CAN'T WE JUST BE WHO WE ARE? THE EXPERIENCES, IDENTITY, AND

BELIEFS OF ADOLESCENTS WITH DISABILITIES WHO IDENTIFY AS A

SEXUAL OR GENDER MINORITY

by

LAUREN GUTMANN KAHN

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Department of Special Education and Clinical Sciences
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

June 2014

DISSERTATION APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Lauren Gutmann Kahn

Title: Can't We Just Be Who We Are? The Experiences, Identity, and Beliefs of Adolescents with Disabilities Who Identify as a Sexual or Gender Minority

This dissertation has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Department of Special Education and Clinical Sciences by:

Lauren Lindstrom, PhD	Chairperson
Brigid Flannery, PhD	Core Member
Deborah Olson, PhD	Core Member
Judith Raiskin, PhD	Institutional Representative

and

Kimberly Andrews Espy	Vice President for Research and Innovation; Dean of the Graduate School

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

Degree awarded June 2014

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Laurie Gutmann Kahn

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Special Education and Clinical Sciences

June 2014

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The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of adolescents with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority within four ecological domains of self, school, family, and community and of how those experiences shape identity, sense of self, and beliefs about the future. Using in-depth semi-structured interviews, this research was conducted with an intersectionality framework that examined how the intersection of markers of difference inform individual reality and lived experiences for young adults with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority. The sample included eight adolescents in high school across the state of Oregon who had a 504 plan or an Individualized Education Program and identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, or queer.

A multiple-phase data analysis led to in-depth descriptions of each individual's experiences as well as consistent cross-case themes. Key themes in the individual context included: identity development, positive beliefs about identity, navigation of identity labels, strategies for facing discrimination, and relationships. Experiences in the home context that shaped identity focused on the key areas of support, rejection, and religion. Concerning the school social context, the themes that emerged were the overlap of queerness and disability in the schools, Gay Straight Alliances and extracurricular clubs, and desired staff

characteristics for an adult ally in school. No consistent themes were identified in the community domain. These findings contributed to the participants' descriptions of their beliefs about the future, focusing on independent living, postsecondary education, and employment. Analysis extends the limited research available for this subgroup, shedding a light on the importance of inclusive research. In addition, findings support implications for changes in how we work with students with disabilities who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, or intersex as well as how we train and support our teachers to work with all students and engage in anti-discriminatory practices.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Laurie Gutmann Kahn

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

> University of Oregon, Eugene
> Mercy College, Bronx, NY
> Trinity College, Hartford, CT

DEGREES AWARDED:

> Doctor of Philosophy in Special Education and Clinical Sciences, 2014, University of Oregon
> Master of Science in Urban Education, 2006, Mercy College
> Bachelor of Arts in Education Studies and Sociology, 2003, Trinity College

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

> Secondary Special Education and Transition
> Disability and Culture
> Teacher Education

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

> Adjunct Instructor, University of Oregon, 2011 - Present
>
> Practicum Supervising Faculty, University of Oregon, 2011 – 2013
>
> Research Intern, University of Oregon, 2009 – 2013
>
> Student Services Staff, IMG Academies, Bradenton, FL, 2008 - 2009
>
> Special Education Teacher, New York Department of Education, 2004 – 2007
>
> Social Work Intern, Dr. White Community Center, Columbia School of Social Work, 2004
>
> Program intern, Youth Advocacy Center, New York City, NY, 2003
>
> Teaching Assistant, Discovery Institute Teaching Scholars, College of Staten Island, NY, 2003

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

University of Oregon, College of Education Travel Grant, 2014

Council of Exceptional Children Graduate Student Scholarship, 2014

Pat Sitlington Emerging Researcher Award Runner-up, 2013

Clare Wilkins Chamberlin Memorial Research Award, 2013

General University of Oregon Graduate School Award, 2013

Boone Conference Travel Award, Boone Mentorship Endowment Fund, 2013

PAIR Leadership Grant funding from U.S Department of Education, 2009-2013

Masters Degree Distinction Award, Mercy College, 2006

Education Award, Americorps, 2005

PUBLICATIONS:

Kahn, L., Lindstrom, L., & Murray, C. (in press). Factors contributing to preservice teachers' beliefs about diversity. *Teacher Education Quarterly*.

Lindstrom, L. & Kahn, L. (2013). Career advancement for young adults with disabilities. In J. Heymann, M. Stein and G. Moreno (Eds.), *Disability and Equity at Work*. New York: Oxford University Press. 213-241. (Invited book chapter).

Lindstrom, L., Kahn, L. G., & Lindsey, H. (2013). Navigating the early career years: Barriers and strategies for young adults with disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 39, 1, 1-12.

(The following was published under a former name.)
Gutmann, L, (2007). Yes, you are understanding! *Schools: Studies in Education*. 4(1), 61-71.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

"Appreciation is a wonderful thing: It makes what is excellent in others

belong to us as well." -Voltaire

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to all of the individuals who contributed to the completion of this dissertation study. As Voltaire stated, this research was a result of numerous contributors and belongs to all of them. First, I would like to thank Dr. Lauren Lindstrom, my dissertation chair and advisor, for her guidance and support throughout my study design, data collection, analysis, and writing. In addition, I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Brigid Flannery, Dr. Deborah Olson, and Dr. Judith Raiskin (my dissertation committee members) for their direction and guidance. Next, I want to acknowledge the faculty, staff, and students involved in the Secondary Special Education and Transition research unit for their valuable input. It is also critical for me to express my gratitude to the network of school professionals who helped me find and interview the eight adolescents who participated in my research. Finally, I would like to extend a special thank you to my family, partner (Joshua Kahn), and friends who have provided be with unconditional love and encouragement over the years. Without them, this dissertation study would not have been possible. Thank you.

This dissertation is dedicated to Artemis, Cylis, Purple, Sarah, Fuzzer, Luna,
Ron, & Elijah for their honesty and bravery. It is also dedicated
to the students who are silenced by fear or rejection with
the hope that the voices of these eight participants will
contribute to their emancipation.

Orchid
By "Cylis Bennet" (name changed to protect confidentiality)

A myth to legend,
Legend to reality.
A mistaken identity.
My wicked art is described with a deep purple and the splash of white.
I'm delicate but build to stand against the odds of society.
Recognized by being perched on a tree.
I don't take more than need and give only when I have it.
I flower for those who choose to see.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is an active developmental phase in which individuals develop skills, knowledge, sense of self, and values in preparation for transition into their adult lives (Sadowski, 2008). For adolescents with disabilities, there are many potential barriers that make the transition to adulthood more challenging and may lead to poor post-school outcomes (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine & Marder, 2007). Young adults with disabilities have lower rates of vocational and educational attainment compared to non-disabled peers as demonstrated by discrepancies in both school and post-school achievement indicators (Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000; Lindstrom, Doren, Metheny, Johnson, & Zane, 2007; Murray, 2003; Wagner et al., 2007).

Research documenting poor post school outcomes has led to greater awareness of the need to support adolescents with disabilities during high school to increase positive outcomes concerning their transition to independence (Murray, 2003). Halpern's model of transition (1985) was fundamental in articulating the multi-faceted nature of transition for young adults with disabilities. Prior to this seminal theory of transition to adult life for students with disabilities, services were focused on achieving the uni-dimensional goal of successful post-school employment. Halpern expanded the goals of service delivery beyond an employment-only approach by focusing on the primary goal of "living successfully in one's community" (p. 480). In addition to meaningful and successful employment, this includes independent living, which encompasses the quality of a person's residential environment and her or his social and interpersonal network, improving one's quality of life. This multidimensional framework is essential to those researching and practicing in the field of secondary special education and transition.

Although students with disabilities experience poorer post-school outcomes than their peers, they are not a homogeneous group (Greene & Nefsky, 1999; Gil-Kashiwabara, Hogansen, Geenen, Powers & Powers, 2002; Harry, 2002; Trainor, Lindstrom, Simon-Burroughs, Martin, & McCray Sorrells, 2008). The diversity of identities, experiences, and perspectives of students with disabilities is as varied as in the general population. Previous research has identified many subgroups of students with disabilities that are marginalized and vulnerable to increased discrimination and negative post school outcomes (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2005; Gil-Kashiwabara et al., 2007; Green & Nefsky, 1999; Harry, 2002; Murray, 2003; Trainor et al., 2008). Some of these sub-groups include students with disabilities who are in poverty, youth of color, females, English language learners, immigrants, sexual minorities, and other marginalized groups. The effects of institutional racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, classism, heterosexism, and other hegemonic forces compounded with ableism, create greater challenges and barriers for students with disabilities who identify with one or more marginalized groups. Although research is beginning to bring awareness to the lived experiences and outcomes of these subgroups, one subgroup in particular exists at the intersection of two historically marginalized identities that has received very little attention in research and practice are individuals with disabilities who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, queer, transgender, or intersex (LGBTQI) (Duke, 2011; Sherry, 2004). This subgroup is the focus of this study.

Conceptual Influences

Ecological model. Viewing transition from secondary school towards adult independence for students with disabilities from an ecological model allows us to understand the interconnected relationship between the individuals and their social and cultural environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Individuals gain an understanding about themselves

both as unique entities and as group members through cognitively processing their interactions with their social context (Phinney, 2008). Identity development is shaped by multiple interacting social and cultural forces including a) the microsystem, consisting of direct influences like peers, family, and classrooms; b) the exosystem, consisting of larger, indirect influences such as school, community, and media; as well as c) the macrosystem, consisting of cultural values, customs, and laws that influence the individual's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This study focuses on the experiences and beliefs of young adults with disabilities who identify as LGBTQI across four contexts within this ecological framework: a) the individual, b) the home, c) the school, and d) the community.

Intersectionality. In order to understand the meaning and manifestations of multiple categories of identity, difference, and exclusion/oppression, this research utilizes a framework of intersectionality. Intersectionality is the term given to studying and speaking about how the facets of identity that are sites for privilege and oppression (race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability status) inform individual reality and lived experiences (Bowleg, 2008; Collins, 1999; Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005). Scholars in the field of special education and disability studies in education have called on researchers to adopt an intersectionality framework in order to understand the political, social, cultural, and historical context of disability and its effect on lived experience within schools (Garcia & Ortiz, 2013). Even though identities are multi-faceted by nature, research has given very little attention to how social categories depend on one another for meaning (Cole, 2009; Warner, 2008). The construct of intersectionality was developed within a critical feminist studies framework that criticized gender-based and race-based research for ignoring the unique experiences of those that live at the subjugated points of the intersection of identities (Bilge, 2010; Collins, 1999; McCall, 2005). Many of the first researchers using an intersectionality

framework explored why it was not possible to understand an African-American woman's experience by separately studying the marginalization of African Americans and the marginalization of women in an additive nature (Bowleg, 2008; Crenshaw, 1991). The perspectives and experiences of an individual who has multiple subjugated identities are qualitatively different because their social identities are interdependent and mutually constitutive (Bowleg, 2008; Warner, 2008) and not compartmentalized. Intersectionality aims to go beyond simply recognizing that there are unique and multiple forms of oppression and marginalization that come out of social categories and seeks to understand how these interactions produce and reproduce social inequity (Bilge, 2010; Collins, 1999; Crenshaw, 1991).

Very little research has been conducted on the intersection of sexual orientation and disability, so the literature does not offer many examples. However, an example of how ableism and heterosexism overlap in the political culture (and how that affects an individual's experience), Sears (2005) discussed a case, Kansas State v. Limon in which an 18 year old boy with intellectual disabilities engaged in consensual sex with a 14 year old boy, also with intellectual disabilities. The state law for statutory rape was more lenient for teenagers; however, same-sex couples were excluded from that leniency. The 18 year old was sentenced to over 17 years in prison while if the same act was conducted between a male and a female, the maximum time would have been 15 months in prison (Sears, 2005). Despite his intellectual disabilities, the court deemed that he was fully aware of his actions. Because of his attorney's case to dismiss the charges due to discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, the wording of the law was changed and the young man was released from prison (Perelman, 2006). Another example of intersectionality concerning sexual orientation and disability is the experience that many individuals with physical disabilities, especially

4

those youth still living with their parents, are dependent upon their families for transportation due to a lack of accessible modes of transportation available. For individuals who also identify as LGBTQI, if their families are homophobic or if they do not feel safe disclosing their sexual orientation, the LGBTQI individual with disabilities will not be able to access homosocial environments where they could meet other LGBTQI individuals, learn about their identity, and gain a sense of community (Sears, 2005).

When using an intersectionality approach to research, the central category of analysis is the relationship between the multi-faceted nature of social relations and subject formations (McCall, 2005). Utilizing intersectionality within a research context does not dictate the use of a different set of methods; rather, it requires a reconceptualization of the meaning and consequences of the social categories we are examining. When conducting research using an intersectionality approach, we need to avoid treating social categories as if they are independent variables that are tangible representations of identity. Doing so would imply that these labels are characteristics of the individual rather than the social construction of the more macro-level hegemonic processes (Cole, 2009; Warner, 2008). Instead, the focus needs to be the emergent intersections between the social categories.

Labels and categories of difference. Researchers who want to understand the lived experiences of individuals living in locations of oppression and privilege but who also want to problematize the normalized nature of the social categories of difference that they are examining, such as sexual orientation and ability, often run into conflict concerning their use of labels and social categories. Utilizing an intersectionality approach allows the researcher to simultaneously question the social group defining process and view socially constructed categories through a critical lens. This acknowledges the relationships and social belonging that the categories can create as well as the social power imbalance they represent

5

(McCall, 2005). My research aims to use intersectionality in my conceptualization of group differences, primarily regarding disability and sexual minority labels, providing me with the ability to use labels and social group categories to strategically critique larger systemic processes of privilege and oppression (McCall, 2005).

Since one of the main foci of my dissertation is identity and its relationship with the beliefs and lived experiences of LGBTQI youth with disabilities, it is important for me as a researcher to be clear with my operationalization of these concepts. The normalized use of these terms (disabled, gay, lesbian, etc.) and labels are a powerful way to maintain and reproduce the hegemonic power structures where some of these labels are privileged and others are not (McDermott & Varenne, 1995; Sherry, 2004). By conducting this research concerning the intersection of two labels, I am also entering into a study examining the identity politics in which these labels are embedded (Levy & Johnson, 2012; Sadowski, 2008; Sherry, 2004). Using an intersectional approach with theoretical influences from Queer Studies and Disability Studies allows me to use labels and social group categories to strategically critique larger hegemonic processes (McCall, 2005).

Disability labels. Disability is a category and label that is diverse, unclear, and open to interpretation, yet the presence of a disability label may lead to unequal outcomes in one's ability to access education, housing, healthcare, transportation, and other aspects of independent functioning (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2012; McDermott & Varenne, 1995; Savaria, Underwood, & Sinclair, 2011). I purport to approach my research from a social model of disability that aims to distinguish between the impairment (biological and functional limitation) and the disability (the social oppression that results from the category) (Gabel & Conor, 2009; Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare & Watson, 2001). Although the social model of disability is widely recognized in the International Disability Rights Movement, it

6

has had minimal influence over the US institutions (including education, politics, or employment) and culture which continue to view disability through the medical model, a lens focusing on the individual pathology and interventions that attempt to normalize the individual. In contrast to the medical model, the social model of disability focuses on the disabling consequences of social exclusion (Stevenson, 2010). For the purpose of this study, it is important to note that labels have been a pragmatic tool used by people with disabilities and their advocates to obtain modifications, accommodations, and the supports needed to access their right to equal education, employment, transportation, housing, and other aspects of independent life. The same label that allows individuals equal access may also be the term that isolates and excludes them from full participation in society. As stated earlier, I will use various disability labels in my research; however, they will be used critically and to communicate the socially constructed identities that exist in our culture.

Sexual minority labels. Much like disability labels, the labels and categories we use to represent individuals who do not identify as exclusively heterosexual are unstable, open to interpretation, and loaded with challenges (Savin-Williams, 2008). This is especially true when discussing adolescents because they are constantly shifting, negotiating, and redefining their identities (Russell, Clarke, & Clary, 2009), especially concerning their understanding and expression of their own sexuality and relationship preferences (Lipkin, 2008). Unlike disability labels, which are often assigned by professionals, sexual minority labels are mostly self-claimed and self-ascribed.

Many individuals will self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, transsexual, or intersex; however there are many individuals who do not feel they fit into, nor do they want to fit into one of those labels, due to the label's rigidity. Often, they use the term "queer" to describe their identity, a term that was historically used by outsiders in a

7

derogatory manner that is now reclaimed by insiders as an act of resistance (Levy & Johnson, 2012; Lipkin, 2008, Russell et all, 2010). Queer is not just an inclusive category nor is it shorthand for lesbian and gay identities. Instead, it is a political representation that is broader than just an identity; it purports to problematize and deconstruct the binary of sexuality and gender (Levy & Johnson, 2012). Within this category are individuals who do not subscribe to the gender binary who identify as gender queer. Someone who identifies as gender queer, despite his or her biological sex, transgresses the gender binary distinction. Additionally, many youth and adults reject any sexual identity labels at all as an act of resistance and liberation (Lipkin, 2008; Savin-Williams, 2008). This complication of terminology and the ways in which individuals and groups claim these labels is demonstrative of the instability and complexity of identity and social positioning, and it is important to be aware of this when researching the lived experiences of individuals who do not exclusively identify as heterosexual.

This research aims to examine the politics of representation from the perspective of the adolescent experience, therefore allowing me to explore their lived experiences, how they currently position themselves, and how they anticipate their future positionality as they prepare to enter the world of adulthood. This includes how adolescents distinguish and perceive their own identities and labels that they have claimed or been given.

This research uses a variety of terms to represent gender and sexual orientation. First, when describing the youth's gender and sexual orientation identity, I use the words that they have claimed or used to describe themselves. Second, when discussing the larger identity group, this research will use the terms, "sexual or gender minority" or "LGBTQI" to represent all individuals who do not identify as strictly heterosexual or Cisgender. This both represents the larger group identity as well as the social context the identity is situated within.

8

When talking about sexual or gender minorities as a group, the term "minority" is not used to communicate a quantitative ratio. Instead, it refers to a description of a group in a "subordinate position in a multiethnic society, suffering from the disabilities of prejudice and discrimination, and maintaining a separate group identity"(Gibson, 1991). Finally, this research will utilize the term "queer" or "queerness" when discussing transformative issues that attempt to explore the non-heterosexual personal, social, and political issues.

