparency (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012), and conceptual misunderstanding (Francis et al., 2010; Mason, 2010) in claiming saturation have been noted, leading scholars to question the consistency among methods of establishing saturation in qualitative studies (Dworkin, 2012; Francis et al., 2010; Guest et al., 2006; Mason, 2010; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). Guest et al. (2006) wrote that while the concept of saturation is beneficial, the literature "provides little practical guidance for estimating sample…" size (p. 59). Some have argued that saturation has become a nebulous concept, because over time researchers have continually refined it to fit specific qualitative designs (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). Others have contended that saturation has been overshadowed by researchers feeling compelled to meet institutional or publication demands for a specific sample size when reporting qualitative results (Dworkin, 2012; Mason, 2010). Mason (2010), for example, reviewed 560 British dissertation abstracts to determine the most frequently used sample sizes in dissertations reporting qualitative methods. Findings revealed that the mean sample size was 31, with a standard deviation of 18.7. Results also indicated a positively skewed and bi-modal distribution. Mason also found a "significantly high proportion of studies utilizing multiples of ten" (para 1) as the

reported sample size, leading Mason to question the likelihood of saturation being achieved solely through sample sizes ending in zero. Mason concluded that the PhD students who authored the sampled dissertations might have either been unclear on how to define saturation, or compelled to bypass the process of saturation in favor of meeting respective university criteria for sample sizes in order to defend their data.

To operationalize saturation, Guest et al. (2006) tracked the emergence of newly discovered concepts and codes while coding 60 in-depth interviews of West African female sex workers at risk of contracting HIV. Guest et al. recruited a homogenous sample (i.e., participants shared characteristics of gender, occupation, and West African ethnicity). In data analysis of the first 30 interviews, which were conducted with women from Ghana, 73% of the codes were found in the first six transcripts; 92% of the codes were discovered by the 12th interview. Even though an additional five codes were identified during the analysis of the remaining 30 interviews, these codes were determined to be variations of previous codes. From this, Guest et al. concluded that six interviews could potentially yield "meaningful themes and useful interpretations" (p. 78). O'Reilly and Parker (2012) argued that the level of transparency regarding the process of claiming saturation is critical to the trustworthiness of qualitative results substantiating the quality of the data collected as opposed to the actual size of the sample.

Although Guest et al. (2006) provided a convincing argument for achieving a 92% saturation level with 12 participants, the data collection and analysis methods used were not consistent with grounded theory methods of analysis. Specifically, sample selection was not based on emerging categories (Francis et al., 2010), as was the case in the current study (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2008). Also, the interview protocol was not

refined to reflect the emerging data (Merriam, 2009). Finally, Guest et al. noted that interviews were conducted solely with sex workers from one geographical area, giving no indication of following the emerging data to select participants whose voices would contribute to enriching the data beyond that area. Additionally, though Mason (2010) found a mean of 32 participants in PhD dissertations, Mason conjectured that this number was set *a priori* with little or no regard to saturation. The mean of 32 becomes even more speculative in light of the reported 16.6 standard deviation and the bimodal distribution of the data. For the current study, participants were recruited until saturation was reached; there were ultimately 14 participants in all, with no new data emerging after the 10th interview. The anticipated sample size for this study was between 12 and 20 participants. The process of achieving saturation is detailed later in this chapter.

Participants

Participant recruitment began after Internal Review Board (IRB) approval from the supporting university was obtained. Students identifying as same-gender-attracted under the age of 18, who were not legally emancipated and who were not able to get permission from parents because they had not come out to them yet, were precluded from participating in the study.

In addition to the consent requirements, all perspective participants were advised that participation involved engaging in one face-to-face interview with me, anticipated to last between 60 to 90 minutes, at a place where they would feel most comfortable. Participants were recruited through GSAs, flyer postings, and Facebook postings, as well as participant and school counselor referrals.

In total, 35 students responded to recruitment measures. During the three GSA meetings attended, a sign-up sheet was passed around for students to indicate interest in participating by providing their name, age, grade, and preference for being contacted (e.g., phone, text, or email). A total of 19 potential participants were identified during these meetings. Of these, 8 participants ultimately agreed to participate. The remaining either did not respond when contacted ($n=9$), were unable to acquire parental consent ($n=1$), or did not show up to the interview ($n=1$). In addition to participants recruited through GSAs, youth responded to a flyer posting in a high school ($n=3$), counselor referral ($n=1$), personal referral ($n=3$), and snowball sampling ($n=9$). The total number of youth recruited through the flyer posting was 6. The others were either too old to participate ($n=1$), under 18 and not out to parents ($n=2$), did not respond after two attempts to contact them ($n=6$), or did not show up for the interview ($n=1$).

The ages and grades of the participants ranged from 15 to 18 years and 11th through 13th, respectively. Gender identities represented in the sample were male ($n=4$), female ($n=8$), and gender fluid (n=2). Race/ethnicities included African American ($n=1$), Black ($n=1$), White/Native American ($n=1$), Multiracial ($n=3$), and White ($n=8$). Participants also varied in age of being out to self (range of 10 to 16), peers (never to 17), and parents (never to 18). Two students were out to only one parent, and in both cases the parent was the mother. The complete demographic summary can be found below in Table 3.2.

Confidentiality

Procedures to protect participant confidentiality were followed. Interviews were recorded, using two digital audio recorders and transcribed by the researcher. The

recordings were transferred to a computer for transcription, then deleted from the

recording devices. All data were stripped of any identifying information during

transcription. For example, students' names were replaced with a pseudonym personally

Table 3.2
Student Demographics

	School	Age & Year	Gender	Sexual Identity	Race	GSA	Age First Out		
							Self	School	Parents
Princeton	A	17/11th	Male	Gay	African American	No	14	12	14
Nancy	A	17/12th	Female	Bisexual	White	No	14	15	17
Bernadette	B	17/12th	Female	Lesbian	White	No*	14	16	15
Mary	C	17/12th	Fluid	Queer	White	Yes	11	16	16
Rae	C	18/12th	Female	Lesbian	White	Yes	15	17	18 (mom)
Ann	C	18/12th	Female	Lesbian	White	Yes	14	17	17
Warren	D	17/11th	Male	Bisexual	White	Yes	15	15	16
JC	D	16/11th	Female	Bisexual	White	Yes	11	11	16
Lizzi	D	18/13th	Fluid	Bisexual	Multi-Racial	Yes	14	14	14
Kelhani	E	15/9th	Female	Bisexual	Multi-Racial	Yes	10	Never	Unsure
Alex	E	19/12th	Male	Bisexual	Black	Yes	16	16	18
Kyle	E	17/10th	Male	Gay	Multi-Racial	Yes	13	16	17 (mom)
Amelia	F	18/13th	Female	Lesbian	White/Nat. Amer.	Yes	16	17	16
Alice	G	16/10th	Female	Bisexual	White	No	14	16	16

selected by them. Additionally, any other identifying information (e.g., location, school,

friend's names) was replaced with a pseudonym, or referred to generically

(Hadjistavropoulour & Smythe, 2001; Khiat, 2010).

While all information pertinent to the study (e.g., Informed Consent, Assent,

audio recordings, and transcribed data) remained protected, the interview transcripts were

shared with members of my dissertation committee and disinterested colleagues who

participated in data analysis. All electronic documents will be transferred to a dedicated

external hard drive and placed in a locked cabinet along with any paper documents where

they will be preserved until complete dissemination of the completed dissertation.

Data Collection and Analysis

Instrumentation

Fundamental to the fact that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection in qualitative research is the existence of researcher biases (Englander, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Williams & Morrow, 2009). To control for biases that may potentially insert themselves into the data collection and analysis, the researcher must identify them and attain an epoché regarding previous subject matter knowledge. This enables the researcher to approach the data with a fresh perspective (Charmaz, 2014; Giorgi, 2009; Merriam, 2009). Giorgi (2009) defined epoché as an attitude that the researcher brings to the data. Giorgi suggested that in data analysis, researchers naturally draw from personal experience to understand a phenomenon. Acknowledging that one cannot fully remove the self from personal knowledge, Giorgi suggested that being intentionally aware of this allows the researcher to suspend judgment. Rather than affecting the outcome of data analysis, drawing from personal experience allows the researcher to enrich the data by questioning the emerging concepts from multiple perspectives (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Morrow (2005) and colleagues (Williams & Morrow, 2009) wrote that in doing so, the researcher strives to balance the perspectives of the researcher and participant to assure that the participants' voices were reflected in the data rather than the researcher's voice. Memos on existing personal preconceptions and assumptions were noted before and throughout the data collection and analysis process. Researcher biases will be discussed with the researcher's perspective later in this chapter.

{ TC "Semistructured interview protocol"\l 3 }**Semistructured interview protocol**. The interview, the most common form of data collection in qualitative research

(Merriam, 2009), is an effective technique for collecting data when the researcher intends to gather data that cannot be obtained through observation (Englander, 2012; Merriam, 2009).Various types of interview instruments are available to the researcher (Flick, 2014; Merriam, 2009); however, because the goal of the current study was to uncover perceptions, a semistructured interview protocol was used. The semistructured interview allowed me to follow an interview protocol, while at the same time remain flexible and open to new dialogue that arose during the interview. The protocol, then, served as a guide, with no predetermined order for introducing the questions into the interview session (Flick, 2014; Merriam, 2009). The protocol also afforded the participant the opportunity to offer perspectives not initially considered, thus allowing the participant to lead the interview and for me to refine the instrument for following interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).The final interview protocol is included in Appendix E.

{ TC "Field Notes"\l 3 }Field Notes. Documenting observations during fieldwork is "essential to exploring and expressing the context of the study" (Morrow, 2005, p. 259). By documenting observations, the researcher can be mindful of what does and what does not occur while in the field (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Wolfinger, 2002). In order to accurately document happenings in the field, observations made at the research sites and in the interview process were recorded using jottings and descriptive field notes (Emerson et al., 1995). Jottings consist of phrases or keywords about observations that are intended to spark the memory of the researcher. They are an effective and unobtrusive way to record notes from the field when the time or the situation is not conducive to openly constructing field notes (Emerson et al., 1995; Merriam, 2009). Jottings were made on the site in the margins of the protocol and were

converted to descriptive field notes after leaving the site. Descriptive field notes are comprehensive notes that reflect the researcher's perception of the observation (Emerson et al., 1995). Patton (2002) noted that writing field notes before leaving the site is crucial to capturing observations in totality, and suggested allowing for time before leaving the site to properly construct field notes. In the current study, field notes were both taken on site and developed from jottings after leaving the site.

Data Analysis

Grounded Theory methods were used to analyze the data. Similar to other qualitative research methods, Grounded Theory methods use an inductive approach of gathering raw data for analysis to understand participants' experiences (Merriam, 2009). Unique to Grounded Theory is that it also incorporates a deductive approach. Though there are varying theoretical perspectives on the role of deduction in Grounded Theory data analysis (see Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the perspective of Corbin and Strauss was used in this study. From this perspective, both inductive and deductive methods of data collection and analysis are utilized to "develop a well-integrated set of concepts that provide a thorough theoretical explanation of social phenomena under study" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 5).

In the early stages of data collection and analysis, data are opened up to analysis as concepts are identified. Concepts, the cornerstone of data analysis, are based on inferences about what is going on in the data (Blumer, 1954). These concepts are elevated in the later stages of analysis and developed into categories that represent experiences under study. At the same time, hypotheses are formed and theory construction begins. The formation of hypotheses marks the beginning deductive phase of GT. At this point

that data sampling and collection proceeds in order to confirm or disconfirm the

hypotheses (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Though it is not a

predictive methodology, the resulting theory provides a conceivable explanation of the

relationships between interactions, conditions, and responses regarding the phenomenon

under study (Corbin & Strauss, 1990); that is to say that given X, it is plausible to assume

that Y will follow.

According to the canons of Grounded Theory analysis, data collection and data

analysis are "interrelated processes" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 6). Analysis in

Grounded Theory begins as soon as the data are collected. The first transcript lays a

foundation for the formulation of concepts, which ultimately inform the development of

categories as well as future data collection and analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Using

the constant comparative method, an iterative process of continually comparing data

against one another, the researcher forms an interactive relationship with the data,

moving back and forth between analysis and collection (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2008;

Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As data appeared to be relevant, new findings were

incorporated into the next observation, interview, and theoretical sample selection. This,

in turn, informed the next steps of data collection. This process continued until data

saturation was reached (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2008).

Before analysis, each completed interview was transcribed and read completely.

While reading the transcript, notations were made in the margin, which provided

interpretation of the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). During the initial phase of analysis,

referred to as open coding, data were analyzed using microanalysis. In microanalysis, the

transcript is analyzed line by line or in meaning units (Charmaz, 2014, p. 101; Corbin &

Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1994) to identify lower level concepts, which represent

the core of what is going on in the data. Open coding "is a process through which

concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data"

(Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 101). The data are opened up, allowing all potential

meanings of an identified concept to be examined (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2008; Strauss

& Corbin, 1994). It has been noted that the concept is the "basic unit of analysis" (Corbin

& Strauss, 1990, p. 7) and, when fully developed, is the mechanism that connects the

developing theory with the participants' worlds (Blumer, 1954). During coding, as

concepts were identified, codes were noted in the margins of the transcript.

Once identified, the concepts were clustered based on their relationship with one

another (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2008). The clusters that were more encompassing of the

interpretation of the data were elevated to a category. A category is a higher level concept

that " represents relevant phenomena" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 159). Corbin and

Strauss (1990) argued that it is through this rigorous process of examination that concepts

earn their way into a category. In designating clustered concepts as categories, it was

determined that they had the potential to become fully developed with distinct properties

and dimensions. They were also found to be recurring among the data. The categories

were a culmination of the "concepts that [stood] for phenomenon" (Strauss & Corbin,

1998, p. 101) and were mutually exclusive (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriam, 2009;

Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Strauss and Corbin (1998) wrote that categories are abstractions

in that they are representative of the voices of several people.

These higher-level clustered concepts, or categories, were then more fully

developed using axial coding. Axial coding refers to the process of relating the

subcategories to categories and linking categories to one another. Through axial coding

the categories were linked to lower level concepts, or subcategories, by the "conditions,

context, strategies, and consequences" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 13) that gave rise to

them. Once the categories became visible and relationships between or among the

categories became evident, hypotheses, "grounded in the data" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008,

p. 318) was recorded in theoretical memos. The lower level clusters, subcategories, were

then linked to related categories in order to provide a clearer definition, including

indications of the conditions under which the actions represented in the categories arose

(Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Properties, and dimensions, which provide context to the categories, were also

defined through axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) wrote that properties represent the "characteristics of the

category, the delineation of which defines and gives it meaning" (p. 101). The

dimensions represent the potential range of variation within each property and provide

depth to the meaning of the categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2008; Strauss & Corbin,

1998). Still using the constant comparative method, categories were compared against

one another and across levels (i.e., , categories, concepts, properties, and dimensions) to

confirm or disconfirm their presence in the data, differentiate them from one another, and

affiliate them with their properties and dimensions (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss,

1990, 2008). While these processes are listed sequentially here, in accordance with the

tenets of GT, I moved between open and axial coding freely during data analysis until the

categories were fully saturated (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Theoretical memos. Theoretical memos were written during all phases of data collection and data analysis and through the construction of theory (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Areas to probe in further interviews were noted, as were the developing hypotheses about what was going on with the participants. Writing theoretical memos is a way of preserving the researcher's questions and conceptions about the data that are instrumental in continually shedding new light on the data; they are analytical tools (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2008; Montgomery & Bailey, 2007). Montgomery and Bailey (2007) suggested that through memos the researcher engages in a dialogue with the data and that, in addition, memos document the meanings behind the codes as they are being identified during data analysis. Theoretical memos are differentiated from field notes in that, as previously described, field notes are descriptive observations of the happenings in the field (Emerson et al., 1995). By contrast, theoretical memos contain the researcher's analytical hypotheses as they develop and the data supporting them (Charmaz, 2014). Ultimately, the descriptive, theoretical memos informed the next interview protocol and were compared with one another to determine common themes among them.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in a qualitative study refers to the ability of the researcher to present findings so that the reader finds them valuable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In doing so, the researcher must establish the "integrity of the data" (Williams & Morrow, 2009, p. 578) by proving that the results mirror the data (Golafshani, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Williams & Morrow, 2009). In addition, the findings must be presented clearly so that the reader has a complete picture of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Williams &

Morrow, 2009) and is able to apply the results to the external world (Golafshani, 2003;

Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Establishing integrity of the data and presenting findings clearly

are referred to as credibility (also commonly referred to as internal validity) and

transferability, or external validity, respectively. Two other indicators of trustworthiness

are the ethical code of the researcher (Merriam, 2009) and the degree to which the study

results are dependable or reliable. This refers to the degree to which the processes have

been documented and are reproducible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These constructs are

discussed below.

Credibility (Internal Validity)

In establishing credibility, the researcher must demonstrate that the research

results are reflective of the perceived realities as reported by the study participants

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009) and that a balance between the data

interpretation of the researcher and the participant voices has been demonstrated (Lincoln

& Guba, 1985; Morrow, 2005; Williams & Morrow, 2009). In the current study,

credibility was established in a number of ways. To begin, in order to demonstrate that

the participants' perspectives were mirrored in the research conclusions, participants

were quoted and cited directly from the data when reporting results, thus providing a link

between the data and the conclusions (Williams & Morrow, 2009). In order to maintain a

separation of researcher bias and participant perspectives, reflexive notes were written to

record personal preconceptions and ongoing perceptions (Williams & Morrow, 2009).

Similarly, throughout the study, my experiences and findings were processed with

"disinterested peer[s]" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). Lincoln and Guba (1985) wrote

that "peer debriefing" (p. 308) allows the researcher to maintain neutrality and gain

another perspective on all aspects of the study, including but not limited to researcher perceptions, study methodology, and emerging theory in order to assure a thorough examination of the phenomenon under study.

Secondly, researcher bias was controlled through triangulation. Triangulation is a when the researcher examines or collects data through multiple methods in order to get a comprehensive understanding of the study phenomenon (Golafshani, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Williams & Morrow, 2009). Data were collected through using various methods (e.g., interviews, theoretical memos, and field notes) and participants were drawn from multiple sites (e.g. multiple schools and a community). Multiple perspectives on data analysis were also sought. While I conducted the majority of the data analysis, findings were reviewed with three peers who were familiar with Grounded Theory data analysis and two faculty advisors. Additionally, participant validation of the data were sought through member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Williams & Morrow, 2009). An outline of the results (Appendix F) was emailed to all participants and followed up with a text message, asking participants to check the boxes of categories that pertained to them in order to confirm that the data are being interpreted in a way that "honor[s] the meaning as conceived by the participants" (Williams & Morrow, 2009, p. 579). Of the 14 outlines sent, only one participant responded with a completed document. While this participant did identify with 55% of the data reflected on the outline, in light of the uniqueness of the culture of each school and each participant's journey regarding identity acceptance and school-based discrimination, I was unable to draw conclusions based on member-checking.

Finally, credibility was established through transparency in the process of achieving saturation (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012; Williams & Morrow, 2009). As previously mentioned in this chapter, the standard of achieving saturation across qualitative studies has been applied inconsistently, at best (Francis et al., 2010; Mason, 2010; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). In the current study, a four-step process recommended by Francis et al. (2010) was followed in documenting the claim of saturation. First, an anticipated sample size was identified (12-20). Secondly, a criterion was established for determining saturation. Francis et al. suggested that this criterion will dictate how many interviews will be "conducted with no new themes emerging" (p. 1234); this is the stopping criterion. Prior to beginning data collection, it was established that the stopping criterion would be after three interviews were conducted with no newly emerging data. The third guideline is that data be analyzed by at least two independent coders. As stated above, disinterested peers and faculty advisors assisted in data analysis. Per the fourth requirement, by reporting on the saturation method and the results, the readers were allowed the opportunity to evaluate the results.

Dependability (Reliability)

In a qualitative inquiry, dependability refers to whether the study is replicable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Considering that the data are representative of one point in time, and given the ever-changing worlds of people, the results may not be replicable (Merriam, 2009); however, dependability of the study can be established by documenting, step-by-step, the procedures and methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Williams & Morrow, 2009) and by logging all activity and artifacts, including journals, memos, and field notes (Huberman & Miles, 2007; Lincoln & Guba,

1985). Huberman and Miles (2007) argued that managing data is critical to the success of research, and the methods should be articulated before the commencement of the project. Systematic and well defined processes of "data collection, storage, and retrieval" (Huberman & Miles, 2007, p. 180) ensure that the procedures, including data analysis, have been precisely documented, that the researcher can readily access the data, and that the data will be preserved throughout and well after the completion of the study. Specific efforts were made to collect, record, protect, and preserve the data. The research materials, including transcripts, memos, and code books, were titled by date, indexed, referenced by subject, and, in the case of written feedback, by author, and updated routinely. (Huberman & Miles, 2007). For example, all research methods, including the data collection and sampling procedures, sample size, and data analysis, have been documented in this chapter. Additionally, evidence of the findings being reflected in the data (Morrow, 2005), including saturation procedures (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012) have been included in this dissertation.

Transferability (External Validity)

Unlike quantitative research, which has a goal of producing findings that can be generalized to a population, the concept of transferability in qualitative research is reader-based (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Because qualitative research is an exploratory and explanatory strategy, rather than a predictive strategy (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriam, 2009), it is the reader who establishes transferability, rather than the researcher (Merriam, 2009). The level of transferability is determined by the degree to which the context of the study is congruent with the context of the reader (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher must sufficiently describe the results, contexts (Hood, 2012;

Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and sample (Hood, 2012) to allow the "person seeking

applicability" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 298), to determine the whether the results apply

to him or her. In order to provide a broad context for the reader, the sample in this study

included students from a diverse set of demographics. For example, inner city, suburban,

and rural schools were represented in addition to both male and female participants of

varying races. The school demographic information can be found in Table 3.1 in this

chapter. This information for participants can be found in Table 3.2 in this chapter as

well.

Ethical Code

Trustworthiness is ultimately driven by the ethical code of the researcher

(Merriam, 2009). In designing, implementing, and reporting on the research of the current

study, I remained mindful of ethical considerations regarding the setting and participants

(Heppner, Wampold, & Kivlighan, 2008; Merriam, 2009). While in the field, the

researcher may encounter situations where setting practices are found to be unethical.

Should such instances arise, steps should be taken to assure the integrity of the study as

well as to maintain relationships and access to the setting (Merriam, 2009). Posing harm

to the participants, engaging in, or supporting, unethical practices would cast a shadow on

the ultimate research results (Heppner et al., 2008).

