STUDENT DEVELOPMENT IN COLLEGE

THEORY, RESEARCH, AND PRACTICE

SECOND EDITION

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

SEXUAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, and Questioning Alliance (LGBQQA) faces a dilemma. Its advisor has just announced that he has taken a new job and will be leaving the university. To remain an active student organization, LGBQQ needs a member of the university faculty or staff to serve as their advisor. So far, they have had no luck finding a suitable LGBQQ person for this position, as members of the community are either already overburdened or are reluctant to take on this public role because it might jeopardize their careers in a rather conservative university setting. The alliance president, John, has decided to ask a relatively new student activities advisor, Andrea, who has been supportive of the LLBQQ community, if she would be willing to take on this responsibility. John believes that a strong ally such as Andrea might have a positive impact on the organization as well as the straight community. The Alliance advocacy director, Travis, is up in arms about this possibility, arguing that no "het" can provide the support and active voice the group needs. The social director, Allison, likes Andrea and finds her accepting, a factor that is important to Allison, who is still getting comfortable disclosing her identity to heterosexuals. Younger members of the group are mostly indifferent to the issue; they are mainly concerned with their own comfort level in the group.

Word has gotten out within the student government association (SGA), which Andrea advises, that there is a possibility that Andrea will become the LGBQQA advisor. The SGA president, Jeremy, views this possibility positively, as he would like more collaboration between student government and the LGBQQ community in order to provide learning opportunities and break down stereotypes on campus. Blaire, the SGA vice president, is shocked. She is now questioning Andrea's sexual orientation since she does not know why Andrea would be asked if she was not a lesbian and Blaire does not want any association with someone who may be "homosexual."

Andrea herself is interested in working with the alliance, as it would allow her to demonstrate that she is a strong ally to the LGBQQ community, but she is concerned about maintaining a good rapport with the student government officers.

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The scenario just presented illustrates in part the complexity of sexual identity in the lives of college students. Many students begin or accelerate exploration of their sexual identities during college (Evans & D'Augelli, 1996). For gay, lesbian, or bisexual students who have known they are not heterosexual earlier in their lives, college is often seen as a safer environment in which to explore and "come out" than their home environment. Since research indicates that as many as 10 percent of all college students identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual and that others may be questioning their sexuality (Ellis, 1996), student affairs educators must understand the developmental challenges these students face and provide appropriate supports to assist them in navigating what is often a hostile environment (Evans & Rankin, 1998; Rankin, 2003).

Heterosexual students also find college an opportune time to explore and solidify their sexual values, needs, and attitudes (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), as well as their feelings about same-sex attraction and nonheterosexual individuals (Sullivan, 1998). However, heterosexuality has only recently received attention in the developmental literature. Bieschke (2002) stressed the importance of bringing sexual identity development into the awareness of heterosexuals to clarify important aspects of their sexuality as well as the privilege bestowed on heterosexuals by society.

In this chapter, we present an overview of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) identity development in the first section and of heterosexual development in the second section. Each section begins with a brief review of the evolution of theory and research, followed by a discussion of prominent models of gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity development and heterosexual identity development, respectively. We then discuss research and applications in the college setting specific to each model. We close the chapter with implications and suggestions for future directions. Although sometimes included in discussion of lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities, *transgender* identity is gender based and discussed with gender theories in Chapter Eighteen.

Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity Development

The first important studies of same-sex attraction, which in the past was considered pathological, focused on identifying its "cause" in order to find a "cure" (L. S. Brown, 1995). Another major debate in the literature has centered around

the question of whether sexual orientation is innate (the essentialist argument) or fluid and changeable over time in response to context and interpersonal experiences (the constructionist position; Broido, 2000; L. S. Brown; Kitzinger, 1995). Broido, citing work by Epstein (1987) and Rhoads (1994), suggested that there may be a middle ground between these two positions that recognizes "that people experience and make meaning of their sexual orientation in a variety of ways, some experiencing it as a central, stable, and fundamental part of who they are and others experiencing more fluid identities" (p. 24).

In the early 1970s, the focus shifted away from the etiology of sexual orientation and viewing same-sex attraction as an illness to the development of a gay or lesbian identity (Cass, 1990; Fox, 1995). Gay and lesbian identity was distinguished from sexual acts between individuals of the same sex since many people engage in same-sex sexual behavior without identifying themselves as gay or lesbian (Cass, 1983–1984). Cass (1990) defined gay or lesbian identity as "the sense that a person has of *being* a homosexual/gay man/lesbian" (p. 246).

The term *homosexual identity* is found in earlier literature and generally refers only to sexual behavior. Klein (1990) stressed that sexual identity encompasses much more than sexual activity. He noted that emotional preference, social preference, lifestyle, and self-identification, as well as sexual attraction, fantasy, and behavior, must all be considered to provide a complete picture of sexual identity. Later theorists examined gay, lesbian, and bisexual identities encompassing emotional, lifestyle, and political aspects of life, as well as sexual aspects. This broader perspective is usually preferred in the LGB community since it has a more positive, comprehensive, and less clinical connotation (Levine & Evans, 1991).

Early models of identity development can be loosely grouped into two categories: sociological, which focus on the impact of community, development of social roles, and managing stigma, or on the coming-out process (Coleman, 1981–1982; DuBay, 1987; Lee, 1977); and psychological theories, including those of Plummer (1975) and Troiden (1989), which concentrate on internal changes, such as growing self-awareness, formation of a gay/lesbian/bisexual self-image, and personal decisions about identity management, experienced by individuals as they come to identify as nonheterosexual. Levine and Evans (1991) identified four general developmental levels common to these models: first awareness, self-labeling, community involvement and disclosure, and identity integration. The first model to remain in use over a period of time is the gay and lesbian identity model of Vivienne Cass (1979, 1996).