Research Approach and Researcher Positionality

It is important to note that I entered this research with the understanding that research is a situated cultural practice, from conceptualization to making meaning of the knowledge and representations that are produced (Arzubiaga, Artiles, King, & Harris-Murri, 2008). This means that every stage of the process is culturally and social negotiated. Conducting research as cultural work embodies my personal (assumptions, values, etc.), social (the interactions between myself as a researcher and my participants), as well as ideological framework (Arzubiaga et al., 2008). With a background in qualitative social constructivist theory, feminist theory, and disability studies, it would be difficult for me to conduct research about a historically marginalized group, such as LGBTQI youth with disabilities, without utilizing qualitative methodologies. This methodology will give me the opportunity as a researcher to position myself, my values, my biases, and my perspectives within larger social and cultural contexts. Since I am the person who designed the study, decided which questions should be asked, and interpreted the words of the participants, this understanding is a crucial process.

At times during my research I was an outsider, while at other times I was an insider. My background as a special education teacher provides me with the firsthand knowledge of special education environments, processes, and experiences familiar to my participants. I am

9

also an individual with a disability, having been diagnosed with Attention Deficit

Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Learning Disabilities (LD) in adulthood. Although I

never experienced the special education system as a student, I have experienced the

navigation process of identity, disclosure decision-making processes, and understanding

accommodations as a person with a disability. Although I strive to act as an ally with sexual

minorities and am aware of how heterosexuality manifests as a set of institutional practices

that marginalize and subordinate other sexual orientations afforded the power and privileges

that come with heteronormativity (Allen, 2010), I am currently in a heterosexual marriage

with a male cisgender partner (identifying with the biological sex in which he was born, or

non-transgender) and personally identify as a heterosexual, cisgender woman. As a European

American, middle-class woman with a graduate education who is not the parent of a student

with a disability, I bring with me an awareness of a set of values and beliefs that have been

shaped by these positions. This study draws on in-depth interviews with youth with

disabilities who identify as LGBTQI. My research considers the interaction between

sexuality and disability categories while acknowledging that issues of race, ethnicity, class,

gender, and other areas of social power and exclusion are not explored in the depth that they

should be.

Political Climate

In order to understand the context of my research, it is important for me to describe

the time and place that my study is located within. Data collection was conducted

throughout the state of Oregon between March 2013 and February 2014. During this time,

there were several political and social events being reported in the media across the country.

First, and arguably the event with the most media coverage, was the US Supreme Court's

hearings and ruling of Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), 1996. DOMA is

the law stating that same-sex couples were not recognized as spouses in the eyes of the federal government. This case, United States v. Windsor (2013), confirmed that Section 3 of DOMA is unconstitutional under the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment (Banco, 2013; Liptak, 2013). With news reports depicting happy same-sex couples celebrating their commitments to each other publically (Banco, 2013), these images and stories of activism are likely to have had an impact on the youth I interviewed. At the time of this research, Oregon had not legalized same-sex marriage, however it recognized same-sex marriages as of October 2013. The momentum towards achieving marriage equality is building; the Oregon Same-Sex Marriage Amendment may appear on the November 2014 statewide election ballot (Mapes, 2013).

The second federal legislation that occurred during the time of research was the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA). Although this legislation has not received as much attention as DOMA, it is an important political step toward the recognition of the discrimination and inequity that exists in the institution of employment. ENDA, recommending that the US Congress prohibit discrimination in hiring and employment based on sexual or gender orientation by employers with over 15 employees, has been presented to the US Congress every year since 1994 (Peters, 2013). In November 2013, the bill passed the Senate with bipartisan support. These two acts demonstrate that, although homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism still are systemic within our culture, the legislation to battle this kind of oppression is building momentum in several institutional dimensions of our society.

Not all of the influential media coverage concerning sexual and gender minorities was about legislation. In April 2013, Jason Collins discussed his sexual orientation in an op-ed article in *Sports Illustrated*, causing the media to tout him as the first openly gay male

11

professional athlete (as others have disclosed their sexual orientation after retirement) (Collins & Lidz, 2013). Additionally, not all of the news that circulated the country was positive. There were reports of violence and brutality directed at LGBTQI individuals and groups, including the story of two teenage suicides reported, Alexis "Lexi" Lopez-Brandies (Levesque, 2013) and Carlos Vigil (Pazienza, 2013), that were suspected of being the result of homophobic and transphobic bullying. These stories are not unique to this specific time period, but depict the urgency to understand both the lived experiences of LGBTQI youth as well as the larger ideological beliefs that shape our institutions. The students that I interviewed were adolescents during this time where these battles for civil rights equity for individuals who identify as LGBTQI were being openly discussed and won, adding another dimension to the narratives of discrimination, violence, and exclusion.

Purpose, Conceptual Model, and Research Questions

Purpose. The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of adolescents with disabilities who identify as LGBTQI within the four domains of self, school, family, and community, and how those experiences shape identity and sense of self. I examined how identity and sense of self shape beliefs about the future concerning three broad areas of post-secondary transition: employment, post-secondary education, and independent living. This research was conducted with an intersectionality approach that examined how the intersection of markers of difference inform individual reality and lived experiences for young adults with disabilities who identify as LGBTQI.

Conceptual model. Using the four levels of the ecological context with an intersectionality approach to research, the conceptual model for my study is as follows (see Figure 1):
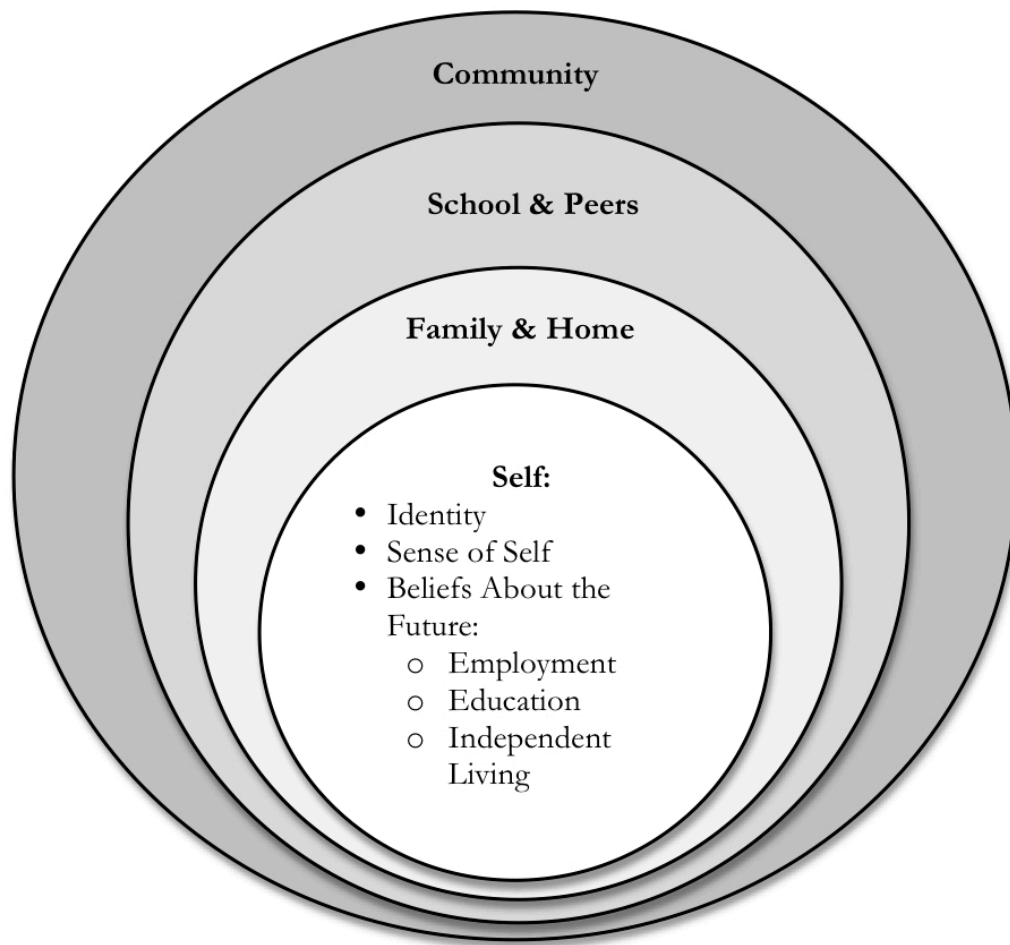
Figure 1: Conceptual Model for Experiences, Identity, and Beliefs of Adolescents with Disabilities who Identify as a Sexual or Gender Minority.

Research questions. Based upon the intended purpose of my study, this research includes three main research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences salient to LGBTQI adolescents with disabilities within four levels of the ecological context:

    A. Self

    B. Home

    C. School

    D. Community

2. How do the experiences salient to LGBTQI adolescents with disabilities affect their sense of self/identity?

3. How does personal (sense of self) and group identity affect beliefs about the future for LGBTQI adolescents with disabilities across the three post-secondary transition domains:

    A. Independent Living

    B. Post-secondary Education

    C. Employment

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research intends to fill a gap in the literature by exploring the experiences, sense of self and identity, and beliefs about the future for adolescents with disabilities that identify as LGBTQI. In this chapter, I first explain the methodology of my literature review and identify and describe the themes that emerged from the literature. Second, I review the literature examining adolescent identity development and beliefs about the future. Then I describe the research concerning risk and protective factors, transition outcomes, and inequalities that students face across the four domains (self, home, school, and community), specifically focusing on young adults with disabilities, young adults who identify as LGBTQI, and individuals who have disabilities and identify as LGBTQI (when available). Since the social, environmental, and individual influences are interdependent, most of the research touches upon the interactions of such mechanisms in more than one of the four contexts.

Literature Review Methodology

The subgroup of adolescents with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority is a population and topic that literature rarely addresses (Duke, 2011; Sherry, 2004). Because of this lack of previous research, this literature review examined both the non-intersectional research that focuses on adolescents with disabilities, adolescents who identify as LGBTQI, as well as the literature that explores the intersection of the two identities. This literature review draws upon the informing empirical and theoretical research from the fields of education (special and general education), counseling psychology, disability studies, women and gender studies, and social work. My conceptual model and research questions

serve as a guide, both of which utilize Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of development (1998) and Halpern's model of transition (1985).

I organized the articles by the themes that emerged from my literature review. To generate the most inclusive potential pool of articles, I performed searches in three online databases: Academic Search Primier, PsychInfo, and ERIC, using a combination of search terms including a) special education, b) disability/disabilities, c) Gay/LGBTQ/GLB/ Homosexuality, d) intersectionality, e) adolescents/adolescence, f) self/identity, g) home/family, h) school/peers/teachers, i) community, j) protective factors, k) barriers, l) independent living, m) employment/vocational/job, and n) postsecondary education/college. Articles included in this review met the following criteria: a) published in the year 2000 or later, b) published in a peer-reviewed journal, and c) addressed the topic area for either adolescents with disabilities, adolescents who identify as LGBTQI, or adolescents who occupy the intersection of disability and sexual orientation. The following literature review synthesizes the outcome of this search outlined by my purpose and research questions.

Adolescent Identity Development and Beliefs About the Future

Individuals gain an understanding about themselves both as a unique entity and as a group member through cognitively processing their interactions within their social context (Phinney, 2008). In order to make sense of and navigate the various landscapes, individuals can only use the tools, ideas, and vocabulary that are directly available for them to access. Many researchers today are grappling with the question of how influential a student's failure or success is focused on issues related to identity: "'Who am I?', 'How do others perceive me?', 'How do I perceive myself?', 'What kind of a student do I want to be?', 'What will my life be like in the future?', and 'What things are and are not possible for me? '" (Sadowski,

16

2008, p3). Combined with cognitive development, puberty, development of social roles and importance of peer networks, sexual experimentation, and creating plans for the future, reflecting on these types of questions is vital to the developmental stage of adolescence. The influx of social, cognitive, and biological demands during adolescence is what Erickson terms the central "crisis" in identity development (Erikson, 1968). Even though many of these influences are happening subconsciously, youth are often sensitive to the many facets of their shifting social world that shape their understanding of themselves including school, peers, family, community, and greater cultural context (Harper, Brodsky & Bruce, 2012; Sadowski, 2008).

Identity is not only one's personal identity (individual sense of self with unique goals, skills, and interests), but also their membership in identified social groups (group identity). One's group identity is comprised of more than just the labels one adopts; it is a dynamic process that develops as one struggles to gain an understanding of who one is. This process includes what group one belongs to both in one's direct social context as well as within the larger social context (including media influences, cultural values, etc.) (Phinney, 2008). Individual and group identities are inextricably intertwined with the direct and larger social context in which they develop (Erikson, 1968; Phinney, 2008).

Beliefs about the future can be defined as one's occupational aspirations, personal goals, anticipated barriers to achieving one's goals and aspirations, and strategies for achieving those goals and aspirations. Occupational aspirations are made up of an individual's ideal work related goals that incorporate one's self-concept, perceived opportunities, preferences, and interests (Rojewski, 2012). These aspirations can encourage or limit educational and career planning, organize and influence decision-making processes, and shape transition related activities (Mau & Bikos, 2000). There is extensive research

documenting how an adolescent's occupational, educational, and independent living

aspirations are significantly related to their adult experiences and outcomes (Mau & Bikos,

2000, Scanlon, Saxon, Cowell, Kenny, Perez-Gualdron, & Jernigan, 2008; Sirin, Diemer,

Jackson, Gonsalves, & Howell, 2004).

Protective and Risk Factors Concerning the Four Ecological Contexts

Although there is a lack of research concerning youth with disabilities who identify

as LGBTQI, information is available that clearly documents the risk and protective factors

for youth with disabilities as well as the risk and protective factors for youth who identify

specifically as LGBTQI. This next section explores the empirical knowledge concerning the

two groups of youth independently (as well as intersectionally, if available) in the individual

context, the home context, the school context, and the community context. Risk factors,

when present, increase an individual's probability of negative outcomes while protective

factors are those that are demonstrated to have a relationship with positive adjustment

outcomes (Murray, 2003; Russell, 2005).

Individual context. There are a myriad of risk factors and protective factors that

affect outcomes for youth concerning the individual. This review primarily focuses on

factors relating to identity, sense of self, and beliefs about the future in the individual context

for youth with disabilities, youth who identify as LGBTQI, and youth with disabilities who

identify as LGBTQI.

Youth with disabilities in the individual context. There are a variety of individual

variables that can support or hinder the successful transition to adult life for young adults

with a disability (Murray, 2003; Trainor, 2005). Young adults with disabilities face unique

challenges in high school and are more likely to encounter struggle as they develop their

identity and begin to think about the future (Ferri & Connor, 2010; Whitney-Thomas &

Maloney, 2001). Compared with their nondisabled peers, students with disabilities are more likely to have low self-esteem, low-self definition, and low or non-existent visions of the future (Kortering et al., 2010; Lindstrom, Harwick, Poppen & Doren, 2012; Whitney-Thomas & Maloney, 2001) due to reoccurring academic failure, academic and social segregation, and struggles with demonstrating successful self-advocacy (Rojewski, 1996).

Research shows that a variety of individual characteristics and skills help mediate the risks and poor outcomes for students with disabilities. These skills include goal-setting, ability to follow plans, self-awareness, and positive self-advocacy (Murray, 2003; Trainor, 2005). Contextual social factors such as peer groups, family, and school influence the development of self-definition and beliefs about the future for young adults with disabilities (Whitney-Thomas & Maloney, 2001). For example, how one's disability is understood and viewed by peers is interpreted and incorporated into their construction of their identity (Wehmeyer, 2008).

For individuals with disabilities, a disability label is often something that is externally obtained (given to them by a medical profession, an educational expert, etc); however, they still go through an identity development process. Disability identity development is a process where an individual with a disability actively integrates their disability related differences and understanding of those differences into their own self-definition (Mpofu & Harley, 2006). Positively developed disability identity contributes to the desire to obtain knowledge about desired careers, including potential barriers and strategies for vocational success. Youth who actively participate in the construction of their disability label are more likely to engaging in self-advocating behaviors (Rosetti & Henderson, 2013) and have positive self-concept outcomes (Savaria, Underwood, & Sinclair, 2011). Higgins and colleagues (2002), used a mixed-methods longitudinal study that examined the process of 'coming to terms' with a

19

learning disability label and the social and emotional impact of the label. Their findings suggest that participants experience a process of becoming aware of their differences, understanding and negotiating those differences, compartmentalizing their disability, and finally, understanding their learning disability as a positive aspect of their identity (Higgins, Raskind, Goldberg, & Herman, 2002). In a follow-up examination, Higgins and colleagues suggest that individuals with learning disabilities who were successful also reported higher levels of disability acceptance.

Youth who identify as LGBTQI and the individual context. Young adults who identify as (or who are identified as) LGBTQI face unique challenges in high school and are more likely to face developmental challenges as they develop their identity. LGBTQI youth report the same individual risk and protective factors as heterosexual adolescents; however, because of the prevalence of homophobia and heterosexism in society it is often difficult for LGBTQI youth to establish supportive and safe relationships with peers, family, and school adults to bolster protective factors. Students who identify as LGBTQI also risk internalizing the negative beliefs, stigma, and stereotypes that society reproduces regarding individuals who identify as LGBTQI. This can result in low self-esteem and self-hatred (Russell, 2005).

Sexuality identity development and vocational identity development both occur most strongly during adolescence. These concurrent developmental processes might influence each other in ways that are not apparent for non-sexual minority youth (Lyons, Brenner & Lipman, 2010; Schmidt & Nilsson, 2006). For example, negative heterosexist beliefs encountered directly (in schools, family relationships) or indirectly (stereotypes, cultural beliefs, and media influences) can contribute to social isolation, stigma, and lower self-efficacy that can exacerbate the typical developmental challenges of adolescence (Espelage, 2011; Harper, Brodsky, & Bruce, 2012; Russell, Ryan, Toomy, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2011).

Students who identify as LBGTQI often consider external barriers to their future aspirations, causing them to limit possible career options (Harper et al., 2012; Parnell, Lease & Green, 2012). Many students who identify as LGBTQI anticipate work-based discrimination to be a normal projected experience. With the historic invisibility of LGBTQI individuals in a variety of occupational fields, they often have limited options for vocational role models and mentors (Lyons et al., 2010).