Merriam (2009) wrote that paramount to ethical research is the assessment of any

potential risk to participants that could result from participation. Before conducting the

study, I completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research

Participants." In addition, throughout the study, the overall well-being of the participant

took precedence over data collection. I kept my school contact updated on interviews that

were taking place, including where, when, and with whom. Before the interview began,

students were reminded that they were free to pass on any questions and could terminate

the interview at any point of the study. If it appeared that students needed to process their

reactions to prompts or their responses, the interview was suspended until the participant

indicated that he, she, or they were ready to commence. All steps were taken to assure

that participants' rights and confidentiality would be preserved. Participants, and parents

of participants who were minors or not emancipated, were informed of the limits of

confidentiality, and the nature, benefits, and any potential risks associated with their

participation as outlined above in this dissertation. All IRB materials, such as signed

Informed Consent and/or Assent forms, will be maintained along with the other study

documents until the dissertation has been disseminated or published. While there were no

apparent risks associated with this study, it was explained to students that there could be

points where discussing topics during the interview might feel uncomfortable or trigger

past emotionally charged memories. Participants were provided with my contact

information as well as a list of counseling resources in their area.

Researcher Perspective

As the researcher, I approached this study knowledgeable about the topic of

sexual orientation microaggressions, school environments, sexual identity development,

and symbolic interactionism. In addition to participating on a research team investigating

sexual orientation microaggressions in the context of lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults, I

have done extensive reading on this subject as well as the developing adolescent, school

culture, and negotiating a stigmatized identity. I also have experience working

individually with sexual minority students in a high school environment. The stories from

adolescents who are developing an identity as a sexual minority against the backdrop of unaccepting fellow students, faculty, and school cultures are both compelling and heartbreaking. The experiences with these students, in part, drove me to my research questions. Because of my experiences, I came with preconceptions regarding the research questions. Specifically, these included the following:

- An expectation that high school students with same-gender attractions can identify incidents of subtle discrimination in school

- The perceived level of support within the context of the school environment that students with same-gender attractions will experience will vary from school to school and person to person.

- In entering into microaggressive interactions, high school students with same-gender attractions will perceive their status to be stigmatized, and will perceive other actors in the interaction to view their status as stigmatized.

- High school students with same-gender attractions will leave the interactions with varying levels of acceptance of the stigmatized status.

- Because of the microaggressive interactions, the high school student with same-gender attractions may perceive his or her identity negatively, and may report caution in disclosing his or her same-gender attractions within the high school context.

As a researcher, it was crucial for me to set aside preconceptions to assure that the voices of the participants are central in the results. The cultures of the schools I have worked in have not been affirming of students with same-gender attractions; thus, these students have been marginalized and left feeling isolated at school. I strove to remain

cognizant of the fact that these students' experiences may not have been representative of

the participants in the current study.

Chapter Four: Results

This study was an inquiry into experiences with sexual orientation microaggressions in high school, including the management strategies employed in responding to microaggressions during social interactions and the relationship between sexual orientation microaggressions and sexual identity. Twelve current high school students and two recent high school graduates, from seven different high schools, all of whom identified as same-gender-attracted, were interviewed individually about their high school experiences. A demographic summary of the participants and the high schools represented can be found in Chapter Three of this dissertation (Table 3.1 and Table 3.2, respectively). In total, 6 types of sexual orientation microaggressions were found, as well as 5 distinct management strategies and 4 connections with sexual identity. These categories are fully described below.

Category One: Sexual Orientation Microaggressions

Participants reported being the recipient of subtle discrimination from faculty and students alike. Sometimes the participants reported their experiences matter-of-factly, and sometimes they conveyed pain in their responses, highlighting both the potentially routine and harmful nature of microaggressions. The data showed that, although they were able to identify pockets of support, participants received denigrating messages at school regarding their sexual identity. All 14 of the participants reported experiencing some form of sexual orientation microaggressions. The number of microaggressions experienced by each participant ranged from six to 12, with the average being ten. Six separate subcategories of sexual orientation microaggressions were identified. These included: (1) Expressed Denigration; (2) Lack of Recognition; (3) Change in

Relationships; (4) Mixed Messages; (5) Stereotyping; and (6) Secondary

Microaggressions. The microaggressions identified through data analysis are summarized

in Table 4.1. In this section, pronoun usage is consistent with participants' expressed

preference.

Table 4.1
Microaggressions

Subcategory	Subcategory/Property	Property/Dimension
1. Expressed Denigration	a. Message Content	i. Devaluation (Entirely to Partially)
		ii. Condemnation (Harsh to Mild)
	b. Delivery Method	i. Disparaging Comments (Harsh to Mild)
		ii. Nonverbal Expressions (Ambiguous to Obvious)
2. Lack of Recognition	a. Personal Level	i. Non-heterosexual (Always to Never)
		ii. Non-lesbian or gay (Always to Never)
		ii. Non-sexual Identities (Always to Never)
	b. Systemic Level	(None to All)
3. Change in Relationships	a. Targeting	(Aggressively to Casually)
	b. Distancing	(Always to Never)
	c. Violation of Privacy	(Completely to Partially)
4. Mixed Messages	a. Visibility	(Obstructed to Promoted)
	b. Acceptance	(Rejected to Accepted)
	c. Double Standard	i. Endorsed Behavior (Disparate to Uniform)
		ii. School Practices (Biased to Impartial)
5. Stereotyping	a. Personal Characteristics	(Always to Never)
	b. Sexualization	(Always to Never)
	c. Assumption of Choice	(Always to Never)
6. Secondary Microaggressions	a. Failure to intervene	(Always to Never)
	b. Evasion of Responsibility	(Always to Never)

Expressed Denigration

Expressed denigration referred to the disparagement of same-gender-attracted

identities that was directed to the individual participant or the LGB community in

general. This subcategory of microaggressions, which was reported by 12 of the 14

participants, was further divided into two subcategories. Denigration was found to contain specific *message content*, the devaluation or condemnation of same-gender-attracted persons and identities, and to be delivered through two separate *delivery methods*, disparaging comments and nonverbal expressions.

Message content. The content of disapproving messages included the *devaluation* or *condemnation* of same-gender-attracted identities and individuals. One half of the students interviewed recalled receiving messages conveying the content of one or both of these properties. Specifically, of this one-half of all students, six students reported devaluation, six reported condemnation, and three reported experiencing both devaluation and condemnation.

Devaluation. Messages of devaluation challenged the credibility or value of the participants' sexual identities or sexuality. For instance, Amelia, 18, was in her first month of college. Notwithstanding the harmless intent she perceived those who conveyed devaluation to have, she found these messages hurtful. She stated, "it was just little things where they don't necessarily mean to hurt, you know, they don't…but they do hurt" (A791-792). Amelia continued by providing an example of her lesbian identity being devalued while she was attending the rural high school from which she graduated three months prior to the interview. She stated that after offering her perspective to peers during a conversation on sex, "They're [peers] like, oh, but you don't know because, like, and they wouldn't finish their sentence" (A795-796). She continued, saying, "I'd be like, because why? What do you mean? And they're like, well, you know, that doesn't really count. Like, oh. OK. Um, because lesbian sex, quote-unquote, does not count as real sex" (A797-801).

Sexual identities were also devalued when others relayed that the participants were only confused or didn't understand sexuality after they disclosed their sexual identity. Lizzi stated that "just because you are a teenager, people think that you don't know what you're talking about, or that people think, 'You're a kid' you'll learn once you get older (L190-192). For Nancy, some told her that "it's just a phase" (N95) after she disclosed her sexual orientation to them and that bothered her. She stated, "What really gets me is when people say, 'Oh, that's a phase.' I, because it's an integral part of who I am and to say, 'That's a phase,' it really, it really hits me" (N96-97).

Condemnation. Condemnation was experienced when others proposed that participants were morally wrong or would go to hell because of their sexual orientation. Ann was 18, a senior, and identified as lesbian. She explained with a tone of sarcasm that one of her teachers "warned us very carefully about the homosexuals, because the homosexuals were coming to get Ya" (Ann701-702). Alex was in the 12th grade, a senior at an urban school, and identified as bisexual. He stated that his teacher conveyed these sentiments of homosexuality being a sin in a less direct way and during class time. Alex explained:

> He won't talk to me directly, but the way he does it is a group discussion that was like, gay people go to hell. Because you know in the bible the city Seldom [Sodom]…The city that God destroyed?... They was talking about that city and how…the man kept getting raped in that city and …they was talking about that and about how God destroyed it because he couldn't look upon sin (Alex 561-571).

Delivery method. The delivery method was defined as the way that others conveyed denigrating messages. *Twelve students* expressed that sexual orientation microaggressions were delivered through *disparaging comments* and *nonverbal expressions*.

Disparaging comments. Disparaging comments were experienced by 8 youth and were expressed through spoken or written language during face-to- face interactions or via social media, respectively. According to Lizzi, a 19-year-old gender fluid youth who identified as bisexual, and who had graduated from a suburban high school four months prior to the interview, it was not uncommon to hear such comments at their school. They shared that "They [school peers] would just blatantly say, like, rude things or they would call you fag or gay" (L100). JC, age 16, was a student at that same school and identified as bisexual. She explained that disparaging comments, some of which were so offensive that she did not feel comfortable repeating, were made from faculty as well as students. For example, she shared the following:

> Some people frowned on the same-gender relationships. They would, kind of not really like it much (JC18). They would say rude comments about it and tell them rude sayings that I don't feel comfortable repeating…they [the target] wouldn't like it and they would tell them [the perpetrator] to stop and they [the perpetrator] would say other rude things to them about it – even some teachers would do that (JC23-24).

 Warren, a bisexual male, was a high school junior and 17-years-old. He shared that, while at school, he was commonly referred to "as an F – boy; a Fuck boy" (W495) by his peers.

Nonverbal expressions. Disparagement was also conveyed through nonverbal expressions, such as facial expressions or body language. The 11 participants reporting this explained that in reaction to a class discussion or to them passing by a peer, the offender would alter his or her stance or even spatially back up. For instance, Kyle recounted a common experience at his urban school of others intentionally moving away from him because of his sexual identity; he was 17 years old, in the 10th grade, and identified as gay. He said, "Um, they move away from me cuz they think I will try to touch them" (K71-71).

Nancy's experience was less blatant, but the message was the same nonetheless. A 17-year-old senior who identified as bisexual, she described an incident when she entered a classroom conversation on women pretending to be sexually interested in women to avoid cat-calling from men. She commented on the unreasonableness of the idea, asserting that because female-on-female relations are more highly sexualized than heterosexual relationships, this would not deter men from making sexual innuendos. In response, Nancy received a negative nonverbal reaction from some of her classmates. She described her experience:

> [I said], So, if you were to tell some creepy old guy whose already cat-calling that you are sexually interested in women, then who knows where they might take that. And they might be following you and stuff like that. And then the whole class, you could tell that I have experience with that and that I like women from what I was saying. The whole class, like some kids were, like, nodding, but other kids were like quiet and, like, giving me this look like I didn't belong or something (N377-386).

Lack of Recognition

In contrast to expressed disapproval, where offenders acknowledged and disparaged same-gender-attracted identities, *lack of recognition* referred to instances of same-gender-attracted students not being acknowledged or represented. The data showed that lack of recognition was experienced on the *personal level* as well as the *systemic level* in their schools.

Personal level. On the personal level, 9 participants expressed feeling a lack of recognition of their *non-heterosexual, non-lesbian or gay,* and *non-sexual* identities. Regarding non-heterosexual identities, on the occasion that non-heterosexual identities were recognized, only lesbian and gay identities were acknowledged. In other words, the overall message received by participants was that everyone should be heterosexual, but if they had to be non-heterosexual, they must identify as either gay or lesbian; there were no other options. In addition, once a non-heterosexual identity was established, all other identities, such as musician, vocalist, or scholar fell to the wayside and sexual identity became the sole identity of participants.

Non-heterosexual identities. The lack of recognition of *non-heterosexual* identities was operationalized in the form of assumptions of heterosexuality. While this microaggression was extended by peers as well, the most commonly reported occurrences were made by faculty. Five students reported experiencing lack of recognition of their non-heterosexual identity. Bernadette provided an example when she explained her chemistry instructor's attempt to explain course content. Bernadette explained:

We were talking about single replacement reactions in Chemistry, which is where the, um cation and anion switch. What she described it as, she gave us an analogy

of boys and - a boy and a girl and a boy and a girl at a dance. And she's like, and

the way you can remember it is when they flip, a boy would never dance with a

boy and a girl would never dance with a girl (B57-61).

She expressed her dismay and hurt that this same type of expression was commonplace

among several of her classes. She stated, "I mean it's the smallest of comments but you

remember them" (B65-66).

 Non-lesbian or gay. On the contrary, like three of his non-lesbian or gay peers,

Warren perceived that others were willing to accept his non-heterosexuality; however,

they were unwilling to recognize his *non-lesbian or gay* identity. He talked about the

difficulty he had in getting others to accept his bisexual identity. He said, "People only

see me as gay and not bisexual. And I'm always like, I can like both genders" (W522-

523). Ultimately this affected his relationships with others. He described the difficulty

this cased him when he said, "it's come to be that gay people can't trust me because they

think I'll go out with a girl, and girls can't trust me because I'll like guys more than them.

It's kinda hard sometimes" (W522-526).

 Mary described a similar experience when she recalled an incident of discussing

her queer identity with a friend. In Mary's words,

 I know one of my friends who I first came out to was very persistent that I

 couldn't be anything but gay, um, or lesbian. Because he knew I, um, was

 attracted to girls, and, um, since I had first come out to him as a lesbian, um he

 was very sure that that was never gonna change (M67-70).

 Non-sexual identity. Five students shared that once participants' sexual identities

were recognized by others at school, their *non-sexual identities*, including their

individuality, were no longer defining features for them in the eyes of others. Instead, they were only seen as being gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer. Rae explained that being identified as lesbian "kind of like shoves them [other identities] out the window a little bit" (R206) and that it "becomes, like, the predominant trait of who you are to them (R207). Princeton, a 17 year-old, gay, 11th grader, perceived this as well. He explained that others were unable to see him as an individual, but only as a gay man. He shared his frustration saying, "No that's not how it go. Like, I'm [not] just gay, I'm Princeton, I'm me. I'm not just gay" (P391).

Systemic Level. The *systemic level* referred to the lack of recognition of same-gender-attracted individuals in school-related functions, such as the curriculum and school activities. Six students experienced lack of recognition at the systemic level. For example, Nancy noted that when same-gender-attracted sexuality was mentioned in text books, the instructor skipped over the character or only mentioned him or her briefly. She shared,

> If there's an author and there's like a book and there's a gay character in the book.
> A lot, this has happened before. There's a lot of times when you skip over that
> character, even if they've had a major development or like they've done
> something important to the story. Like, and Claude did this and they will never
> talk about him again. And it's like, OK…Ya, like, all right. Last chapter he just,
> like, killed somebody, so we should probably talk about that (N450-465).

Lizzi shared that promotional materials posted throughout the school were absent depictions of same-gender-attracted individuals or couples, and expressed their feelings about this. Lizzi said:

Like, at school, the prom posters or graduation cap posters, or, um, just the

movies we watch at school and…like, they were all of heterosexual

couples…Like it's not a really reminder, it's not a really reminder but it's kind of

in your face...That heterosexual couples are better. And it makes you feel bad.

And it's just like, well why can't that be two girls or why can't it be two guys?

(L655-676)

Change in Relationships

Ten students reported that once their sexual identities became known at school,

they experienced changes in their relationships with others. Three properties of *change in*

relationships were found. Relationship changes were found to be demonstrated through:

(1) targeting, (2) distancing, and (3) violation of privacy.

Targeting. Five participants reported that once others at school became aware of

their sexual identity, they became targets of discrimination. While *targeting* was enacted

casually in some instances, in others instances it was more aggressive. Kyle shared that

some classmates purposefully aroused the attention of the entire class and pressed him to

disclose his sexuality. He shared that upon stating that he was bisexual, "and den [sic]

everybody was laughing at me and telling me how disgusting I was and stuff like that"

(Kyle535). With a tone of sadness, he continued by describing the interaction that

followed. He stated:

"The assistant teacher she told them to stop and she was saying that's just my

sexual preference, but they didn't care. And they was like aksing [sic] me do I

suck dick and stuff like that. And den…They were like in my face and den they,

um, moved, and den they moved away from me. Everybody got up and moved

away from me (Kyle541-545).

Kyle described the impact this experience had on him. He shared, "I just put my head

down until class was over. And den when class was over I kinda broke down (Kyle 547-

548).

In addition to peers, participants were targeted by teachers as well. Lizzi

described an instance where once a teacher became aware that Lizzi identified as

bisexual, the teacher began treating them differently and picking on them. They noted the

difference in the way the teacher treated them after disclosing their sexual identity. Lizzi

stated, "at first, I was completely fine. And then, after I said that out loud about three

days after I said that out loud that's when I started seeing little bitty things that she would

pick at me about" (261-263). Lizzi provided an example when she explained an incident

where the teacher noticed Lizzi and a female classmate joking about a something that had

happened during an in-class science experiment. Lizzi recounted:

> The teacher was, like, she sees we are joking around with each other. The teacher,
>
> she pulled me out of the lab completely. She told me I couldn't go back in the lab,
>
> put me in a classroom next door, because there was one adjoining door. She put
>
> me in the class next door, there was no teacher, the lights were out, and it was
>
> cold. She put me in that classroom; she shut the door, and went back into her
>
> classroom (L238-240).

Distancing. Eight participants shared that when some peers became aware of their

sexual identity, relationships with them began to trail off as others began to put emotional

distance between themselves and the participants. This was experienced both

immediately during interactions and slowly over time. Nancy recalled an immediate

distancing when peers became uncomfortable during a social interaction and noted that

sometimes the distancing was subtle. She stated,

> It's really, it's really easy to tell whether someone's comfortable once they find
>
> out or not (N17-18). Like, when in casual conversation, if you're someone that
>
> I've just met and I haven't, like, specifically come out to you and said, 'My
>
> name's Nancy and I'm bisexual,' then you just sort of pick up on, like, when I'm
>
> talking to my friends and stuff I say. And like, I'll say 'Oh she's cute or I really
>
> like her.' And you can tell. They kind of distance themselves from you (N22-25).

She further described an experience of distancing in a relationship with a specific friend

with whom she was once close. Nancy shared that once her friend learned of Nancy's

sexual identity, conversation between them became less friendly. She stated, "She still

hangs out in my friend group but me personally, I, we don't talk unless it's with the

people that are there, and like if someone leaves while we're all three there it gets really

awkward between us" (N46-47).

Warren, however, noticed the distancing over time, which he interpreted as a

slight to his sexual identity. He described his relationships with peers as having "a big

pause," and explained that "they [peers] don't talk to me as much anymore, they just kind

of go about their ways, but they don't really say much to me anymore" (W450-453). He

also shared the difficulty he experiences in losing friends when he said, "I mean, after,

like a week after the distancing I feel like kind of bad because, I mean this is kind of who

I am" (W466-467).

Violation of Privacy. When peers became aware of participants' sexual identities, they assumed that private details of the participants' lives were open for public inquiry. This microaggressions, which was particularly evident in reference to sexual activity, was reported by six students. Ann stated that others freely asked her about the intimate details of the relationship between her and her girlfriend, and this caused her to feel violated. She explained her frustration by stating, "They seem to kind of fail to realize that I am still a person that might want privacy and just because I'm gay doesn't mean that all my barriers are down" (A83-84). She then went on to say, "they ask like do you guys have sex, like how do you have sex? Like, really? You want me to just talk about this? I mean… just go on Google, I'm sure they have plenty of answers" (A90-92). Nancy shared that though she perceived friends' intentions to be harmless, probes into her sexual life were nonetheless disconcerting. She said,

> My friends… don't mean it to be offensive to me. They just start talking about same-sex sex and stuff like that. And, uh, they'll ask me questions and I'm like, that's, now I'm uncomfortable. Because I don't want to talk about this at the lunch table because I'm trying to eat my barely edible lunch (N126-132).

Mixed Messages

Thirteen of the fourteen participants perceived to experience some form of *mixed messages* regarding the level of acceptance and affirmation of same-gender-attracted identities they received from peers, faculty, and administration at school. Mixed messages were found to be demonstrated in four ways: (1) visibility; (2) acceptance; (3) double standard; and (4) expressed support.

Visibility. Six participants perceived that the *visibility* allowed same-gender-attracted students and school-based organizations was either promoted or obstructed. Students reported that although they were allowed visibility within the school environment, the level of visibility allowed to extend outside of school was dependent upon the amount of pushback received or perceived to arise from stakeholder groups. This was particularly pertinent regarding parents of heterosexual students at their schools. For example, Bernadette organized a first time LGBQT committee at her school. In her capacity as chairperson, she planned an event featuring LGBTQ issues. She shared, "I was baffled throughout the entire process with the amount of hoops I had to jump to make this happen" (B857-858), which she attributed to attempts to keep stakeholders happy. She explained the mixed messages she received regarding allowed visibility when she differentiated between being accepted and being allowed visibility as a lesbian student. Bernadette shared the following:

> Ya, it's two different things. So I do feel, I do feel accepted. I know the administration would like, would never harass me or something about that; however, they will do anything, uh, when parents call to complain. Parents are the people paying the tuition money. So, if here was ever an issue with parent, I don't know, if something. Say, that newspaper ran and I set it on my coffee table. I'm sure other people do. And if a parent read that, I don't know how that would go over with a parent. Let's say they are angry and they call the school, then the school has an issue on their hands (B701-707) …And I don't like it when I am made to feel invisible or like I don't exist to them within the [school name] community (B796-797).

Alice identified as bisexual, was 16, and in the 10th grade. She also avowed that same-gender-attracted identities were not uniformly affirmed by stakeholders, and that the preservation of the school reputation took a front seat to the level of visibility same-gender-attracted students were allowed to enjoy. She shared that LGBTQ events were more closely monitored because, "They don't want anybody to be like completely crazy and like not want to go their school anymore cuz we're a pretty high standard school. We have a really good marching band; a really good football team (141-143). She further explained the offensiveness of this in saying, "Like, people that don't support same-sex couples and while doing that, they're offending people that do support same-sex couples or people who are in same-sex relationships. Like me" (AL151-152).