Cass's Model of Sexual Orientation Identity Formation

Cass's (1979) model (originally called homosexual identity formation) was based on her clinical work with gays and lesbians in Australia. Cass identified six stages of perception and behavior, moving from minimal awareness and acceptance of a

gay or lesbian identity to a final stage in which gay or lesbian identity is integrated with other aspects of the self. She expanded her discussion of these stages in her later revision (Cass, 1996). The process of movement through these six stages is multifaceted, based on the interaction of personal needs, desires, and behaviors with biological factors (such as sex drive) and contextual variables (including the person's social class, geographical location, and race).

Cass (1983–1984) cautioned that not all gays and lesbians progress through all the stages, stressing that individuals make choices and play an active role in the development of their identities. In 1996, Cass introduced possible pathways leading to either movement to the next stage or foreclosure at the current stage. Earlier, she also indicated that sex-role socialization might result in differences in how males and females negotiate the developmental process (Cass, 1979). Cass (1990) argued that because societal norms view identity as fixed, and this belief also finds support in the gay and lesbian community, most people view their identity as essential rather than variable.

Cass's (1979, 1996) stages include both a cognitive component, reflecting how individuals view themselves, and an affective component, indicating how they feel about their own and others' perceptions. The stages are defined as follows:

- *Prestage 1.* Prior to the first stage, individuals perceive themselves as heterosexual and recognize this as a preferred state of being (Cass, 1996). As their perceptions change, increased conflict occurs between self-concept, behavior, and the perceptions of others, resulting in either movement to a new stage or identity foreclosure at this stage (Cass, 1979).
- *Stage 1: Identity confusion.* This stage begins with individuals' first awareness that their behavior or feelings could be labeled gay or lesbian (Cass, 1996). These perceptions may be accompanied by curiosity, confusion, or anxiety. Reducing discomfort is the primary focus of this stage.
- *Stage 2: Identity comparison.* Movement from stage 1 to stage 2 occurs once individuals have accepted the possibility that they might be gay or lesbian (Cass, 1979). Individuals must now determine how to manage the social alienation that accompanies a nonheterosexual identity. Their reactions may range from intense feelings of ostracism and pain to relief that previously unexplained feelings of difference are now clearer (Cass, 1996).
- *Stage 3: Identity tolerance.* Individuals entering stage 3 have acknowledged that they are probably gay or lesbian and seek out other gay and lesbian people to reduce their feelings of isolation (Cass, 1979). The nature of this contact can determine how individuals come to feel about themselves and their newly

determined identity. Some of the newer members of the LGBQQA in the opening scenario might be at this level.

- *Stage 4: Identity acceptance.* Although one's self-perception is clearly gay or lesbian at this stage, Cass (1996) noted that the person's "inner sense of self is still tenuous" (p. 244). Contacts with other gay and lesbian people are frequent, and friendships develop (Cass, 1990). Selective disclosure to heterosexual individuals also occurs. The greater commitment to a gay or lesbian identity made at this stage leads to a more stable sense of self (Cass, 1996). The norms and behavior of individuals' social groups influence how they choose to present themselves, particularly in mainstream heterosexual society. The LGBQQA's social director, Allison, may be at this stage since she is not always comfortable coming out to heterosexual individuals.
- *Stage 5: Identity pride.* In this stage, individuals focus on gay issues and activities and minimize contact with heterosexuals (Cass, 1979, 1996). Feelings of both pride in things gay and anger at things not gay propel individuals into activism and confrontation with an oppressive society. The angry reaction of the advocacy director, Travis, to the possibility of a straight ally serving as the LGBQQA advisor suggests he may be in stage 5.
- *Stage 6: Identity synthesis.* In the final stage of development, gay/lesbian and heterosexual worlds are less dichotomized, and individuals judge others on the basis of their personal qualities rather than solely on the basis of their sexual identity (Cass, 1979, 1996). Public and private identities become more congruent as individuals become comfortable and secure with who they are. Sexual identity is now seen as just one aspect of self rather than one's entire identity. The LGBQQA president, Steve, who is able to see that a straight advisor has much to offer the organization, appears to be in this stage.

Research. To validate her model, Cass (1984) developed two measures, the Homosexual Identity Questionnaire (HIQ) and the Stage Allocation Measure (SAM). She found that stage identification on the HIQ, a multiple-choice and checklist instrument describing feelings, thoughts, and actions that she categorized as indicative of specific stages in her model, generally corresponded to the one-paragraph descriptions of the stages presented on the SAM. Six stages were identifiable in her data; however, there was a great deal of overlap between stages 1 and 2 and stages 5 and 6, suggesting that a four-stage model might be a better fit (Eliason, 1996a). Eliason (1996a) also noted that the cross-sectional nature of the study made validation of the stage sequence impossible.

In 1983, Brady independently developed a measure of Cass's (1979) model for gay men called the Gay Identity Questionnaire (GIQ), which he later refined (Brady & Busse, 1994). Brady and Busse found significant relationships between

stage and assessments of psychological well-being and adjustment to a gay or lesbian identity, as predicted by Cass's (1979) model. Levine (1997) demonstrated the utility of Brady's instrument for measuring the last three stages of lesbian identity development. A later validity study of the GIQ (Marszalek, Cashwell, Dunn, & Heard Jones, 2004) suggested that a two-stage approach in which gay identity is categorized at concrete (lower stages) versus abstract (upper stages) might be more appropriate than Cass's six-stage model.

Criticism of Cass's (1979, 1996) model of lesbian and gay identity development argued against her assumption that all individuals pass through the same six stages in order as they form their identities. Many studies examining whether the linear stage progression Cass (1979, 1996) proposed was evident in the lives of gay men and lesbians have provided evidence of a number of patterns rather than one linear, universal progression (Degges-White, Rice, & Myers, 2000; Kahn, 1991).