Fortunately, research is moving toward focusing on positive aspects of identifying as LGBTQI and the relationship to adolescent identity and beliefs about the future. Schmidt and Nilsson suggest that school environment, family variables, and access to LGBTQI career role-models contributes to the concurrent development of a vocational identity and a sexuality identity (2006). Harper and colleagues' (2012) qualitative study with young men with same-sex attraction focuses on a resilience-based approach to exploring sexual orientation identity. They suggest that the men experience positive personal aspects of their conceptualization of being gay/bisexual (more identity flexibility and greater connectedness with females and the gay community) as well as higher levels of resiliency (self-acceptance, importance of self-care, rejection of stereotypes, and activism) (Harper et al., 2012).

LGBTQI youth with disabilities and the individual context. Very little research documents the experiences of identity development of individuals with a disability who identify as a sexual minority (Corker, 2001; Thomson, Bryson, & de Castell, 2001). Often, individuals are defined in uni-dimensional terms where LGBTQI identity is defined by their sexuality and individuals with disabilities are viewed mostly by their impairment. Frequently, sexuality is non-existent in the social construction of disability identity, and when it is, people with disabilities are assumed to be heterosexual or asexual (Das Nair & Butler, 2012). For young adults with a disability who feel self-hatred or stigmatization resulting from

21

internalized negative beliefs about having a disability, the self-recognition of also identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, or intersex can lead to a great deal of confusion, conflict, and complexity without support (Corker, 2001; Whitney, 2006). Developing an identity as a sexual minority with a disability is a challenging task because of a strong heterosexist and ableist presence in our contemporary culture (Henry, Fuerth, & Figliozzi, 2010). Additionally, since many individuals with disabilities require additional instruction and guidance to develop the cognitive and social skills needed to process their identity development, the type of support they are provided can either help or hinder their sexual orientation identity and disability identity development process (Morgan, Mancl, Kaffar, & Ferreira, 2011). Increasing the knowledge and awareness of disability identity allows LGBTQI individuals to incorporate and integrate all aspects of their identity into their sense-of-self (Whitney, 2006).

Home context. The home environment has a strong influence on the academic and social development of adolescents. Parents and family can have a significant impact on the development of an individual's beliefs, values, choices, and interests (Whiston & Keller, 2004). Additionally, the home context can also serve as a mediating factor of support when a student is being victimized at school or conversely, a source of rejection and isolation. For example, Brausch and Decker (2013) found that even the perception of parental support and combined positive self-esteem was a protective factor for suicide ideation, even when the adolescent was exhibiting depressive symptoms.

Youth with disabilities and the home context. The home context is highly influential concerning the support of youth with disabilities during the transition to adult roles. Parents and family members are often the principal support system for youth with disabilities, providing them with crucial guidance, advocacy, management and guidance

22

(Carter & Lunsford, 2005). There are several risk and protective factors concerning the family context for young adults with disabilities that influence involvement in positive behaviors and healthy adjustment. Some of these protective factors include family connectedness, parental presence, moral support, positive family role models, and high family expectations (Blum, Kelly, & Ireland, 2001; Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2011; Dixon & Reddacliff). Lindstrom and colleagues (2007) suggest that family relationships, involvement, support, aspirations, and involvement influence the career development and post-secondary school outcomes for young adults with learning disabilities. Specifically, this study found that a) early and ongoing relationships with parents, b) high family involvement in school and other activities, c) strong family support and advocacy, d) high parental vocational expectations, and e) involvement in intentional career related activities seem to play a role in post school employment outcomes. (Lindstrom, Doren, Metheny, Johnson, & Zane, 2007).

Youth who identify as LGBTQI and the home context. A student's home can be both a source of support or rejection for a developing young adult who identifies as LGBTQI. If a student is experiencing peer rejection or homophobia in the school setting, positive parental support can act as a mediating factor concerning several poor adjustment outcomes including depression, substance abuse, suicide attempts/suicide ideation (Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006; Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008; Mustanski & Liu, 2013; Needham & Austin, 2010). Espelage and colleagues (2008) suggest that positive parental support protects lesbian, gay, bisexual, and questioning students against depression as well as drug abuse while Needham & Austin (2010) suggest that parental support either partially or fully mediates the reports of suicidal thoughts, recent drug use, and depressive symptoms. Of all of the protective factors in Eisenberg & Resnick's (2006) study,

23

connectedness with family has the strongest mediating effect on the suicide behaviors of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students.

Youth who identify as LGBTQI risk being rejected by their family due to possible homophobia demonstrated after the disclosure of their sexual orientation. Needham & Austin (2010), using data from wave 3 of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, suggest that youth who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual report significantly lower levels of parental support than their heterosexual peers. In 2009, Ryan and colleagues' provided evidence of a positive relationship between family rejection for LGBTQI youth and substance abuse, risky sexual behavior, and suicide attempts/suicide ideation. Because of family rejection or fear of family rejection, LGBTQI youth are also over-represented in the homeless and runaway youth population (Dunne, Prendergast, & Telford, 2002; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2012).

LGBTQI youth with disabilities and the home context. To date, few studies exist that examine the unique experiences of youth who identify as LGBTQI with disabilities concerning the family/parental context. I Individuals who identify as LGBTQI and who have a disability often feel familial isolation concerning both of their identities (Sherry, 2004) because they may be the only family member with a disability or who is a sexual minority (Das Nair & Butler, 2012). In addition, many young adults with disabilities are reliant upon their parents for access to social events (transportation, planning, etc.). If a young adult has not disclosed their sexual identity to his/her parents or has faced rejection concerning their disclosure of their sexual orientation, their access to homo-social events could be limited. This impedes their ability to create positive peer relationships and community belonging (Sears, 2005).

School context. School is the location where youth spend the most amount of time outside the home, and thus the school environment significantly impacts experiences, relationships, and psycho-social development (Sadowski, 2008). The school culture and climate, including the relationships that exist between students, teachers, and administrators, can act as either a risk factor or protective factor for youth with disabilities, LGBTQI youth, and youth with disabilities who identify as LGBTQI. Although there are a variety of ways in which school can affect a student, the majority of the literature concerning the risk and protective factors for youth with disabilities, youth who identify as LGBTQI, and LGBTQI youth with disabilities focuses on bullying, victimization, and school harassment. This section begins by examining factors concerning the school climate and then focuses specifically on the literature examining bullying and victimization for youth.

School climate. The school environment is one of the most influential contexts for an adolescent's development due to the everyday experiences that occur there and the importance of peer relationships in identity exploration and formation (Sadowski, 2008). School climate is a multidimensional construct that includes physical, social, and academic dimensions that comprise the quality and character of school life. Examples of dimensions of school climate include the availability of resources, disciplinary procedures, relationships among students, teachers, and other staff, and the quality of instruction, curriculum, and assessment (Epstein & McPartland, 1976). Positive school climates have been demonstrated to have a direct, positive effect on academic achievement and pro-social student behavior (McEvoy & Welker, 2000).

Youth with disabilities and the school climate. There are several risk and protective factors concerning the school climate that influence involvement in positive behaviors and healthy adjustment for young adults with disabilities. Halpern, Yovanoff, Doren, and Benz's (1995)

longitudinal study following adolescents with disabilities from high school to post-secondary placements indicates that the students' high school experiences (including the provision and completion of needed instruction and transition planning and services) are strong predictors of participation in post-secondary education (Halpern, et al., 1995). Limited career exploration and transitional services provided within the school system act as a barrier to successful transition for students with disabilities (Lindstrom et al., 2012; Lindstrom, Benz & Doren, 2004). Other research shows that school connectedness, reporting high grade point averages (Blum, Kelly, & Ireland, 2001), and close and supportive teacher-student relationships (Murray, 2003) are important school-based protective factors for young adults with disabilities.

Participating in an inclusive classroom setting also acts as a protective factor for young adults with disabilities (Cooney, Jahoda, Gumley, & Knott, 2006; Leyser & Kirk, 2004; Wehmeyer, 2008). A large portion of students with disabilities receive educational services outside of the general education setting; less than 50% of students with learning disabilities, less than 30% of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, and less than 15% of students with intellectual disabilities receive education primarily in the general education classroom (Wehmeyer, 2008). This social exclusion from peers and lack of exposure to the general curriculum can have detrimental effects on students with disabilities. A study by Cooney and colleagues suggests that students with intellectual disabilities who spend most of their time in a general education setting have more ambitious vocational aspirations compared to their peers in more segregated school settings (Cooney et al., 2006).

Educational differences in performance can be due to the nature of the impairment, but often may also stem from segregation from general education peers and a lack of access to the general education curriculum (Wehmeyer, 2008). This lack of access often results in

26

young adults with disabilities being less knowledgeable about the world of work than non-disabled peers. They are often disconnected from the career decision process during school and after leaving/graduating from school due to a lack of educational control while in school.

   Youth who identify as LGBTQI and the school climate. Although recent evidence suggests that some peer and school cultures have become increasingly more accepting of sexual minority students, current research on school climate and negative psycho-social outcomes for LGBTQI students tells a more complex story (Lipkin, 2008; Murdock & Bolch, 2008; Wilkinson & Pearson, 2009). According to a study by Wilkinson and Pearson (2009), there are a variety of ways in which high school's heteronormative culture affects the well-being of sexual minorities such as depression, low self-esteem, aggressive behaviors, and academic failure. They also found that school culture in non-urban, religiously conservative, and football-focused environments had a negative relationship with LGBT adolescent wellbeing (Wilkinson & Pearson, 2009). Because of high rates of peer victimization, sexual harassment, and a hostile school climate at school, students who identify as LGBTQI have lower reported rates of school belonging, higher rates of unexcused absences, and difficulty focusing in the classroom (Mitchell, Ybarra, & Korchmaros, 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2011). A study utilizing a nationally representative sample suggests that about 30% of LGBT students missed at least one day of school in the past month due to feeling unsafe in school, while only about 7% of their heterosexual peers had missed a day of school due to their perceived safety (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010). According to a 2003 survey of high school students in the state of Massachusetts, LGB identified students are more than five times more likely than their heterosexual peers to feel unsafe in school and are therefore have an increased risk of missing school or being distracted (Massachusetts Department of

Education, 2004). A study conducted by Robinson & Espelage (2011) suggests that there are significant risks for LGBTQI students for lower school belongingness and unexcused absences compared to their heterosexual peers in high school; however, these risk gaps are significantly greater in middle school. A study by Murdock and Bolsch (2005), which surveyed lesbian, gay, and bisexual high school students to study the moderating influence of school climate (inclusion/exclusion of LGB individuals, personal victimization related to being LGB, and social support from teachers) on school adjustment factors (achievement, discipline, and school belonging) suggests that controlling for middle school achievement, school climate variables have a significant relationship with school belonging, current GPA, and discipline issues. Mitchell, Ybarra, & Korchmaros (2013) suggest that students who identify as LBGQTI reported the highest rates of sexual harassment both in-person and online. They found that this interfered with school, family, and peer relationships. Finally, a study by Hatzenbuehler, Birkett, Van Wagenen, & Meyer (2014) found that students who identified as a sexual minority that lived in geographic locations with more protective schools climates reported significantly fewer suicidal thoughts.

There are also various school variables that can act as mediating factors for some of the negative outcomes for students who identify as LGBTQI and can increase academic achievement, behavior, attendance, and school belonging (Murdock & Bolch, 2005). Research shows that curricula inclusive of LGBT people, history, or events increases positive outcomes for LGBTQI students by fostering a safer school environment, feelings of more school connectedness, reinforcing peer acceptance of LGBT students, and creating a more positive image of LGBT people (Kosciw et al., 2010). Schools that have a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) or other student run support groups also act as a protective factor for students who identify as LGBTQI (Kosciw et al., 2010; Lee, 2002; Murdock & Bolsch, 2005;

Toomy, McGuire, & Russell, 2012). Additionally, having a supportive adult at the school also greatly reduces the psycho-social maladjustment that LGBTQI students are at risk for in the school setting (Kosciw et al., 2010).

Bullying and victimization. One of most pervasive school-based phenomena affecting students with disabilities and those who identify as LGBTQI is bullying and peer victimization (Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2003; Swearer, 2011). Research well documents that bullying and victimization in school is a pervasive issue facing children and adolescents' social development, manifesting harmful psychosocial outcomes for both the bully and the victim (Juvonen et al., 2003; Swearer, 2011). Although bullying is a common occurrence for all children and adolescents, youth who are identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, or intersex (LGBTQI) or disabled are at greater risk of being targeted and have more significant negative mental health outcomes because of being bullied (Espelage, 2011; Hong & Garbino, 2012; Mishna, 2003; Young, Ne'eman, & Gelser, 2011).

Youth with disabilities and bullying. Youth with disabilities are at an increased risk for being targets of bullying and victimization than their non-disabled peers (Rose, Espelage & Monda-Amaya, 2009; Schoen & Schoen, 2010; Young, Ne'eman & Gelser, 2011). It is important to note that much of the increased risk of victimization is due to the stigma of having a disability in this culture and the ways in which our culture understands disability. Targeting students with disabilities as victims is largely due to peer, school and culture-based negative attitudes towards individuals with disabilities and the pervasive paradigm of the medical model of disability (Holzbauer & Conrad, 2010). In this understanding, disability is attributed as a deficit within the individual and makes the person needy, weak, and not as worthy (Mishna, 2003).

29

Because children and adolescents with disabilities are more likely to be targets of victimization in academic and social contexts, they are uniquely vulnerable to increased risk of negative outcomes and poor adjustment (Murray, 2003). Some possible effects of ability-based bullying are decreased academic achievement, lowered aspirations, lowered self-esteem, increased anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress, substance abuse, deterioration of physical health, suicide ideation, school failure, being charged as a juvenile offender, and overall social marginalization (Mishna, 2003; Schoen &Schoen, 2010; Young et al., 2011).

Many students with disabilities exhibit lower levels of social competence or different ways of interaction from the normative behavioral expectations, either as a result of segregation from mainstream education and social opportunities for peer relationships, or due to their disability (Mishna, 2003; Young et al., 2011). For example, Rose and colleagues (2009) suggest that students in self-contained settings are more likely to be both a victim and bully than those in inclusive settings. Being segregated from their non-disabled peers limits opportunities to learn and practice social skills; thus putting students with disabilities at a heightened risk for peer rejection which in turn leaves them more vulnerable to victimization (Mishna, 2003). Although this could be true for a variety of disabilities, students diagnosed and presenting with Autism Spectrum Disorder are especially likely to be targeted because of differences in communication and social interactions (Swearer, 2011; Young et al., 2011). Students with behavioral disorders are also more likely to perpetrate bullying, but it is often retaliatory, making them more likely to be a bully-victim. Youth with conduct-behavior disorders have the highest rates of being bully-victims compared to their special education peers with other documented disabilities (Swearer, 2011).

There are also a variety of psychosocial mediating factors that can alleviate the risks associated with disability-based bullying. Some of these individual factors include high self-

esteem, self-awareness, a strong disability identity and awareness, social skills support, and supportive peer relationships (Mishna, 2003).

Youth who identify as LGBTQI and bullying. Youth who identify (or are perceived to be) lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, or intersex (LGBTQI) are at an increased risk for being targets of peer rejection, bullying, and victimization than their heterosexual peers (Espelage, 2011; Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2011). Bullying and victimization is consistently reported to be higher for LGBTQI students than among those who identify as heterosexual and cisgender (Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008; Espelage, 2011; Hong & Garbino, 2012). Youth who report frequent harassment due to their sexual orientation also have lower grades, lower reported beliefs in the importance of graduating, negative school attitudes and belonging, and higher dropout rates (Espelage, 2011; Poteat, Mereish, DiGiovanni & Koenig, 2011; Russell, 2005). Russell and colleagues (2011) suggest that LGBT-directed victimization is strongly related to young adult mental health and risk for STDs and HIV. Research findings demonstrate that school climates where teachers and school personnel intervene in bullying situations and actively provide social support for sexual minority students might provide a context that is intolerant of homophobic bullying (Hong & Garbino, 2012), alleviating some of the individual risk factors such as suicidality, alcohol and drug use, and depression (Espelage, 2011).

LGBTQI youth with disabilities and the school context. The experiences of LGBTQI adolescents are under-researched in general; however, there is a substantial dearth of extant research that explores the school experiences of LGBTQI adolescents with disabilities (Duke, 2010; Morgan, Mancl, Kaffar & Ferreira, 2011). Results of myths and biases leave LGBTQI students with disabilities especially vulnerable to bullying and abuse (Sears, 2005). School anti-bulling policies often neglect or choose to omit reference to sexual orientation or

disability focused harassment and bullying. When they do, they are constructed as separate categories with no reference to how they can be interwoven (Morgan et al., 2011; Sears, 2005). Students with disabilities who are victims of homophobic targeted bullying could utilize their IEP to include resilience goals, services, and strategies to gain the skills and knowledge for navigating discrimination (Duke, 2010; Sears, 2005).

Community context. The larger social context and community in which an adolescent develops also has a substantial effect on adjustment outcomes because it delineates the amount of and type of support, resources, and inclusion the student receives as well as the level of stigma, discrimination, and isolation he/she will experience (Sadowski, 2008).

Youth with disabilities and the community context. There are a variety of risk and protective factors for students with disabilities in the community context. Socio-economic status is related to disability status as significantly more students from low SES backgrounds receive services in special education settings than students from middle to upper SES categories (Hasnain & Balcazar, 2009; Murray, 2003). This affects students by limiting the resources available within the community to access the supports and accommodations needed for successful transition including health care resources, educational support organizations, and prosocial activities.

The type of opportunities and resources available in the community also affects experiences and outcomes for students with disabilities. Carter et al., (2011) found that transportation availability is the most significant community factor that predicts paid employment for students with severe disabilities. Limited exposure to career opportunities also limits the career aspirations and post-school options and opportunities for young adults with disabilities (Benz et al., 2000; Lindstrom et al., 2012). Experiencing employment in the

community during high school can contribute greatly to the positive development for young adults with disabilities (Benz et al., 2000; Carter et al., 2010; Vondracek & Porfeli, 2003). For example, the research of Benz and colleagues suggests that youth with disabilities who participate in career-related paid jobs in the community are more likely to graduate from high school with a standard diploma (Benz et al., 2000). Lastly, linking community services such as vocational rehabilitation, post-secondary educational institutions, and community and employment service providers to coordinate resources acts as a protective factor for young adults with disabilities to improve transition outcomes, particularly employment outcomes (Fabian, 2007; Muthumbi, 2008; Winsor et al., 2011).