Acceptance. Twelve participants received mixed messages regarding support or affirmation of their sexual identity across school spaces, faculty, administration, and peers. This was perplexing to Nancy. She said:

> It's confusing. Because you have this teacher that has a safe place sign and they might have this poster with LGB rights or something like that, and something will come up and you need them to be the activist they say they are, and they just don't, and it's confusing. It's like, I thought you were this, but you're not showing me that you support me, or that you support everyone like me (N195-199).

The participants also noted inconsistency between the acceptance others expressed and their behavior. In other words, they believed that in spite of others expressing acceptance during face-to-face interaction, the acceptance was disingenuous. Princeton shared an experience he had with a substitute teacher who frequently taught at his school. He said the following:

That substitute teacher… looked up at us and was like, I'm gonna leave this

conversation alone. That was one of those times that I felt, like, like looking at her

on the outside she was like cool or whatever; but inside she was fine with saying

God [is going to] strike me down right now (P402-406).

Double Standard. Considering the behaviors of heterosexual students and same-

gender-attracted students, ten participants perceived that similar behavior elicited

discrepant responses. The double standard microaggression, which was reported by ten

participants, was demonstrated in two ways, through *endorsed behavior* and *school*

practices.

Endorsed Behavior. Regarding *endorsed behavior*, one way that this was evident

was in the disparate responses of faculty to public displays of affection at school. Eight of

the students reporting a double standard perceived there to be a double standard at school

regarding endorsed behavior. For example, Princeton explained the following:

The faculty treats the issue between heterosexual displays of public affection and

homosexual displays of public affection very differently. Um, with the

heterosexuals it's kind of like a, like, almost like a, like celebrating puppy love

type thing. Like, aww, come on, guys. Don't do that right here. But, uh, with

homosexuals it's just like come on y'all. Y'all gotta do that right here? (P161-

174).

Similarly, JC stated that "you see a boy and a girl pass by holding hands and you have no

problems with that. But when it comes to a boy/boy or girl/girl holding hands it comes

this big escapade – it's not OK (JC758-759).

School Practices. Five students perceived a double standard in *school practices*. Amelia explained her perception of a double standard in school practices when she stated, "I mean, I would say that our administration tries to put off an air of being accepting. You know, and of being supportive. Um, but, I think in practice they're not always super supportive" (Amelia403-404). She recalled an incident in which a same-gender-attracted male peer requested permission to bring his boyfriend to the school prom. Citing a school policy that prohibited students from bringing prom dates outside of the school student population who were over 20, the request was denied. However, a female student was granted permission to bring this same person as a date. Amelia explained:

> [He] brought in the paperwork and everything for this guy, presented it to my
> principal, and the principal was like, no. That's too old. We don't wanna, we
> don't want our school to look like they have people so old coming, just because
> that can look bad on our school. He turned around, had one of his female friends
> write up the paperwork for his boyfriend and it got approved (A416-419).

Stereotyping

The expectation that the behavior of same-gender-attracted individuals was consistent with the beliefs of the larger culture about non-heterosexuals was referred to as *stereotyping*. Twelve students perceived to be victims of some or multiple forms of stereotyping. The data showed that, as a result of stereotype beliefs, sexuality labels were assigned, or not assigned, to same-gender-attracted individuals. Data analysis revealed four separate forms of stereotyping: (1) personal characteristics; (2) sexualization; (3) assumption of choice; and (4) expectation to represent.

Personal Characteristics. School peers were shown to have clear expectations of how same-gender-attracted peers should look and act. Individuals identifying as lesbian were expected to act more masculine than their heterosexual female counterparts. The behavior of gay males, on the other hand, was expected to be more effeminate compared to heterosexual male peers. The stereotyped assumptions were most frequently in contrast to the participants' behavior and self-perception. Eleven students expressed being stereotyped based on personal characteristics. Amelia shared an experience where her peers expressed surprise in learning of her sexual identity because her behavior was not in line with their expectations of what a lesbian should act like. She shared, "when I told them they're like no, but you, like you act straight and I'm like I just act like a person like that doesn't mean I act gay or straight (A151-152). Alex shared that stereotypic assumptions about how males carry themselves caused others to speculate on his sexual identity. For instance, he stated, "that's what they be looking for. It's the way you walk; like if you walk swishy then they assume you are gay. The way you talk they assume you're gay, it's your actions towards, I don't know, towards anything (Alex634-636).

Participants were also stereotyped based on their overall appearance. Rae, for example, stated that others did not assume she was lesbian until she cut her long hair to a shorter style. Citing the irony in this, she described her frustration when she said, "me getting my hair cut really short, like, a lot of people regardless of, like, people just assume, um, like even when I had long hair, I knew I was gay" (R465-467).

Sexualization. There was a common theme of peers automatically equating same-gender-attracted identities with sexual activity. Twelve participants expressed that others assumed sexual desire was at the core of their identity. For example, there was an

assumption that participants were non-discriminant in their sexual attractions and that

they had no boundaries regarding the sexual activity they would engage in. Mary stated

that in the locker room, her female peers acted as if they believed she wanted all of them.

She said:

> Before it was like a normal locker room, and people um, undressed freely but
>
> when I came out, people went behind lockers and stuff … they fear cause I'm
>
> attracted to girls, that it automatically meant that I was going to violate them
>
> without their consent (M668-670).

Bernadette explained that some of her heterosexual male peers assumed that because she

identified as lesbian, she would be willing to allow them to watch her make out with

female peers. She recalled the conversation:

> Umm great, can I watch? Ya, that's fine, my girlfriend can make out with you,
>
> That'd be great. But, um, so ferociously homophobic to gay men? So that's not
>
> likening, that's not accepting, and that's no, you're not accepting me for my
>
> sexual orientation. You are accepting me because it benefits you and it's
>
> convenient for you (B1129-1133).

Assumption of choice. An additional common assumption among others was that

same-gender-attracted individuals chose their sexual identity. This was reported by four

participants. Ann shared that she fielded questions regarding her same-gender-attractions

from school peers such as, "Why did you turn gay like, why did you do that?" (A332-

333). Likewise, Kelhani noted the following:

> Every now and then I get the same question. Did you choose to be gay or did, you
>
> know. One time something said [was], or did God send a dove saying you're gay

now [laughs]... I'm not sure how you chose to be, you know, homosexual or anything like that. Me, personally, I just, one day I realize that I have feelings for girls and people just don't get that. Like you can't just wake up and say, oh, I like girls and sometimes that's just the way it is. You have emotions and certain feelings of affection towards the same sex and (Kelhani708-717).

Kyle also expressed his frustrations with others assuming he chose to be gay, he stated:

I think that's a bunch of bull, too, but I don't think it's a choice because it's something I've been dealing with my whole life. And if, I mean you chose to accept it or not, but it's not like, I'm thinking I'm gonna be gay now; it's never like that (K1021-1024).

Secondary Microaggressions

The final subcategory of microaggressions, secondary microaggressions, represented the times when the response by the perpetrator of, or bystander to, the microaggression was inappropriate or lacking, thereby causing another layer of harm to victim. Secondary microaggressions were found to be conveyed in two ways: *failure to intervene*, and *evasion of responsibility*. Secondary microaggressions were reported by ten students.

Failure to intervene. During the school day, when same-gender-attracted students were subtly discriminated against in the presence of a teacher or administrator, there were times that the authority figure would not intervene. Eight students reported this microaggression, and Kyle was one of them. He described an incident when the teacher appeared to overlook his being harassed by classmates during class. Kyle stated, "one teacher knew it was happening...and she kind of watched while they kinda provoked

me about it and make fun of me about it. And that's why I don't like her now…She didn't do anything (Kyle112-118). JC recounted a time when a teacher failed to intervene as a peer indirectly disparaged same-gender-attracted peers by demeaning her GSA and its members. She recalled:

> The teacher just kept ignoring the kid when he was saying these rude comments… you could tell that he [the student] wasn't a supporter of our group. He said that I hope they get rid of this group; I hope all the gays burn (JC543-546).

She added that "they wouldn't necessarily step in they would just tell them, you know, that's not a subject you really talk about in class. That's all they would say and go on with the lesson" (JC524-525). She perceived that in the long run, "that doesn't tell the kid that's, that's kind of bashing on gay people, that it's not right to do that" (JC525-527).

Evasion of responsibility. The second form of failure to intervene, evasion of responsibility, referred to others' attempts to make excuses for, or skirt, personal responsibility for their behavior. This was reported by five students. Amelia described an incident in which her teacher demonstrated this microaggression after he made a statement in class about all children needing a father. Amelia relayed that when she pointed out to him that not all parents are opposite gender partners, "he kind of back pedaled and was like 'oh, that's not what I mean.' But when it came down to it, he was like 'I just really think there needs to be a father in a child's life'" (A294-296). Rae recalled similar instances when others used pejorative language regarding the gay community in front of her. She stated that "they'll say, like, 'oh, that's gay.' And they, like, when they do turn around and look at me and say 'oh, I'm sorry!' …I feel like they're, like almost directly, like, attacking, like, LGBT people in general (R565-569).

In sum, the data showed six separate types of microaggressions experienced by same-gender-attracted youth while they are at school. The data showed that once microaggressions were conveyed, the targets became motivated to respond either behaviorally or cognitively. Common strategies used by participants in managing these experiences were identified among the data. These strategies are detailed below.

Category Two: Management Strategies

Five separate categories of strategies were employed by the participants in managing microaggressions to either minimize or mitigate their effect on their sexual identity or individuality. These categories were: (1) triage before responding; (2) rejoinders; (3) self-protection; (4) advocacy; and (5) self-validation. These categories, which have been further broken down in to multiple subcategories, are summarized in Table 4.2.

Triage Before Responding.

When participants experienced subtle discrimination from others they would prioritize their responses based on the perceived significance and context of the infraction. This category delineates those elements considered prior to responding to microaggressions as they happened. Data analysis revealed that the twelve participants who reported to *triage before responding* would consider one of all three of the following aspects of the interaction in determining how to respond. These were: (1) context; (2) personal resources; and (3) risk.

Context. In triaging the *context* of the microaggression, participants considered such things as the nature of the comment, who the offender was, or where the offense

Table 4.2
Management Strategies

Subcategory	Subcategory/Property	Property/Dimension
1. Triage Before Responding	a. **Context**	(Malevolent to Benevolent)
	b. Personal Resources	(Insufficient to Sufficient)
	c. Risk	(Severe to Minimal)
2. Rejoinders	a. Active	i. Confronting (Aggressively to Peacefully)
		ii. Educating (Self-serving to Altruistic)
		iii. Scripted Response (Stringent to Inexact)
		iv. Nonverbal Communication (Covert to Overt)
	b. Passive	i. Deflection (Always to Never
		ii. Brush it Off (Unintentionally to Instinctively)
		iii. Brave Front (Difficult to Casually)
3. Preventative Strategies	a. Defensive	i. Seek Safety (Always to Never)
		ii. Alter Behavior
		1) To Disengage (Always to Never)
		2) For Acceptance (Entirely to Partially)
		3) To Prevent Stereotype (Always to Never)
		4) To Prevent Outed (Always to Never)
		iii. Avoidance (Always to Never)
	b. Offensive	i. Coat of Armor
		1) Pragmatic Expectations (Insufficient to Sufficient)
		2) Thick Skin (Insufficient to Sufficient)
		ii. Positive Self-Talk (Successful to Inadequate
		iii. Relationships
		1) Bridging (Unsuccessful to Successful)
		2) Redefining (Completely to Partially)
4. Advocacy	a. Community	(Vehemently to Casually)
	b. Self or Others	(Vehemently to Casually)
5. Self-Validation	a. Experience	(Never to Always)
	b. Personal Cognitions	(Never to Always)

occurred. Participants were less likely to respond harshly under some circumstances than in others. Nine of the participants shared examples of considering context. For example,

Alex shared that he considered how closely the offense aligned with the truth. For example, he stated the following:

It depends on what the comment is because if the comment's true, I'm gonna agree with you…Like if somebody calls me a fag I'm like, oh. You right. If somebody calls me gay I'm like, oh, Ya. you right. If somebody say, like, you a

weak [not masculine] fag, like, that's call me wrong because I know I'm not weak

(Alex425-434).

Amelia explained why she actively responded to individuals that she knew, and brushed

off comments from those whom she did not know well. She said, "I'm not expending the

energy and emotional energy to educate you, because I don't know you very well; I don't

have to deal with you on a regular basis" (A928-930).

Personal Resources. Four participants also considered the amount of available

personal resources when determining their response. In all, the greater the available

personal resources the more judicious the response would be. Bernadette explained this

when she said, "There are some days when you stand up, you make it an education

moment, and you're the spokesperson, whatever, and you speak out. And there's some

days when you're just too tired and you just don't care" (B424-426). Rae stated that

sometimes the exhaustion from continually explaining her sexual identity played into her decision on whether to correct others who are unable to understand her attraction to both males and females or to educate them. For example, she stated:

> I feel like I'm constantly defending my sexuality. But I feel like it takes so much of my energy just to like really, like be willing to, not like, correct people, but like provide education, or um, just explain things to people, and sometimes it gets really tiring to explain for the 50th time why its ok that I did date a guy at one time (R711-715).

> **Risk.** Finally, participants based their response on the perceived personal risk of responding; assessing risk was reported by seven participants. Lizzi offered that they considered the emotional toll that responding could take on them. They stated the following:

> "Would they say mean things to me, even if I had to see them on a daily basis? Do I want to deal with that? Could I deal with that? Probably. Do I want to? No. It's not worth it… When they are talking about something they don't like, I'm not going to put myself in that situation ta [sic], emotionally damage myself (L573-580).

Kelhani shared that she considered potential social exclusion as a risk of responding. She explained that sometimes, "you have to let it go because if you keep going back and forth with this person it might end up, you know, with you being shunned" (Kelhani536-542).

Rejoinders

Rejoinders, defined as those responses to microaggressions that were made in the moment during social interactions, were used by 13 participants. There were two subcategories of rejoinders: (1) active and (2) passive.

Active. When responding with an *active* rejoinder, the participant directly engaged the offender. Data analysis revealed four separate kinds of active rejoinders. These were: (1) confronting; (2) educating; (3) scripted responses; and (4) nonverbal communication. Thirteen participants engaged in active rejoinders.

Confronting. *Confronting* rejoinders referred to the instances in which participants challenged the offender on the microaggressive comments or behavior on behalf of self, others, or the LGB community. Twelve participants engaged in confrontation. Warren stated that he confronted a peer who was speaking negatively about him to others. Warren said, "I was, like, this is just not OK. It's just not acceptable. I will not allow you to say this stuff about me when it's not true" (W803-804).

Princeton provided an example of confronting the offender on behalf of his peer. He expounded on this by stating that, since he was a senior and has had more experience, he was able to manage subtle discrimination effectively; however, younger, more inexperienced students were not as adept at responding. As a result, he often confronted perpetrators on their behalf. He recounted this experience: "I was like who bullying you? Cuz we fittin' a go; we fittin' a go do something about this" (P485). He further explained, "Like I walked to the person what was bullying him and I was like, … 'you're gang'…You know, I'm not gonna say it's always good for me to intervene, but I do it regardless" (P486-489).

Educating. Five participants reported *educating*, which was the process of enlightening the offender on the infraction that incurred, including why it was offensive. Princeton stated that he engaged in educating the offender and explained this as follows:

> I feel like one of the main reasons people do stuff like that, like say words, they might not be trying to hurt people, it's because they're uneducated. So, I feel like I do have ta, I have a obligation to myself to educate people to all the stuff like that, like this is why this, this is why you cain't [sic] do this and stuff like that (P698-700).

Like Princeton, Nancy shared that she believed there were times when peers were unsure of what was discriminatory and what was not. She also shared that sometimes peers were curious and that when others were willing to listen, she was willing to "educate people and to talk to people who are being respectful of me and who I am and my choice of life" (N346-347).

Scripted Responses. Participants fielded questions regarding their sexual identity so routinely that they were able to draw from a mental bank of *scripted responses* during social interactions. This made the response almost instinctive. Five participants reported using this strategy. Nancy, for example, stated she developed scripted responses to prepare her for discussing her sexual identity with others. She said:

> In the beginning I wouldn't really say anything because I was just out and I was like, oh god. Everyone hates me and they want to burn my house down and stuff like that. And, uh, so, like just over time I've sort of developed like sometimes subconsciously, like what I say to certain things and what I don't say to other things (N580-583).

Similarly, Mary shared:

> Like I've pretty much memorized things to say when um, when people ask me
> what queer means or what being queer means, um, or like when people try to go
> against fluidity, I have the same responses to that every time (M715-717)

Nonverbal communication. The final type of active rejoinder used by participants was *nonverbal communication* and was reported by four participants. This referred to responses to an experience with subtle discrimination in which participants communicated to safe peers nonverbally. Amelia, for example, shared her experience of using nonverbal communication in response to her teacher making judgmental comments on children being raised without the influence of a father. She described her experience of communicating her frustration with a safe male peer, who identified as gay. She stated, "I just looked over at him and just kinda raised my eye brows. Like, 'are you hearing this right now?'" (A450-451). She then defined his nonverbal response to her by adding, "Like he had his fist balled. Like, he couldn't believe it. He couldn't believe how judgmental it all was. How heteronormative it all was" (A452-453).

Rae described a similar incident when she shared her experiences of nonverbally communicating her feelings with safe peers. She said:

> There's a lot of like, funny, like, back and forth looks between my, my like, safe
> friends. Um, there's a lot of like, eye rolling or um, silent laughing or, like point,
> like not even like ha, ha pointing at people; but, like, are you kidding me, but a lot
> of it is just done with like a smirk, or an eye brow raise (R756-759).

Passive. In addition to active rejoinders, the data showed that twelve participants responded passively as well. A passive rejoinder referred to internal, unobservable

responses; that is, they are cognitive responses. Three passive rejoinders were identified. These were *deflection*, *brush it off*, and *brave front*.

Deflection. The data showed that when responding by using *deflection*, participants placed the onus of the negativity on the microaggressor. Five participants reported using deflection. Ann, for instance, shared that she has become strong in her identity. Regarding response to sexual orientation based subtle discrimination she stated, "It was just another, um, reminder that I'm okay with myself... so, they're the ones with the problem, not me" (Ann496-497). Kelhani provided an example of deflecting the responsibility of subtle discrimination back to her peers and faculty as well when she shared her thinking. She said, "at the same time it makes me realize, well, if they dislike a person for being them, then maybe they need a reality check" (Kelhani 317-318). She then added:

> Maybe they need to realize that not everyone's gonna follow someone else's lead based on people judging and just talking about it. Maybe [if] they will just realize that… they're [same-gender-attracted peers] being individuals, living their lives the way they want to live, then, maybe it'd be all right" (Kelhani 318-320).

Brush it off. When *brush it off* was used, the participant made a cognitive decision to disregard the incident as petty or insignificant and let it pass unnoticed. Eight participants used brush it off. For example, Amelia shared that when considering the broader perspective of her life, microaggressive experiences can appear to be of minimal impact. Amelia sated, "I typically just brush it off period" (A353). She shared her rationale for letting these offenses go, adding that she tells herself, "I'm not gonna be

around you after, you know, this year or next year... So, I was like, in the grand scheme of things it doesn't really matter" (A354-355).

   Brave front. The strategy of *brave front*, which was used when participants concealed the emotional hurt of the experience from the perpetrator, was reported by eight participants. In describing her experience, Amelia shared that while externally it appeared as if she brushed it off, she was left with emotional damage to reconcile at a later date. In Amelia's words:

> I kind of brush it off externally, pretty much all the time, um, I mean it could be excruciatingly hurtful, you know. Like, I think, especially when it was teachers who I trusted or teachers who I really looked up to. Like, man, that - that would hurt… I'd act like it's no big deal and come back to it eventually and deal with those emotions and process those emotions (A1136-1141).

An additional example was provided by Alex, who said that when he was condemned by others because he identified as bisexual, he responded by acting like he did not care; however, internally, he was affected. Alex stated, "And what I said to em was, I was like, I don't know, maybe you're right, and I just walked away…It killed me on the inside (Alex854-857).

Preventative Strategies

   The category of *preventative strategies* was comprised of strategies used by same-gender-attracted high school students that enabled them to safeguard against experiencing harm during hurtful, or potentially hurtful, exchanges with peers. Self-protection management strategies were further categorized into *defensive strategies* and *offensive strategies*.

Defensive strategies. Thirteen participants employed defensive strategies in responding to microaggressions. Defensive strategies were used in order to prevent harm during social interactions. Three defensive strategies were utilized by participants. Specifically, these were: (1) seek safety; (2) alter behavior; and (3) avoidance.

Seek safety. *Seek safety* referred to a process of scanning and evaluating the environment, including the behavior of others to determine the level of acceptance and affirmation they could expect to receive. Ten participants reported seeking safety. Alex stated that it was easy to ascertain the level of acceptance he could expect from others. He stated that, "You can tell, like, there might be some who might be like homophob[ic] …it's the reaction on they face that I look for… Like by, your reaction tells me whether or not you're accepting of me or not (Alex35-38).

Kelhani shared an example of identifying a safe faculty member at school. She stated:

> At our school, on doors, there are certain signs and stickers in the corner and, you know, like most of them will have like a rainbow and we know, well, this teacher has a sticker in her window, or he has a sticker in the window, we can go and talk. Or, I can be open with, you know, my sexuality without being judged or looked down on (Kelhani212-215).

Alter behavior. Thirteen participants shared that when they anticipated negative reactions or rejection from others, they would intentionally *alter behavior* to prevent being microaggressed. Four motivations for altering behavior were found. These were: (1) to disengage; (2) for acceptance; (3) to prevent being stereotyped; and (4) to prevent from being outed.

When altering behavior to *disengage*, the participants would verbally shut down or remove themselves from uncomfortable interactions. This was reported by five participants. Rae stated that when she perceived her input would be perceived negatively, she shut down so that she wouldn't receive social repercussions. Rae differentiated this behavior from her baseline behavior when she elucidated,

> If there's a class and they're all talking about something on, on the spectrum of that [sexual orientation], um like I'll, like kinda, like, close up a little bit, and like if I'm receiving like, like a general negative feeling from everybody, I just kinda close up with myself and I don't really say anything, or I don't contribute to it; whereas, I'm usually very like, confident in talking about issues like that (R823-828).

Alice shared that she completely disengaged during class time, and explained how this behavior was in contrast to her behavior outside of class. She stated:

> In class I don't really talk. I'm usually just the quiet girl that doesn't say anything. But with my friends I'm really, really loud and rambunctious and act pretty childish sometimes. But they still love me and they know that I'm a very, very fun person (Al204-206).