Cass's assumption that individuals must pass through an activist stage (stage 5) to achieve identity synthesis (stage 6) was rejected by Eliason (1996a) and Morris (1997) after their reviews of the research literature on the coming-out process, as well as by Degges-White et al. (2000), who conducted a qualitative study of adult lesbians to determine the validity of Cass's model for women in the twenty-first century. In addition, Whitman, Cormier, and Boyd (2000) suggested an additional stage beyond stage 6 that they would label "living out" (p. 17) because for many women in their study, disclosing their identity was no longer a choice but rather an aspect of who they were and how they lived.

The applicability of Cass's model to women has been especially challenged, as women tend to demonstrate more variability in identity formation than do men (Degges-White et al., 2000; Morris, 1997). Cass's failure to include participants who were diverse in age, race, and ethnicity has also been noted as a limitation (Morris).

Applications. In her 1996 chapter, Cass offered a number of implications directed at counselors and psychotherapists that are valuable for student affairs educators as well. She pointed out that individuals' behaviors may not be a true reflection of their internal feelings and that listening to how they describe their identities is important. Other literature on counseling gay, lesbian, and bisexual students also stresses the importance of being familiar with the issues students face at different stages of development (Mobley & Slaney, 1996). Ritter and Terndrup (2002) introduced stage-specific counseling interventions that include exploring and validating feelings associated with each stage.

Cass (1996) pointed out that sexual identity development intersects with other aspects of development. For example, Levine and Bahr (1989) found that students in the middle stages of Cass's (1979) model scored lower on the three scales of the SDTI-2 (developing purpose, developing autonomy, and developing mature

interpersonal relationships) than those in either the earlier or later stages of sexual identity development, suggesting that sexual identity issues take precedence over other issues during the emotional middle period of sexual identity development.

Cass's (1996) model also underscores the importance of peer group interaction. As students' sexual identity develops, contacts with other lesbian and gay individuals influence how students come to see themselves (Cass, 1996). Thus, providing opportunities and encouragement for students to interact with other gay and lesbian persons, as in the LGBQQA, is helpful.

Critique. Several problems exist with the early sexual identity development models, most notably Cass's model (Frable, 1997; Levine & Evans, 1991). First, most of the models reflect the social and political forces of the 1970s when they were developed and may not reflect current social realities. For example, recent research has demonstrated that an integrated sense of identity can be achieved without moving through the period of anger and opposition toward heterosexuals that is included in most models developed during the early years of the gay rights movement when such feelings were prevalent in the face of strong societal homophobia and harassment (Eliason, 1996b).

Another perceived weakness in early models of gay and lesbian identity development is the failure to differentiate personal identity development from development of identity as a member of the gay and lesbian community (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000). Cass and other theorists assumed that to be mentally healthy, a person must publicly identify as gay or lesbian and be active in the community.

Third, many of the early models lack a strong research base to support their suppositions (Eliason, 1996b; Frable, 1997; Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000), and longitudinal studies that are necessary to really map development are rare (Frable). Recent studies of milestone events in the lives of gay men and lesbians, such as first awareness of same-sex attraction, labeling self as gay or lesbian, and becoming involved in the gay/lesbian community, have found great variability in the timing and ordering of these experiences rather than the clear linear progression Cass and others outlined (see Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2000; Maguen, Floyd, Bakeman, & Armistead, 2002; Parks, Hughes, & Matthews, 2004; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2004).

Finally, because most of the early work on sexual identity development centered on gay men and white Eurocentric populations, many writers (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Levine & Evans, 1991; Frable, 1997; Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000) have criticized its lack of generalizability to women, bisexuals, and people of color. Feminist theorists argued that the process of development is much more contextually determined for women than it is for men (Reynolds & Hanjorgiris). Bisexual identity, which has often been viewed as a form of foreclosed identity or a transitional stage

between heterosexual and gay or lesbian identification (Fox, 1995, 1996), has more recently been legitimized as a separate sexual identity, the development of which is complex and variable (Ritter & Terndrup, 2002; Robin & Hamner, 2000; Rust, 2002). Finally, Fukuyama and Ferguson (2000) noted that a white Eurocentric bias is evident in most existing models of gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity development. They provided a number of examples, including these:

- Sexual orientation itself is a Western concept not found in all cultures (see also Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). For instance, Latino/as more often identify as bisexual than as gay or lesbian; the latter concepts are seen in the Latino culture as applying to whites only (Cintrón, 2000; Morales, 1989).
- The assumption that gay, lesbian, or bisexual people are always stigmatized does not hold in some cultures. For example, in some Native American cultures (particularly among those that have not been acculturated to white values), "two-spirit persons" are accepted and valued (W. Williams, 1996; A. Wilson, 1996).
- Models that suggest that coming out is necessary to achieve a positive lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity conflict with the community and family values of many cultures. In some Asian cultures, for example, the idea of sexual identity beyond the familial expectation for procreation is nonexistent, and same-sex attraction can be expressed only if it does not interfere with the person's prescribed role within the family (Chan, 1995).
- Integrating two central identities makes the process of identity formation more complex for people of color than it is for white individuals (Jones & Hill, 1996; Wall & Washington, 1991). For example, African Americans must negotiate both racial/ethnic identity development and sexual identity development, processes that are often in conflict given the norms and values of each community (Greene, 2000; Parks et al., 2004). In addition to ethnic and racial identities, the interaction of other social identities with gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity is important to acknowledge. For example, Harley, Nowak, Gassaway, and Savage (2002) stressed that "LGBT college students with disabilities have been relegated to a status of invisibility" (p. 525), in part because "persons with disability have been desexualized" (p. 527). Also, Valocchi (1999) argued that social class has played a significant role in how gay and lesbian identities have been formulated. Fukuyama and Ferguson (2000) stressed that cultural context, privilege and oppression, and social group memberships contribute significantly in gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity development. They also argued that intersection of multiple social identities—gender, ability status, social class, spiritual identity, race, and ethnicity, in addition to sexual identity—is critical in overall identity construction (see also Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Eliason, 1996b; Poynter & Washington, 2005).