Youth who identify as LGBTQI and the community context. Young adults who identify as LGBTQI are at risk for experiencing harassment, discrimination, stigmatization, and biases regarding their sexual identity. This process can create violence, exclusion, and oppression but it can also create belonging, inclusion, and support. Therefore, students living in a community that is more accepting and inclusive of LGBTQI individuals are more likely to experience inclusion and support than their peers who experience less communal support and acceptance (Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2009; Watson, Varjas, Meyers & Greybill, 2010).

There are various aspects of a community that can have a positive or negative affect on LGBTQI youth. A qualitative study that interviewed staff leaders of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) suggests that several socio-cultural factors create barriers and facilitators to advocacy for LGBTQI youth including public policy, cultural norms, and community resources (Watson et al., 2010). Public policy that includes LGBTQI individuals specifically in policies concerning harassment and discrimination can act as a protective factor for students who identify as LGBTQI. Community resources outside of the school system can

also serve as positive factors for LGBTQI youth. This includes web-sites, local organizations, and supportive professionals (psychologists, physicians, etc. who are aware of issues salient to LGBTQI individuals) that provide emotional, educational, health related, and financial support to LGBTQI youth (Watson et al., 2010). A study conducted by Kosciw and colleagues (2009) shows that there are various characteristics of a community that are more likely to be hostile environments for youth who identify as LGBTQI. Their results demonstrate that LGBT youth in rural communities as well as communities with a lower average adult educational attainment level have greater risk for experiencing hostile climates towards LGBTQI individuals.

Youth with disabilities who identify as LGBTQI in the community context. Heterosexism and ableism can affect various social community groups and movements. Heterosexism within special education, disability-service institutions, and the disability rights movement, and ableism among members of the LGBT community have marginalized LGBTQI individuals with disabilities (Duke, 2011; Sherry, 2004). Until fairly recently, this has caused this subgroup to remain unnoticed in special education, mental health, health and social sciences, disability studies, and sexuality studies research and practice (Duke, 2011). From an individual perspective, myths and stereotypes about disability and sexual-minorities can affect the inclusiveness of the disability community as well as the queer community, making it difficult for an individual with a disability who identifies as queer to feel completely accepted and comfortable in either social group within their community (Das Nair & Butler, 2012; Henry et al., 2010; Thompson et al., 2001).

The literature reviewed for this study revealed that there is a dearth of knowledge on the intersection of disability and sexual orientation. By examining the literature concerning identity, beliefs about the future, risk and protective factors, transition outcomes, and

34

inequalities facing both youth with disabilities and youth who identify as a sexual or gender minority, we are able to gain a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which the literature overlaps for these two groups, laying the foundation for conducting this research.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

This chapter describes my data collection strategies, sample and setting, and data analysis techniques. To answer my research questions, I conducted in-depth interviews with young adults with disabilities who identified as a sexual or gender minority in four different schools in Oregon. The use of qualitative methodology in special education research allows us to gain a rich understanding of individuals with disabilities, their families, and those who work with them (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Kline, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005, Phinney, 2008). This type of research provides an in-depth understanding of the phenomena of focus, gives power to the voice, perspective, and experience of the individual, and empowers disenfranchised groups by allowing them to actively participate in the research process (Blustein, McWhirter & Perry, 2005). These methods have been recommended for research that purports to understand the experiences of youth with disabilities (Brantlinger et al., 2005) and the meanings that people make of their own experiences (Wertz, 2005).

Data Collection

Recruitment. I used a multi-step process to recruit participants for my study. Students were recruited through connections with teachers or other staff members. Utilizing connections through professional organizations and relationships, I provided teachers and other related service providers with information regarding the study (see recruitment documents in Appendix A). School staff were asked to locate possible participants by applying the following criteria: a) identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and/or intersex and have disclosed their identity to the staff member; b) have a documented disability and have/have had either a 504 plan or an IEP at some point in high school; c) are between the ages of 14 and 21, and d) have not yet received a secondary

school diploma or certificate of completion. The educational professionals then spoke to those students to gauge their interest in participation. If the students agreed to move forward with their participation in my study, they either a) chose to begin the interviews directly or b) I set up an information session with myself, the educational professional, and the student to provide them with an overview of the study, my role as a researcher, and their rights as a participant. Only students who were over the age of consent (18) could waive the information session if they chose. During the information session, the student was given a recruitment flyer with my contact information as well as copy of the informed consent for the parents to review (see Appendix A) Once the parents signed and returned the informed consent (if student was under 18) or once the student agreed to participate in the study (if 18 or older), I contacted the student either in person, over the phone, email, or communicated with his or her teacher to schedule the time and location of the first interview.

In order to build rapport with my participants, I spent time allowing them to ask me questions before sitting down for our first interview together either with the school staff present or not, depending on the student's preference. Five of the participants requested an information session while three requested to start with the first interview. Two students (not in the study) requested an information session, but were not able to or chose not to participate in any interviews.

Sample. I adopted a purposeful sampling approach to select participants for this study *(n = 8)*, which allows for the exploration of individual characteristic variables of central importance. All of the participants in the study were high school students who had a diagnosed disability (were on an IEP or 504 plan) and who had disclosed their identity as LGBTQI to the recruited staff member (teacher, related service provider, etc.) attending one of four schools in the state of Oregon. Because there were two participants per school in

this sample, I first present a brief description of the schools before discussing the student sample.

School 1 is a public high school located in a small city (about 150,000 residents) known for its liberal political leanings. There are about 1,200 students attending School 1. They have a well-established Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) run by students. While walking down the halls, I noticed there were many classrooms marked with rainbow triangles and other markings of LGBTQI inclusion.

School 2 is a public high school located in a rural town (about 5,000 residents). There are approximately 500 students attending School 2. The school and town are known for farming and agricultural industry and the generally conservative political environment. School 2 does not have a GSA, but has a club called the Pro-People People club that purported to support all types of people and raise awareness of tolerance issues. The club was encouraged by school administrators to leave out words directly referencing sexual orientation in the club's title and materials due to the conservative nature of a large portion of their community. There were no markings of LGBTQI inclusion in the school at large. The only marking of LGBTQI issues that I observed were in the special education classroom of the teacher who advised the Pro-People People club.

School 3 is a public high school located in the largest city in the state (about 580,000 residents). There are about 1,000 students attending School 3. They have an active Queer Straight Alliance (QSA) and the school has many signs around the building marketing their club as well as additional markings on doors stating that classrooms are LGBTQI inclusive space.

School 4 is an alternative high school and career center located in a small city (about 150,000 residents) known for its liberal political leanings. They offer education and

38

vocational training for out of school youth, ages 14-21 and serve about 100 students. Although there is a plan in place for developing a GSA-type of club in School 4, there was no active GSA at the time of data collection.

Although I did not collect demographic information from the students, information concerning the participants' personal identity and identity group membership was discussed if salient to the participant during the interview. All demographic information is thus from self-report. The final sample (see Table 1) included eight young adults with disabilities who identified as a sexual or gender minority, ranging between the ages of 14 to 19 at the time of the final interview. Each student chose their own pseudonym. Two students from each of the four schools participated. Two participants identified as female, five identified as male, and one identified as transgender. Four of the participants identified as gay, two identified as bisexual, and two identified as pansexual at the time of the interviews. Three of the students described having a 504 plan and five of the students indicated having an IEP. Participants self identified with a variety of disabilities, including Operational Defiant Disorder (ODD), Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Specific Learning Disability (SLD), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Speech and Language Impairment (SLI), Cerebral Palsy (CP), Emotional Disturbance (ED), and Bipolar Disorder (BP). These disability labels were based on the self-report of the student, as IEPs or 504s were only included in the research if the student wanted to review her or his document during the interview process (four students chose to do this). Although racial, ethnic, and socio-economic status information was not explicitly collected, four students discussed issues concerning race or ethnicity. Four students identified as mixed-race during our discussion, disclosing White/European, Hispanic, Arabic, Native American, and Black

identities. One participant identified as White, while three participants presented as

European/White, but did not discuss race or ethnicity throughout the interviews.

Table 1

Self-Reported Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Participant	School	School Type	Age	Grade	Disability	IEP or 504	Sexual/Gender Orientation
Artemis Orion	1	Urban, Public	14	9	ODD, ADHD	504	Pansexual
Cylis Bennet	1	Urban, Public	18	12	SLD, ADHD	IEP	Gay
Purple Panda	2	Rural, Public	18	12	PTSD, SLD	504	Gay
Sarah Smith	2	Rural, Public	16	10	SLD	504	Bisexual
Fuzzer Hop	3	Urban, Public	18	12	ASD	IEP	Gay
Luna Gold	3	Urban, Public	16	10	SLI, CP, Anxiety Disorder, Depression	IEP	Pansexual, Transgender
Elijah Winter	4	Urban, Alternative	18	12	ASD, SLD	IEP	Gay
Ron W	4	Urban, Alternative	18	12	BP, ADHD	IEP	Bisexual

Note. Operational Defiant Disorder (ODD), Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Specific Learning Disability (SLD), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Speech and Language Impairment (SLI), Cerebral Palsy (CP), Bipolar Disorder (BP).

Although not intentional, the age and gender makeup of my sample was

representative of the research that exists concerning who is in special education and who

discloses their identities in high school or younger (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000). Three

quarters of my sample identified as male (with one of those identifying as both male and

female). This was not surprising as females are underrepresented in special education populations (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 2001). I found it interesting that the two female students who participated in my study were two of the younger students. This is consistent with the literature that demonstrates that females tend to claim and disclose their sexual orientation identity younger than males, although males have an earlier onset of same-sex attraction and activity (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000). Only one of my male participants was under the age of 18. Additionally, there were three students under 18 who wanted to participate in the interviews, but were not willing to request permission from their parents or guardians, and so did not participate. These three students were all male.

     Instruments. I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with eight young adults with disabilities who identified as LGBTQI. The semi-structured interviews utilized a protocol (see Appendix B) that I developed based upon my review of the literature. I then reviewed the protocol with several faculty who had knowledge in the content areas, qualitative research, and research ethics. This review process allowed me to gain critical feedback to ensure that my research utilized an empowering approach to research, to promote the self-determination of individuals and marginalized groups (Blustein et al., 2005). The first interview focused on the adolescent's experiences across the four ecological contexts. The second interview focused on beliefs about the future, aspirations, goals, anticipated barriers, and strategies for overcoming those barriers. The third interview focused on disability identity, sexual identity, and how these overlap and influence the participant's beliefs. The third interview also included a follow-up discussion on topics or ideas from the previous interviews, member check, and a short debriefing with the student regarding their research participation experience.

Procedures. I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews. This approach allowed for both me as the researcher and the participant to control the direction of the conversation. After the preliminary information session, and once the informed consent had been signed, the adolescents participated in a series of three semi-structured interviews with the researcher. In one case (Artemis), there were four individual interviews as the third interview was cut short due to a limited school day. The interviews lasted approximately 45 to 140 minutes each and were conducted in a private but comfortable setting to make sure the students felt at ease sharing their experiences and beliefs. All of the interviews were conducted in a private setting at the student's school either during an IEP support class, during a break from classes, or after school.

Before the first interview with each participant, I presented a detailed and clear description of the informed consent, and made sure that the potential participant understood the voluntary nature of participating in this research. This included open-ended questions to check for comprehension of their rights and responsibilities. Students were also provided with his/her own copy of the informed consent as well as my supervisor's and my contact information, should the student want any follow-up information or wished to provide any follow-up commentary. At the beginning of each interview, the participants were provided with an easily understood, verbal reminder of the contents of the informed consent. Each student was also provided small incentives, including a light meal during the data collection process as well as a small gift certificate for participating in each 60-90 minute interview (between $10 and $20). The interview process concluded with a short debriefing session during which the participant reflected upon the interview process. Once each interview was completed, I documented my own impressions, thoughts, and initial interpretations in a separate research journal designated for each participant.

All of the interviews were audio-recorded with a digital hand-held recording device and backed up by a computer software digital recording application. The digital recordings were all transcribed verbatim by myself or a professional transcriber who signed a confidentiality agreement. After I completed transcribing each individual interview, I de-identified the transcripts, using pseudonyms for any names, locations, or other identifying information. Throughout my research process, all digital documents containing identifying information were kept in a password-protected digital folder and all paper documents containing identifying information were kept securely in a locked filing cabinet. Once each interview was transcribed and de-identified, I uploaded the word document into NVivo 10, a qualitative analytic software program that supported the organization, coding, analysis, and presentation of the data. My total data set included 25 interviews and over 700 pages of data across eight participants.

Data Analysis

I utilized a multiple phase analysis process recommended by Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014) to code, draw connections, and explore emerging themes within my data. First, I developed a set of broad descriptive codes based upon my three research questions. I used these deductive codes to apply distinct labels to specific sections of data, such as "home" or "independent living." Throughout this initial coding process, new and more specific codes emerged. I recorded these in my coding memos, and went back through my data to re-code each section with the more inclusive list of first-level codes. Throughout this process, I kept a record of my coding schemes and operational definition of each code and sub-code (See Table 2 for first level codes).

After completing first-level coding, I created a summary report that included all the text coded within each participant's transcript sorted by major categories. Using this

43

summary report, I created an in depth report for each individual participant. These reports

included key findings within all four areas: self, home, school, and beliefs about the future.

This individual level analysis gave me a thorough understanding of each individual

participant's experiences, identity and beliefs before beginning my cross-case analysis. Then,

using NVivo 10, I ran node reports that presented all of the text that was assigned to a given

code across participants. Using these data reports, I explored the themes in terms of

experiences, identity, and beliefs.

Table 2

First-Level Descriptive Coding Nodes and Their Operational Definitions

Name	Description
1. Self	Participants identify aspects of themselves
1a. Self/ Disability	Participants identify aspects of themselves that contribute to their identity as a person with a disability.
1b. Self/ Sexual Orientation	Participants identify aspects of themselves that contribute to their identity as LGBTQ
1c. Self/ Overlap	Participants identify aspects of themselves where their disability identity and LGBTQ identity overlaps or affects the other.
1d. Self/ Sense of self	Participants identify aspects of themselves that contribute to their overall sense of self (who they are as a person).
1e. Self/ Labels	Participants discuss how they understand and use various labels for themselves and for others.
1f. Self/ Outlets	Activities, interests, and hobbies that provide an outlet.
1g. Self/ Experiences	Participants discuss experiences that contribute to their identity
2. Home	Participants identify experiences of their home life that are important to them.
2a. Home/ Parents	Participants identify experiences at home concerning their parents that are important to them.
2b. Home/ Disability	Participants identify experiences at home concerning their disability and disability identity.
2c. Home/ Sexual Orientation	Participants identify experiences at home concerning their sexual orientation and LGBTQ identity.
2d. Home/ Siblings	Participants identify experiences at home concerning their sisters and/or brothers that are important to them.
2e. Home/ Other	Participants identify experiences at home concerning other family members, roommates, etc. that are important to them.
2f. Home/ Self	Participants discuss how their home life affects their sense of

Name	Description
	self/identity
3. School	Participants identify experiences of their school that are important to them.
3a. School/ Peers	Participants identify experiences at school concerning their peers that are important to them.
3b. School/ Clubs	Participants identify experiences in clubs or other organized groups outside of academics that are important to them.
3c. School/ Staff	Participants identify experiences at school concerning the teachers and staff that are important to them.
3d. School/ Academics	Participants discuss experiences in school concerning their academics that are important to them.
3e. School/ Special Education	Participants discuss experiences in school concerning their academics relating to special education or their disability that are important to them.
3f. School/ Transition	Participants discuss experiences in school concerning their academics relating to special education or their disability and the transition post-high school that are important to them (transition activities, coursework, etc.)
3g. School/ Self	Participants discuss how their experiences in school affects their sense of self/identity
4. Community	Participants identify experiences of their community that are important to them.
4a. Community/ Employment	Participants identify experiences of their community that are important to them concerning work, career development, or other employment related activities.
4b. Community/ Religion	Participants identify experiences of their community that are important to them concerning their religious affiliation.
4c. Community/ Disability Organizations	Participants identify experiences of their community that are important to them concerning an organization specific to disability.
4d. Community/ LGBTQI Organizations	Participants identify experiences of their community that are important to them concerning an organization specific to their sexual or gender orientation.
4e. Community/ Other organizations	Participants identify experiences of their community that are important to them concerning another type of organization
4f. Community/ Self	Participants discuss how their community affects their sense of self/identity
4g. Community/ Relationships	Participants discuss their romantic relationships.
5. Future	Participants discuss their beliefs about the future.
5a. Future/ Post-secondary Education	Participants discuss their beliefs about the future concerning post-secondary education (goals, expectations, barriers, & supports).
5b. Future/ Employment	Participants discuss their beliefs about the future concerning employment (goals, expectations, barriers, & supports).
5c. Future/ Independent Living	Participants discuss their beliefs about the future concerning independent living (goals, expectations, barriers, & supports).
6. Intersectionality	The ways in which the experiences and beliefs of participants is

45

Name	Description
	qualitatively different due to the overlap in their identities
6a. Intersectionality/ Similarities	The ways in which their disability identity/experience and sexual minority identity/experience is similar and/or overlapping
6b. Intersectionality/ transition	The ways in which the intersection of their disability and sexual orientation affect their transitional planning and beliefs about transition
7. Favorite Quotes	Quotes that I want to highlight as a researcher that stands out as a favorite chunk of text.

In the second cycle of analysis, I used the resulting first cycle codes to conduct inductive cross-case analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) to compare themes that emerged across the data. Throughout this process, I created similar tables of the codes and their operational definitions as they emerged (See Table 3 for list of second-level codes); however, for the second-level coding, I also included columns for information on each node for each participant. I used these tables to analyze findings both within and across participants, returning to the data to explore the connections and relationships between my findings. After my first level coding of all four contexts, no themes emerged concerning students' beliefs and experiences within the community, although the within subjects data coded "community" was salient to the individual participant. Because of this, I removed social context of "community" for the second cycle of coding and analysis. During this second cycle, much of the data that was coded as "community" now was coded under the appropriate second level inductive code. Although the node of "religion" was originally nested within the "community" parent code, the coded data showed that this was a topic more related to students' experiences and beliefs concerning their sense of self and their home context. This subcode was then moved to the "home" parent code for the second round of coding.