In order to assure they would fit or blend in with peers, participants altered their behavior *for acceptance*. Ten students reported altering their behavior to be accepted by others at school. Warren, for example, shared that during his early high school years, he pretended to enjoy activities that were perceived to be masculine to escape discriminatory experiences. He also said that he did not disclose to others that he actually preferred

activities that were traditionally female because he wanted to be accepted by his peers. Warren shared the following:

> I like to watch girl shows like Project Runway or Pretty Little Liars and I never found anything wrong with that; but apparently, people, other people have. And for the longest time I actually did not watch anything that was girly or did anything girly. I was trying to act more like boys. Then I was like, this doesn't really suit me. Because I was trying to do sports and that kind of stuff, like, no. This is not me (W211-215).

Five participants shared that they also altered their behavior in order *to prevent being stereotyped* by others. Princeton, for instance, perceived his behavior to be effeminate. To prevent others from stereotyping him as lacking masculinity due to his sexual identity, he intentionally exhibited behavior that was more consistent of male behavior. He stated the following:

> My voice get deep and I try to butch up and stuff like that, but those are more the times when like I kinda switch roles all a sudden. Like I become, I don't want to say become a man because even though I'm gay I'm still a man. But those are times when I become, like, that butch, like (P341-344).

Alice stated that she alters her behavior by limiting her interactions with others so they will not stereotype her. She explained her decision:

> But really, I don't…talk just so they don't stereotype me. Cuz earlier I said the stereotyping for homosexuals and everything and I don't want them to stereotype me based on, and just assume how I like, who I like based on how I look. (AL427-431).

Finally, participants altered their behavior *to prevent being outed*. The data showed that in order to keep others from knowing their sexual identity, participants would consciously present themselves as heterosexual. This strategy was reported by four participants. Mary stated that she dressed in a non-preferred way before she was out. She stated, "I wasn't out yet and I was terrified that that was gonna happen to me [being outed], so [I was careful of how I dressed] … so people would just perceive me as straight, or very stereotypical normal girls "(M857-866). Amelia, on the other hand, altered the content of her conversations by referring to her girlfriend in gender neutral terms in conversations with others to prevent being outed. She explained:

> Um, I had a boyfriend – quote unquote. Because I had a girlfriend that I just wanted to talk about like all the time…she meant a lot of me, so I had to talk about her. And I couldn't do that if I was talking about a girl, because I wasn't out and I didn't want to be out at that point. So, I talked about this boyfriend all the time. Um, er – at first I talked about this person I was dating and sort of used gender-neutral pronouns. But when other people started using he pronouns, because they *assumed* that it was a guy, I eventually fed into that and started using he pronouns and even ended up using a masculine form of my girlfriend's feminine name. And so, that was really, it was hard….I felt that I was lying every single day (A665-678).

Avoidance. The third defensive strategy for self-protection was *avoidance,* which represented a conscious decision made by participants to escape being in the vicinity of certain physical spaces or people they perceived to be threatening. Avoidance was used by seven participants. For example, Lizzi avoided the locker room, and instead went to

the bathroom where they could use stalls and gain privacy while changing into their gym cloths. They stated, "I would just find a stall that was empty and go in there and change because I felt so uncomfortable" (L892-893). Mary based her decision to use avoidance when determining which organizations that would be supportive of her. She said, "I would never step into a Young Republicans club, or a politics club…young republicans club; I think those are two very dangerous spaces for queer and trans youth" (M431-436).

Offensive strategies. In addition to using defensive strategies, participants engaged in long term offensive strategies. While defensive strategies were used in the moment, offensive strategies used by the participants served to mitigate the degree of potential harm. Thirteen participants reported using defensive strategies. Three offensive strategies were identified; these were *coat of armor*, *positive self-talk*, and *relationships*.

Coat of armor. Ten participants reporting developing a coat of armor. Coat of armor referred to participants' efforts to accept the reality that microaggressions would occur and to put them into perspective when they did occur. The data showed that they did this through *pragmatic expectations* and *thick-skin*, which were developed over time. Through pragmatic expectations, participants shared that they accepted that experiences of subtle discrimination would always be a part of their world. They were able to accept that there would be always people who wouldn't be accepting of same-gender-attracted identities, which in turn helped them to be unaffected by these experiences. For example, Mary stated "I kinda have to deal with some of it sometimes, like it's, it just happens and it's gonna be ok" (M626-627). Nancy described her effort to accept that not everyone will accept her sexual identity, and balance that with the reality that there are others that do. She expounded on this by saying,

> You know, if I don't feel supported I know I've got other people that do support
>
> me, and not everybody's gonna support, you know, gay, bisexual, transgender
>
> people, you know. There are people that will and there are people that won't.
>
> (JC230-232).

Five participants reported that, over time, they developed *thick skin* that helped to buffer the effects of microaggressions. Because these experiences were ubiquitous, participants were ultimately unfazed by them. Rae shared, "I'm sure there's, like that at school, I just, I spend so much just kind of blocking it out that it doesn't really affect me." She further explained, "I don't know, I kind of, I just, I stopped really, like [caring] what people think" (R898-902). Similarly, Ann stated the following:

> Oh yeah, I definitely went from being kinda just like a, oh that hurts please don't
>
> say that again, to like a, you don't have a right to say that, like, you have, I guess
>
> you have a right to a bad opinion, but I don't want you to like, that negative
>
> opinion to affect me (Ann639-641)

> ***Positive self-talk***. *Positive self-talk* referred to intentional actions of participants to encourage themselves to remain positive and forward looking and was reported by four participants. Nancy provided an example of this when she said, "I try to be upbeat. So most of the time I say to myself, like, 'This is going to be a good day.' So I start out, I start out trying to make this like, 'I'm gonna have a nice today'" (N296-297). Princeton stated that he starts each day with positive self-talk as well. He explained:

> I have this self-involvement with myself, almost like there are moments when I
>
> look in the mirror every day and be like, ain't nobody gonna beat you up. You

cool. You Princess, or whatever. I be like, I wouldn't say that I encourage myself,

but I encourage myself every day (P523-529).

He then explained his behavior by adding, "That's just one of the things I do to make sure

I don't end up being in a corner crying, ready to cut myself because somebody call me a

fag, you know" (P291-297).

Relationships. Establishing and maintaining supportive relationships allowed the

youth to minimize potential harm. Relationship strategies were used by twelve

participants. They did this in one of two ways. One way was through *bridging*

relationships, and another was through *redefining* relationships. Bridging referred to the

selection of supportive outlets, such as peers, faculty, or formal organizations and was

reported by eleven participants. Nancy shared that she has a peer go-to relationship

available to her when she needs support. She stated, "Some days I have a bad day and

then I have a best friend who's like, just let it bounce off. You're great and I love you and

stuff like that. And then that will pick me back up" (N266-268). Alex described the value

of his involvement with the GSA organization as providing him a safe harbor and

normalizing his experiences. He stated:

> It's [GSA] helped me by like getting out extra feelings that I can't tell anyone, but
>
> I can tell them there. It helped me by having a safe zone. Having a safe zone to
>
> come to. Um, it helps me by seeing that I am not the only one that is feeling the
>
> same way. Like when I go there, other people are feeling the same way as you are
>
> feeling (Alex664-667).

In contrast to bridging relationships, five participants worked to *redefine* relationships by

terminating toxic relationships or redefining boundaries within existing relationships. For

example, Alex terminated relationships with people who were unable to positively

support him. In recalling negativity directed toward him because he was bisexual, he

expressed, "it really didn't bother me because if you would say anything to me, we

wasn't friends" (Alex211-213). Mary expounded on her feelings about non-supportive

others:

> I think if I, if I am just queer and I like doing the things that I wanna do and
>
> saying the things that I want to say about same-gender people…and if they aren't
>
> comfortable with how I'm coming across then unfortunately I'm not gonna be
>
> talking to them anymore (M550-553).

Other times, although relationships were not terminated, participants did redefine

boundaries of existing valued relationships when the others were unable to accept their

sexual identity. Amelia described such an experience with a one-time, trusted faculty

member. She shared the following:

> I was very hurt um, and just kind of like, wow, I can't talk to you about this or
>
> even other situations anymore… I kind of had to draw a line in the sand and be
>
> like, I kind of can't trust you about like any of these issues anymore, which
>
> probably is kind of over reacting a little bit, because that's only one facet of my
>
> life (A1094-1097).

Advocacy

The subcategory, advocacy, referred to efforts by participants to mitigate the

damage from microaggressions by working on behalf of the same-gender-attracted

community to facilitate change or on *behalf of self and others*. Engaging in advocacy

provided them with this platform and also elevated them to a position of leadership

within the school. Seven participants engaged in advocacy.

Community. Advocacy on behalf of the LGBT *community* was reported by four

participants. Lizzi explained that because of the advocacy that they and peers did to

advance social justice issues, they were able to change negative attitudes toward same-

gender attracted individuals. They stated, "We felt like we weren't just here just to be

here, we felt like we were making a difference in school (L188-189). Lizzi further

explained by adding, "I felt like we not only were educating the other kids in the school,

with the help of the administration we were also educating our teachers, too" (L203-204).

Similarly, JC perceived that the work she does in conjunction with the GSA at her school

reached beyond the Club membership to positively affect the broader student population.

She shared, "We're not only a gay-straight alliance; we're also an anti-bullying club. And

that's what they really support too is being against the bullying and also being an ally to

gay, straight, bisexual, transgender people" (JC171-173). She explained why it is

important for her to stand up against discrimination when she said, "So, I'm not gonna let

a stupid comment really try and break us down. So, I will try and stand up for our group

as much as I can if I hear something like that (JC552-555).

Self and others. Five participants advocated for themselves or for others. For

Mary, advocacy was achieved through her involvement in a state-organized GSA. She

stated her activism created a space for herself in her world. She shared the following:

> I channel a lot of that, like feeling I get from microaggressions into my activism.
>
> So, I take those instances that have happened, and try to apply those in different
>
> areas of my life. Like within the Missouri GSA network, if I noticed I'm hearing a

lot of things about myself, like, how fluidity isn't a thing, if I hear that a lot, I will

take that as my activism, make that a big part, cause I'm recognizing that that's a

thing (M1030-1034)

Nancy reported that she instinctively advocates for others who have experienced

discrimination. She explained that, in fact, she is more likely to do so for others than for

herself. Nancy shared:

I don't want to say that I care more about others than I care about myself, but I,

I'm very mothering. Um, and I'm very like, I'm very considerate of my friends,

and I usually end up being very like nurturing and watching over people, and so, a

lot of that has to be with kind of being the mother hen, um, and so I… defend

others more than myself just, I don't know, I speak out for them (R938-942).

Self-Validation

When participants perceived they had been the subject of, or a witness to, subtle

discrimination, they engaged in validation of their experiences or perceptions. In doing

so, they would either verify with others that the *experience* happened or validate their

feelings regarding the perpetrators behavior. Eight participants reported engaging in self-

validation.

Experience. Four participants validated their *experience* with others. Nancy

described validating an experience through the following passage:

Like when you're in a room with a bunch of people who have been discriminated

against the same way that you have, you tend to like bounce it, bounce, and vent

off of each other. And you'll be like, oh my god, you'll never guess what this kid

said to me today. And then when you're talking about it with people who've

experienced it, it's easier to, like, because you know they understand… So, it's a

lot easier ta [sic] brush things off (N941-944).

Mary shared that she validated her experiences by comparing them to others'

experiences. She shared:

I've talked to other girls who are same gender attracted and see, saw if they

experienced the same things, especially in different schools, um, but I found that

it's pretty much universal. Everything that I've seen, um it's been difficult to tell

whether something was actually like, I was noticing oppression towards same

gender attracted girls or if I was just, um, very hyper aware of it (M696-701).

Feelings. Six participants validated their hurt *feelings* from being microaggressed

through offering their personal cognitions regarding the perpetrator or the incident.

Bernadette supported her feeling offended by a microaggression from her teacher whose

lectures were infused with heteronormative values by offering her beliefs as follows:

I think it's really, quite unfortunate when a history teacher especially, cannot

remain unbiased in their views. Because when we're learning about politics you

get a completely skewed view. Because you have to, you have to learn based on

what they teach you (B84-90).

Bernadette further described her perceived helplessness in defending her sexual identity

during class when she stated, "even if you disagree with it you have to write it [the

teacher's views] on quizzes and tests to get the grades" (B91).

Kyle addressed others condemning him to hell because he identified as gay and

validated his disagreement through offering his beliefs. He shared:

I don't really think it's true because, from what I've learned, the most

unforgivable sin is not accepting God into your life and no sin is higher than the

other… I still can be forgiven by God at the end of the day. And I'm not saying

that I don't believe in God, but I don't believe in some 1000-year-old book telling

me how I should live my life. And it's been changed multiple times, so nobody

really knows what's up in there (Kyle358-375).

Category Three: Sexual Identity

The final major category, *sexual identity*, referred to the relationship between sexual orientation microaggressions and the participants' personal identities. The data showed that participants were active agents in defining and inserting their identity into their worlds in responses to their experiences with subtle discrimination, though the strength of their sexual identity was not always consistent and varied with level of support they perceived to gain. The four sub-categories for sexual identity were: (1) sexual identity salience; (2) defining self; (3) doubt; and (4) presentation of sexual identity. The categories of Sexual Identity are summarized in Table 4.3.

Sexual Identity Salience

Sexual identity salience referred to instances when the sexual identity was the most prominent identity during social encounters. Participants shared that considering all of their identities, their sexual identity was most salient when they responded to *environmental influences* during social interactions and when they were engaged in LGBT *activism*.

Table 4.3
Sexual Identity

Subcategory	Property	Dimension
1. Sexual Identity Salience	a. Environmental Influences	(Accepting to Rejecting)
	b. Activism	(Entirely to Partially)
2. Defining Self	a. School Climate	(Positive to Negative)
	b. Social Interactions	(Positive to Negative)
	c. Disclosure	(Positive to Negative)
3. Doubt	a. Sexual Identity	(Uncertain to Convinced)
	b. Others Acceptance	(Uncertain to Convinced)
4. Presentation of Sexual Identity	a. Selective Self-Disclosure	(Judicious to Careless)
	b. Self-Acceptance	(Shame to Pride)
	c. Correct the Label	(Vehemently to Calmly)
	d. Separate from Sexual Identify	(Entirely to Partially)

Environmental influences. *Environmental influences* included negative social interactions as well as social interactions with accepting others. Additionally, the emotions associated with sexual identity varied with the context of the interaction. Nancy, for instance, provided the following example:

> It's [sexual identity] a thing about me. It's an integral part of who I am. And so if you are criticizing it, I automatically feel defensive about it. And so it brings it to the front like I'm a proud bisexual teen who is not going to put up with this, even though sometimes I do…And it makes me, it like; it really gets under my skin because it brings it out… And so, it does bring it out at random points during the days or when I'm at home and I see something on the news or my, my homophobic family members say something. And then I'm sitting there like; I'm angry and bisexual (N954-962).

Bernadette's sexual identity was salient when she perceived she was excluded from the conversation because of her sexual orientation. She also added that, compared to her heterosexual peers, her sexual identity being salient required extra work. She explained:

> [My sexual identity] comes to the forefront when everyone's talking about their boyfriends, their dates because, then I am the odd person out (B941). Then the gay hat comes on because I don't talk about my boyfriend I talk about my girlfriend. I don't talk about, um, you know, I'm bringing a boy from [school name] to fall ball, we're just a friends, we're talking but nothing serious yet…. I have ta do extra (B942-944).

Activism. Amelia stated that when she was involved in *activism*, or in her words "on a lesbian soapbox" (A1001), her sexual identity is the most salient. From Amelia's perspective, she is most aware of her sexual identity in the classrooms, because "then I have to be that feminist activist lesbian and drive a point home, because somebody's not getting it…in any shape or form. When I'm being an advocate, that's probably more when it [sexual identity] comes on (A1018-1020). Similarly, Bernadette shared that while her "identity as a student is prominent," there are times when her sexual identity is most salient. She said, "Honestly, it's when people ask questions or when, um, something comes up in class around gay rights or the issue of gay rights. Then I feel myself putting on my gay person in class" (B126-128).

Defining Self

Three Two influences on the students' processes of *defining self* were found: (1) school climate; and (2) social interactions.

School climate. *School climate* referred to the general beliefs held by peers, faculty, and administration. The data showed that participants held varying levels of perceptions regarding the level of acceptance they received at school, which in turn affected their school experiences and self-definitions. For example, Bernadette, who perceived that, in general, the climate at her school led her to believe that "that people are very open and accepting" (B11), also noted that there were some who were unable to grasp the overall homophobic aspects of the school climate. Regarding the unsupportive aspect, she stated that there were those that were unable to comprehend her experiences of living in her world as lesbian, and this, in turn, affected how she defined herself at school. She stated the following:

> They just don't understand. They just don't think, that – like I'm an anomaly.
>
> And that, that's annoying to feel like that I'm alone and I'm the only one. Because
>
> I know a lot of girls who LGBTQ and none of them are out at [School's Name].
>
> So at school you're made to feel you're an anomaly (B981-983).

Interestingly, participants who attended the same schools conveyed discrepant perceptions of the level of affirmation within the schools' climate, highlighting the uniqueness of each youth's journey to identify sexually. Mary stated that at school, while blatant discrimination was absent, subtle discrimination was abundant. She spoke to the prevalence and oppressive nature of microaggressions in her school climate specifically when she said:

> If you look at like blatant oppression and things like that, it's really not existent.
>
> But um that's where microaggressions play, and I think there is a lot of really
>
> subtle oppression that plays in, um because my school is one that sees everything

as like love and equality, everything's really accepting and that in turn leads to a

lot of things that people don't realize is oppression (M28-32).

In light of this, she explained that it was easier for her to accept the identity label others

put on one her, because students at her school conveyed subtle messages that in claiming

a queer identity, she was only trying to be "different and cool" (M89). She further shared

the hardship this caused her. Mary stated that because her peers would only accept her

identity as lesbian, "I had to agree, um, because, and so, it caused me so much inner hate

because I didn't know if it was OK if I identified as a lesbian" (M534-535). Mary added

that "sometimes it's just difficult to go to school, cause I know that like in that day I'm

gonna have to deal with people talking about stuff" (M1064-1065); however, though

noting the difficulty of the journey in self-acceptance, she was ultimately able to

positively self-define at school. She stated that, "not looking at how other people view

me, I, I'm really proud of my sexual orientation (M464). It's taken a long time for me to

get that way though, but um as of right now, I'm, I'm pretty proud (M467-468).

On the other hand, Ann, who attended the same school as Mary, enjoyed going to

school. She explained that peers in her school was so accepting of her sexual identity that

she felt elevated to a celebrity status and a positive sense of self. She stated the following:

Everyone was like, finally we have a lesbian couple, because there are two gay

couples, um…and everyone, it's kinda like instead of, um, looking at the gay

couples as like, we don't want that here, it's more like idolized, I guess. And kind

of treated us like celebrities at the school, like, it's really kind of bizarre but at the

same time, it is kind of like, putting us, like, on a pedestal I guess (Ann 57-60).

Rae also attended the same school as Ann and Mary. While she has experienced discrimination at school, she also felt freer to express her sexual identity at school compared to when she is at home. She explained that her parents are unwilling to accept her sexual identity and that it was at school that she learned to be comfortable with living her sexual identity. She shared:

> I know that I'm definitely way more comfortable at school being open and out than I am at home, or around relatives, or just in general outside of school. I think school is honestly one of the safest places for me to be out and to be me. Um, and I think [my school] does a good job, like, open to it, even though some people don't get the memo (R388-391).

Social interactions. *Social interactions* referred to engagements with others, either communally, such as with school or community-based gay straight alliance clubs, or individually, with peers. Participants shared that negative experiences at school regarding their sexual identity could be difficult for them. Through engaging either with other individuals or supportive organizations, they were able to achieve self-acceptance and, in some cases, come to understand their sexual identity more clearly. For Mary, who struggled to define herself positively in individual interactions, her involvement in a statewide gay straight alliance club helped her to learn about and define her queer identity. It also helped her to be comfortable in her identity. She stated the following:

> Especially with the [statewide GSA] network… being with other queer and trans people um and having that be such an accepting environment, really made me realize its ok to not be, like not be straight, just to be fluid, and to be open to things (M464-470).

JC was unclear of how to define her sexual identity. Having assumed through her childhood that she was straight, she defined herself sexually through her involvement with her school-based gay straight alliance club. She shared, "It kind of gave examples of what a gay person was and what a bisexual person was and what a transgender, you know, like how they felt and all this" (JC 565-566). From her engagement with her GSA she was able to self-define as bisexual and find pride in her identity.

Disclosure. Participants also defined themselves through *disclosure* of their sexual identity. In all, disclosing their sexual identity to others allowed them to express themselves more freely and provided them a format for telling their story. Bernadette described what it was like for her to return to school after for the first time openly living her sexual identity out in the world during the summer break. She said, "I feel like a bird; and that I've had the entire summer to stretch my wings and to fly and now I'm going back into a cage, and my wings don't fit the cage anymore" (B146-148). She continued by explaining how disclosure tempered her feelings about sharing her sexual identity with others in saying, "it used to be emotionally draining to talk about it. But now that I'm so out and I've told my story so many times to so many different people" (B309-310).

Similarly, Warren shared that sharing his sexual identity with others caused him to be more open with others and at ease with himself. He expounded on this by recalling his post-disclosure feelings. He stated:

> I feel like I am more open to the community, this [school] community, to the LGBT community as well. Uh, I feel like I can be more of who I am now. I had nothing, nothing to be afraid or shy away from because…before I never really

knew who I was. Sometimes I still don't know that, but I am just a teenager

(W984-987).

Doubt

Experiences with subtle discrimination caused participants to engage in doubt.

Doubt manifested in two ways: (1) sexual identity; and (2) others' acceptance.

Sexual identity. The results showed that there was a roller coaster effect at play

regarding their *sexual identity*. Along with periods of self-pride, there were times when

negative encounters with others caused them to doubt that their sexual identity was valid

or worth the hurt felt by living their sexual identity. For example, in reference to negative

comments directed to her sexual identity, Kelhani stated, "It makes me question whether

I feel like, maybe this isn't right, maybe I shouldn't be bisexual, maybe I should just like

boys (Kelhani316-317). She later expressed that there are also times where she disregards

others beliefs when she said, "I really don't really care about what people in my school

say, because they don't know me; they're not gonna be near me all my life" (K567-568).