To overcome some of the criticisms of the earlier models of gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity development, Fassinger and D'Augelli proposed alternative models.

Fassinger's Model of Gay and Lesbian Identity Development

McCarn and Fassinger (1996) attempted to provide a more accurate model of lesbian identity development than that provided by earlier models. Their model was later validated for men as well (Fassinger & Miller, 1997). Fassinger and her colleagues (Fassinger & Miller; McCarn & Fassinger; Mohr & Fassinger, 2000) sought to address the criticism that Cass and other stage theorists equated identity disclosure and activism with higher stages of identity development. Their work also took into account cultural and contextual influences on development to a greater extent than many earlier stage theories, particularly those developed by psychologists (Fassinger, 1998a).

The Theory. Fassinger and her colleagues hypothesized two parallel processes of identity development: one related to individual sexual identity and the other focusing on group membership identity (Fassinger, 1998a). The former process involves internal awareness and acceptance of being lesbian or gay, while the latter centers around what it means to be gay or lesbian in society and one's role in the gay/lesbian community.

Each of the two processes consists of a four-phase sequence of development: awareness, exploration, deepening/commitment, and internalization/synthesis (Fassinger, 1998a). With regard to the development of individual identity, awareness involves perceiving oneself as different from other people. In the second phase, exploration, one begins to actively investigate feelings of attraction for individuals (or a particular person) of the same sex. In the deepening/commitment phase, one's sense of self as a gay or lesbian person is strengthened, and one's sexual identity becomes more secure and internalized. In the last phase of the individual identity process, one's sexual identity becomes a part of one's overall identity.

In the group membership identity process of the model introduced by Fassinger and her colleagues (Fassinger, 1998a), the first phase centers on awareness of the existence of people with different sexual orientations. In phase two, individuals begin to explore their relationship to the gay and/or lesbian community. In the opening scenario, members of the LGBQQA are doing this by being involved in the organization. In phase three, individuals make a personal commitment to the lesbian and gay community and accept the potentially negative consequences of being part of this group. The LGBQQA officers, who are often called on to speak for the group, are likely at this stage or the next one. The

final phase of group membership identity is internalization of a minority group identity across contexts.

Fassinger (1998a) pointed out that a person could be in different phases of development with regard to each of these two processes but that development in one branch of the model could influence development in the other. Recycling through phases could also occur, particularly as individuals experience new environmental contexts. Unlike in other stage models, coming out to others is not assumed to be a prerequisite for identity integration in Fassinger's (1998a) model.

Research. Research conducted by Fassinger and her colleagues supports the validity of their model. McCarn (1991) studied identity development among a group of thirty-eight lesbians who were diverse with respect to age, education, race, ethnicity, and occupation, while Fassinger and Miller (1997) explored the applicability of the model for a similarly diverse group of thirty-four gay men. In both studies, support was found for each of the two processes as well as the four-phase sequence within each process. Degges-White et al. (2000) provided indirect support for Fassinger's model in their examination of the validity of Cass's (1979) model. Based on the findings of their qualitative study, they stated, "Perhaps [stage 4 of Cass's model] would be a better representation of the experience of lesbians if it was divided into two stages, one stage representing the more reflective inner process . . . and the second stage being a more external process where lesbians seek out community with each other" (p. 328). In their longitudinal study of two first-year students, Evans and Herriott (2004) also reported evidence of separate internal and external developmental processes similar to those in Fassinger's model. However, Stevens (2004) failed to find two processes of development among the gay men he interviewed.

Abes and Jones (2004) explored lesbian identity development in a diverse group of college women, focusing on the intersection of various dimensions of identity, including race, social class, and religion, with sexual identity. They also considered the influence of cognitive and interpersonal development on the manner in which students made meaning of their identities. As Fassinger (1998a) hypothesized, increased cognitive complexity appeared to be related to lesbian identity development. The multidimensionality of identity was evident in Abes and Jones's study, and they argued for a more complex understanding of identity development than that proposed by Fassinger (1998a).

Applications. Fassinger (1998a) stressed the importance of recognizing that gay and lesbian individuals may be in different places with regard to their individual and group identities. Because a student is not active in an organization such as the LGBQQA does not mean that he or she does not have a secure sense

of self as gay or lesbian. Factors such as parental attitudes, level of support in the student's academic department, or partner's comfort with being out can all affect how open and involved a person is in the larger community. Conversely, a high level of community involvement does not necessarily mean that a student is personally secure with his or her individual identity. Understanding the two separate processes of development is important when working with gay and lesbian students.

Tomlinson and Fassinger (2003) explored the relationship of lesbian identity development, perceived campus climate, and career development for 192 lesbian and questioning college women. Their findings indicated that vocational development is influenced by campus climate and, to a lesser degree, by lesbian identity development status. They suggested that lesbian and questioning students might feel freer to explore both their sexual and vocational identities in an environment that is supportive. Thus, career counselors need to create a visibly welcoming environment for gay and lesbian students.

D'Augelli's Model of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Development

Arguing against the essentialist notion of a linear identity development process, D'Augelli (1994a) introduced a life span model of gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity development based on the idea that identity is a "social construction," shaped to varying degrees by social circumstances and environment and changeable throughout life. D'Augelli (1994a) pointed out that the social invisibility of sexual orientation and the social and legal penalties associated with same-sex sexual expression represent two unique and powerful barriers to self-definition as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Societal oppression can lead to feelings of panic, anxiety, and denial when individuals first become aware of thoughts and desires indicating same-sex attraction. Because of oppression and the feelings it elicits, developing a gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity takes time.