Table 3

Second-Level Inductive Coding Nodes and Their Operational Definitions

Name	Description
1. Self	
1a. Self/ posbeliefs	Qualities of the individual acquired because of their identity that are positive.
1b. Identity Development	Participant descriptions of their sexual orientation identity development (exiting heterosexuality, developing personal identity, developing social identity, becoming an LGBT offspring, developing an intimacy status, entering LGBTQ community
1c. Self/ navigating_labels	Ways in which participants describe navigating the use of identity labels
1d. Self/ Disclosure	Issues of disclosure of identity
1e. Self/ coping_homophobia	Ways in which the participant's disability affects the ways in which they cope with peer rejection and homophobia.
1f. Self/ Derog_lang	Ways in which they understand and react to derogatory language
1g.self/normality	Ways in which students navigate the concept of "normal" (rejection of or desire for). Ways in which a student tries to pass for being heterosexual or non-disabled or embrace not passing.
1h. Self/Relationships	Intimate or romantic relationships (limited options, relationship skills, online social networks etc.)
1i. Self/ passing	Ways in which a student tries to pass for being heterosexual or non-disabled.
1j. Self/ changetalk	Ways in which students self-empowerment is discussed or acted upon
1k. Self/ LGBTQ_knowledge	Ways in which youth learn about LGBTQ history, issues, models,
2. Home	
2a. Home/ Disclosure	Disclosure of identity with their family
2b. Home/ Support	Ways in which members of their family support them in reference to their disability or sexual orientation.
2c. Home/rejection	Ways in which parents have rejected them in reference to their disability or sexual orientation
2d. Home/religion	Ways in which families and religion overlap with participant's identity.
3. School	
3a. School/ markingspace	Navigating spaces in schools marked by disability and sexual orientation.
3b. School/ peer_homophobia	Experiences and beliefs about coping with their peers homophobia
3c. School/finding_ally	Strategies and tools they use to find an ally
3d. school/clubsidentity	How clubs or extracurricular activities have supported their sexual orientation and/disability identity.
3e. School/GSAs	Participant's beliefs and experiences with GSA's.
3f. School/ staff_characteristics	Characteristics of staff that are desirable
5. Future	

5a. Future/marriage	Beliefs about marriage and relationships in the future.
5b. Future/children	Beliefs about having children/a family in the future.
5c. Future/ location	Ways in which desires about future residential location is influenced by identity
5d. Future/ livingconditions	Beliefs about their future living conditions
5e. Future/ comm_engage	Beliefs concerning community engagement in the future.
5f. Future/ studentgroups	Desires and beliefs about accessing disability services, LGBTQI student groups, or other groups in post-secondary education.
5g.Future/ socialinvolvement	Possible future opportunities for social involvement
5h. Future/ psed_disclosure	Issues pertaining to future disclosure of identity (sexual orientation and disability) in the post-secondary education environment.
5i. Future/ employment_choices	Ways in which their identity affects their job choices
5j. Future/ jobdiscrimination	Ways in which student will cope with homophobia or ableism
5k. Future/ jobdisclosure	Issues pertaining to future disclosure (sexual orientation and disability) on the job.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter describes the experiences, identity, and beliefs about the future of eight young adults with disabilities who identified as a sexual or gender minority. The research questions identified in the introduction chapter serve as an organizing framework for the presentation of findings. To answer Research Question One, I provide a brief participant profile for each of the eight youth who participated in the study. Next, I present cross case findings including information about self, home, and family in order to answer Research Question Two. Finally, I speak to Research Question Three by exploring how the participants' beliefs salient experiences impact their beliefs about the future. In addition to the detailed description of each theme, I include excerpts from the interview transcripts that are the voices of the adolescents, to illustrate the lived meaning. Although community context was salient to some participants' experiences, no common themes emerged from the interviews regarding community; therefore, I do not present findings at the community level.

Participant Profiles

I completed interviews with eight adolescents with a disability who identified as a sexual or gender minority. This section purports to answer my first research question that asked, "what are the lived experiences salient to LGBTQI adolescents with disabilities within four levels of the ecological context?" The participant profiles below are organized by the four schools (described in the methods chapter). The purpose of the participant profiles is to present an integrated description of each individual participant concerning the self, home, and school experiences. Each student is described in the manner in which they represented themselves, the labels that they claimed to represent their own identities, and the pseudonym that they chose.

School 1: Artemis Orion. Artemis is a boisterous, thoughtful, and well-spoken 14-year-old young woman whose future goals include becoming a bookstore owner or a graphic designer. During the interviews, she spoke freely, but often became distracted and forgetful. Artemis spent most of her childhood with her father. In middle school, she moved to the Northwest to live with her mother, sister, and grandmother. She does not get along well with her mother. Artemis attended a military middle school and is now a freshman at a public high school. Her academic strengths include reading and writing, and she struggles with math and science. Artemis enjoys high school and describes herself as social and outgoing with her peers. She loves to draw and spend time with her girlfriend of a year.

Overall, Artemis has a positive self-image and self-esteem. She believes that she is tolerant and easy going if treated with respect, otherwise, she will, "blow up." Throughout the interviews, Artemis did not make any reference to her racial or ethnic identity. Artemis has been diagnosed with ADHD and ODD. She was on a 504 plan during high school, although she was not sure of the documentation. Artemis identified as pansexual, meaning that she did not limit future intimate partners to gender or sexual orientation. She commented, "I'm not a lesbian. I'm pansexual and I like people for who they are…I like people. I don't really like gender. Like, if somebody who was transgender, I like them, I would date them." Artemis was open with her pansexual identity with her peers and family however, she had not disclosed her sexual orientation to her father.

School 1: Cylis Bennet. Cylis is a friendly and reflective young man whose future goals include working with plants. At the time of the interviews, Cylis was an 18-year-old senior in high school about to graduate with a regular diploma. During our conversations, he was generally open and talkative, however, when posed with personal questions, he avoided answering by changing the subject. Cylis was born in another state and lived with his

birthmother until the age of 2. He then moved in with his father, step-mother, and step-sister because he experienced physical abuse from his birth mother. At the beginning of our conversations, he was living with his family, but was "having a rough patch." By the third interview, he was living on friends' couches. After graduation, he was planning on going to community college to earn a degree in environmental science. His academic strengths include music and environmental science, but he had difficulty in math, reading, and writing. Cylis presented himself as social and outgoing, but he was skeptical of his peers and did not feel supported in school.

Cylis is proud of his quirky and "different" personality, although he fears being targeted due to his differences. Often, Cylis experiences overwhelming episodes of anxiety. He retreats into caring for his plants or writing poetry in order to cope with his anxiety. Cylis identified as predominantly Hispanic. During middle and high school, he was on an IEP to support his diagnoses of ADHD and a Specific Learning Disability (SLP) in writing. Cylis identified as a gay man. Although he seemed proud of who he was, he engaged in internal battles concerning his sexual orientation and how others perceived him, stating that, "sometimes I really don't want to be gay." Cylis was only open with his sexual orientation with a few trusted friends, staff, and family members. At home, he had attempted to disclose his sexual orientation to his family, but his mother had communicated that he should not claim that identity. His family members were practicing Catholics, which influenced their denial of his sexual orientation. He no longer attended his family's church, instead choosing a Unitarian church to seek out a more inclusive religion and spirituality.

School 2: Purple Panda. Purple is a humorous and polite young man who planned to enter the Army after graduation to learn information technology. He also planned to attend an online university during his service to earn a bachelors degree in information

51

technology. During our interviews, he was an 18-year-old senior. Throughout our conversations, he avoided talking about personal subjects and chose to have a close friend present to make him feel more comfortable. Purple grew up in Alaska with his twin brother, but they were removed from their birth parents after it was discovered the boys were being physically abused. He was placed with a foster family who later adopted both him and his brother. He now refers to the foster family as his parents. He has one younger sister who was also fostered and later adopted by his parents. Purple's family moved two years ago to their current town and he changed schools as a junior. At this high school, he enjoyed socializing with his peers and was achieving academically. His social relationships with his peers were easily the most salient experience for Purple Panda as he attributed his school improvement and participation to his acquisition of peer acceptance and friends.

Purple Panda felt a sense of pride concerning his eccentric and charismatic personality, stating often that it made him "awesome." Throughout our interviews, Purple did not discuss any issues of his identity relating to his racial or ethnic identity and was generally avoidant of labels. Throughout elementary and middle school, he received several diagnoses including ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). On his 504 plan, he was given accommodations for a SLD and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). He did not believe that he has any learning disabilities, although he did believe that he has PTSD resulting from his abusive experiences with his birth parents. Purple admits difficulty controlling his rage, having had "horrible fits in elementary school" that often led to physical restraint. Concerning his sexual orientation, he avoided labeling himself, but does consider himself gay. During our conversations, he often avoided talking about sexual orientation by making a joke or changing the subject. He has only disclosed his sexual orientation to a select few of his peers and to his family. His family supports him in regards to his sexual

orientation, but they firmly believed that he should not get married to man because of their religious beliefs. He agrees with this restriction.

School 2: Sarah Smith. Sarah is a reserved young woman with a sarcastic sense of humor who wants to be a firefighter or an EMT in the future. Sarah was a 16-year-old sophomore who planned on attending community college after graduation. She began our interviews withdrawn, often choosing to skip questions, but became increasingly outgoing and forthcoming as time passed. Sarah grew up with her mother and step-family about two hours away from her current town, but moved in with her father in the sixth grade, regularly visiting her mother. She enjoys school and spends most of her time outside of school playing sports (basketball and softball) or participating in a high school program at her local fire station.

Sarah was proud of her active and helpful personality. She was very concerned with respect and has high expectations of acceptable behavior for herself and others. Throughout our interviews, she did not discuss any issues concerning her racial or ethnic identity. Sarah has a diagnosed SLD in writing and math. A hard worker, she was on an IEP up until this year when she was exited from special education. She was on a 504 plan that laid out accommodations but she declined to request these accommodations because she felt like it was cheating. Sarah identifies as bisexual, but clearly preferred to date women. She was working on the ability and courage to be open with her sexual orientation (e.g. choosing to openly hold her (ex)girlfriend's hand in gym class). Sarah was honest about her sexual orientation if asked by close friends or family, but felt extremely uncomfortable talking about it with others.

School 3: Fuzzer Hop. Fuzzer is a logical and thoughtful young man who wants to compose music for video games or films. He was an 18 year-old senior on an IEP who was

in the process of applying to colleges, specifically schools with a music conservatory. During our conversations, he was very blunt. An only child, Fuzzer lived in a house with his mother and a couple adult roommates. After his parents divorced when he was two, his family tried a variety of living situations (co-habitating, alternating houses every 6 months, etc.). At the time of the interviews, his father lived with his girlfriend and Fuzzer stayed with them occasionally on the weekends. Fuzzer's relationship with his mother was positive, although he described it more as a roommate relationship than a mother-son relationship. His father is much more conservative than his mother, with high expectations of behavior, especially concerning gender. Fuzzer attended a small arts middle school with smaller class-size, exploratory instruction styles, and social opportunities with his peers who were "artsy and weirdos" like him. He often felt lost in his large high school, with teachers, "being too vague" and disconnected from his peers, who only "speak hashtag and twitter." His main passion is playing the French horn and piano with the jazz and symphonic band and community youth orchestra.

Fuzzer Hop is proud of his political curiosity and musical abilities. He identified as mixed-race as his father is White and his mother is Black. Fuzzer was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) when he was in middle school and obtained an IEP. His ASD label has recently become an important part of his identity. Fuzzer wishes that he had stronger social skills. He believes that he is a "nice, kind, smart personal, but like society, [I don't] seem to fit into it that well." Fuzzer identifies as a gay man. He has disclosed his sexual orientation to his parents (although he was worried about talking to his father) and to most of his peers. His father told his evangelical family about his sexual orientation without permission, causing them to reject him for a good part of a year.

School 3: Luna Gold. Luna is a friendly and outgoing student. Throughout our interviews, he was excited and open. When I met Luna, he was a 16-year-old sophomore student who had a wide variety of post-school employment goals, including therapist, English teacher, janitor, and sound engineer technician. An only child, he lived at home with his mother and his step-father. He lived with his father until he was 12, but he moved in with his mother once she found out that his education and health was being neglected. One example of this neglect was that Luna began drinking and smoking marijuana with his father and his father's friends as well as doing poorly in school when he was eight years old. In high school, Luna participates in a school-based program called ReachOut that includes after school tutoring, mentoring, and leadership development. Luna has a variety of solitary creative outlets, such as listening to and writing music, as well as writing stories and poetry. Luna has difficulty establishing and maintaining friendships, but enjoys opportunities to share these works with his peers at events like poetry slams.

Luna Gold appreciates the thoughtful, loyal, and honest aspects of his personality. Although he no longer communicates with his father, he identified with his father's South Indian/Arabic identity and wants to learn more about his heritage. Luna is on an IEP to accommodate his disabilities including mild Cerebral Palsy (CP), Apraxia, and Dysarthria, which made it difficult to understand his speech. Luna does not know a lot about his diagnoses, but identifies as a person with a disability because of his overt communication impairments. He has also been coping with issues of depression and anxiety disorders, with past suicide ideation. Luna identified as transgender. When asked what pronoun he prefers, Luna stated that it did not really matter to him, but that I could use male pronouns if I wanted to since that is what his paper work stated. When we started the interviews, Luna identified as bisexual; however between the first and second interview, he changed his

identity label to pansexual, having just been exposed to that term. Luna was honest with his sexual and gender orientation and did not mind speaking openly about it.

School 4: Elijah Winter. A shy and skeptical young man, Elijah has aspirations of being a geologist and moving to Australia. At the time of the interviews, Elijah was an 18-year-old senior who hoped to graduate at the end of the school year. Throughout our conversations, Elijah answered questions very succinctly and had difficulty with questions that were open-ended or abstract, choosing to skip the more personal inquiries. He lives at home with his father in a rural town about 20 miles south of his school. His mother left him and his family at an early age. Elijah has five siblings who do not live in his house because they are either addicted to drugs or in juvenile detention center. His father also battled issues of drug addiction, but Elijah reported that he was no longer using narcotics. Elijah attended his local public middle school in his hometown, but faced peer rejection and severe bullying because of his differences. Since he felt he did not have any supportive staff or peers, in order to avoid harassment and violence, Elijah wrote in a bomb threat, eventually turning himself into the school administration. Expelled from his middle school, he was placed in an alternative school for students with Emotional and Behavior Disorders (EBD). There, he also felt unsafe, but engaged in more internalizing behaviors. After demonstrating emotional and behavioral self-control, he was transferred to School 4 where he reports being satisfied with the social and instructional environment.

Elijah was proud of his thoughtful and kind personality, but was trying to improve his social skills. He identified as White but did not have specific knowledge about his ethnic identity. Throughout his schooling, Elijah has been on an IEP to accommodate his diagnoses of Communication Disorders, ASD, and SLD. With a basically non-existent disability identity, he is not aware of when he was diagnosed, or began receiving special

56

education services, nor the specifics of what is on his IEP. Elijah identifies as a gay man and has recently become very open about disclosing his sexual orientation with his peers and family.

School 4: Ron W. Ron is a social, polite, and passionate young man who has a variety of aspirations and interests including environmental restoration, aviation, and political activism. During the interviews, he was an 18-year-old student who hoped to "graduate in a year or so." Ron was forth-coming and honest throughout our conversations, speaking very quickly and excitedly, but often became distracted. He grew up in a small Midwestern city with two older brothers and both parents before moving out the Pacific Northwest. Ron lives at home with his mother but his father remains an important part of his life. Both brothers are living out of state but remain important influences. Ron attended his local public high school, but was asked to leave after getting caught with marijuana. He was given the option of returning but chose to transfer to School 4. Ron enjoys the academics of his new school, the social environment, and participating in a work crew. Work crew is a school program where students participate in environmental restoration projects in the community for half days, get high school and community college credits, and receive a small monthly stipend. During the summer after his school transfer, Ron began to experiment with drugs (methamphetamine, cough syrup, etc.). When we began interviews, he had not used any drugs other than marijuana for 3 months.

Overall, Ron had a very positive self-image, but understood that he needs to give himself parameters. Ron feels a sense of pride concerning his outgoing and social personality, enjoying interacting with others and discussing political issues. Concerning his racial/ethnic identity, Ron identifies as mixed-race with Native American (Choctaw Nation), German, Irish, and other heritages. Ron has been diagnosed with Bi-Polar Disorder and

57

ADHD, and although he does not strongly identify as a person with a disability, he attributes a lot of his personality characteristics to his two diagnoses. He was on an IEP, but was not aware of his services or accommodations. Ron identifies as a bisexual cisgender man, although he likes to challenge gender assumptions by wearing women's clothes or make-up every once in a while. He has disclosed his sexual orientation to his mother, but not his father or brothers. At school and in the community, his comfort level with disclosing his sexual orientation fluctuates.

Cross Case Findings

Throughout the in-depth interviews, each of this study's eight participants discussed the experiences that were salient to their lives across the four levels of the ecological context: self, home, school, and community. By exploring these salient experiences (Research Question One), I could interpret relationships and connections that emerged from my data's themes. This allowed me to answer Research Question 2 that asked, "How do the experiences salient to LGBTQI adolescents with disabilities affect their sense of self and identity?" The major themes addressing Research Question Two are presented here with supporting examples from individual participants.

Self. All of the participants described a variety of topics related to sense of self, including identity development, positive beliefs, facing discrimination, and romantic or intimate relationships. Each of these topics is described briefly below. See Table 4 in Appendix C for a summary of major findings related to the participants' experiences and beliefs about their sense of self and identity.

Identity development. Throughout the in-depth interviews, all of the participants discussed their identities and sense of self. Because of purposeful sampling procedures, all of the youth claimed a non-heterosexual identity and were comfortable conversing about their

58

disability. These characteristics were the only consistencies regarding disability and sexual orientation identity across all cases. It is also important to note that none of the participants seemed to have a static understanding of their identities. Instead their personal understanding of themselves shifted across time and environments. Throughout the interviews, even though there were discussions of self-questioning and self-resentment, the youth had strong beliefs that the discrimination, stigma, and judgment that they faced because of different facets of their identity was not due to something inherently wrong with them, instead, it was how they were perceived by others. They attributed this stigma and biases to cultural influences. As Fuzzer noted, "The problem isn't yourself overcoming, it's other people overcoming you."

Although some participants claimed a sexual orientation identity without hesitation for the most part (Artemis, Ron, Luna, Elijah and Fuzzer), others were still developing pride in that aspect of their identity (Panda, Sarah, Cylis). Interestingly, none of the participants claimed a strong disability identity. There were some who were angered by disability discrimination and others who were actively working on learning about their disability. Several participants believed that their disability wasn't an identity, just an aspect of their personal characteristics. They believed disability was something they could overcome, control, or fix. For example, Ron believed that if he stayed away from drugs, he would not be affected by his disability at all, and therefore did not fully identify as a person with a disability.