Warren conveyed similar sentiments resulting from negative statements from others when

he expressed, "Sometimes it makes me feel like, is this really who I want to be? Do I

want to lose people because of who I am?" (W496-501). He then continued, saying, "I do

act who I am, but most of the time that I don't feel like I should or I can. Just because in

the back of my head I always feel like…I probably shouldn't be doing this" (W575-579).

This is contrast to his previous quote under *disclosure,* in which he explained the benefits

of disclosing his sexual identity at school.

Others' acceptance. Participants also doubted whether or not their sexual

identity was accepted by others and they questioned their place in school among their

peers. Kyle expressed that he is so unsure of *others' acceptance* that he questions his being embraced at his school. He said, "Like I don't really belong here. Kind of like, I can't think of the word. I kinda feel like I don't really need to be at this school" (Kyle570). He added, "It didn't make me, it didn't make me feel any worse about yourself, I just didn't feel welcome (Kyle570-571). Similarly, Nancy shared that other's behavior toward her causes her to question their acceptance, and explained that this varied from day-to-day. More exactly, she stated the following:

> Ya. Some days' I'm up and I can deal with it. It just sort of bounces off. Then some days it really, I take it to heart and it builds up. And then, like, once it's happened like so many times, it's just like, you know, I feel gross about it and I'm like, do these people not like me? (N257-259).

Presentation of Sexual Identity

Presentation of sexual identity referred to the ways in which participants inserted their sexual identity into their worlds as a result of their experiences with subtle discrimination. The subcategories for this category were: (1) selective self-disclosure; (2) self-acceptance; (3) correcting the label, and (4) separate from identity.

Selective self-disclosure. Through *selective self-disclosure*, participants managed their identity by exercising agency in controlling where and to whom to present their sexual identity. While some were more judicious in their decision to disclose, others indicated willingness to disclose to anyone who asked them. For instance, JC expressed that, while she freely shares her sexual identity to those who ask her directly, as a rule, she exercises caution in disclosing. She shared, "If someone on the street now would ask me, I'm like, Ya, I am. You know? It doesn't really affect you who I am" (JC710-711).

She then addressed the difficulty in making the decision regarding disclosure by adding,

"I'm not going to hide it but at the same time it's kind of hard… you don't know what

community you're in and… how people react. That's why I'm trying to be careful of

what I do" (JC276-278). Alex, on the other hand, stated that he is always upfront with

people who ask him about his sexuality. He shared, "like if you ask me, Ya. I just come

say it to you, Like I don't believe in hiding. I believe in telling the truth always" (Alex42-

43).

> **Self-acceptance.** In spite of the harm caused by experiences with subtle

discrimination, a majority of participants stated that they presented their sexual identity

through a lens of *self-acceptance*. Alex stated that he was comfortable with who he was

and didn't concern himself with the opinions of others. He shared, "I try hard to walk in

my truth. Like, I don't bend easy for no one" (Alex 55-56). Later, he clarified this when

he stated the following:

> I didn't have to be more macho to self, I just be myself. Like what you think of
>
> me, I'm gonna let you think it. I'll let you think of it. Because I don't prove
>
> myself to no one. If you want to get to know me that's how you will get to know
>
> me (Alex314-317).

Similarly, Princeton stated, "It's like to me I am my sexual identity. It makes me who I

am and I'm not gonna downplay it just to make someone feel comfortable" (P279-280).

He went on to explain:

> Because, Ya, my sexuality and people knowing, it's very important to me, very
>
> important. Like if I was to meet somebody new, I'm gonna put it out there. I'll be
>
> like, girl, I put it out, like you need to know. Because I feel like if you know that,

you know me … me being gay makes up me. I mean there's much more to me

than just being gay, but that's a real big important piece (P280-285).

Correct the label. Others were so persistent in presenting their sexual identity

that they acted to *correct the label* when their sexual identity was incorrectly defined by

others. Alice stated that because she identifies as bisexual, she does not want people to

assume she is heterosexual because she is dating a male. She described a common

experience after she broke up with a boyfriend by saying the following:

I don't want people to assume that I'm doing something that I'm not. 'Oh, are you

with this guy?' and, like, a lot of people have asked me that. Like, am I with my

friend DJ or if I'm still with my ex-boyfriend. And I'm like, no. I have a

girlfriend. And I'm like, I just tell them and I don't care because now they know

and now they won't ask me again (AL256-259).

JC shared the same frustration in being mislabeled, and demonstrated her intentionality in

making sure others perceived her sexual identity correctly. She explained, "It's mostly

important to me, because if people try and label me as something that I'm not with my

sexuality, I will tell them, 'No. That this is what I am,' You know. I, I've been called a

lesbian before, I've been called many other things and I'm like, 'No. I'm bisexual'"

(JC406-409).

Separate from sexual identity. Finally, there were those who denied or moved to

separate from [their] *sexual identity*, during social interactions, thereby choosing not to

present their sexual identity at all. Amelia explained, "I would just kind of, like, ignore

that part of who I was a lot around those [unaccepting] people" (A462). Amelia explained

this when she said that "because it was just emotionally draining and it wasn't going

anywhere. Attempting to educate failed to work so why put myself through it? Through

that rejection, when I could just ignore that part of me" (A470-473). Similarly, Mary

stated that separating from her identity provided her with the space necessary to reconcile

what happened. She shared:

> A lot of the times I will not act, I'll act like the remarks toward same gender
>
> attracted people aren't really about me because that's, that's, I just try to separate
>
> that from my identity so I can look at it more um, like, objectively, and face it that
>
> way (M1070-1071).

Summary

In summary, the data showed that high school students with same-gender

attractions experience subtle discrimination in the form of sexual-orientation

microaggressions during school. Overall, the sexual orientation microaggressions were

experienced from peers as well as faculty and conveyed messages of denigration and lack

of significance of same-gender-attracted identities as well as disparate treatment

compared to heterosexual peers. In response, participants reported intentionality in

responding to microaggressions both in the moment and in the development of long-term

strategies in order to assuage any real or potential damage. Finally, a relationship

between microaggressions and identity was identified. These experiences caused

participants to question their identity and place among others, and to manage the

presentation of their identity.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Sexual identity development is influenced by environmental messages and, for adolescents, most notably those received within the context of the school environment. In fact, considering all positive and negative factors associated with the well-being of same-gender-attracted identities, the school environment includes the most negative factors compared to all other environments (Higa et al., 2014). Affirming school climates have been associated with school success. On the other hand, school climates that perpetuate messages of devaluation of same-gender-attracted sexual identities are associated with a decreased sense of belonging and increased isolation of these youth (Chesir-Teran, 2003; Poteat & Anderson, 2012; Toomey et al., 2012). In spite of this documented link between school climate and student well-being, subtle messages, both direct and indirect, that denigrate same-gender-attracted identities permeate high school environments (Birkett & Espelage, 2015; Kosciw et al., 2012). In turn, the targeted individuals are faced with responding in a way that will both preserve their sense of self and enable them to carve out a place among peers within the school environment. School belongingness and peer acceptance have been shown to be pivotal to student success and well-being (Busseri et al., 2006; Espelage et al., 2008) and to sexual identity pride (Kwon, 2013).

The goal of the current study was to explore the experiences of subtle discrimination in the form of sexual orientation microaggressions among same-gender-attracted students in high schools. The research questions guiding this inquiry sought to provide an understanding of the prevalence of this phenomenon as well as to explore the methods used by participants for managing occurrences of this subtle form of discrimination and the relationship between microaggressive experiences and sexual

identity. In the current study, 14 adolescents from 7 different high schools participated in interviews lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes each. Six categories of sexual orientation microaggressions were found through data analysis. In addition, the results revealed five categories of management strategies and four categories related to identity.

Results showed that experiencing sexual orientation microaggressions at school was routine for same-gender-attracted high school students. Consequentially, the youth exhibited specific strategies for managing the experiences during social interactions. In response to the microaggressions, some participants questioned their sexual identity and their place among peers at school, while others responded with resilience. Initially, it appeared that encounters with microaggressions were the antecedents in a linear process. That is, the incident occurred, the recipient responded to the incident, and the individual identity was or was not affected. However, the goal of Grounded Theory methods of analysis is to uncover the process of change regarding a particular phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), in identifying the process of change among the data, the researcher uncovers the "series of actions/interactions or emotions taken in response to problems, or as sequences or for the purpose of reaching a goal as persons attempt to carry out tasks, solve certain problems, or manage events in their lives" (p.99-100). With this in mind, and in order to gain a comprehensive understanding regarding the process at play among the data, the categories were reviewed to identify prevalent concepts and themes in answer to the research questions. This additional analysis revealed a reciprocal relationship among the categories.

Rather than merely responding to the discriminatory incidents in isolation, participants played an active role in managing their responses and, at the same time, their

identities. These experiences, in turn, affected their future responses. This finding is

consistent with the symbolic interactionism literature, which posits that when social

identities are stigmatized, actors sculpt their interactions based on their perceptions of the

meaning of the interactions, their ability and willingness to conceal or reveal the identity,

as well as their desire to negotiate a status comparable to those involved in the interaction

(Goffman, 1963). Additionally, contextual factors, such as perceived identity acceptance

and support from others, served to guide the interactions. The data revealed that inherent

in the adolescents' responses were efforts to negotiate a pathway to being accepted and

recognized by others equal to their heterosexual counterparts. From this, I deduced that

the process was initiated by the individuals' desire to acquire a positive identity through a

process of negotiation.

The literature on identity negotiation is consistent with both the findings of the

current study and with the theoretical lens of the study, symbolic interactionism. Like

symbolic interactionism, identity negotiation theory posits that social identities are the

product of social interactions (Goffman, 1959, 1963; Strauss, 1959; W. Swann, 1987; W.

Swann & Bosson, 2008). W. Swann and Bosson (2008) noted that negotiating identity

was a "process through which people strike a balance between achieving their interaction

goals and satisfying their identity-related goals" (p. 449), where interaction goals were

defined as the desired outcome of each interaction and identity-related goals being

identity perceptions that are consistent between perceiver and the individual. Central to

the process of identity negotiation is the satisfaction of the individual's basic needs to

achieve *psychological adherence* (congruence between self-views and others' views of

the individual's identity), *agency* (positive self-view that is unique and autonomous), and

communion (self-views that connect individual to others). Satisfaction of these needs become the motivating factors of social interactions (W. Swann & Bosson, 2008).

Additionally, both symbolic interactionism and identity negation theory posit that when discrepancies occur in any of these areas, the individual enters into a process of negotiation with the interaction partner (Goffman, 1959, 1963; Strauss, 1959; W. Swann & Bosson, 2008). While more than one goal can be accomplished in social interactions, it is not uncommon for two or all of the interaction goals to be in conflict with one another. Subsequently, the individual reframes by compromising one or two for the other, while at the same time minimizes tension among the competing needs (W. Swann & Bosson, 2008). For example, when an interaction partner is unwilling to affirm an individual's sexual identity (lack of psychological adherence) but indicates willingness to maintain a positive relationship (communion), the individual will negotiate identity (agency) by abandoning the interaction goal of psychological adherence while pursuing the goals of communion and agency.

The categorical results of the current study will be discussed within the framework of these interaction goals; other references to the literature will be included. It should be noted that while these concepts are defined separately, there is a reciprocal relationship among them. As the actors strove to seek identity congruence (psychological adherence), they were at once negotiating individuality (agency) and connectedness (communion).

Psychological Adherence

Because individuals strive for consistency and continuity in their identity, they seek feedback from others that confirms their own self-view. For individuals with a

positive sense of self, negative feedback from others leads to discrepant views, which the

individual then seeks to reconcile (Goffman, 1959, 1963; Strauss, 1959; W. Swann,

Chang-Schneider, & Angulo, 2008). Sexual orientation microaggressions are

discriminatory and biased messages which convey a devalued status to same-gender-

attracted individuals (Sue & Capodilupo, 2008). The results of this study showed that

microaggressive experiences highlighted the discrepancy between participants' self-

views and perpetrators' views of them, thus causing a lack of psychological adherence

between the two. The students interviewed in this study expressed that sexual orientation

microaggressions were persistently conveyed in the course of their school experience

through *expressed denigration*, *lack of recognition*, *change in relationships*, *mixed

messages, stereotyping*, and *double microaggressions*.

Several of the sexual orientation microaggressions in this study signifying a lack

of psychological adherence are consistent with previous findings that were based on adult

or college-aged samples (e.g., Deitz et al., 2016; Kosciw et al., 2012; Nadal et al., 2010;

Platt & Lenzen, 2013; Sue & Capodilupo, 2008). However, there are findings unique to

this study and/or distinguishable from earlier findings. For example, all of *stereotyping*

and most of the subcategories and properties of *expressed denigration*, have been

identified in previous work (Deitz et al., 2016; Nadal, Issa, et al., 2011; Nadal et al.,

2010; Platt & Lenzen, 2013; Sue, 2010). Regarding expressed denigration, however, as

reported here, expressed denigration is further broken down into two subcategories,

delivery method, and *content meaning*. Also, within the subcategory of content meaning,

although the sexual orientation microaggression of devaluation is similar to previous

findings of Nadal et al. (2010) and colleagues (Nadal, Issa, et al., 2011; Shelton &

Delgado-Romero, 2013), one nuanced difference between the previous and current findings is that devaluation in this study included messages that participants sexual orientations were a phase, thus not valid and subject to change. This finding could be unique to adolescents, since the developmental periods of adolescence and identity coincide (Morgan, 2013). In addition, condemnation, as reported elsewhere, was referred to as sinfulness and was conveyed by adult peers (Platt & Lenzen, 2013; Sue, 2010). In this study, condemnation, which was experienced in both religious and non-religious based schools, was predominately conveyed by teachers who evaluated the participants academically, and thus in an authoritarian position over the participants. Condemnation was conveyed during class time and in conjunction with a lesson. This power differential, not identified among adult samples, limited the ability of the youth to respond and to escape the situation.

The category of *lack of recognition* has been partially reported elsewhere. Because the assumption that all students were heterosexual was woven through the school culture, casual conversations with peers were centered around assumptions of heterosexual dating, marriage, and parenting, and were mirrored both casually and through instruction in classrooms by faculty. Although lack of recognition of *non-heterosexual identity* is similar to findings of heteronormativity and endorsement of heteronormative culture/behaviors by Deitz et al. (2016) and others (Nadal, Issa, et al., 2011; Nadal et al., 2010; Sarno & Wright, 2013), respectively, the current study expands on this concept by differentiating among the lack of recognition of *non-lesbian or gay identifies*, *other identities*, and *school functions*. As reported here, there were times when non-heterosexual identities were endorsed; however, the endorsement was limited to

lesbian or gay sexual identities. Not surprisingly, these microaggressions were experienced by participants identifying as bisexual or queer. Although Sarno and Wright (2013) found that bisexual individuals reported being subjected to assumed heterosexuality (Alien in Own Land), the finding here conveys approval and recognition of lesbian and gay identities, but not any identities beyond that.

Lack of recognition of other identities, which was experienced on both the *personal* and *systemic* levels, has not been previously reported in microaggression literature. On the personal level, the data showed that once participants' sexual identities were known to others, their sexual identity became their exclusive identity; they were only gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer. Finally, systemically, although the lack of recognition of non-heterosexual identities in *school functions*, such as curriculum, has been noted in survey research (Kosciw et al., 2012) it is absent in the microaggression literature. This is not surprising, since to date research on sexual orientation microaggressions has focused primarily on adult experiences. The data also showed that a lack of psychological adherence was experienced by participants who were members of school-based student organizations perceived to be associated with same-gender-attracted students when these organizations were not recognized by faculty or administration.

Change in relationships is a finding unique to this study. Participants reported that when others at school learned their sexual identity, they experienced a change in relationships, which indicated a lack of psychological adherence. The changes in relationships included others *distancing* themselves from participants, engaging in *violation of privacy* of participants' lives' by assuming that all aspects of the same-gender-attracted students' lives were open for discussion, and identifying the participant

as a *target* for overt discrimination. Targeting, as reported here, could be comparable to threatening behavior (Nadal, Issa, et al., 2011) and blatant negative communication (Deitz et al., 2016) reported elsewhere; however, it is differentiated from those findings because in the current study the nexus of change for a pre-existing relationship was identified to be related to the change in status of the targets' sexual identities. Change in relationships during social interactions is consistent with symbolic interactionist theory (Goffman, 1959, 1963), which proposes that the revelation of a stigmatized identity in social interactions is associated with goal realignment and change in relationship status.

Mixed messages is also a new finding. To experience psychological adherence, individuals require identity congruence in relationships and across environments (W. Swann & Bosson, 2008). The findings in the current study showed that, unlike their heterosexual peers, same-gender-attracted students were unable to receive consistent support from the faculty and administration at school regarding their sexual identity. Although some of the properties of mixed messages were specific to faculty and administration, mixed messages were received from peers as well. King (2008) reported a finding similar to *visibility*, which she conveyed as college students feeling silenced in schools; however, the findings here expand on that of King, in that they identify a contingency of support linked to stakeholder acceptance and is specific to high school students.

The finding of mixed messages regarding inconsistent *acceptance* has been partially reported by Evans (2002), who found that the sample of educators in her study reported that changes in context (e.g., spaces and people) were often accompanied by requirements to renegotiate acceptance. Unlike Evans (2002), however, the current study

further defines acceptance to differentiate between genuine and disingenuous support.

Additionally, mixed messages were conveyed through a *double standard* through the

disparate endorsement of students' behaviors and through school practices and is newly

reported here. Participants in this study reported disparate treatment regarding *endorsed*

behavior, most commonly as it pertained to public displays of affection, and *school*

policies.

Lastly, *secondary microaggressions* were defined as an additional layer of harm

to the target due to the lack of or inadequate response from bystanders. In this current

study, this was experienced through *failure to intervene* and *evasion of responsibility*.

Although failure to intervene has been reported through survey results (Kosciw et al.,

2012) and evasion of responsibility has been reported elsewhere as pushback (Deitz et al.,

2016) and denial of heterosexism (Nadal, Issa, et al., 2011; Nadal et al., 2010; Sue,

2010), the concept as presented here moves the infraction from occurring in a dyadic

relationship between the target and perpetrator to a triadic one that includes the

bystander(s). As reported here, targets were faced with enduring a double penalty; being

devalued by the perpetrator and again by the bystander. A comparison for the added

distress associated with secondary microaggressions can be made to research on

bystanders and bullying, which has found that bullying victims who perceive themselves

to be undefended scored lower on self-esteem assessments and had lower peer evaluation

scores than those who felt defended (Sainio, Veenstra, Huitsing, & Salmivalli, 2010).

Communion

The motivation to satisfy the need for connectivity with others is met through

communion. That the need to be connected with others is a basic human need

(Baumeister & Leary, 1995) is supported in the data on school belongingness. School and social connectedness have been associated with positive well-being of students (Cox et al., 2011; Hill & Gunderson, 2015). Specific to identity, Hill and Gunderson (2015) noted that communion, "the desire and striving for relatedness and connection with others" (p. 238), serves to equalize and provide consistency to the social identity. Baumeister and Leary (1995) found that people are "fundamentally and pervasively motived by a need to belong," causing them to "seek frequent, affectively positive interactions within the context of long-term, caring relationships" (p. 522). The data in the current study showed participants sought to satisfy the need for communion through managing microaggressions.

Several of these management strategies have been reported in previous studies in whole or in part, and some findings are unique to this study. Additionally, management strategies employed by adolescents have, until now, been absent from microaggression literature. For example, the management strategy of *triage before responding*, which was defined as engaging in environmental and contextual assessment by sexual minorities, has been substantiated among both adult (Deitz et al., 2016) and adolescent (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003; Madsen & Green, 2012) populations in previous literature. Specific to adolescents, Madsen and Green (2012) reported that youth engaged in an "analysis of the anti-LGB incident for personal relevance and severity" (p. 147) prior to responding.

In the moment, *rejoinders* were found to be either active or passive, with active rejoinders being those instances where the individual directly engaged the perpetrator. The active responses identified here included: *confrontation, education, scripted responses*, and *nonverbal communication*. Of these, only confrontation (Madsen &

Green, 2012) and education (McDavitt et al., 2008) confirm findings from other studies; scripted responses, and nonverbal communication are newly presented here. Regarding scripted responses, participants reported that because they had become accustomed to microaggressive experiences, they developed an arsenal of responses that they were able to draw from, with less intentionality, when responding. Nonverbal communication referred to responses, most commonly to safe peers, that expressed dissatisfaction, or in some cases shock, to messages devaluating same-gender-attracted identities. Passive responses, on the other hand, were strategies that did not directly engage the perpetrator, but were managed through intrapsychic strategies. All of the passive responses reported in this study are consistent with other findings (Madsen & Green, 2012; McDavitt et al., 2008).

Preventative strategies were used to safeguard against potential harm. Within the context of communion, this was interpreted as strategies employed when individuals perceived a potential inability to establish connectedness and the potential for rejection. Participants in the current study acted both defensively and offensively in managing microaggressions while striving for communion. All of the preventative strategies found in this study, both defensive and offensive, have been reported elsewhere and specifically among adolescent samples (Carvallo & Pelham, 2008; Erhard & Ben-Ami, 2016; Fuller et al., 2009; Goldbach & Gibbs, 2015; Hill & Gunderson, 2015; McDavitt et al., 2008). It should be noted that while the literature has found that these strategies are, in part, due to maturation and the pervasiveness of discriminatory experiences, research has also found that because discriminatory experiences become routine and are considered a normal part of everyday live, accepting them and expecting them can ultimately be associated with

increased resiliency among the targets (Erhard & Ben-Ami, 2016; Nadal, Wong, et al., 2011).

When youth in this study were actively engaged in the management strategy of *advocacy* on behalf of self and others, they felt they were contributing to the betterment of their environment and felt a greater sense of belonging. With this sense of purpose, they could play an active role in mitigating the harm from sexual orientation microaggressions and gaining wider acceptance among peers, thus increasing communion. These findings mirror those of Toomey and Russell (2011), as students in their study reported that engaging in social justice activities at school increased positive well-being and school connectedness.

The final management strategy, *self-validation*, was used to by participants to substantiate that discrimination took place by confirming their experience or feelings with others. These findings are comparable to previous studies, which found that participants validated their experiences with others in order to determine if the incident occurred in order to adequately assign responsibility for the act (Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1991; W. Swann & Bosson, 2008).