The Theory. D'Augelli's (1994a) life span model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity development takes into account "the complex factors that influence the development of people in context over historical time" (p. 317). Three sets of interrelated variables are involved in identity formation: personal actions and subjectivities, interactive intimacies, and sociohistorical connections.

Personal subjectivities and actions include individuals' perceptions and feelings about their sexual identities, as well as actual sexual behaviors and the meanings attached to them. In the opening scenario, for instance, Travis, the advocacy director, perceives that no heterosexual advisor could be supportive of the LGBQQA and actively opposes Andrea's selection.

Interactive intimacies include the influences of family, peer group, and intimate partnerships and the meanings attached to experiences with significant others. In the scenario, the officers of the LGBQQA are aware of the influence their new advisor can have on them; they are also influenced by each other in the group setting.

Sociohistorical connections are defined as the social norms, policies, and laws found in various geographical locations and cultures, as well as the values existing during particular historical periods. Certainly students today have greater opportunities to come together and live in a society that is more open about sexual orientation than did students in earlier decades of the twentieth century, when an organization such as LGBQQA could never have existed.

Assumptions of D'Augelli's Model. Accepting the assumptions of more general life span models (for example, Baltes, 1987), D'Augelli (1994a, 1994b) viewed development of sexual orientation as a life-long developmental process. Multiple changes can occur over time in attitudes, feelings, and behavior.

"Developmental plasticity," a concept that refers to human responsiveness to environmental and biological changes, is important in D'Augelli's (1994a) model. At certain times, sexual identity may be very fluid, while at other times, it will be more solidified. Hormonal changes, social circumstances, and peer relationships at different life stages are three factors that may influence development.

Another idea that D'Augelli (1994a, 1994b) borrowed from the life span perspective is that the developmental path of each individual is different. D'Augelli suggested that there may be more similarities in sexual self-definition in certain periods of life, such as late adulthood; in certain kinds of families, such as those that do not value difference; in certain communities, such as those that are highly homogeneous; and in certain historical periods, such as the 1950s. The degree of difference tends to increase in late adolescence and adulthood as persons are exposed to more models of behavior and have more choices about how to live their lives.

Finally, D'Augelli (1994a, 1994b) stressed the impact that individuals have on their own development. People not only react to social circumstances, they make choices and take action. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, particularly, shape their own identity, since our heterosexist culture provides little or no socialization for how to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual. In the LGBQQA, the students are defining for themselves what it means to be gay, lesbian, and bisexual personally and on their campus.

The Identity Development Process. D'Augelli (1994a) identified six interactive processes (not stages) involved in lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity development:

- *Exiting heterosexual identity* requires recognition that one's feelings and attractions are not heterosexual as well as telling others that one is lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

Attending a meeting of a group such as the LGBQQA is often a first step for college students in this process.

- *Developing a personal lesbian/gay/bisexual identity status* involves determining for oneself the unique meaning being gay, lesbian, or bisexual will have in one's life. One must also challenge internalized myths about what it means to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Developing a personal identity status must be done in relationship with others who can confirm ideas about what it means to be nonheterosexual. Members of groups such as the LGBQQA often do this for each other.
- *Developing a lesbian/gay/bisexual social identity* consists of creating a support network of people who know and accept one's sexual orientation. Determining people's true reactions can take time. Reactions may also change over time and with changing circumstances, such as whether an individual is involved in an intimate relationship. To some extent, all of the students attending the LGBQQA come seeking a support network. This need is more salient for students like Allison, the social director, who are less ready to be publicly out than others.
- *Becoming a lesbian/gay/bisexual offspring* involves disclosing one's identity to parents and redefining one's relationship after such disclosure. D'Augelli (1994a) noted that establishing a positive relationship with one's parents can take time but is possible with education and patience. This developmental process can be particularly troublesome for many college students who depend on their parents for financial as well as emotional support. Some of the LGBQQA members may be struggling with the issue of how to be themselves in their home environments without risking their parents' love and acceptance.
- *Developing a lesbian/gay/bisexual intimacy status* is a more complex process than achieving an intimate heterosexual relationship because of the relative invisibility of lesbian and gay couples in society. D'Augelli (1994a) noted, "The lack of cultural scripts directly applicable to lesbian/gay/bisexual people leads to ambiguity and uncertainty, but it also forces the emergence of personal, couple-specific, and community norms, which should be more personally adaptive" (p. 327). The college years are often a time when individuals establish their first meaningful relationships (Evans & D'Augelli, 1996). In addition to their other reasons for existence, groups like the LGBQQA serve as places to meet potential romantic partners or to see models of same-sex couples.
- *Entering a lesbian/gay/bisexual community* involves making varying degrees of commitment to social and political action. Some individuals never take this step, while others do so only at great personal risk, such as losing their jobs or housing. Some members of the LGBQ faculty and staff were reluctant to serve as the LGBQQA advisor because of the risks they perceived.

In summarizing his theory, D'Augelli (1994a) stated, "A revision of our operational definition of 'sexual orientation' must occur, allowing for the study of the continuities and discontinuities, of the 'flexibilities' and 'cohesiveness,' of sexual and affectional feelings across the lifespan, in diverse contexts, and in relationship to culture and history" (p. 331).

Research. In support of a life span perspective, researchers have documented many different patterns of gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity development and provided evidence that such development occurs over a wide age range (D'Augelli, 1994b; Savin-Williams, 1995). Environment has also been found to influence development. Because urban youth, for example, have more opportunity to meet gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals and to be exposed to LGB culture, they also tend to come out earlier than youth living in rural communities (D'Augelli, 1991; Savin-Williams, 1995; Sears, 1991). Finally, Kahn (1991) and Rhoads (1994) reported that supportive family and friends facilitate formation of a positive LGB identity and self-disclosure.