All eight participants described ways in which their disability and sexual orientation intersected and qualitatively affected their identity development. At the center of this intersection was the some of the participants' fear of rejection from their peers for being different. Although this is a typical adolescent fear, it came up frequently during discussions

59

with most of the participants due to past experiences with rejection concerning their

identities. Some of the participants thought that their disability affected the ways in which

they understood the multi-dimensional aspects of identity. For example, Cylis discussed how

his disability (ADHD) caused him to have difficulty understanding his identity. He often

finds himself struggling to understand why he feels certain ways about himself, both because

of his disability and his sexual orientation.

> I hate myself because I didn't know what I was or how come I felt this way
> about some things… like just not understanding why I have feeling towards
> the same sex people and about males and not understanding why I don't
> understand things like people do and why sometimes I don't get things like
> people should or shouldn't do… For instance like sometimes when I run out
> of things to do that keep me busy, I think my mind starts to think about all
> the bad things that have happened and stuff like that and I make myself sad
> and then I continue to do so. It is like I can't get myself out sometimes and
> sometimes I can and then when I am with friends I feel safe with it is like I
> forgot what I was suppose to be sad about. … because I over think and
> fraternize everything cause I am hard on myself and I don't talk to anybody
> and I seclude myself. So if I am secluded then so I don't have an outlet to
> talk to and so then I am always sad. I think and then sometime I think I play
> the character so well that I forget what my real self is. (Cylis)

For some, this feeling of being rejected or being an outsider began at a very young age-

sometimes without any understanding of why. This quote demonstrates how some

participants' identity development reflected internalized homophobia or ableism. Luna

remembers being depressed, engaging in self-harm, and having suicide ideations from the

age of eight. As he grew up, with accepting family environments and social experiences, he

began to start understanding why he was different and gaining pride, although still

occasionally experiencing insecurity and isolation.

All of the adolescents discussed the ways in which they conceptualized and navigated

the concept of normality, specifically focusing on their disability and queerness as identities

based on self-description. Normality refers to the assumptions and expectations that

privilege the unmarked categories of difference, in this case heterosexuality and non-

60

disabled. The concept of normality is manifested in such actions as passing and disclosure (or "coming out"). Students demonstrated two predominant ways of understanding normality, either desiring it or rejecting it.

Many of the participants discussed how wanting to be normal and having difficulty accepting their own identities conflicted with their desire to reject normality. Cylis knows that he does not need to conform to society's expectations, he still has difficulty coming to terms with his own beliefs. He describes an inner conflict between what he believes he should be and how he really feels, demonstrating that he has internalized the concept of normality (for disability, sexual orientation, and race):

> Sometimes it's kind of hard because sometimes I really don't want to be gay. I just feel like sometimes I get into that emotional range like I dip into the dark part of my brain where I usually don't like to go. And so it's like I feel weird. I don't feel like myself and I don't feel accepted. Like, I don't accept myself completely, sometimes and I kind of struggle with that. Sometimes I wonder what if I was the opposite sex because you know would it be okay if I were straight. You know? And would I still be me… I don't necessarily feel like I was meant to be gay but because it was like, I wanted to be normal like sometimes.   (Cylis)

For Fuzzer, although he has a positive self-concept (nice, kind, and smart) and generally has pride in his disability and queerness, he wishes he could act in socially acceptable ways so that he could fit into society. He feels similarly conflict because he knows that he should not have to fit society's definition of normality concerning disability and queerness, but desires it nonetheless. Here, he also described how he believes sexual orientation is fixed and a change in gender would "correct" the homosexual desire. He thinks about changing gender, not desire in order to normalize himself.

> As for the social aspect of myself, I don't really like how socially awkward I am. I wish I could talk to people better and I feel like I might be a nice kind smart person but like society, I don't seem to fit into it that well. So in that aspect I don't like myself but I like myself but I don't like where I am so I wish I was like other people in my society… I wish I could talk about hash tag and Twitter with other people. I wish I could be to that level…And I try

to think of, I mean I guess I try to think of you know is this what an autistic person would do? When I do things now, which then that right there is quashing because now I'm worrying about, is this something that a normal person would do or an autistic person would do? I'm trying to normalize myself… But I'm trying to fit into the normal box when I don't think I should be trying to fit into the normal box… Cause that's I guess I wanted to convince myself that I was normal because I didn't want to have autism, but also I just think that it's just kind of what society would like me to be as normal.

Although deviating from normality can be difficult at times, most of the participants discussed the joy that they found in being themselves and rejecting normality. Fuzzer also described how the rejection of normality troubles the status quo and allows for a more interesting society. For Sarah, she enjoyed participating in spaces and communities that allowed her to reject normative gender roles that could possibly mark her as non-heterosexual in other contexts. She appreciated volunteering at the firehouse and participating in sports because she felt like she felt like she could dress and behave like herself. Because of that, she described how she challenged other people to challenge their own stereotypes of behavior concerning queerness and disability.

> I told [a friend] a while back [about my sexual orientation] and she was like, "you don't seem to be that kind of person." And ok, is that a good thing or a bad thing? She is like," I guesses that is a good thing." You know there is like the people that are obviously either bisexual or lesbian or either way and she said that I don't seem to be like that way. I am kind of discrete about it… I have gotten that too, "like you wouldn't tell that she had that disability if you didn't see her walking into the SPED room or asking for the accommodations." You know I have gotten that… That's ok, you have your stereotypical hypocritical little things. I am going to deny you and do the exact opposite. I'm a defiant child… not to just to prove a point but it is my style; it is my thing you know I have always been that one kid that was different from the rest. Not like disability wise or sexual orientation wise. It is just like normal, you know? I prance instead of run. (Sarah)

Sarah described how challenging others' preconceived notions of behavior and stereotypes gave her a sense of pride, but still demonstrated how she internalized stigma concerning

disability and sexual orientation. This rejection of normality was reflected in several of the conversations as participants discuss the joy and pride in being themselves:

> Cause I just want to be myself. I don't want to be what other people expect me to be. I just want to do what I want or not what I want but like what I feel is good, what I feel is okay just not like social norm. I don't want to be like everybody else, I want to be different. There are certain things, I want to have friends obviously. (Purple)

Positive beliefs about identity. The youth also identified positive aspects of the intersection of disability and sexual orientation. This was more evident for students who lived and went to school in more open and accepting environments (although there was still variation based on the individual).

Gaining knowledge about what it means to have an impairment, be labeled as having a disability, or identify as LGBTQI had positive effects on the youths' identity development. For both disability and sexual orientation, the more they learned about who they were, the more positively they felt about themselves and their identity. Initially, Fuzzer rejected the identity of having Autism Spectrum Disorder.

> I felt like [my teacher] was saying there was something wrong with me, Before freshman year I never talked to anybody about Autism really, I didn't really know what it was. I mean I had seen some kids before and like I had seen a couple of autism kids, like they freak out when they hear loud noises and scream and then someone told me in 8th grade I was like that's not me, I don't do that. (Fuzzer)

It wasn't until high school where he attended a social group for kids with ASD run by a speech and language pathologist who encouraged a Autism identity, that he learned about his disability and began to develop a sense of identity. This was similar to his sexual orientation identity development. When he was young, Fuzzer knew that he "felt different." It was not until learned what it meant to be gay and was shown positive examples of gay role models that he started to claim that identity for himself. Because of Fuzzer's Autism, he does not feel the need to conform to society's expectations as strongly and it was easier for him to

63

disclose his sexual orientation to others, earlier than his cisgender male, gay peers. For Ron,

his disability allowed him to express his gender in non-conforming ways, highlighting an

important positive aspect of his intersectional experience. On days when he was feeling

more manic, he felt comfortable wearing women's clothes and/or makeup in specific

environments (school and at home around his mother). He felt that because of his disability,

he was able to act in accordance with his personal identity. Artemis describes a similar

positive belief about her disability identity (supported by her father), which is a lesson she

includes in all aspects of her identity.

> When I was growing up, my dad knew I had ADHD. I'd been taking ADHD
> medication since I was 5. Which is why I'm so awesome as I am today… he
> always told me, because I'd always get in trouble at school because I didn't
> focus or I'd jump my leg or I'd bang on the table [bangs on the table], such
> like that. I'd always, I wouldn't pay attention and he's like "You don't fit their
> cookie cutter, and they're mad because you don't fit their cookie cutter.
> Don't ever fit the cookie cutter. Be yourself." And so, I kind of feel like, we
> should strive to not fit into the cookie cutter. (Artemis)

Some of the participants discussed how being open about who they are across all

aspects of his/her identity helps he/she be happier or have more positive self-beliefs. This

included having a unique perspective, being able to challenge gender norms, being more

tolerant and kind, establishing more meaningful cross-gender friendships, and being more

politically active. Additionally, their experiences concerning their multiply marginalized

identities allowed for multiple opportunities for non-conformity and strength. As Artemis

said, "The best thing is that discovering who I was let me expand on. Just discovering that

one little bit about me helped expand on other parts of my life about who I was, what I

wanted, and how I was going to get there." The development of these positive beliefs was

rooted in their experiences across various environments.

> In elementary and middle school I got picked on and teased quite a bit. At
> the time I didn't know, but I was different than the typical boy and they
> treated me bad because of that. I was growing my hair out and to them it was

weird because most of them have short hair and I was growing my hair out. To them it looks [air quotes] weird… I have been there too. I was treated badly because of who I was. I don't want all people to experience that too. The least I could do is help. (Luna)

Because of the opportunities to act proudly about herself and her identities, risking her peers' judgment, Sarah believed that she has learned how to be brave and sympathetic to others.

It is hard, [dealing with judgment]. It is like the understanding perspective like you can sit here and talk all day to me and I will sit here and listen. Like if somebody needs somebody to listen to or someone needs someone to talk to, I will just sit here and listen... being there to help people and then it is like the determination and the braveness. I honestly like being brave. (Sarah)

Artemis connects her positive personality characteristic of wanting to help people to her identity as pansexual, not just because of understanding what it feels like to be rejected, but also because of the innate characteristic of "liking people" across labels.

I got to say because of my identity and who I identity as and how I identify as, as being pan[sexual and have a disability], and because I was excluded a lot as a child, I'm really tolerant…....It helped a lot because once I started realizing who I was and even before then, I tolerated people who are different too because I was different. And, I wasn't tolerated very well… So it's kind of like an underlying thing and I've always wanted to help people and I'm always putting people before me. So, it's kind of like a personality trait that goes along with my sexuality. (Artemis)

For Fuzzer, because of his disability and sexual orientation, he does not feel the constraints of gender norms. He feels free to discuss any topic that interests him or act in ways that suit him, not just what society dictates he must because he is male.

I think [my identities] have been more helpful because I view things somewhat differently as, you know when I talk to people I don't, I'll most likely not talk about something that only straight people would think about like girls, I'm aware of that, I don't, I just don't likely assume. And I also don't you know use words like retarded, you know I don't immediately try to make fun of disabled people at all... I don't have to worry about being manly cause a lot of guys are all you know I have to be buff and have the biggest penis and I just don't really have to care about that. You know joining football or any of that. (Fuzzer)

65

Other participants echoed Fuzzer's positive beliefs, discussing that identifying as LBGTQI

allowed them to be, as Cylis stated, "the best of both worlds." This means that he has

positive personality traits associated with both genders, allowing him to have close

relationships with peers of the other identified gender. A few of the participants also

discussed the need for people who think differently than the norm because of their unique

experiences. Cylis discussed this when he said:

> It's kind of a good sometimes [being a gay man with a disability]. A good
> thing sometimes because it's like I can make things and think of things that
> normally people wouldn't think of. Or, you know I'm not afraid to you know
> write a story about something and I should!   (Cylis)

Navigating labels. All of the participants had strong beliefs about the use of labels.

Although many participants found that using labels had some utility, they believed that labels

limited people and could be harmful. Most stated that labels could help people understand

others, but that using labels provided a narrow-focused understanding of what that label

represents. As Cylis stated, labels provided a "cheap way to learn something about

somebody." Luna believed that labels were at the core of the ways in which our society

judges people. This was especially true for his gender identity as the binary label of

male/female. Artemis also believed that labels gave a false sense of understanding, but she

also claimed that she used them to assist other people.

> The labels that I claim for myself are kind of to help other people get an
> understanding of what I mean. Because, if I say "I like people," they're like
> "Well what does this make you? I don't understand things if they're not set
> into labels because I'm a label-reading machine and not a human being". So,
> I kind of have to say like "I am so and so, so you will understand me with
> your machine brain." So, other than that I'd say labels are kind of useless.
> They help organize people, but if your organizing people, you're putting
> them into little boxes... I mean, it helps them understand, but to also helps
> them understand how to deal with you because you're different, you're not
> what they expect... So, I guess it's kind of like guideline for people... I don't
> really feel like I need to be labeled on that it's just treating me like you'd treat
> any other human being because I'm not a child. I'm smarter than that.
> (Artemis)

Concerning the process of labeling themselves, some of the participants also discussed the utility and manifestations of self-labeling, while others discussed rejecting labels all together. Overall, very few of the students believed that the disability label that was given to them represented their experiences and identity. They also stated that disability labels marked them as different, and they did not feel different from their peers. Most of the participants discussed how claiming labels could be empowering. Because of having multiple marginalized labels, some students felt that it taught them to claim these "non-normal" labels and embrace their identities. Finding and claiming these labels also provided them with a better understanding of themselves (and helped them reject the notion that something was wrong with them), even if caused more confusion for others.

> Well. When I was jumping around between lesbian, bisexual, straight, like I've always had this little…I guess it was unsteady because I think "Why can't I just decide what's wrong with me? Why do I like this person? This person's kind of cool. I like that guy. I like this girl. Oh hey!" And then it was just really confusing and then I just like "You know what? I just like people!" Then when that happened it was just like "snap!" and my brain rearranged into how it was supposed to be. And then it all made sense. (Artemis)

> I was thinking that when I admitted I liked guys I was saying I was bisexual, I was like, "ok…eh," then I didn't know there was a word, but when I learned the word [pansexual], I was like, "wow, I understand myself so much more now!" Same thing with "transgendered." I didn't know any sort of sexual or gendered words because I hadn't invested anything to it…It was like, ok, more like gaining knowledge, which made me more excited to get knowledge… I am learning more, a new word that actually describes what I am feeling. It just helped me identify myself even more. (Luna)

Most of the participants also discussed how they rejected or ignored labels since many of the labels can have such negative connotations. Cylis claimed the label of "different," but does not want to claim any others because, "the other ones are just so negative." He also rejected labels because he wanted to avoid stereotypes (such as being effeminate). Purple discussed how gaining friends gave him a more positive self-image,

67

giving him courage to reject the negativity associated with labels Luna, rejected labeling himself mostly because he did not believe that any one label fits him. He will label himself for other people's benefit, but he does not feel protective about labels since his identity is fluid.

Facing discrimination: Homophobia and ableism. All of the participants reported incidents of homophobic language and overwhelming heteronormative cultures in their high schools. Although only three reported physical violence or direct homophobic bullying, most of the participants felt as if their identities were influenced by the heteronormative school culture. A majority of the participants believed that there was a homophobic culture at their schools primarily because of ignorance. Purple wished that his peers could be more sympathetic while Ron was hopeful that the world will become more accepting with his and future generations.

A majority of the participants reported that their disability identity or impairment influenced or affected the way they responded to their peer's homophobia/ homophobic remarks. For example, because of his processing difficulties associated with his disability, Cylis sometimes became so overwhelmed with fear of rejection and judgment that he has anxiety attack.

> Sometimes I can't be in rooms with people, like sometimes I hyperventilate because they are so many people around and I start freaking myself out. And then I forget to breathe... And I think I worry about what people think about me. It's something I've been trying to work on with myself but it's just, society is not very kind... I guess that's why I probably don't come out to people. Like, being on the side of the gay side of the spectrum. That I'm afraid of being judged. You know? (Cylis)

For Elijah, his impairments both limited his ability to develop and maintain positive relationships as well as coping mechanisms that would allow him to make positive decisions when faced with discrimination. He described how he was bullied at his middle school for

being different than other students. He did not feel that he had any support from any peers, his teachers or school staff because of how his disability affected his behavior. He has difficulty remembering details because he blocked many of his memories, but he reported feeling lonely, being called names and being physically assaulted by his peers because of his differences. Because of his disability, he had difficulty generating solutions; in order to avoid peer bullying and harassment, he wrote and sent a bomb threat to the school, causing his expulsion.

About a year before our interviews, Ron began to abuse methamphetamine and cough syrup. He described how his substance abuse and his bipolar disorder caused his manic highs to become uncontrollable. Because of his drug use, he also lost inhibition and became much more open and even aggressive with his sexual orientation. During one of these manic episodes, he was in the town square at a drum circle and overheard some kids he knew being explicitly homophobic. Because of his drug induced high and his bipolar disorder, he became enraged and began violently attacking the group of ten people by himself. He was contained and then released. He went home and began to collect anything in his house that could be used as a weapon. Ron's mother and brother witnessed his manic behavior (with Ron pointing a knife at his brother) and called the police who arrived to detain him. At his mother's suggestion, Ron agreed to enter into a residential mental health treatment center to overcome his addiction and learn to control his manic behavior. After this experience, he felt more open about his sexual orientation, and learned how to respond to homophobia in a peaceful, pro-active way.

Strategies for responding to discrimination. All of the participants discussed how homophobia, ableism, discrimination, and judgment were inevitable experiences. They described a variety of strategies for coping with discriminatory behavior and language based

69

on their feelings about themselves as well as their environmental context: a) direct response, b) ignoring, c) avoidance, d) distancing themselves from the stereotype, e) anger, f) self-harm, g) finding an outlet, or h) thinking positively. None of these students described finding an ally (either peer or adult), but overall, they appreciated when schools had an implemented policy concerning language that supported inclusivity.

In terms of the "direct response" approach, several of the youth discussed how through multiple exposures to derogatory language, they learned to practice advocacy skills, employing a direct response through conversation, asking follow-up questions, or explicitly pointing out others' biases. Artemis describes how she challenges derogatory language:

> When I'm in a group of people and one of them says the word 'faggot', I turn to them and I'm usually really smiley first, and I'm just like 'Excuse you. Sir, what did you say?' I'm like, 'That's not acceptable; that's not acceptable at all, but especially around me. So, I'd appreciate it if you don't say that or you can get out. (Artemis)

She stated that she learned how to stand up for herself and others because of her father's advice regarding her disability, "because my dad's like 'Don't let people walk all over you. Don't let them try and mold you into their own shape." Sarah described instances with her peers in which she directly challenged their use of words like, "faggot" and "retard." She explains that, "it just makes you look like you are uneducated and you are an ass and you don't know what to say so you replace it for a non-educated word."