Agency

In meeting the goal of agency, individuals strive to "negotiate identities that will reflect self-views that make them unique from others" (W. Swann & Bosson, 2008, p. 452). Individuals have multiple identities and the salience of an identity is contingent upon the context and influences during social interaction (Goffman, 1959, 1963; Strauss, 1959). As individuals enter into social interactions, they can have conflicting views of one another and of the agendas for the interaction. As people engage with one another,

they not only work to establish a common agenda, but also to establish themselves in a unique and positive light (W. Swann, 1987). Because identity negotiation is continual and ongoing, engaging in the process becomes routine, often occurring outside of the actor's consciousness (Evans, 2002; Goffman, 1959, 1963; Strauss, 1959; W. Swann & Bosson, 2008). The salience of one's sexual identity fluctuates among environments, and is most salient when it is central to the social interaction (Evans, 2002). While individual findings of the identity results have been previously reported, they are newly presented here as a process for establishing agency.

In the current study, the data showed that the categories of sexual identity were both unique and interrelated. In line with identity negotiation theory (W. Swann & Bosson, 2008), during social interactions, participants strove to meet their interaction goals as well as their identity goals. Specific to sexual identity, as participants interacted with others, they strove to define themselves and to insert their identity into their worlds in a way that would be positively received by others. Specifically, as the youth experienced sexual orientation microaggressions, or lack of psychological adherence, they moved to negotiate an identity that would establish them as unique individuals.

Regarding *sexual identity salience*, although participants perceived their sexual identities to be consistent across time and integral to who they were, in their day-to-day interactions with others they strove to be perceived as person first – not a sexual minority person, just a person. Sexual identity salience increased, however, when they received disapproving environmental messages and when they engaged in actions of advocacy on behalf of peers or the larger same-gender-attracted community; thus, they sought to achieve the goal of agency. For some, experiencing multiple incidents that brought the

individuals' sexual identities to the forefront were beneficial. When youth engaged in

school-based advocacy activities they at once learned who they were and defined

themselves as experts, leaders, and role models for others within the school environment,

which ultimately facilitated identity pride. This is consistent with Evans (2002) finding

that, keeping in mind that people have multiple identities, the repetitive experiences of

identity salience was associated with identity strength for that identity. Regarding the

participants in this study, as they negotiated their most salient identity, they were also

defining self.

Striving to meet the basic need of agency is rooted in the assumption that identity

construction and negotiation are embedded in social interactions (Corbin & Strauss,

1990; Evans, 2002; Goffman, 1959). Hence, identity negotiation is an ongoing process

through which an individual's "sense of self interacts with social labels, or broader social

categories" (Evans, 2002, p. 20). The association of self-worth and positive sexual

identity development with peer evaluation, school climate, and faculty support has been

strongly supported in the literature (Almeida et al., 2009; Chesir-Teran, 2003; Cohler &

Hammack, 2006; Hammack et al., 2009). The data showed that *defining self* was

influenced by messages, both accepting and disapproving, from *environmental*

influences, *social interactions*, and through *disclosure* of their sexual identities. Students

shared that it was in response to or through these interactions that they learned who they

were, and who they were not. Many expressed that through their involvement with GSA

and social encounters with others like them in their day-to-day experiences, as well as

through disclosure of their sexual identity, they self-defined more clearly as they learned

that their sexual identity was real and in, in many cases, in common with others. This not

only facilitated a connection with others, thereby meeting the need of communion, but also balanced the effect of any negative experiences with positive identity support.

When individuals could not achieve psychological adherence, their sexual identity came into question and they engaged in *doubt* regarding their *sexual identity* and *others' acceptance*. Scholarship has suggested that in negotiating identity, it is not uncommon for the others' perspective to be incorporated into the negotiated identity (Goffman, 1959, 1963; W. Swann, 1987; W. Swann & Bosson, 2008). Thus, to doubt self and the acceptance of others became integral parts of negotiating identity, causing a roller coaster-like experience for the youth in this study. The participants reported that they questioned the value in claiming a same-gender-attracted identity and that this changed from one interaction to the next. Sexual identity theorists have suggested an ebb and flow of identity pride for same-gender-attracted youth. Claiming a sexual identity is not a destination, but rather a continual process of negotiation in which doubt can be a challenge, but not necessarily detrimental, to the outcome (see Cohler & Hammack, 2006 for review of sexual identity development theory)

Presentation of sexual identity referred to the ways in which the participants inserted their sexual identity into social interactions. In presenting their sexual identity to others, the participants exercised varying levels of judiciousness in who they self-disclosed to and where through *selective self-disclosure*. When the context was affirming, they were more likely to insert their sexual identity into the interaction, sometimes even exercising intention in by *correcting the label* to redefine themselves to others who labeled them incorrectly. At other times, the youth were found to *separate from [their] sexual orientation* during social interactions. This is consistent with identity negotiation

theory, which postulates that though individuals strive the meet the goals of psychological adherence, communion, and agency, when a goal cannot be met, the actors abandon that goal and move to achieve another one during social interactions (W. Swann & Bosson, 2008).

In spite of the microaggressive experiences, all of the participants expressed *self-acceptance* and presented with a positive sense of self. Although one participant indicated that he believed that the negativity of what others said was true, including that he was destined to go to hell, he claimed pride in who he was as a gay male. Another, who offered that he felt so uncomfortable in his school that he didn't want to attend anymore, claimed that he was unwavering in his gay identity. Overcoming adversity to achieve self-acceptance is supported by McDavitt et al. (2008), who found that participants engaged in a cognitive change strategy of "adopting a self-reliant attitude" (P. 10), which both minimized the impact of negative experiences and increased their sense of self. In contrast to traditional theories of sexual identity development, which posit that discriminatory social messages obstruct positive identity development, the participants in this study were able negotiate a positive identity, albeit with difficulty in some cases, amidst persistent and pervasive messages of being less than their heterosexual counterparts. This finding was consistent with the scholarship of Savin-Williams (2005) and colleagues (Cohler & Hammack, 2006; Hammack et al., 2009; Savin-Williams, 2001), who found that while some youth are negatively affected by discriminatory messages and other forms of discrimination, most youth ultimately overcome these obstacles and achieve identity pride.

Limitations

There are limitations to this study that should be noted. The focus of this study was to identity the kinds of subtle discrimination experienced by students within the context of high school. The sample in the current study was over represented by females (*n*=10), bisexual (*n*=7), and White (*n*= 8) students, as well as schools in suburban settings (*n*=4) settings. In light of the unique differences between and among genders and sexual orientations, race, and settings, it could be that a more balanced sample would have provided different results. Similarly, the sample was drawn from one region – the Midwest. Because of the variation in acceptance among geographic regions in the United States, results may or may not be applicable to other regions regarding same-gender-attracted youths' experiences at school.

As the participants told their stories it was clear that their journeys were unique to them. For example, while some students attending the same school had similar interpretations of the school climate, others experienced the school climate differently than their peers at the same school. Saturation in this study was reached at the 11th interview. The remaining three interviews were of students attending the same school whose data showed they agreed on the oppressive nature of the climate at their school. Seven schools were represented in this study. It could be that a larger sample of students and a larger representation of schools could yield different results.

Implications for School Counselors, Faculty, and Administration

Because of the insidious nature of sexual orientation microaggressions they may not be detectable to others. As a result, while the target may interpret lack of intervention by witnesses, specifically school personnel, as endorsement of homophobic behavior, it

could be that witnesses are oblivious to the microaggression. At other times, witnesses

may detect the infraction but the behavior could be so embedded in the school culture

that it may appear routine. In addition, because microaggressions are sometimes

committed by well-intentioned individuals, it could be that the perpetrators are unaware

of damage caused by their actions. A holistic approach to facilitating an increased sense

of community in schools could lead to a more inclusive environment. Engaging students

and school personnel in the process of educating the members of the school environment

on the ways that microaggressions are perpetuated in and level of harm experienced by

the targets could foster a stronger sense of community and belongingness in schools.

For example, student-led instruction, to include personal narratives of targeted

students, on the ways sexual orientation microaggressions are conveyed, the content of

the messages, and the impact they have on same-gender-attracted students would

humanize the incidents by providing first-hand accounts from the perspectives of the

targeted students. In addition, cooperative work groups consisting of students and faculty

that focus on facilitating change within the school could make students aware of the

moral responsibility of members to be kind to one another by promoting exposure to, and

acceptance of, differences among students.

Participants in this study perceived that they were not represented in school

curricula and were devalued in class lectures. Making instruction inclusive would

increase feelings of school belonging among these students. For example, teachers could

change the language used in class to be more inclusive by using married couples as

opposed to husband and wife, or parents in place of mother and father. Health classes

could be modified to include issues pertaining to same-gender sexuality rather than solely

focusing on heterosexual health. Finally, text books depicting same-gender couples and parents would allow increased visibility of same-gender-attracted identities.

Though this study focused on the school environment, family and community support were mentioned by several students. In fact, it was difficult for some to tell their story without including the level of acceptance they did or did not receive outside of school. For some, school was their safe place as opposed to home. This could be a call to schools to assume a holistic approach to inclusion by working conjunctively with students' families and their communities to provide consistent, affirming messages both within and outside of the school environment. This was particularly noticeable among African American students at inner city schools who held strong religious convictions. Working jointly with families and the surrounding community, including affirming religious leaders, to hold community awareness events would help to assure increased, consistent positive support of these youth.

Community and family members could be invited into the schools to be part of the cooperative work groups. Student led town hall meetings on ways to work together to promote inclusion in and out of school could facilitate a sense of belongingness with the community. Additionally, social justice programs outside of the school, such as a school-community co-op, through which students and community could work together on a targeted need would provide the opportunity for social interactions; this, in turn, could facilitate positive relationships with, and ultimately perceptions of, same-gender-attracted students.

It is also worth noting that even in the face of pervasive discrimination, the participants were able to negotiate a positive identity. It is important for mental health

clinicians and school counselors working with these students to refrain from pathologizing them but, instead, work to direct efforts towards inclusion, equality, and effective management strategies.

Recommendations for Future Research

School climate surveys are commonly used to assess discrimination directed toward same-gender attracted students in schools. While school climate surveys are beneficial tools for identifying harmful behaviors, such as harassment of same-gender-attracted students, that are embedded in the schools' culture, they are not designed to identity the perceived damage of these behaviors, nor are they designed to effectively depict the targets' response. As a result, schools could have an incomplete understanding of the nature of, and issues related to, discrimination in schools. By including level of harm indicators (e.g., how much did this bother you), school personnel would be able to get a clearer picture of the relationship between same-gender-attracted students and the school climate. As Savin-Williams (2001) suggested, questions such as, "did it happen?" and "was it harmful?" could elicit separate responses. Also, in defining school climate, questions pertaining to harassment are typically structured to identify blatant harassment. While surveys to identity microaggressions have been constructed, one specific to the school environment that include the insidious, often silent forms of harassment identified in this study could be beneficial to school personnel. In addition to obtaining a more complete view of the nature and effects of harassment in schools, it could assist school personnel to know where to target interventions in order to create a more inclusive school environment.

The role of allies and advocates in facilitating inclusion and acceptance of same-gender-attracted students at school has been understudied. Future inquiries into the benefits of safe peers and the ways in which allies could take a more prominent role of promoting acceptance of same-gender-attracted peers could help identify new strategies for creating inclusivity in schools.

Sexual orientation microaggressions were commonly conveyed by administration and faculty. Considering the environmental context of the school, and in light of the fact that attending school is a legal and, frequently, parental requirement, the youth in this study felt forced to endure the discrimination. In addition, those in authority engaging in microaggressive behaviors were often the same ones who graded them and evaluated them behaviorally. Further research into the effects of this power differential would provide additional insight into the adolescent school experience and could further differentiate adolescent experiences from those of adults.

One topic that arose, yet was unsubstantiated among the data, was the intersection of gender and sexual orientation. Though expectations to conform to socially endorsed gender behavior was found among female students, this was particularly evident with male participants. Research into the relationship between these constructs within the school environment would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the unique contributions of gender and sexual orientation in relation to sexual orientation microaggressions.

Finally, as noted in the limitations, these findings are based on a sample in the Midwest. Examining sexual orientation microaggressions in other geographical areas could help to identity the breadth of universality associated with this construct.

Conclusion

This appears to be the first inquiry into sexual orientation microaggressions using a high school-age sample. The results showed that while a number of findings were consistent with those reported using adult and college-age samples, some findings were identified as unique to high school students and the high school environment. The results also showed that in spite of the ubiquity of these discriminatory experiences, students acted with intention in effectively managing their responses to sexual orientation microaggressions in a way that allowed them to maintain a positive identity. This finding is consistent with others that have reported that, unlike previous models of sexual identity development, today's same-gender-attracted youth are ultimately able to navigate discrimination and harassment to enjoy positive mental health and identity pride comparable to their heterosexual peers (Savin-Williams, 2001, 2005).

The current study also appears to be the first to apply sexual orientation microaggression data to identity negotiation theory, which holds that individuals engage in an ongoing process of identity negotiation. As reported here, the process of identity negotiation has been explained through the application of real life microaggressive experiences. The results have shown adolescents do not merely acquire unique identity strength, but that instead, identity pride is the result of a process of negotiations motivated by the basic needs for psychological adherence, communion, and agency.

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Appendix A: Site Request Letter

Date

School Administrator
School Name
School Address
City, State, Zip

Dear [School Administrator's Name]

I am a doctoral student at University of Missouri – St. Louis. This letter is in request of your organization's participation in a research study I am conducting for my dissertation. The purpose of my study is to explore subtle forms of discrimination experienced by high school students with same-gender attractions at school. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at UMSL has approved this study.

If you elect to participate, I would like to invite your members who self-identify as having same-gender attractions, and who are currently enrolled in high school, to participate in interviews. During the interviews, participants will be asked to share any experiences of subtle discrimination, ways in which they manage these interactions, and ways in which these experiences affect their sexual identity. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Pseudonyms will be used in place of the participant's name, the school name, and the organization's name, so that no identifying information will be part of the transcript. Parental consent will be required for all youth under the age of 18, or as required by your organization. Interviews will be conducted at your site or at a location that is mutually agreed upon by the parents, participants, and me.

No risks from involvement in this project are anticipated, but there are perceived benefits. The faculty and staff at the participants' schools could potentially benefit from learning how same-gender attracted youth experience the school day and what they perceive they need in order to maximize their perceived safety and their overall school experience. More importantly, the participants may benefit from knowing that they were instrumental in contributing to such change.

Per the IRB requirements for this project, I will need formal written agreement on your organization's letterhead so that I will have record of your consent to participate. You can send the letter to me at the address below, or I can pick it up directly from you. I will clarify this with your office. Once I have your consent, I would like to consult with you on your preferences for recruiting participants. I will then work directly with the participants to assure that they have returned the required consent forms, unless otherwise directed by you.

Thank you for considering this request.

Marti Baricevic

27 Marilyn Circle
Fairview Heights, IL 62208
618.632.7089

Appendix B: Participant Invitation

One University Blvd.
469 Marillac Hall 63121-4499
Telephone: 314-516-5782
Fax: 314-516-5784
E-mail: mlcvwb@umsl.edu

Date

Name
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear [Parent or Guardian]

My name is Marti Baricevic. I am a doctoral student at University of Missouri – St. Louis. This letter is in request of your child's participation in a research study I am conducting for my dissertation. The purpose of my study is to explore subtle forms of discrimination experienced by students with same-gender attractions at school. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at UMSL has approved this study.

You are receiving this letter because your child identifies as having same-gender attractions. If you provide permission for your child to participate, I would like to interview him/her about school experiences regarding sexual identity. This interview will take place on school grounds, or at a mutually agreed upon location. During the interviews, students will be asked to share any experiences of subtle discrimination, ways in which they manage these interactions, and ways in which these experiences affect their sexual identity. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed. However, when the recordings are transcribed, a false name will be used in place of the participant's name and the school name so that no identifying information will be part of the transcript.

Included with this letter is an Informed Consent form. This form explains the process and the rights of all parents and participants. Please know that your child's best interest will always be paramount. You or your child may withdraw permission at any time throughout the study.

Thank you for considering this request. Please call me at the number below with any questions.

Regards,

Marti Baricevic

618.632.7089

Appendix C: Parental Informed Consent for Student Participation

Division of Counseling
One University Blvd.
St. Louis, Missouri 63121-4499
Telephone: 314-516-5782
Fax: 314-516-5784
E-mail: mlcvwb@umsl.edu

Participant _____   HSC Approval Number _____

Principal Investigator Marti Baricevic   PI's Phone Number   618.978.2812

_____

1. My name is Marti Baricevic. I am a doctoral student in counseling at the University of Missouri – St. Louis. I am inviting you participate in a research study that I am conducting for my dissertation. Completing this study is a graduation requirement for my program at UMSL.

   I am conducting my research under the supervision of Dr. Susan Kashubeck-West, my faculty advisor in the Department of Counseling and Family Therapy at UMSL.

2. The purpose of this research is to learn about experiences of subtle discrimination of students who identify as having same-gender attractions, or who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. An example of subtle discrimination is an assumption by teachers that all couples attending prom will consist of one male and one female rather than two males or two females.

3. Your child's participation will involve:

   ➢ Participating in an interview, which will last approximately one to 1½ hours. During the interview, your child will have the opportunity to share any experiences of being treated differently or negatively at school due to his or her sexual identity.

   ➢ Participants in the interview will include your child and me, the researcher. The interview will take place at school or at a mutually agreed upon location.

   ➢ The only requirements for the study are that your child identify as having same-gender-attractions, or as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and currently be enrolled in high school.

   ➢ Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. This means that the recording of my conversation with your child will be typed, word for word, after the interview is completed. Your child's name and the school's name will be replaced with fake names. No identifying information will be included in the transcription,

data analysis, or final report. All audiotapes will be destroyed at the end of the study.

➢ Approximately 12 to 30 students from different schools in the Midwest may be involved in this research.

4. There are no direct risks associated with participation, though sometimes students can be sad from talking about their experiences. Your child will be provided with a list of counseling resources in the event that this would happen.

5. There are no direct benefits for your child's participation in this study. However, his or her participation will contribute to the knowledge about how students experience subtle discrimination at school so that school counselors might more effectively serve them. In addition, this knowledge may benefit school administrators and teachers striving to provide a more accepting environment at school. Your child will be offered a $10 Target gift card for participating in this study.

6. Your child's participation is voluntary. Both you and your child may choose to withdraw consent for your child to participate. Your child may choose not to answer any questions that he or she does not want to answer. Also, know that there will be no penalty to you or your child for not participating or for choosing to withdraw participation.

7. I will do everything I can to protect your child's privacy. By agreeing to let your child participate, you understand and agree that your child's data may be shared with other researchers and educators in the form of presentations and/or publications. In all cases, your child's identity will not be revealed. In rare instances, a researcher's study must undergo an audit or program evaluation by an agency that reviews research to make sure that the rights of participants, such as your child, are preserved. This type of agency is referred to as an oversight agency. An example of an oversight agency is the Office for Human Research Protection. Any agency that audits this study would be required to maintain the confidentiality of your child's data.

8. What your child and I talk about will be confidential. Even though our conversation will be transcribed, he or she can always ask me not to include part of our conversation in the transcript and/or the study. However, your child's well-being is important to me. If I feel that your child is in danger of being hurt or that he or she are going to hurt someone, I am required by law to tell someone who can help them.

9. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Marti Baricevic, 618.978.2812, or the Faculty advisor, Dr. Susan Kashubeck-West, 314.516.6091. You may also ask questions or state concerns regarding your child's rights as a research participant to the Office of Research Administration, at 516-5897.

Thank you for allowing your child to participate in this study.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my child's participation in the research described above.

_____   _____
Parent's/Guardian's Signature   Date   Parent's/Guardian's Printed Name

_____
Child's Printed Name

_____   _____
Signature of Investigator or Designee   Date   Investigator/Designee Printed Name

Appendix D: Assent to Participate in Research

Division of Counseling
One University Blvd.
St. Louis, Missouri 63121-4499
Telephone: 314-516-5782
Fax: 314-516-5784
E-mail: mlcvwb@umsl.edu

1. My name is Marti Baricevic. I am a doctoral student in counseling at the University of Missouri – St. Louis. I am inviting you to participate in a research study for my dissertation.

2. The purpose of this research is to learn about experiences of subtle discrimination of students who identify as having same-gender attractions, or who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

3. Your participation will involve:

   ➢ Participating in an interview, which will last approximately one to 1½ hours. During the interview, you will have the opportunity to share your experiences of being treated differently or negatively at school due to your sexual identity.

   ➢ Participants in the interview will include you and me, the researcher. The interview will take place at your school or at a mutually agreed upon location.

   ➢ I am conducting my research under the guidance of Dr. Susan Kashubeck-West, my faculty advisor at UMSL in the Department of Counseling and Family Therapy.

   ➢ The only requirements for the study are that you identify as having same-gender attractions, or as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and feel you have been discriminated against at school because of this.

   ➢ Interviews and will be audio recorded and transcribed. Your name and your school's name will be replaced with a pseudonym. No identifying information will be included in the transcription, data analysis, or final report.

   ➢ Approximately 12 to 20 students in all, from different schools in the Midwest, may be involved in this research.

4. There are no direct benefits for your participation in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about how students experience subtle discrimination at school so that school counselors might more effectively serve them. In addition, this knowledge may benefit school administrators and teachers striving to provide a more accepting environment at school.

5. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose to participate or to withdraw.

6. I will do everything we can to protect your privacy. By agreeing to let participate, you understand and agree that your data may be shared with other researchers and educators in the form of presentations and/or publications. In all cases, your identity will not be revealed. In rare instances, a researcher's study must undergo an audit or program evaluation by an oversight agency (such as the Office for Human Research Protection). That agency would be required to maintain the confidentiality of your data.

7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call me, Marti Baricevic, at 618.978.2812, or my faculty advisor, Dr. Susan Kashubeck-West, at 314.516.6091. You may also ask questions or state concerns regarding your child's rights as a research participant to the Office of Research Administration, at 516-5897.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to participation in the research described above

_____   _____
Participant's Signature, Date   Participant's Printed Name

_____   _____
Participant's Age   Grade in School

_____   _____
Signature of Investigator or Designee, Date   Investigator/Designee Printed Name

Appendix E: Interview Protocol

1. Overall, how do you think people in your school view same-gender relationships?
   a. Can you give me examples of why you think this?
   b. Are some spaces, like classrooms, the gym, or lunchroom, more/less comfortable for you than others?

2. How do you, personally, experience identifying as having same-gender attractions while you are at school?
   a. In what ways does this affect your feelings about having same-gender attractions?
   a. In what ways does this differ from when you are not at school?