In a study of identity development of lesbian, gay, and bisexual college students living in residence halls, Evans and Broido (1999) found that students' coming-out process was affected by the three factors D'Augelli (1994a) hypothesized as being involved: personal subjectivities and behaviors (the ways in which they perceived their experiences and how they chose to act on them), interactive intimacies (the attitudes, values, and behaviors of peers), and sociohistorical connections (past settings and specific residence hall environments in which the students lived). A second study, which examined the effect of first-year students' participation in an ethnographic investigation of the campus climate for lesbian, gay, and bisexual students, also revealed that involvement with the sociocultural environment of a college campus; interactions with significant others, including peers and mentors; and the students' actions and reflections on their experiences in the form of journals and debriefing sessions influenced the identity development of a gay student and a student questioning her sexual identity (Evans & Herriott, 2004).

In a study investigating aspects of gay students' identities and factors that influenced identity development, Stevens (2004) confirmed D'Augelli's (1994a) belief that sexual identity development is nonlinear and varies depending on context and the sense that gay men make of their situations. In particular, interactions with different people (peers, staff, faculty) led to revisions in the participants' identity. Critical incidents reported by the participants "centered around disclosure of their gay identity and assessment of their surroundings" (p. 201). The men reported that incidents of heterosexism and homophobia in the campus environment, as well as supportive statements and actions, had a significant effect on their willingness to disclose.

Love, Bock, Jannarone, and Richardson (2005), examining the link between lesbian and gay identity development and spiritual development among college students, found that the twelve lesbian and gay students in their study had all addressed four of the six developmental processes that D'Augelli (1994a) suggested as part of the identity development of lesbian and gay students. A significant majority had also dealt with the other two processes: developing intimacy status and coming out to parents. Their study validated the role of past experiences and environment (sociohistorical connections), the values and beliefs of parents and peers (interactive intimacies), and the meaning that the individuals made of their experiences (personal subjectivities) in the extent to which students were able to reconcile their sexual and spiritual identities. Love et al. stressed that nonlinear models of identity development, such as D'Augelli's (1994a), are more helpful than stage models when considering the interaction of multiple aspects of identity.

Applications. As D'Augelli's (1994a) theory suggested, environmental factors play a major role in the development of a positive gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity. Strategies for creating more supportive campus environments for lesbian, gay, and bisexual students can be found in Cramer (2002), Wall and Evans (2000), Sanlo (1998), D'Augelli (1996), Evans and D'Augelli (1996), and Evans and Wall (1991). An inclusive approach that addresses campus policies; provision of campus support services and resources specifically for lesbian, gay, and bisexual students; programming for heterosexual as well as gay, lesbian, and bisexual students; inclusion of content about gay, lesbian, and bisexual topics in the curriculum; supportive faculty and staff who are willing to act as advocates and role models; and active intervention to address homophobic acts are critical (D'Augelli, 1996; Evans & D'Augelli, 1996). "Safe zone" programs (Evans, 2002)—networks of individuals who identify themselves as available to provide support and information to gay, lesbian, and bisexual students—provide personal support that D'Augelli (1994a) viewed as important in identity development. They also provide visible signs of support that can make the climate appear more positive to gay, lesbian, and bisexual people.

Based on the findings of Evans and Broido's (1999) study of the coming out process for students in residence halls, Evans (2001), Evans and Broido (2002), and Evans, Reason, and Broido (2001) made specific recommendations designed to enhance the climate of college residence halls. Strategies included hiring LGB-affirmative staff and training them so they can effectively address homophobia and provide support to gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. The importance of developing policies to support lesbian, gay, and bisexual students and actively confronting acts of harassment was also stressed. Visible programming, curricular changes to educate students, and support groups and social activities where

lesbian, gay, and bisexual students can meet other members of the community were recommended. Bourassa and Shipton (1991) and Schreier (1995) provide examples of affirming programming.

Heterosexual Identity Development

Perhaps because of the assumption that heterosexuality is normative, almost no attention has been given to heterosexual identity development (Bieschke, 2002). As Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1993) noted, normative identities "are always less well theorized, less articulated, less self-conscious, than are oppositional or oppressed identities; lack of reflectiveness is the privilege of power" (p. 32).

Early Views of Heterosexuality

While Freud did view heterosexuality as a constructed identity, with the gender of individuals to whom persons are attracted being influenced by children's interactions with their parents, most theorists who followed Freud took an essentialist position, viewing heterosexual identity as innate and fixed (Eliason, 1995). By the end of the twentieth century, theorists again began arguing that sexual identity development was a fluid process influenced by historical period, societal norms, and culture (Katz, 1995; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1993). Feminist writers (Hyde & Jaffee, 2000; Rich, 1980) contributed to the constructivist position, arguing that social forces such as family, peers, the media, and the educational system played a significant, though often unconscious, role in pushing women to adopt a heterosexual identity.

Recently some efforts have been made to explain heterosexual identity formation from a developmental standpoint. For example, using Marcia's (1980) identity development model, Eliason (1995) found evidence of identity exploration and commitment in heterosexual students' written explanations of how their sexual identity was formed and how it affected their lives. Worthington, Savoy, Dillon, and Vernaglia (2002) pointed out limitations of this model, including its failure to account for variation in commitment and exploration across time.

Stage models of heterosexual identity development have also been introduced. Sullivan (1998) modified Hardiman and Jackson's (1992) racial identity development model to describe both lesbian/gay/bisexual and heterosexual identity. Sullivan's model consisted of five stages of increasing awareness and complexity regarding sexual identity. Suggesting that heterosexual identity development parallels white identity development, Simoni and Walters (2001) also proposed a five-stage model starting with a complete lack of awareness of heterosexism progressing

to full acknowledgment of the heterosexual bias in society. Worthington et al. (2002) pointed out the limitations of stage models of heterosexual identity development, particularly noting their inability to allow variation and fluidity in the developmental process.