> I was over at his house and we were playing video games and he was like, "that is gay!" And I pressed the pause button and I was like, "wow, bro! Ok, I have known you for like ten years, now let's not say that alright?" And he is like my friend that I have known for ten years, and I was 14, but you know I stuck up to him and he just like kind of was like "wow! where did that come from?" I was like alright! I can stand up for myself. (Sarah)

The youth discussed how direct response was a form of activism. Some participants used direct response in acts such as creating blogs (Fuzzer), starting a student group (Elijah), or writing and performing slam poetry (Luna) on issues of discrimination as a form of activism:

70

I am actually making a poem about trying to not be judging… making it more noticeable to people to make them stop judging just in general. Just to teach them that people who have been judged by other people often commit suicide because … I'm one of those percentage of people who have tried to commit suicide and it was because people judged me so badly. So I just want people to be more noticeable [of their judgments] (Luna)

As a second strategy, some participants discussed how they ignored others' discriminatory language and behavior. Students chose to ignore derogatory language and discriminatory behavior if they: a) predicted there would be a negative consequence for replying with a direct response, b) believed others had a right to their own opinions, c) did not want to make others' uncomfortable, d) did not possess self-confidence to directly respond, or e) justified others' language or behavior by believing that there was not meaning behind it. For Elijah, he had heard derogatory language so often that he had become numb to derogatory words associated with disability or sexual orientation. Cylis discussed how he usually brushes off derogatory language because he does not want to bring attention to himself or "push anyone's boundaries," but if he felt safe, he would want to challenge this type of behavior. Purple Panda described how hearing homophobic/ableist language upsets him, however he ignores it because he does not feel confident enough in himself to stand up to his peers, stating that "I am not powerful enough to say stuff like that." At times, a few of the participants justified the use of derogatory terms by stating that there was not any hatred behind their words, just a lack of a better negative word. This let them off the hook for not actively challenging their peers.

Just some people are just talking like, "oh you're a faggot." I'm like in my head, it's not bothering me to where it's like, "oh I'm not going to hang around here anymore." It's just like to me, I know they're not discriminating against gay people, that's just a word like meaning stupid or something, or it's an annoyance where it's not meaning, you see what I'm saying? There's a difference between saying, "hey you're a gay fag," it's just saying that. (Ron)

The third strategy for reacting to discriminatory behavior or actions was avoidance (either physical or linguistic avoidance). A couple of participants would manipulate the situation in some way to avoid responding to homophobia or ableism. For example, several of Ron's friends at his first high school rejected him when he disclosed his sexual orientation. To cope with this rejection, Ron began to skip school to avoid coming into contact with his previous friends. This affected his academic standing and his overall feeling of belonging at that school. For Cylis, he used his sarcastic communication style to avoid other's inquiries regarding his sexual orientation

> Sometimes if people want to say, "Are you gay?" I'm like, "Um…do aliens poop blue?" They are like "yes…Well… no." And then they're like, "uhh…" And then they drop the subject… Like I had a kid who last year, he asked me more or less perverted way. He's like, "So do you go home and like sit down in front of the computer for like 8 hours and look at gay porn?" I was like, "Yeah totally that's what I do. That's my free time yo. You know? You feel me, bro? You feel me?" (Cylis)

Cylis stated that because of his sarcastic personality and quick ability to change the conversation subject due to his ADHD, he is often able to verbally avoid responding to discrimination by confusing other people. Elijah discussed how he used the strategy of avoiding discriminatory behaviors and language by manipulating the situation that placed those peers in his environment. His first use of the avoidance strategy (writing in a bomb threat to avoid going to go to school) caused him to face negative consequences: he was transferred to a program for students with emotional behavioral disabilities. Elijah described this environment as "very hostile." He was scared by his fellow students' aggressive behaviors and language, having experienced traumatic bullying at his middle school. He found a way to avoid their aggressive behavior without interacting with them or receiving negative consequences himself. He explained how he manipulated the situation, "Over time I got sick of these people and I tried to get them kicked out of my classes by whispering to

72

the teachers that this person is bothering me and misplacing work, rewriting their files."

A select few of the participants discussed how they would also distance themselves from disability or non-heterosexual stereotypes as a fourth strategy for coping with discriminatory behavior or language. They expressed how they played different characters or wore different masks, both intentionally and unintentionally, so that others would not discriminate against them. Cylis actively avoided being marked as non-heterosexual out of fear of "stepping on someone's toes," being targeted, or being judged. He distanced himself from discrimination by believing that he was not that type of gay man. He gave an example of a peer of his school who would act flamboyantly (speech, gait, etc.) and was the target of homophobic language as juxtaposition to his self-image.

> I think in order to protect myself mentally and physically I had built barriers around myself…Like sometimes it would be kind of conflicting emotions because [my classmate] exploited that he was gay any which way he could use it, he would use it. But it was just slightly uncomfortable because he pushed it on to people. If you are conservative about it, like I saw this interesting definition of what the term they used was "faggot" and a gay person is conservative about it and isn't like "Bam, here I am. Take it" or "I'm going to punch you in the face, taste the rainbow!" And [other gay men] are just you know, "Yes I'm gay. I do have a partner. We do have kids." You know like Neal Patrick Harris. He's a definition of gay because no matter what he does, he's who he is and he doesn't throw the rainbow at you. He's like, yes I'm gay and he has two kids and he's married you know… and so then, the definition of a faggot is and supposedly that's the word they said because I think it's kind of horrible, but it's somebody who does, who uses their sexuality as a weapon and does it just cause. (Cylis)

The fifth and sixth strategies of responding to discriminatory language and behaviors were anger and self-harm. Anger was manifested with externalizing anti-social behaviors (like fighting or yelling) while self-harm is manifested by engaging in internalizing behaviors (like depression or anxiety). Ron's experiences initiating physical altercations with peers in his community after overhearing homophobic remarks is an example of using anger as a reaction. Concerning self-harm, Luna describes self-injurious behavior (like cutting) and

73

suicide attempts as a result of being bullied due to his disability and his non-gender-conforming behavior.

> I got very teased and bullied in middle school and at my elementary school. So I was all by myself. So I started to cut to try to relieve the pain. Like I didn't talk about it because I was afraid to create more drama to get bullied more and teased more. In elementary and middle school… Being different actually. In elementary school, I don't really remember too much. Actually no, I didn't mess up but my speech was terrible, so people kept saying things like "you are retarded. Dumb." In middle school. That was when I started to get know myself, and I was growing my hair out and wore more jewelry and was walking a little bit different. I was walking weird, for a guy at least. And people teased me about that, because I was doubly weird. (Luna)

As a means of controlling these externalizing and internalizing anti-social behaviors, many of the participants in this study discussed employing the seventh and eighth strategies of finding an outlet to process the discriminatory behaviors and language and thinking positively. Students would engage in various forms of expression. For some students, this was being a part of a team or community where they felt a sense of belonging to counteract rejection. For Sarah, this was through athletic teams and the youth fire-fighting program. For Fuzzer, the outlet was the youth orchestra. Whatever their outlet, this contributed to their ability to think positively.

> Music and thinking positive got me through. A few things that kept me from killing myself was music. Music helped me big time. Being positive. I told myself 10, 20, 30, 40 years from now, things could change. That possibility that things might change, the possibility of changing. Like, I might have a close friend, I might have a best friend, a good awesome job. That could possibly change. (Luna)

Besides positive thoughts about their future, most of the participants discussed how positive thoughts about their identities helped them understand and overcome experiences with homophobia and ableism. Experiencing multiple marginalized identities allowed for multiple opportunities for non-conformity. Purple discussed how having pride in his identity greatly diminishes the impact of his peers' discriminatory language and behavior when he explained,

74

"They've called me freak, but I was like of course I'm a freak, I sit in the hallway and dance and do random stuff. It's like they just call me things that sometimes, yes are true, but they're not going to affect me."

Concerning environmental and personal variation of the use of the eight strategies, all of the participants discussed how they employed the strategy that fit the time, space, and people involved. For example, Ron discussed how if he is with a large group of people and he is feeling secure with himself, he will employ a direct response, however if he is feeling insecure, he would be more likely to ignore his peer's words or actions. If he is in a one-on-one situation, Ron stated that he would be more likely to respond as an activist and try to learn about the root of the homophobia and possibly attempt to educate his peer. For Luna, he used to engage in self-harm when he was younger and not actively trying to control his depression. Since he has been actively working on controlling his depression, he will instead try to physically avoid responding to homophobia by removing himself from the immediate situation.

Relationships. Like the majority of adolescents, issues concerning romantic relationships, dating, intimacy, and sexuality were salient to their experiences and sense of identity. Because of disability and sexual orientation, they described several ways in which the intersection of their identities affected their experiences with relationships by a) limiting opportunities for relationships and intimacy and b) restricting their ability to gain relationship knowledge and skills.

Limited options. All of the participants discussed wishing that there were more LGBTQI students in their high schools because there would be lower levels of stigma, they would have a stronger voice in the school, and there would be more options for dating, relationships, and intimacy. The two female students, Artemis and Sarah, were dating a

75

classmate that they knew from school. Two students, Ron and Elijah, had only dated someone that they had met outside school in the community. Three students, Cylis, Purple, and Fuzzer, had never had a romantic relationship that aligned with their current sexual orientation while Luna had dated a straight, cisgender female classmate before he identified as pansexual or transgender. Throughout the interviews, most of the participants discussed the ways in which their disability affected their social skills and social opportunities, especially considering their ability/opportunity to meet other LGBTQI youth.

All participants stated that very few peers openly disclosed their sexual minority status in high school (especially young men and students in rural environments). Some students had more frequent social opportunities while others discussed struggling with social skills and social opportunities. The division between these two groups seemed to fall along the lines of disability. For Ron, Cylis, and Artemis, they found that because of their ADHD, their personality was frequently social, open, and outgoing. This allowed them to interact with a wider variety of students and peers, giving them more opportunities for meeting other LGBTQI youth. Artemis noted that, "I think that's really great because it makes a lot more interaction with people and it helps build better tolerance for people who aren't like you and helps you discover other things out there in the world that you would've never thought about." She even claimed because of her pansexual identity and open personality, she has had a majority of her friends across genders show romantic interest. Participants with Autism Spectrum Disorder described that due to their difficulty in social situations, they had a doubly limited friend group and opportunities to interact with other LGBTQI youth. For Fuzzer, he had difficulty conversing with peers who do not share his interests of chamber music and science fiction. When asked what was getting in the way of him finding a relationship (which he has wanted since middle school), he stated:

76

> Well the big thing is being gay, cause there are just not many people out at the moment. I can count the number of people on my fingers… so then narrow it down to someone who has my interests that none of the people who I know in school are out share my interests at all and then even then, I mean I can still try to date someone who doesn't have my interests, but they also have to be into me as well. It just hasn't worked out. (Fuzzer)

Additionally, he described how it is difficult for him to date since he has discovered that many young men do not disclose their sexual orientation until after high school, further limiting his opportunity to have a romantic or intimate relationship. Fuzzer also found accessing homosocial environments intimidating because of his disability. He wanted to attend events at the local LGBTQI youth center, but would not because of the fear of rejection due to his Autism and social difficulties.

Several of the participants discussed how with limited options for developing relationships with other LGBTQI youth, the internet and online social networks provided the opportunity to meet other LGBTQI youth. These online relationships also gave the youth a space to discuss discrimination they face, find solidarity in LGBTQI groups, and explore identities that they might not feel safe exploring in person. Elijah described a group of friends that he found on Facebook. Through this network, he joined several groups, begun to feel pride in his sexual orientation, and even participated in intimate relationships online. This online community helped him access social environments that would be otherwise challenging due the limited number of peers who are gay, his limited social skills, and his past traumatic experiences of peer rejection. Elijah also discussed the capacity for online social networks as far as opening up the opportunities for youth. He stated, "Well it's a lot of freedom [having Facebook], if you can't really talk to anyone around in my town, then why can't you just talk to someone that's halfway across the world? There is bound to be someone out there you can make conversation with." He also described the potential for

using other technological tools including a mobile application that is a community of gay

men who are looking to meet up to engage in romantic, social, or intimate relationships.

Restricted skill and knowledge development. Several of the participants discussed their

restricted development of relationship skills and knowledge because of the intersection of

their identities. These barriers include a paucity of models, lack of social skill instruction, and

friendship attempts being interpreted as overly-strong romantic interest. Because many

students with disabilities benefit from direct modeling and instruction, the lack of LGBTQI

relationships in the media can be a barrier, not just for self-esteem, but also to learning about

relationships and intimacy. Cylis describes how, as a part of his disability, he is

predominantly a kinesthetic learner, increasing his need for explicit modeling. The

overwhelming scarcity of non-heterosexual relationships and intimacy in the media,

combined with his disability, severely limited his relationship self-efficacy.

> Sometimes I don't believe that my IEP fits my sexual orientation and some
> people believe that sexuality is a choice and they would believe that my IEP
> would have affected my sexual orientation. I feel like sometimes it doesn't
> and then I think it does. Like I feel like awkward, like it would be awkward if
> I got into a partnership because I wouldn't know what to do because I see it
> on TV and stuff but it's for heterosexuals. And then on for homosexuality
> you would see it like briefly here and there and be like, but they would be like
> kind of shoved in the corner… This is kind of weird but you see
> heterosexual sex on TV sometimes. Like you turn [TV], you're likely to see
> hetero sex instead of homosexual sex because it's perverted, it's dirty, it's this
> it's that… Like I wouldn't know what to do because I see everything being
> heterosexual instead of homosexual. (Cylis)

Concerning limited knowledge and skills, Fuzzer described how, because of his IEP and

limited course selection, he has yet to take a sexual education class as a senior. He reported

that one of his friends previously took sex ed course and told him that there were no

references to LGBTQI issues. Fuzzer believes that not only would an inclusive sex ed

curriculum help students like him learn intimacy and sexuality knowledge, it would eradicate

some of his peers' ignorance and fear concerning non-heterosexual identities and sexualities.

The ways in which the participants described their identity development, understanding of labels, strategies for reacting to discrimination, navigation of normality, and understanding of intimate and romantic relationships paint a vivid overall picture of the participants' sense of self and identity.

Home. These eight young adults with disabilities who identified as a sexual or gender minority discussed several salient experiences at home. They described a wide variety of familial histories, structures, and beliefs that affected them. Three major themes that emerged from the data concerning the social context of the family were support, rejection, and religion. Each participant described how their home context was comprised of several relationships that exhibited both support and rejection. None of the adolescents described their home social context as universally supportive or completely negative. Individual relationships with family members often shifted depending on space, time, as well as dimension of their identity that was salient at the moment. Refer to Table 5 in Appendix C for a summary of major findings related to the participants' experiences and beliefs about the social context of the home.

Support. Although none of the participants described a globally supportive home context, each discussed the ways in which the home context provided some levels of support. They discussed how having other members of their family identify as a sexual or gender minority was an important source of support providing strength and a resource for honest conversations. Artemis described her grandmother (who lives with her and her mother) supporting her and all aspects of her identity. She told Artemis that she would identify as pansexual if she had been born in her generation, which provided Artemis with a

feeling of connection. Fuzzer also had an aunt that identified as bisexual as well as a cousin that was developing an identity as a lesbian. Cylis talked about how his bisexual aunt always supported him, especially when he was having a romantic crisis or difficulty with his parents. He reported that she was the only family member he can talk to about his sexual orientation or relationship issues. Since he was living on friends' couches after leaving home, he has also found support from his friend's parents (whom he was living with at the time of the final interview) who were a same-sex couple. After Cylis moved in with his friend's family, he felt much more comfortable at home, not having to be careful about talking about his identity, relationships, etc.

Disclosure of sexual orientation was a salient experience with beneficial ramifications for several of the participants because it allowed them to feel comfortable at home. As Elijah described, "I felt more alive afterwards, like I was a real person instead of being cloaked… Hidden, like under a blanket all my life." For Sarah, disclosing her sexual orientation to her father and step-father has brought them closer because they have something in common they can joke about together:

> Now honestly, we [my step dad and I] joke around and we me and him love
> to fish alright. Almost every weekend, I am over there we go down to the
> cove or haystack and go fishing. and you know, a girl will walk by and he will
> look at me and he is like "hey" [to me]…It hilarious, its like the first time
> that happened after the first one walked away we just busted up laughing for
> like 3 minutes straight. (Sarah)

Rejection. Although the participants did not experience complete rejection at home, each discussed the ways in which various members of their family rejected them along one or more dimensions of their identity. Familial rejection took two forms: direct aggression, in which the damage was overtly done face-to-face, and micro aggressions, brief and commonplace indignities that intentionally or unintentionally communicate aggression or discrimination (Sue, 2010). For some participants, the family rejection was upsetting, but not

80

a salient experience. All participants reported some experience with micro-aggressions with one or more members of their family concerning their disability, gender orientation, or sexual orientation, especially in the least stable parent/child dyads (e.g. Artemis and her mom, Cylis and his mom, Fuzzer and his dad).

Some of the participants also felt familial rejection due to aspects of their disability. For example, Artemis' mother accused her of "using her ADHD as a crutch." She describes that instead of supporting her disability, her family expected her to get over it and stop using it as "an excuse." After Ron's manic break and substance abuse, he believed that his family viewed and treated him differently, which upset him.

> But yeah my family is kind of an example like that. Like my grandma is like, "Oh if he does drugs, I'm afraid he's going to go crazy and start doing stuff," no, no, no, that's not how it is, cause doctors made me like saying that to my family... Ableism is tough…Yeah, some of my family thinks that way. Now they think that I'm crazy. Now they think that I'm just going to get manic randomly and start hitting them or something. That's not even true. A lot of people are that way. I think that's a big issue right now.

For some of the participants, controlling who knows about their disability or sexual orientation (or what they know) was important to them. For example, Sarah's mother disclosed to Sarah's step-father, even though Sarah was not prepared to do so. Fuzzer's father also disclosed Fuzzer's sexual orientation to one side of his family, leading to members of his family not speaking to Fuzzer for about six months. This was upsetting to Fuzzer. He was angered by his father's lack of respect for his privacy, and also the tension it created between Fuzzer and his extended family. Cylis had one salient experience in a public setting where his mother loudly began asking him personal questions about his sexuality so nearby shoppers would overhear. She did not stop when asked to do so numerous times.