3. In what ways do you think that identifying as having same-gender attractions has affected the way others at school view you?
   a. In what ways is this similar or different from how you would like them to view you?
   b. What, if anything, have you done to ensure they view you in the way you would like?
   c. In what ways does this affect how you perceive your identity?

4. What are some examples of times you have felt put down by someone or treated differently at school, because of your sexual orientation?
   a. Was this by faculty, staff, or peers?
   b. What were your initial thoughts during that interaction?
   c. How frequently does this happen?

5. How did you handle those interactions?
   a. Describe your response
   b. Was your actual response different from the way you wanted to respond?
      i. In what ways?
      ii. Why did you respond differently?
   c. How to you determine how to respond?
      i.   Does it matter whom you are responding to?
      ii. Does the place where the interaction took place matter?

6. What about times that you have anticipated being put down or treated differently?
   a. How do you act differently than when you actually experience being put down or treated differently?

7. What do you think the overall impact of these experiences at school has been in terms of how you view yourself regarding your sexual orientation?
   a. Do some incidents affect you more than others?
      i. In what ways?

8. Have you ever altered your behavior at school in order to avoid being viewed or

treated negatively by others?
    a. If so, in what ways?
    b. How do you decide whether to alter your behavior?
    c. Were the interactions with peers? Faculty? Staff?

9. How do you feel about others knowing you are attracted to same-gender peers?

10. If you could make any changes in your school that would improve the way that same-gender-attracted youth are perceived in your school, what would they be?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix F: Member Check Feedback

Your Name:

I. Microaggressions: subtle discrimination

1. **Expressed Disapproval:** *people say negative things about same-gender-attracted identities or the LGBT community*

    a. Delivery Method: how they say it

        i. ☐Disparaging Comments: *they say negative things about you or other people with same-gender attractions. This could be in person or through social media postings*

        ii. ☐Nonverbal Expressions: *they react negatively to you or others with same-gender attractions without using words. For example, by making faces or moving away from you*

    b. Content Meaning

        i. ☐Devaluation: *the messages you hear are about same-gender-attracted identities not being important or valued*

        ii. ☐Condemnation: *messages that you are wrong or you will go to hell*

2. **Lack of Recognition:** *People at school do not acknowledge your sexual identity and same-gender-attracted are not represented at school.*

    a. ☐Invisible: *It's like you aren't heard because you are attracted to same-gender others. You are not included or overlooked*

    b. Sexual identity *Sexual identity must be from a predefined category*

        i. ☐Non lesbian or gay: *people think that if you identify as same-gender-attracted, you must be gay or lesbian. Other sexual identities, such as bisexual or queer, are not considered.*

        ii. ☐Non heterosexual: *people at school assume that everyone is heterosexual*

    c. ☐Other identities: *when people know your sexual identity, they overlook your other identities, such as student, musician, person*

    d. ☐Curriculum: *In classes only heterosexual topics are covered in the lessons and only heterosexual persons are depicted in text books*

    e. ☐School Functions: *Heterosexual students are the only ones featured in school promotions or school functions, such as Prom Court and activities featuring same-gender-attracted students or topics are not acknowledged.*

3. **Change in Relationships** *Others modify or terminate a relationship after learning of participant's sexual identity*

    a. ☐Targeted: *You are picked on or bullied at school because of your sexual identity*

    b. ☐Distancing: *people at school stopped talking to you or you lost friendships because of your sexual identity*

    c. ☐Violate Privacy: *When people at school learned of your sexual identity they thought it was OK to ask you private or personal questions about your sexuality*

4. **Mixed Messages:** *you are accepted sometimes and sometimes not while you are at school*

    a. ☐Visibility *You are allowed to be who you are at school and be in activities specific to LGBT issues, unless parents complain to the school. Then the activity is shut down.*

    b. ☐Acceptance: *You are not able to feel you are accepted in all classrooms, by all faculty, and by all classmates.*

    c. ☐Endorsed Behavior: *When same-gender attracted students do the same things that heterosexual students do, they are talked to or disciplined. For example, taking a date to prom or showing affection to one another at school*

    d. ☐Expressed Support: *People at school act like they accept your sexual identity, but then act like they don't or you think they are not being honest*

5. **Stereotype:** *People expect you to follow a stereotype because of their personal beliefs*

    a. ☐Behavior: *You are expected to act a certain way to be gay or because you are gay*

    b. ☐Looks: *you are expected to dress a certain way to be gay or because you are gay*

    c.   Sexualize: *people assume that everything you do is about sex*

        i. ☐Non-discriminant attractions: *people assume you are attracted to every person who is the gender you are attracted to*

        ii. ☐Fetishize: *people assume that you do not have boundaries because of your sexual identity*

    d. ☐Chose sexual identity: *people assume you decided to be gay*

    e. ☐Expectation to Represent: *people assume that you can speak for every same-gender-attracted person on the face of the earth*

6. **Secondary Microaggressions:** *when you have been discriminated against, no one steps in to stop it or call the person who did it out*.

    a.   Failure to Intervene**:** *Teachers or administrators step in*

        i. ☐Overlook: *they act like they don't see it or hear it*

        ii. ☐Side-stepping: *When someone asks about an incident, the teacher or administrator does not answer directly*

    b.   Evading Responsibility: *people do not take responsibility for their behavior*

        i. ☐Back Pedal: *they try to take it back*

        ii. ☐Defend Comments: *they make excuses for their behavior*

Is there something I missed? Please comment below

II. Managing Microaggressions

1. **Triage before responding:** *Before you respond, you think about the situation*

   a. ☐Nature of comment: *what did they mean*

   b. ☐Personal resources: *Do you have the energy to respond*

   c. ☐Source: *who did it?*

   d. ☐Location: *Where did it happen*

   e. ☐Risk: *Will responding be harmful to you?*

2. **Rejoinders:** *In the moment responses*

   a. Active Response: *Respond directly to the person who did it*

      i. ☐Confronting: *Call them out on their behavior*

      ii. ☐Advocating: *Step in for others*

      iii. ☐Educating: *Tell them why it was offensive to you*

      iv. ☐Aggression: *Fight or think about fighting*

      v. ☐Scripted Response: *Have a response ready in case someone offends you*

      vi. ☐Nonverbal Communication: *Communicate feelings to others without speaking*

      vii. ☐Deflection: *Put the responsibility on the person who did it (For example, that's their problem, or they shouldn't be saying that)*

   b. Passive Response: *Respond in a way that others cannot see*

      i. ☐Brush it off: *Let it go*

      ii. ☐Brave Front: *Act like you don't care, when really you do.*

3. **Self-protection:** *Protect yourself from the pain of discrimination*

   a. Defensive Strategies: *Something you do to prevent harm from happening*

      i. ☐Assessing for Safety: *Figure out if you are in a safe place*

1. ☐Symbols: *Look for signs, such as safe zone signs*

2. ☐Spoken Language: *Figure out if they are a safe person by what they say*

3. ☐Behavior: *Figure out if they are safe by watching how they act*

ii. ☐Selective Self-disclosure: *Figure out who is safe and not safe to share your sexual identity with*

iii. Alter Behavior: *Change behavior when you are with other people*

1. ☐Self-silence: *Keep things to yourself*

2. ☐For acceptance: *to fit in or blend in*

3. ☐To Prevent being stereotyped: *Act a certain way so they you won't people won't stereotype you*

4. ☐To prevent being outed: *Change your behavior or what you say so that others won't discover your sexual identity*

iv. Avoidance: *Stay away from certain places or people*

1. ☐Spaces: *For example, certain classrooms, the gym, locker room, bathroom.*

2. ☐People: *Administration, faculty, and/or peers*

b. Offensive Strategies: *Things you do so that discrimination won't be as hurtful*

i. Coat of Armor: *Ways to protect yourself from future discrimination*

1. ☐Pragmatic expectations: *Accept that discrimination will happen*

2. ☐Thick skin: *become used to it so that it doesn't hurt so much*

ii. ☐Self-Talk: *Say positive things to yourself to keep you up*

iii. ☐Relationships: *the relationships your form in school*

1. Bridging: *supportive relationships with people or organizations*

      a. ☐Peers: *Fellow students*

      b. ☐Formal Organizations: *For example, Gay Straight Alliance clubs or diversity groups*

      c. ☐Faculty: *Teachers, administrators, and school counselors*

2. Redefine: *Changing your relationships or the way you look at your relationships*

      a. ☐Terminate: *End relationships that are not supportive*

      b. ☐Trustworthiness: *Your ability to trust people you used to trust*

4. **Advocate:** *Speak out for yourself or the LGBT community*

    a. ☐Work the system: *Get projects approved by going around people who might night approve them*

    b. ☐Social Justice: *Be involved in programs or activities for equality*

    c. ☐Social media: *speak out for yourself through social media*

Is there something I missed? Please comment below

III. Identity

1. **Doubt:** *You question your sexual identity*

   a. ☐Sexual Identity: *Is it real or valid? Should you be this?*

   b. ☐Acceptance: *You wonder if others do or ever could accept you for who you are*

2. **Sexual Identity Salience**: *When you are most aware of your sexual identity*

   a. ☐Environmental Influence: *When you are around other same-gender-attracted peers, dating, or when someone discriminates against you*

   b. ☐Advocacy: *When you are involved in social justice activities*

3. **Defining Self:** *Defining your sexual identity*

   a. Social Interactions: *through talking with others or being involved in organizations*

      i. ☐Gay Straight Alliance Organizations: *Organizations at the school, community, or State level*

      ii. ☐Peers: School mates or friend groups

   b. ☐Life Experiences: *learn who you are though your day-to-day experiences*

4. **Presentation of Sexual Identity:** *how you live in your world*

   a. ☐Living Out: *you have pride in your sexual identity and live it openly*

   b. ☐Correct the Label: *You make sure others define you as you want to be defined*

Is there something I missed? Please comment belo

Appendix G: Code Book

Category I: Microaggressions			
Subcategory	**Subcat/Property**	**Property/Dimension**	**Supporting Text**
1. **Expressed Denigration**	a) Message Content	i. **Devaluation** Entirely to Partially	1. it was just little things where they don't necessarily mean to hurt, you know, they don't…but they do hurt (A791-792). They're like, oh, but you don't know because, like, and they wouldn't finish their sentence (A795-796). I'd be like, because why? What do you mean? And they're like, well, you know, that doesn't really count. Like, oh. OK. Um, because lesbian sex, quote-unquote, does not count as real sex (A797-801). 2. Just because you are a teenager, people think that you don't know what you're talking about, or that people think, 'You're a kid' you'll learn once you get older (L190-192) 3. It's just a phase (N95). What really gets me is when people say, 'Oh, that's a phase,' I, because it's an integral part of who I am and to say, 'That's a phase,' it really, it really hits me (N96-97)
		ii. **Condemnation**	1. warned us very carefully about the homosexuals, because the homosexuals are real and they're coming to get Ya

Category I: Microaggressions			
Subcategory	**Subcat/Property**	**Property/Dimension**	**Supporting Text**
		Harsh to Mild	(Ann701-702). 2. He [teacher] won't talk to me directly, but the way he does it is a group discussion that was like gay people go to hell because they was talking about that city [Sodom] and how, um everybody about how the man kept getting raped in that city and …they was talking about that and about how God destroyed it because he couldn't look upon sin (Alex 561-571).
	b) Delivery Method	i. **Disparaging Comments** Harsh to Mild	1. They [school peers] would just blatantly say, like, rude things or they would call you fag or gay (L100). Some people frowned on the same-gender relationships. They would, kind of not really like it much (JC18). They would say rude comments about it and tell them rude sayings that I don't feel comfortable repeating…they [the target] wouldn't like it and they would tell them [the perpetrator] to stop and they [the perpetrator] would say other rude things to them about it – even some teachers would do that (JC23-24). 2. as an F – boy; a Fuck boy (W495)

Category I: Microaggressions			
Subcategory	**Subcat/Property**	**Property/Dimension**	**Supporting Text**
		ii. **Nonverbal Expressions** Obvious to Ambiguous	1. Um, they move away from me cuz they think I will try to touch them" (Kyke71-71) 2. [I said], So, if you were to tell some creepy old guy whose already cat calling that you are sexually interested in women, then who knows where they might take that? And they might be following you and stuff like that. And then the whole class, you could tell that I have experience with that and that I like women from what I was saying. The whole class, like some kids were, like, nodding, but other kids were like quiet and, like, giving me this look like I didn't belong or something (N377-386).
2. **Lack of Recognition**	a) **Personal Level**	i. **Non heterosexual** Always to Never	1. We were talking about single replacement reactions in Chemistry, which is where the, um cation and anion switch. What she described it as, she gave us an analogy of boys and - a boy and a girl and a boy and a girl at a dance. And she's like, and the way you can remember it is when they flip, a boy would never dance with a boy and a girl would never dance with a girl (B57-61). I mean it's the smallest of comments but

Category I: Microaggressions			
Subcategory	**Subcat/Property**	**Property/Dimension**	**Supporting Text**
			you remember them" (B65-66). I mean it's the smallest of comments but you remember them (B65-66).
		ii. **Non lesbian or gay** Always to Never	1. People only see me as gay and not bisexual. And I'm always like, I can like both genders (W522-523) ... it's come to be that gay people can't trust me because they think that I'll go out with a girl and girls can't trust me because I'll like guys more than I'll like them. It's kinda hard sometimes (W523-526). 2. I know one of my friends who I first came out to was very persistent that I couldn't be anything but gay um, or lesbian because he knew I, um, was attracted to girls, and um since I had first came out to him as a lesbian, um he was very sure that that was never gonna change (M66-70).
		iii. **Non-sexual identities**	1. kind of like shoves them [other identities] out the window a little bit (R206.) becomes like the predominant trait of who you are to them (R207). 2. No that's not how it go. Like, I'm [not] just gay, I'm Preston, I'm me. I'm not

Category I: Microaggressions			
Subcategory	**Subcat/Property**	**Property/Dimension**	**Supporting Text**
			just gay (P391).
	b) **Systemic Level**	Always to Never	1. If there's an author and there's like a book and there's a gay character in the book. A lot, this has happened before. There's a lot of times when you skip over that character, even if they've had a major development or like they've done something important to the story. Like and Claude did this and they will never talk about him again, and it's like, OK…Ya, like, all right. Last chapter he just like, killed somebody so we should probably talk about that (N450-465). 2. Like, at school, the prom posters or graduation cap posters, or, um, just the movies we watch at school and…like, they were all of heterosexual couples…Like it's not a really reminder, it's not a really reminder but it's kind of in your face...That heterosexual couples are better. And it makes you feel bad. And it's just like, well why can't that be two girls or why can't it be two guys? (L655-676).
3. **Change in Relationship**	a) **Targeting**	Aggressively to Casually	1. and den [sic] everybody was laughing at me and telling me how disgusting I was and stuff like that" (Kyle535). The

Category I: Microaggressions			
Subcategory	Subcat/Property	Property/Dimension	Supporting Text
			assistant teacher she told them to stop and she was saying that's just my sexual preference, but they didn't care. And they was like aksing [sic] me do I suck dick and stuff like that. And den…They were like in my face and den they, um, moved, and den they moved away from me. Everybody got up and moved away from me (Kyle541-545). I just put my head down until class was over. And den when class was over I kinda broke down (Kyle 547-548). 2. At first, I was completely fine. And then, after I said that out loud about three days after I said that out loud that's when I started seeing little bitty things that she would pick at me about" (261-263). The teacher was, like, she sees we are joking around with each other. The teacher, she pulled me out of the lab completely. She told me I couldn't go back in the lab, put me in a classroom next door, because there was one adjoining door. She put me in the class next door, there was no teacher, the lights were out, and it was cold. She put me in that classroom; she shut the door, and went back into her classroom (L238-240).

Category I: Microaggressions			
Subcategory	**Subcat/Property**	**Property/Dimension**	**Supporting Text**
	b) **Distancing**	Always to Never	1. It's really, it's really easy to tell whether someone's comfortable once they find out or not (N17-18). Like, when in casual conversation, if you're someone that I've just met and I haven't, like, specifically come out to you and said, 'My name's Nancy and I'm bisexual,' then you just sort of pick up on, like, when I'm talking to my friends and stuff I say. And like, I'll say Oh she's cute or I really like her. And you can tell. They kind of distance themselves from you (N22-25). She still hangs out in my friend group but me personally, I, we don't talk unless it's with the people that are there, and like if someone leaves while we're all three there it gets really awkward between us (N46-47). 2. a big pause, they don't talk to me as much anymore, they just kind of go about their ways, but they don't really say much to me anymore (W450-453). I mean, after, like a week after the distancing I feel like kind of bad because, I mean this is kind of who I am" (W466-467).
	c) **Violation of**	Always to Never	1. They seem to kind of fail to realize that I

Category I: Microaggressions			
Subcategory	**Subcat/Property**	**Property/Dimension**	**Supporting Text**
	Privacy		am still a person that might want privacy, and just because I'm gay doesn't mean that all by barriers are down (Ann33-84). They ask like do you guys have sex, like how do you have sex? Like, really? You want me to just talk about this? I mean… just go on Google, I'm sure they have plenty of answers (Ann90-92).
			2. My friends …They just start talking about same-sex sex and stuff like that. And, uh, they'll ask me questions and I'm like, that's, now I'm uncomfortable. Because I don't want to talk about this at the lunch table because I'm trying to eat my barely edible lunch (N126-132).
4. **Mixed Messages**	a) **Visibility**	Obstructed to Promoted	1. I was baffled throughout the entire process with the amount of hoops I had to jump to make this happen" (B857-858). Ya, it's two different things. So I do feel, I do feel accepted. I know the administration would like, would never harass me or something about that; however, they will do anything, uh, when parents call to complain. Parents are the people paying the tuition money. So, if here was ever an issue with parent, I don't know, if something. Say, that

Category I: Microaggressions			
Subcategory	Subcat/Property	Property/Dimension	Supporting Text
			newspaper ran and I set it on my coffee table. I'm sure other people do. And if a parent read that, I don't know how that would go over with a parent. Let's say they are angry and they call the school, then the school has an issue on their hands (B701-707) …And I don't like it when I am made to feel invisible or like I don't exist to them within the [school name] community (B796-797). 2. They don't want anybody to be like completely crazy and like not want to go their school anymore cuz we're a pretty high standard school. We have a really good marching band; a really good football team (AL141-143). Like, people that don't support same-sex couples and while doing that, they're offending people that do support same-sex couples or people who are in same-sex relationships. Like me (AL151-152).

Category I: Microaggressions			
Subcategory	**Subcat/Property**	**Property/Dimension**	**Supporting Text**
	b) **Acceptance**	Inconsistent to Consistent	1. It's confusing. Because you have this teacher that has a safe place sign and they might have this poster with LGB rights or something like that, and something will come up and you need them to be the activist they say they are, and they just don't, and it's confusing. It's like, I thought you were this, but you're not showing me that you support me, or that you support everyone like me (N195-199). 2. That substitute teacher… looked up at us and was like, I'm gonna leave this conversation alone. That was one of those times that I felt, like, like looking at her on the outside she was like cool or whatever; but inside she was fine with saying God [is going to] strike me down right now (P402-406).
	c) **Double Standard**	i. **Endorsed Behavior** Disparate to Uniform	1. The faculty treats the issue between heterosexual displays of public affection and homosexual displays of public affection very differently. Um, with the heterosexuals it's kind of like a, like, almost like a, like celebrating puppy love type thing. Liked, aww, come on, guys. Don't do that right here. But, uh, with

Category I: Microaggressions			
Subcategory	**Subcat/Property**	**Property/Dimension**	**Supporting Text**
			homosexuals it's just like come on y'all. Y'all gotta do that right here? (P161-174). 2. You see a boy and a girl pass by holding hands and you have no problems with that. But when it comes to a boy/boy or girl/girl holding hands it comes this big escapade – it's not OK (JC578-759).
		ii. **School Practices** Biased to Impartial	1. "I mean, I would say that our administration tries to put off an air of being accepting. You know, and of being supportive. Um, but, I think in practice their not always super supportive" (Amelia403-404). 2. [He] brought in the paperwork and everything for this guy, presented it to my principal, and the principal was like, no. That's too old. We don't wanna, we don't want our school to look like they have people so old coming, just because that can look bad on our school. He turned around, had one of his female friends write up the paperwork for his boyfriend and it got approved (A416-419).

Category I: Microaggressions			
Subcategory	**Subcat/Property**	**Property/Dimension**	**Supporting Text**
5. **Stereotyping**	a) **Personal Characteristics**	Always to Never	1. when I told them they're like no, but you, like you act straight and I'm like I just act like a person like that doesn't mean I act gay or straight (A151-152). 2. that's what they be looking for. It's the way you walk – like if you walk switching then they assume you are gay. The way you talk they assume you're gay, it's your actions towards, I don't know, towards anything (Alex634-636). 3. me getting my hair cut really short, like, a lot of people regardless of, like, people just assume, um, like even when I had long hair, I knew I was gay" (R465-467).
	b) **Sexualization**	Always to Never	1. Before it was like a normal locker room, and people um, undressed freely but when I came out, people went behind lockers and stuff … they fear cause I'm attracted to girls, that it automatically meant that I was going to violate them without their consent (M668-670). 2. Umm great, can I watch? Ya, that's fine, my girlfriend can make out with you, That'd be great. But, um, so ferociously homophobic to gay men? So that's not

Category I: Microaggressions			
Subcategory	**Subcat/Property**	**Property/Dimension**	**Supporting Text**
			likening, that's not accepting, and that's no, you're not accepting me for my sexual orientation. You are accepting me because it benefits you and it's convenient for you (B1129-1133).
	c) **Assumption of Choice**	Always to Never	1. Why did you turn gay like, why did you do that? (Ann332-333). 2. Every now and then I get the same question. Did you choose to be gay or did, you know. One time something said [was] or did God send a dove saying you're gay now [laughs]... I'm not sure how you chose to be, you know, homosexual or anything like that (Kelhani714-717). Me, personally, I just, one day I realize that I have feelings for girls and people just don't get that. Like you can't just wake up and say, oh, I like girls and sometimes that's just the way it is. You have emotions and certain feelings of affection towards the same sex and (Kelhani708-717). 3. I think that's a bunch of bull, too, but I don't think it's a choice because it's something I've been dealing with my

Category I: Microaggressions			
Subcategory	**Subcat/Property**	**Property/Dimension**	**Supporting Text**
			whole life. And if, I mean you chose to accept it or not, but it's not like, I'm thinking I'm gonna be gay now; it's never like that (K1021-1024).
6. **Secondary Microaggressions**	a) **Failure to Intervene**	Intentional to Unintentional	1. one teacher knew it was happening...and she kind of watched while they kinda provoked me about it and make fun of me about it. And that's why I don't like her now…She didn't do anything (Kyle112-118). 2. The teacher just kept ignoring the kid when he was saying these rude comments… you could tell that he [the student] wasn't a supporter of our group. He said that I hope they get rid of this group; I hope all the gays burn (JC543-546). They wouldn't necessarily step in they would just tell them, you know, that's not a subject you really talk about in class. That's all they would say and go on with the lesson (JC524-525). That doesn't tell the kid that's, that's kind of bashing on gay people, that it's not right to do that (JC525-527).
	b) **Evasion of Responsibility**	Harmful to Benign	1. he kind of back pedaled and was like 'oh, that's not what I mean'. But when it came down to it, he was like I just really

Category I: Microaggressions			
Subcategory	**Subcat/Property**	**Property/Dimension**	**Supporting Text**
			think their needs to be a father in a child's life" (A294-296). 2. they'll say, like, 'oh, that's gay.' And they, like, when they do turn around and look at me and say 'oh, I'm sorry!" …I feel like they're, like almost directly, like, attacking, like, LGBT people in general (R565-569).