Using a somewhat different approach, Mohr (2002) proposed that heterosexual identity derives from the interaction of individuals' "working models of sexual orientation" (p. 539) and their "core motivations" (p. 539). Individuals' working models (beliefs) about heterosexual identity are determined by their sexual attractions, fantasies, and behavior, as well as their exposure to information about sexual orientation from external sources such as the media, significant others, and societal institutions. The roles played by individuals' core motivations—to be accepted by others and to maintain an internally consistent self-concept—suggest that individuals' ideas about sexual identity are influenced by both the views of people who are important to them and their own need for congruence between how they experience heterosexuality internally and express it publicly. In a qualitative study, Mueller and Cole (2009) found evidence of Mohr's working models of sexual orientation among the fourteen self-identified heterosexual students interviewed.

The Multidimensional Model of Worthington and His Colleagues

Worthington, Savoy, Dillon, and Vernaglia (2002) have introduced the most comprehensive model of heterosexual identity development to date. Unlike most other models that focus primarily on psychological processes in development, their model also considers social aspects of identity, such as the roles played by group affiliation and privilege. Worthington et al. (2002) defined heterosexual identity development as "the individual and social processes by which heterosexually identified persons acknowledge and define their sexual needs, values, sexual expression, and characteristics of sexual partners" (p. 510). They also stressed that understanding of the privilege and oppression associated with majority and minority group status was important in heterosexual identity development. They included attitudes, values, and beliefs about lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals as part of their model.

Worthington et al. (2002) identified six interactive factors as influential in the development of sexual identity: (1) biology, particularly physical maturation; (2) microsocial context, including the values and attitudes held by significant others; (3) gender norms and socialization; (4) culture, including place and time; (5) religious orientation, including the extent to which one adheres to a fundamentalist belief system and the importance of religion in one's life; and (6) systemic homonegativity, sexual prejudice, and privilege; that is, the discrimination and

negativity targeted at gays, lesbians, and bisexuals and the benefits society awards to heterosexuals.

The Theory. As in Fassinger's (1998a) model of lesbian/gay identity formation, Worthington et al. (2002) included two interactive processes in their model of heterosexual identity development: (1) an internal process of identity development related to one's growing awareness and acceptance of "one's sexual needs, values, sexual orientation and preferences for activities, partner characteristics, and modes of sexual expression" (p. 510); and (2) an external process of developing a social identity in which one sees oneself as belonging to a specific sexual identity group (predominantly heterosexual, but possibly having other identities, such as celibate, voyeuristic, swinging, and so forth). A person's social identity also includes seeing oneself as part of a group with specific attitudes toward those whose sexual identities are nonheterosexual.

Drawing on concepts from Marcia's (1980) identity development model, Worthington et al. (2002) proposed five developmental statuses applicable to individual and group identity. These statuses are not rigid, can be revisited at different points in the individual's life, and may be arrived at consciously or unconsciously as a result of both cognitive and behavioral learning experiences. As such, there are many different paths and outcomes associated with the heterosexual identity development process.

The first status discussed by Worthington et al. (2002) is *unexplored commitment.* Similar to Marcia's (1980) foreclosed identity status, unexplored commitment is characterized by unconscious acceptance of a sexual identity largely defined by the expectations of society and important people in one's life; individuals are minimally, if at all, cognizant of their dominant status and, because of the heterosexist assumptions and biases of society, usually exhibit negative attitudes toward individuals who are not heterosexual. It is likely that Blaire, the SGA vice president in the opening scenario, is in this stage of development, as her attitudes about sexuality appear quite rigid. Because movement out of unexplored commitment requires conscious choice, one cannot later return to this status.

Worthington et al.'s (2002) second status, *active exploration,* which is similar to Marcia's (1980) moratorium identity status, consists of careful consideration of one's sexual desires, values, and preferred sexual activities and involves both cognitive and behavioral exploration; it may lead the individual into either of two statuses: deepening and commitment or diffusion. At the group level, the individual becomes aware of the privilege that is automatically ascribed to individuals who profess a heterosexual identity—either questioning these benefits or more actively asserting one's rights to them. Views of nonheterosexual individuals

will vary widely in this status but are likely to be somewhat more positive than in unexplored commitment. Given the openness that the SGA president, Jeremy, demonstrated in the opening scenario, it is possible that he is actively exploring his heterosexuality.

Worthington et al.'s (2002) third status, *diffusion*, is similar to Marcia's (1980) identity diffusion status in which the individual does not engage in either exploration or commitment. Diffusion is often the result of crisis and may be associated with psychological distress. Persons in this status may actively reject the heterosexual identity expected by others and exhibit a willingness to try new behaviors without considering the implications of their choices. Individuals may enter diffusion from any of the other identity statuses, but the only path out of diffusion is through active exploration.

In the fourth status of Worthington et al.'s (2002) model, *deepening and commitment*, individuals have a more thoughtful and complex understanding of their individual and group sexual identities, as well as a heightened awareness of oppression and privilege. While their attitudes toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals may vary, their positions are carefully considered, self-chosen, and coherent. Although similar in many ways to identity achievement in Marcia's (1980) model, *deepening and commitment* is different from Marcia's achievement status in that it is often the result of developmental maturation rather than active exploration because of the strong societal norms that accept a very narrow range of sexual behaviors. Andrea, the potential LGBQQA advisor, certainly seems to have a strong commitment to her identity that would indicate she is in this status. Individuals may move out of this status into synthesis or back into active exploration or diffusion.

In the final status of Worthington et al.'s (2002) model, *synthesis*, "individual sexual identity, group membership identity, and attitudes toward sexual minorities merge into an overall self-concept, which is conscious, volitional, and (hopefully) enlightened" (p. 519). As such, this status is the most sophisticated and adaptive. In this status, other social identities, such as gender, race, ethnicity, and religious beliefs, are compatible with the individual's sexual identity. It is possible for individuals to move out of synthesis and back into either active exploration or diffusion if faced with significant challenges to their belief systems.