Category: II. Managing Microaggressions

Category	Subcat/Dimension	Property/Dimension	Supporting Text
1. **Triage before responding**	a) **Context**	Malevolent to Benevolent	1. It depends on what the comment is because if the comment's true, I'm gonna agree with you…Like if somebody calls me a fag I'm like, oh. You right. If somebody calls me gay I'm like, oh, ya. you right. If somebody say, like, you a weak [not masculine] fag, like, that's call me wrong because I know I'm not weak (Alex425-434). 2. I'm not expending the energy and emotional energy to educate you, because I don't know you very well; I don't have to deal with you on a regular basis" (A928-930).
	b) **Personal Resources**	Insufficient to sufficient	1. There are some days when you stand up, you make it an education moment, and you're the spokesperson, whatever, and you speak out. And there's some days when you're just to tired and you just don't care (B424-426). 2. I feel like I'm constantly defending my sexuality. But I feel like It takes so much of my energy just to like really, like be willing to, not like, correct people, but like provide education, or um, just explain things to people, and sometimes

Category: II. Managing Microaggressions			
Category	**Subcat/Dimension**	**Property/Dimension**	**Supporting Text**
			it gets really tiring to explain for the 50th time why its ok that I did date a guy at one time (R711-715).
	c) **Risk**	Severe to Minimal	1. Would they say mean things to me, even if I had to see them on a daily basis? Do I want to deal with that? Could I deal with that? Probably. Do I want to? No. It's not worth it… When they are talking about something they don't like, I'm not going to put myself in that situation ta, emotionally damage myself (L573-58). 2. you have to let it go because if you keep going back and forth with this person it might end up, you know, with you being shunned" (Kelhani536-542).
2. **Rejoinders**	a) **Active**	i. **Confronting** Aggressively to Peacefully	1. I was, like, this is just not OK. It's just not acceptable. I will not allow you to say this stuff about me when it's not true (W803-804). 2. I was like who bullying you? Cuz we fittin' a go; we fittin' a go do something about this" (P485). He further explained, 'Like I walked to the person what was bullying him and I was like, … 'you're gang'…You know, I'm not gonna say it's always good for me to intervene, but

Category: II. Managing Microaggressions			
Category	**Subcat/Dimension**	**Property/Dimension**	**Supporting Text**
			I do it regardless (P486-489).
		ii. **Educating** Altruistic to Self-serving	1. I feel like one of the main reasons people do stuff like that, like say words, they might not be trying to hurt people, it's because their uneducated. So, I feel like I do have ta, I have a obligation to myself to educate people to all the stuff like that, like this is why this, this is why you cain't [sic] do this and stuff like that (P698-700). 2. Educate people and to talk to people who are being respectful of me and who I am and my choice of life (N346-347).
		iii. **Scripted** Stringent to Inexact	1. In the beginning I wouldn't really say anything because I was just out and I was like, oh god. Everyone hates me and they want to burn my house down and stuff like that. And, uh, so, like just over time I've sort of developed like sometimes subconsciously, like what I say to certain things and what I don't say to other things (N580-583). 2. Like I've pretty much memorized things to say when um, when people ask me what queer means or what being queer means, um, or like when people try to go

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			against fluidity, I have the same responses to that every time (M715-717).
		iv. **Nonverbal Communication** Covert to Overt	1. I just looked over at him and just kinda raised my eye brows. Like, are you hearing this right now? (A450-451). Like he had his fist balled. Like, he couldn't believe it. He couldn't believe how judgmental it all was. How heteronormative it all was (A452-453). 2. There's a lot of like, funny, like, back and forth looks between my, my like, safe friends um, there's a lot of like, eye rolling or um, silent laughing or, like point, like not even like ha ha pointing at people, but, like, are you kidding me, but a lot of it is just done with like a smirk, or an eye brow raise (R756-759).
	b) **Passive**	i. **Deflection:** Always to Never	1. It was just another, um, reminder that I'm okay with myself… so they're the ones with the problem, not me (Ann496-497). 2. At the same time, it makes me realize, well, if they dislike a person for being them, then maybe they need a reality check (Kelhani 317-318). Maybe they need to realize that not everyone's gonna

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			follow someone else's lead based on people judging and just talking about it. Maybe they will just realize that, well, since they're being individuals living their lives the way they want to live, then, maybe it'd be all right (Kelhani 318-320).
		ii. **Brush it Off** Unintentionally to Instinctively	1. I typically just brush it off period (A353). Because I'm like, I'm not gonna be around you after, you know, this year or next year; this was junior or senior year. So, I was like, in the grand scheme of things it doesn't really matter (A354-355).
		iii. **Brave Front** Difficult to Casual	1. I kind of brush it off externally, pretty much all the time, um, I mean it could be excruciatingly hurtful, you know. Like, I think especially when it was teachers who I trusted or teachers who I really looked up to. Like, man, that - that would hurt … I'd act like it's no big deal and come back to it eventually and deal with those emotions and process those emotions (A1136-1141). 2. And what I said to em was, I was like, I don't know, maybe you're right, and I just walked away…It killed me on the

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			inside (Alex854-857).
3. **Preventative Strategies**	a) **Defensive Strategies**	i. **Seek Safety** Never to Always	1. You can tell, like, there might be some who might be like homophob[ic] …it's the reaction on they face that I look for… Like by, your reaction tells me whether or not you're accepting of me or not (Alex35-38). 2. At our school, on doors, there are certain signs and stickers in the corner and, you know, like most of them will have like a rainbow and we know, well, this teacher has a sticker in her window, or he has a sticker in the window, we can go and talk. Or, I can be open with, you know, my sexuality without being judged or looked down on (Kelhani212-215).
		ii. **Alter Behavior** 1) **To Disengage** Entirely to Partially	1. if there's a class and they're all talking about something on, on the spectrum of that [sexual orientation], um like ill, like kinda, like, close up a little bit, and like if I'm receiving like, like a general negative feeling from everybody, I just kinda close up with myself and I don't really say anything, or I don't contribute to it; whereas, I'm usually very like, confident in talking about issues like that (R823-828).

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			2. In class I don't really talk. I'm usually just the quiet girl that doesn't say anything. But with my friends I'm really, really loud and rambunctious and act pretty childish sometimes. But they still love me and they know that I'm a very, very fun person (Al204-206).
		2) **For acceptance** Entirely to Partially	1. I like to watch girl shows like Project Runway or Pretty Little Liars and I never found anything wrong with that, but apparently, people, other people have. And for the longest time I actually did not watch anything that was girly or did anything girly. I was trying to act more like boys then I was like, this doesn't really suit me. Because I was trying to do sports and that kind of stuff, like, no. This is not me (W211-215).
		3) **To prevent being stereotyped** Always to Never	1. My voice get deep and I try to butch up and stuff like that, but those are more the times when like I kinda switch roles all a sudden. Like I become, I don't want to say become a man because even though I'm gay I'm still a man. But those are times when I become, like, that butch, like (P341-344).

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			2. But really, I don't … talk just so they don't stereotype me … I don't want them to stereotype me based on, and just assume how I like, who I like based on how I look. Cuz, if they want to know, then they can come up to my face and ask me (AL427-431).
		4) **To Prevent being outed**	1. I wasn't out yet and I was terrified that that was gonna happen to me [being outed], so [I was careful of how I dressed] … so people would just perceive me as straight, or very stereotypical normal girls (M857-866). 2. Um, I had a boyfriend – quote unquote. Because I had a girlfriend that I just wanted to talk about like all the time…she meant a lot of me, so I had to talk about her. And I couldn't do that if I was talking about a girl, because I wasn't out and I didn't want to be out at that point. So, I talked about this boyfriend all the time. Um, er – at first I talked about this person I was dating and sort of used gender-neutral pronouns. But when other people started using he pronouns, because they *assumed* that it was a guy, I

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			eventually fed into that and started using he pronouns and even ended up using a masculine form of my girlfriend's feminine name. And so, that was really, it was hard….I felt that I was lying every single day (A665-678).
		iii. **Avoidance** All to None	1. I would just find a stall that was empty and go in there and change because I felt so uncomfortable (L892-893). 2. I would never step into a Young Republicans club, or a politics club…young republicans club; uhm, I think those are two very dangerous spaces for queer and trans youth (M431-436).
	b) **Offensive Strategies**	i. **Coat of Armor** 1) **Pragmatic Expectations** Insufficiently to Sufficiently	1. I kinda have to deal with some of it sometimes, like it's, it's just happens and it's gonna be ok (M626-627). 2. You know, if I don't feel supported I know I've got other people that do support me, and not everybody's gonna support, you know, gay, bisexual, transgender people, you know. There are people that will and there are people that won't. (N230-234).
		2) **Thick Skin:**	1. I'm sure there's like that at school, I just,

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		Insufficient to Sufficient	I spend so much just kind of blocking it out that it doesn't really affect me…um, I don't know, I kind of, I just…decided to stop putting energy into it (R898-902). 2. Oh yeah, I definitely went from being kinda just like a, oh that hurts please don't say that again, to like a, you don't have a right to say that, like, you have, I guess you have a right to a bad opinion, but I don't want you to like, that negative opinion to affect me (Ann639-641).
		ii. **Positive Self-Talk:** Successful to Inadequate	1. I try to be upbeat. So most of the time I say to myself, like, "This is going to be a good day". So I start out, I start out trying to make this like, I'm gonna have a nice today (N296-297). 2. I have this self-involvement with myself, almost like there are moments when I look in the mirror every day and be like, ain't nobody gonna beat you up. You cool. You Princess, or whatever. I be like, I wouldn't say that I encourage myself, but I encourage myself every day (P523-529). That's just one of the things I do to make sure I don't end up being in a corner crying, ready to cut myself

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			because somebody call me a fag, you know (P291-297).
		iii. **Relationships** 1) **Bridging** Casually to Intentionally	1. Some days I have a bad day and then I have a best friend who's like, just let it bounce off. You're great and I love you and stuff like that. And then that will pick me back up (N266-268). 2. It's [GSA] helped me by like getting out extra feelings that I can't tell anyone, but I can tell them there. It helped me by having a safe zone. Having a safe zone to come to. Um, it helps me by seeing that I am not the only one that is feeling the same way. Like when I go there, other people are feeling the same way as you are feeling (Alex664-667).
		2) **Redefine**	1. it really didn't bother me because if you would say anything to me, we wasn't friends (Alex211-213). 2. I think if I, if I am just queer and I like doing the things that I wanna do and saying the things that I want to say about same-gender people…that um, it will get across, and if they aren't comfortable with how I'm coming across then unfortunately I'm not gonna be talking to

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			them anymore (M550-553).
			3. I was very hurt um, and just kind of like, wow. I can't talk to you about this or even other situations anymore …I kind of had to draw a line in the sand and be like, I kind of can't trust you about like any of these issues anymore, which probably is kind of over reacting a little bit, because that's only one facet of my life (A1094-1097).
4. **Advocacy**	a) **Community**	Vehemently to Casually	1. We felt like we weren't just here just to be here, we felt like we were making a difference in school (L188-189). I felt like we not only were educating the other kids in the school, with the help of the administration we were also educating our teachers, too (L203-204).
			2. We're not only a gay-straight alliance; we're also an anti-bullying club. And that's what they really support too is being against the bullying and also being an ally to gay, straight, bisexual, transgender people" (JC171-173). She explained why it is important for her to stand up against discrimination when she said, "So, I'm not gonna let a stupid

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			comment really try and break us down. So, I will try and stand up for our group as much as I can if I hear something like that (JC552-555).
	b) **Self or others**		3. I channel a lot of that, like feeling I get from microaggressions into my activism. So, I take those instances that have happened, and try to apply those in different areas of my life. Like within the Missouri GSA network, if I noticed I'm hearing a lot of things about myself, like, how fluidity isn't a thing, if I hear that a lot, I will take that as my activism, make that a big part (M1030-1034). 4. I don't want to say that I care more about others than I care about myself, but I, I'm very mothering. Um, and I'm very like, I'm very considerate of my friends, and I usually end up being very like nurturing and watching over people, and so, a lot of that has to be with kind of being the mother hen, um, and so I… defend others more than myself just, I don't know, I speak out for them (R938-942).
5. **Self-Validation**	a) **Experiences**		1. Like when you're in a room with a bunch of people who have been discriminated

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	Never to Always		against the same way that you have, you tend to like bounce it, bounce, and vent off of each other…And then when you're talking about it with people who've experienced it, it's easier to, like, because you know they understand… So, it's a lot easier ta brush things off (N941-944). 2. I've talked to other girls who are same gender attracted and see, saw if they experienced the same things, especially in different schools, um, but I found that it's pretty much universal. Everything that I've seen, um it's been difficult to tell whether something was actually like, I was noticing oppression towards same gender attracted girls or if I was just, um, very hyper aware of it (696-701).
	b) **Feelings** Never to Always		1. I think it's really, quite unfortunate when a history teacher especially, cannot be; remain unbiased in their views because when we're learning about politics you get a completely skewed view. Because you have to, you have to learn based on what they teach you and even if you disagree with it you have to write it on

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			quizzes and tests to get the grades (B84-91). 2. I don't really think it's true because, from what I've learned, the most unforgivable sin is not accepting God into your life and no sin is higher than the other… I still can be forgiven by God at the end of the day. And I'm not saying that I don't believe in God, but I don't believe in some 1000-year-old book telling me how I should live my life. And it's been changed multiple times, so nobody really knows what's up in there (Kyle358-375).

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1. **Sexual Identity Salience:**	a) **Environmental Influences**	Rejecting to Accepting	1. It's [sexual identity] a thing about me. It's an integral part of who I am. And so if you are criticizing it, I automatically feel defensive about it. And so it brings it to the front like I'm a proud bisexual teen who is not going to put up with this, even though sometimes I do…And it makes me, it like; it really gets under my skin because it brings it out… And so, it does bring it out at random points during the days or when I'm at home and I see something on the news or my, my homophobic family members say something. And then I'm sitting there like; I'm angry and bisexual (N954-962). 2. [My sexual identity] comes to the forefront when everyone's talking about their boyfriends, their dates because, then I am the odd person out (B941). Then the gay hat comes on because I don't talk about my boyfriend I talk about my girlfriend. I don't talk about, um, you know, I'm bringing a boy from [school name] to fall ball, we're just a friends, we're talking but nothing serious yet…. I have ta do extra (B942-944).
	b) **Activism**	Entirely to Partially	1. on a lesbian soapbox (A1001) but when I feel like it's affecting other people… then I have to be that feminist activist lesbian and drive a

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			point home, because somebody's not getting it…in any shape or form When I'm being an advocate, that's probably more when it comes on (A1018-1020). 2. Identity as a student is prominent. Honestly, it's when people ask questions or when, um, something comes up in class around gay rights or the issue of gay rights. Then I feel myself putting on my gay person in class (B126-128).
2. **Defining Self**	a) **School Climate**	i.	1. that people are very open and accepting" (B11). They just don't understand. They just don't think, that like I'm an anomaly. And that, that's annoying to feel like that I'm alone and I'm the only one. Because I know a lot of girls who LGBTQ and none of them are out at [School's Name]. So at school you're made to feel you an anomaly (B981-983). 2. If you look at like blatant oppression and things like that, it's really not existent. But um that's where microaggressions play, and I think there is a lot of really subtle oppression that plays in, um because my school is one that sees everything as like love and equality, everything's really accepting and that in turn leads to a lot of things that people don't realize is oppression (M28-32). different and cool

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			(M89). I had to agree, um, because, and so, it caused me so much inner hate because I didn't know if it was OK if I identified as a lesbian (M534-535). sometimes it's just difficult to go to school, cause I know that like in that day I'm gonna have to deal with people talking about stuff" (M1064-1065). not looking at how other people view me, I, I'm really proud of my sexual orientation (M464). It's taken a long time for me to get that way though, but um as of right now, I'm, I'm pretty proud (M467-468). 3. Everyone was like, finally we have a lesbian couple, because there are two gay couples, um…and everyone, it's kinda like instead of, um, looking at the gay couples as like, we don't want that here, it's more like idolized, I guess. And kind of treated us like celebrities at the school, like, it's really kind of bizarre but at the same time, it is kind of like, putting us, like, on a pedestal I guess (Ann 57-60). 4. I know that I'm definitely way more comfortable at school being open and out than I am at home, or around relatives, or just in general outside of school. I think school is honestly one of the safest places for me to be out. Um, and I think [my school] does a good

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			job, like, open to it, even though some people don't get the memo (R388-391).
	b) **Through Social Interactions**	Positively to Negatively	1. Especially with the [statewide GSA] network… being with other queer and trans people um and having that be such an accepting environment, really made me realize its ok to not be, like not be straight, just to be fluid, and to be open to things (M464-470). 2. It kind of gave examples of what a gay person was and what a bisexual person was and what a transgender, you know, like how they felt and all this" (JC 565-566).
	c) **Disclosure**	Negatively to Positively	1. I feel like a bird; and that I've had the entire summer to stretch my wings and to fly and now I'm going back into a cage, and my wings don't fit the cage anymore (B146-148). It used to be emotionally draining to talk about it. But now that I'm so out and I've told my story so many times to so many different people (B309-310). 2. I feel like I am more open to the community, this community, to the LGBT community as well. Uh, I feel like I can be more of who I am now. I had nothing, nothing to be afraid or shy away from because before I came, before I never really knew who I was. Sometimes I still

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			don't know that, but I am just a teenager (W984-987).
3. **Doubt**	a) **Sexual Identity** Uncertain to Convinced		1. It makes me question whether I feel like, maybe this isn't right, maybe I shouldn't be bisexual, maybe I should just like boys (Kelhani316-317). I really don't really care about what people in my school say, because they don't know me; they're not gonna be near me all my life (K567-568). 2. Sometimes it makes me feel like, is this really who I want to be? Do I want to lose people because of who I am? (W496-501). I do act who I am, but most of the time that I don't feel like I should or I can. Just because in the back of my head I always feel like, I'm kind of a negative person so there's always that one thing in the back of my mind being like, I probably shouldn't be doing this. Saying everything that comes to mind, even though that's probably a good idea, uh, like, acting the way I should (W573-579).
	b) **Others Acceptance** Uncertain to Convinced		1. Like I don't really belong here. Kind of like, I can't think of the word. I kinda feel like I don't really need to be at this school (Kyle570). It didn't make me, it didn't make me feel any worse about yourself, I just didn't feel welcome (Kyle570-571).

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			2. Ya. Some days' I'm up and I can deal with it. It just sort of bounces off. Then some days it really, I take it to heart and it builds up. And then, like, once it's happened like so many times, it's just like, you know, I feel gross about it and I'm like, do these people not like me? (N257-259)
4. **Presentation of Sexual Identity:**	a) **Selective Self-disclosure** Judicious to Careless		1. If someone on the street now would ask me, I'm like, Ya, I am. You know? It doesn't really affect you who I am. (JC710-711). I'm not going to hide it but at the same time it's kind of hard cuz you don't know what community you're in and you don't know how people react. So, that's why I'm trying to be careful of what I do (JC276-284). 2. like if you ask me, Ya. I just come say it to you, Like I don't believe in hiding. I believe in telling the truth always (Alex42-43).
	b) **Self-acceptance**	Shame to Pride	1. I try hard to walk in my truth. Like, I don't bend easy for no one (Alex 55-56). I didn't have to be more macho to self, I just be myself. Like what you think of me, I'm gonna let you think it. I'll let you think of it. Because I don't prove myself to no one. If you want to get to know me that's how you will get to know me (Alex314-317).

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			2. It's like to me I am my sexual identity. It makes me who I am and I'm not gonna downplay it just to make someone feel comfortable (P279-280). Because, Ya, my sexuality and people knowing, it's very important to me, very important. Like if I was to meet somebody new, I'm gonna put it out there. I'll be like, girl, I put it out, like you need to know. Because I feel like if you know that, you know me … me being gay makes up me. I mean there's much more too me than just being gay, but that's a real big important piece (P280-285). 3. I mean just personally, not looking at how other people view me, I, I'm really proud of my sexual orientation (M464). It's taken a long time for me to get that way though, but um as of right now, I'm, I'm pretty proud (M467-468).
	c) **Correct the Label**	Vehemently to Calmly	1. I don't want people to assume that I'm doing something that I'm not. 'Oh, are you with this guy?' and, like, a lot of people have asked me that. Like, am I with my friend DJ or if I'm still with my ex-boyfriend. And I'm like, no. I have a girlfriend. And I'm like, I just tell them and I don't care because now they know and now they won't ask me again (AL 256-276).

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			2. it's mostly important to me, because if people try and label me as something that I'm not with my sexuality, I will tell them, 'No.' That this is what I am. You know. I, I've been called a lesbian before, I've been called many other things and I'm like, 'No. I'm bisexual' (JC406-409).
	d) **Separate from sexual identity**	Entirely to Partially	1. I would just kind of, like, ignore that part of who I was a lot around those [unaccepting] people (A462). Because it was just emotionally draining and it wasn't going anywhere. Attempting to educate failed to work so why put myself through it? Through that rejection, when I could just ignore that part of me (A470-473).
			2. A lot of the times I will not act, I'll act like the remarks toward same gender attracted people aren't really about me because that's, that's, I just try to separate that from my identity so I can look at it more um, like, objectively, and face it that way (M1070-1072).