Research. In an ongoing program of research, Worthington and his colleagues have developed two instruments based on their model that show great promise for further exploration of two components of heterosexual identity development: the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Knowledge and Attitudes for Heterosexuals (LGB-KASH), which measures attitudes toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual people

(Worthington, Dillon, & Becker-Schutte, 2005), and the Measure of Sexual Identity Exploration and Commitment (MoSIEC), a measure of sexual identity development (Worthington, Navarro, Savoy, & Hampton, 2008). Both instruments need further validation.

Initial studies based on Worthington et al.'s (2002) model support its validity. For instance, Worthington et al. (2005) demonstrated a strong relationship between positive attitudes toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual people and the extent to which individuals had explored their own sexual identities. In a later study involving 178 practicing psychotherapists and therapists in training, Dillon, Worthington, Soth-McNett, and Schwartz (2008) found that individuals who reported sexual identity exploration and commitment on the MoSIEC also reported being more confident of their ability to work effectively with LGB clients than those who had less fully explored their sexual identity.

Worthington et al.'s (2008) MoSIEC offers great potential for comparing the sexual identity development processes of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual individuals. Preliminary research suggests that they are different. For example, in a study using a measure of Marcia's (1966) ego identity statuses, Konik and Stewart (2004) found that heterosexually identified college students scored higher on identity foreclosure and moratorium than students who identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, while the former scored higher on identity achievement. Heterosexual students were also less likely than LGB students to see sexual identity formation as a process requiring effort and intentionality. In a qualitative study, Mueller and Cole (2009) found that heterosexual students had rarely considered their sexual identity. Their data suggested that exploration related to sexual identity was subtle and less conscious than Worthington et al. (2002) proposed. A study comparing LGB and heterosexual identity development using the MoSIEC is needed.

Applications. Several implications can be derived from Worthington et al.'s (2002) model. As these authors pointed out, sexual identity is often an issue that clients bring up in counseling sessions. Worthington et al.'s (2002) heterosexual identity development model can provide guidance in working with clients who identify as heterosexual. Heterosexual counselors and student affairs educators would also benefit from having a clearer understanding of their own sexual identity development process in order to more clearly understand the sexual diversity of individuals with whom they work (Hoffman, 2004).

Mohr's (2002) model suggests that LGB-affirmative environments are influential in shaping positive working models of heterosexual orientation. Being around others who are secure in their sexual identity and affirmative of sexual diversity provides the necessary context and motivation for the self-exploration and commitment Worthington et al. (2002) have suggested as precursors to achievement

of a synthesized heterosexual identity. Thus, focusing on development of an affirmative environment in which individuals can explore and grow is as important as working with the individuals themselves.

Critique and Future Directions

In recent years, research and theory about sexual identity development has increased in quantity and quality. Models are much more sophisticated and inclusive than were initial attempts to describe the formation of sexual identity.

The four theories reviewed in depth in this chapter—those of Cass, Fassinger, D'Augelli, and Worthington et al.—explore the interaction of psychological and sociological variables in formation of identity and the differential outcomes that result. D'Augelli, in particular, took issue with the rigidity of earlier stage models and presented an alternative that allows fluidity and variation in identity development. His theory has generated more research in college settings than the other models and has led to theory-to-practice applications.

Problems remain, however. First, too few attempts have been made to validate the theoretical propositions that have been advanced. Study of identity and factors related to identity development is preliminary at best. Retrospective self-report does not always present a reliable picture of reality, and it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions about developmental processes based on cross-sectional studies; almost no longitudinal research has been reported. More effort needs to be focused on development of assessment techniques and research designs to validate models of sexual identity development. The work of Worthington and his colleagues is a good start.

Researchers also need to consider the interaction of sexuality and other social identities. Developmental theorists, particularly Jones and McEwen (2000) and Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007), have demonstrated the importance of considering identity development as an integrated process; researchers need to explore the roles that gender, ethnicity, religion, race, disability, class, and other identities play in sexual identity formation.

Sociocultural influences on development also warrant further exploration. Historical time, geography, and cultural norms all contribute to the sexual identity development process. A typology model (Dilley, 2002, 2005) based on an analysis of the lives of gay men in college between 1945 and 1999 shows promise for explaining the different ways in which gay men see themselves at different historical times and how they live out their identities. The influences of societal values at particular times are worthy of consideration as well.

Of particular interest is the effect of acculturation on development of sexual identity for second- and third-generation Americans. Exploration of sexual identity development in non-Western cultures is also important for an overall understanding of the role of culture in identity development.

Bieschke (2002) pointed out the need for an integrated model of sexual identity development that would explain the development of both gay/lesbian/bisexual and heterosexual identities. Theory development along this line would lessen the dichotomization of sexuality and further understanding of the process of identity formation for all people. The development by Worthington and his colleagues (2008) of the MoSIEC, a general measure of sexual identity development applicable across sexual orientation identities, is a step forward in this area.

In addition, as Broido (2000) argued, a resolution to the essentialist/constructionist debate is needed. It seems likely that sexual feelings are innate and sexual identity is constructed in interaction with the environment. This idea deserves further exploration. What is most important, however, as Broido reminded us, are the personal definitions individuals use to describe their sexual identities. The implications of personal identity definitions for other outcomes, such as self-esteem and decision making, require further study.

This chapter underscores the limited number of studies that have examined sexual identity development in college settings or ways that sexual identity development theory can contribute to intentional design of strategies to enhance identity formation. We encourage higher education scholars to build on the research that is available and to develop and evaluate interventions to facilitate the sexual identity development of students.