> [My mom] is a really loud lady, so we were at the grocery store and she was asking questions. Very personal and very inappropriate questions. She was like, "So are you gay?" In the middle of the grocery store. Yes, so I was like, "Oh my God. Please stop talking." This is like sophomore year so it was two

years later [after he disclosed that he thought he was bisexual]. She was like, "So do you like it up the butt?" I'm like, "Oh my God, Mom! Stop talking." She kept asking questions like that. So she's like, "Do you think this guy is hot?" And she points to a picture. I was like, "Oh my God." So it was like, I didn't know to say or what to do, so I was just went down a random aisle and acted like I didn't know her. I was like, that's so wrong.   (Cylis)

He felt that this experience demonstrated that his mother believed his identity was not something he was allowed to control. This is similar to how she treated his disability (not letting him have autonomy over his disability identity, services, etc.) or not letting him identify as bisexual when he attempted to disclose his sexual orientation to her.

Some of the participants described how their families rejected the ways they express their gender. Fuzzer's father thought that he was helping him by making him adhere to gender behavioral expectations. Fuzzer believed that instead, it just caused tension in their relationship and affected his ability to follow his own desires.

When I was little, I had very long hair and I had a ponytail and wore a lot of pink and for Halloween I wanted to be a fairy princess. My mom thought that was all right, she didn't care. My dad cut my hair, told me no I couldn't be a fairy princess, I could be a goblin thing and got rid of a lot of my pink stuff and got blue stuff. And I asked some of my relatives about that recently and they said that he was afraid of me becoming gay when I was older. I finally asked my dad about it. He said that he thought I had a gender identity crisis, which I definitely didn't cause I knew I was a guy just that I could do whatever I wanted. But he thought he was helping me by reassuring my gender role…Actually this is in a way how I've been quashed because my dad didn't let me do a lot of things, I now don't have an urge to be a fairy princess anymore cause the urges have been pushed out of me….I probably would be a lot more pink or something, my hair would probably be in a ponytail right now. (Fuzzer)

The father was, indeed, successful in his attempt to instill gender normative behavior and some internalized desire for normative expression.

For some participants, family rejection was one of the most important aspects of their home life, taking the form of more direct and explicit aggression. For example, Artemis discussed how her mother would use derogatory language, like, "You butch ass dyke" when

82

they were having arguments. Cylis also reported his mother would say things like, "what crawled up your little gay ass" during a disagreement. As a whole, Cylis was so overwhelmed by his mother's denial of his identity and overall limitations that he was in the process of moving out to a friend's couch during the time of our interviews.

> The idea [of moving out] was because my mother more or less, now that I look at it, she ruled mine and my sister's lives with fear but I developed anger which is kind of horrible and so, she taught me, I should say, I taught myself that moving on and saying you know, it's okay to say your opinion because your opinion does matter… And it was just, I felt like I wasn't a person… I don't think she really kind of knew [about my sexual orientation]. I told her in 8th grade that I was bisexual and she's like, "no you're not. You don't know what you want. You've never, you're still a virgin." I was like, I'm pretty sure you're not supposed to have these thoughts about Heath Ledger or whatever... I just felt like I wouldn't be completely accepted by my family…That's why sometimes I don't believe my family yet. (Cylis)

Religion. Religion and spirituality affected participant's identity and experiences in the home context. Most participants discussed how homophobia could be based in religious beliefs (some denominations of Christianity). Sarah, Artemis, and Elijah discussed how they were fearful of disclosing their sexual orientation to more religious family members, but did not explicitly describe their beliefs in terms of religion. For example, although Artemis has a closer relationship with her father (who lives out of state), she has not disclosed her sexual orientation to him yet because he has religious Christian beliefs and "he thinks that people who identify as gay, there's nothing wrong with them but he doesn't think that they should act on it. …I've never really told him about it."

Those participants that were raised in religious families (Purple and Cylis) did not reject organized religion, but instead actively sought out religious or spiritual communities that were inclusive of all identities. These two students (Cylis and Purple) also were the two that demonstrated the most inner crisis and confusion about their non-heterosexual orientation. For example, Cylis grew up in a practicing Catholic family. He did not feel that

83

his religion was accepting of his identity and was fearful of anyone in the congregation knowing he was gay. He began attending a Unitarian church with his friend and his friend's same-sex parents and felt accepted in this new religious/spiritual community. For Purple Panda, belonging to a religious community provided him with a sense of community, especially after experiencing the abuse and rejection from his birth family. Concerning his religious beliefs and his identity, he was still exploring the ways in which they could be congruent. He did not feel the church directly rejected his gay identity and even incorporated their beliefs about homosexuality into his own beliefs about the future, thinking that marriage should just between a man and a woman.

The participants who described themselves as Atheist discussed how their spiritual beliefs supported their beliefs about their identity. These students also tended to be more open and positive about their sexual orientation (Fuzzer, Luna, Ron). Fuzzer and Luna believed that people use religion as an excuse for bad behavior, like homophobia or misogyny.

> I mean I don't want to hate religion or other people's religion or their beliefs, but I find that a lot of people use religion to explain their behavior, their bad behavior or try to get out of something… I think that's an excuse (Luna)

He continued by describing how he believes that these discriminatory religious beliefs stem from the fear of the unknown, which is similar to how society is discriminatory towards disability. For these young adults with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority, the experiences described above concerning the social context of the home allow us to understand the ways their home and family shaped their identity. These family experiences laid the foundation for the experiences that the youth faced in the social context of the school.

School. The participants experienced a range of events and interactions during their school experiences and developed a range of relationships with their peers and adults working at their schools. For the eight youth in this study, school, staff, and peers were a crucial contributor to their understanding of their identity and their experiences. Although this study included a sample of students from a variety of schools (rural, urban, public, alternative, etc.) and the students had a variety of experiences, some notable themes emerged from the data. These themes include a) overlap between special education and queerness in schools, b) peer homophobia, c) navigation of marked spaces, d) clubs (including GSA's) and e) desired staff characteristics. Refer to Table 6 in Appendix C for a summary of major findings related to the participants' experiences and beliefs concerning the social context of the school.

Disability and queerness in schools. Many of the participants described how the social construction of disability and the social construction of queerness intersected within the school context. Many participants remembered experiences with their disability diagnosis and special education referral, testing, or placement as one of the first places they were marked as different or treated differently from their peers. Since this process occurred in the schools, they remember how that feeling of difference was situated in the school context. They were labeled by others and told that they had a disability and that experience continued to have an effect on their high school experience.

Several of the participants discussed issues of not wanting to be the only different individual in a class. Sarah and Luna described not wanting to use the accommodations provided in their IEP or 504 plan because they did not want to be marked as different. In addition, they considered these accommodations to be a form of cheating, even if the accommodations would help them. Sarah stated that she "was all for it [receiving

85

accommodations] in elementary school; it didn't really affect me because not a lot of the kids understood." This changed as she became older and fitting in with her peers was a more salient concern. She liked knowing that she had a disability because it allowed her to be aware of herself, but in general, she wished that she did not have a disability. Just like her sexual orientation, she is worried about her peers knowing about her label and judging her.

Some of the participants also expressed how receiving accommodations made them feel different and marked them as having a disability. Fuzzer resented having to take a study skills class because he did not think he needed it and it limited his ability to take classes with friends and socialize (which he says he needs to do more of because of his disability). He remembered that when he first got the diagnosis of ASD, his teacher had him on a tracking program that was not used by other students. He was offended and felt that his disability caused others to treat him like he needed a "leash." Similarly, Sarah was resentful that her special education teacher treated them like they "were kids." Ron hated how receiving the accommodation of a calculator for his disability made others view him as different and were resentful of the extra support he received.

> I know ableism is going on at this city's school () (…) cause they were like, well you have a disability of learning so you're going need a different class, you're going to need IEP, you're going to need all this stuff where you get extra time on your tests. That's cool and all, gives me an advantage, but then everyone else is like, well I wish I got that and they're gonna be mad at me cause they are like, well how'd you get that?…. It's just embarrassing, a good example, oh you get a calculator but everybody else doesn't. It's cool, I get an advantage, but then everybody looks at me like (gesture) loser, well not loser but like he must be stupid or something then and that's not cool. Must be retarded or something, you need it. And then it's like, I don't know why they gave it to me, I can do without just fine. I don't know, it's just discriminatory, happens all the time.   (Ron)

Some participants spoke of how they desired normality and did what they could to pass as non-disabled or non-queer in the school context. They were conscientious of the ways in which they acted because they did not want to be interpreted as having a disability or

86

being LGBTQI. Fuzzer discussed how his arts-based middle school was a safer space for challenging normality. When his peers and he entered the large, public high school, they actively attempted to "pass" in order to avoid targeting from peers. Fuzzer used to wear bizarre hats and flamboyant colors in middle school, but no longer wears these pieces, opting instead for neutral clothing in order to pass as "normal."

Students discussed how this feeling of difference negatively affected their belief in their academic capabilities. Alternatively, they found that having peer acceptance affected their abilities to do well in school. Purple Panda switched schools during high school to a place that was less homophobic and more accepting overall. Here, he was able to make friends for the first time and found that this increased his self-esteem which increased his academic achievement and made him spend less time online playing games.

> Well definitely I did get help from my friends and I actually felt like I was more secure with myself that I could actually do good in school and actually pay attention to school more than online. I would not spend as much time online nowadays. (Purple)

Students discussed how navigating certain spaces of the school in which gender norms were more strictly enforced by peers was the most challenging for them. For Purple, he felt excluded and awkward in health class when they were asked to separate into groups divided by the sexes to complete a group project outlining all of the desired characteristics for a partner in the opposite sex. This activity made him feel excluded and caused him anxiety that his group members would find out that he was not heterosexual. For Fuzzer and Elijah, physical education was a difficult place because they were expected to conform to certain gender norms regarding athletic ability. Because of behavior differences that they ascribe to both sexual orientation and disability, they were targets of peer aggression. Fuzzer believed that his lack of desire to play sports was largely due to his Autism, but made him the target of homophobic reactions from his peers. For Elijah, physical education class was

87

where most of the bullying happened in middle school (before he wrote in the bomb threat):

> I was always getting picked on at PE time, so I would always hide out in the bathroom areas on top of the toilets and just look outside when people were running out and when school was over I would run back home. [I felt] very unsafe. (Elijah)

Some participants discussed how sometimes their disability caused them to be placed in environments with other students who had difficulty modulating their behavior (including containing discriminatory beliefs, actions, and language). When Elijah was transferred to a school for students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders after expulsion from his middle school, he was faced with aggressive peers who intimidated him and reminded him of his experiences with homophobic bullying. He felt like this educational environment left him just as vulnerable to being targeted as when he was mainstreamed in the general student population. Several of the participants also reported that often they would be the target of homophobic language or behavior and, because of their disability, would react in a manner that ended up causing them to face punitive consequences from their teacher while their aggressor would not. At his first high school, Purple described how he would be bullied often and that the result of his targeting would be that his teachers would blame him for the conflict.

> Since I got into high school, out of middle school, like the teachers have a different like brain thought or something because in middle school if you get bullied you're in trouble for not being able to defend yourself. But it seems that in high school, sometimes you'll get in trouble for being bullied but it's usually the bully's fault…Like, they would get like slapped and then they would angrily say like a swear word and the other kid would get completely forgotten and the kid who just swore in class would get in trouble. Like when I was actually being bullied, like they'd actually hit me, like twice this kid, not going to say his name cause it's not even worthy, he like, rubber mats you would find on the floor, they'd like grab one of those and slap me in the face and I almost went blind for two days because I couldn't see. The same thing happened a couple of weeks later with like a computer book stand for computer class, same thing, and he never got in trouble for either of them…. I got in trouble, yeah, [for his angry reaction], which didn't make any sense. (Purple)

88

Artemis described similar situations, including one instance where her friend defended her after a peer taunted her. The peer ended up having to go to the principal's office for his use of explicit language, while the peer who taunted Artemis with homophobic slurs did not face consequences.

Marked spaces and marked bodies. Certain spaces in the school signified disability and/or non-heteronormative identities. In the same way that receiving accommodations marked their bodies as disabled, students were aware of how they navigated these marked spaces within the school context. Sarah stated how she prefers that her school has a tolerance group instead of a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) or other club specifically focusing on issues of sexual orientation because if she was seen walking into a GSA, her peers would make assumptions about her sexual orientation, marking her as queer.

> I guess that if we maybe if we had just like that strict group of people that just talk about sexual orientation that if you if someone that was disapproving of that saw you walking into that rumors would be flying. You know…but with the small school and a small community once you tell one person it is like telling the whole entire world. It is crazy…You know it is just kind of like here they put the SPED classes at the end of the hall right by the smart people classes it is like oh awesome. I hate this everyday when I was in the special ed classes I hated that walk to that classroom... The computer labs and the business and the marketing and the keyboarding and the personal finance. It is like how awesome you are putting the SPED classes right next to the college classes. Thanks (sarcastically).   (Sarah)

The tolerance club at school 2 was first designated to meet in the special education classroom (since the special education teacher was the faculty advisor), however the location was switched when the advisor learned that many students did not want to participate because they did not want to be seen entering the special education classroom. After it was switched, several of the students in special education felt unwelcomed in the tolerance club because of the original rejection of the space marked with disability.

89

For many of the participants, marked spaces for queerness and disability allowed students to not worry about homophobia, ableism, or how they presented themselves. Fuzzer related this feeling of safety and transformation to the social skills lunch meetings that he had with his Speech and Language Pathologist and other students with ASD. School one participated in a district-wide prom for LGTBQI students and allies. Participants from school one attended this prom at some point during the interview timeline. They discussed how at all school dances, they were on edge and worried about how their actions were being interpreted. At this LGBTQIA prom, they could let that guard down and just enjoy themselves. Cylis discussed these marked spaces as the appropriate space for being open with your sexual orientation. Not needing to constantly evaluate his environment for judgment gave him a rare opportunity to stop "playing a character" and to fully be free to be himself.

GSAs and Extracurricular Activities. Although academic classes were important to the participants, they were not the main location where disability and sexual orientation intersected (except for the examples discussed above). This occurred more frequently in social interactions with peers and specifically in extra curricular clubs and activities. Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) were an extracurricular club that the youth described as being an important aspect of their identity development in schools. Participants who belonged to a school with an active GSA spoke of finding a group of supportive peers who could relate to the issues they were facing. School one's GSA even had what they described as their "family" a network of peers that acted as their family at school. For Cylis, this "family" was the only support he felt from his peers on all aspects of his identity (sexual orientation, race, disability, etc.). This support helped him develop his own sense of identity, history, and transformation.

90

I don't feel any support from them [my peers]. Maybe the GSA because they understand and they know. If something were to go down then they would help me but other than that, I feel like some peers, if I were burned at the stake, some would just let it happen…because they don't know me. Or I'm different. Or they hate me. Or I'm loud or I'm different. You know. I'm brown. I'm this. I'm that. I'm a label. They don't see what I am as a person. Like they know the things you go through. They see it every day. I think that's just why people who are in GSAs or are a part of the LGBTQIA… they understand. They are going through the same struggles as you know I am. With or without an IEP. And they, when you're down, they're because they understand. Some people call you…drop death bombs on you all day…probably punched you or threw you against the locker…and the GSAs are like, okay yes this is your haven. You're okay here, you know. This is a group of friends who actually care. And it's just they understand. (Cylis)

The GSA's give youth opportunities for youth to practice peer leadership, education, and activism. Although Fuzzer was the vice-president of the QSA, he did not seem to be very involved. He did participate in activities and events that raised awareness (designing posters, protesting how the Red Cross would not take blood from individuals who are gay, etc.). This type of activism and support is also similar to the type of work Fuzzer did concerning disability support and awareness. Along with two friends, Fuzzer created a blog for young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder to connect and talk about their experiences. Although this turned into an extracurricular activity, it began as a project for his English class.

Participants also described how their disability acted as a barrier for setting up or becoming involved in their school's GSA. For Luna, his disability acted as a barrier to participating in the GSA. Although he stays positive, he has difficulty understanding why he has such difficulty making and maintaining friendships, but knows that it is related to his disability. Elijah was trying to start a GSA at his alternative school as a senior project to graduate, but was having difficulty because of other obligations and an inability to focus and follow through on goals. He wanted to create a safe space in the school, hoping that more

students would disclose their identity as non-heterosexual. Because of different aspects of

his disability and past experiences with bullying, he did not want to take a leadership role;

instead, he wanted to set it up and then find another student to lead the group. He described

the many reasons for wanting a to create a GSA:

> Well it's a safe environment for others to let out their feelings, get along with others, solve problems and it's a comfortable place to make friends. You don't have to be afraid. There's people there for you... [the GSA] just brings people together. I don't like people being disconnected in the world, feeling like there's not much to do in life, not much to hold on to. Years ago when I first went to my old middle school, I felt like there was nothing for me in the world, I was lonely, I also felt like I was the only one of my kind.   (Elijah)

Students attending School two, were prohibited from having a GSA or student club that

specifically supported LGBTQI students by their administration. Instead, they had a student

club that purported to support all students and promote tolerance across varying

marginalized groups. Even within this "tolerance" club, however, students were not open

about their sexual orientation or disability. Participants from School two stated that peers in

the school that they had disclosed their sexual orientation to are members of this "tolerance"

club.

Many participants discussed how extra-curricular clubs and activities provided them

with the ability to connect with peers over a shared interest, blurring the lines of difference,

such as sexual orientation. Fuzzer feels at home in the orchestra. Because of his Autism

Spectrum Disorder, he often feels like he is unable to connect or engage in "mindless

banter" with his peers. He also does not enjoy the gender typical activities such as sports that

would let him connect with his peers. The orchestra provides him with a space where he can

communicate with a group of his peers through music.

> I like playing with other people, I guess I feel like I'm connecting to them cause we're all reading the same thing, we're playing the same thing together or trying to create the same thing, but we're not just like robots doing it… In 7th grade, I joined the school band and I liked french horn and I learned

how to play with other people and I realized that you know, I guess I don't communicate with others that well, but I find when I'm playing music with everybody else I can communicate really well, I mean communicating while playing. It's fun, it's a good feeling and when you hear all the voices when you're playing, just hearing it all is amazing to me… There's no talking, there's only playing. So in essence yes, there would be no care about political views or sexual orientation or anything, just playing, just listening to the music… There's the band room. It seems most people in the band happen to be weird. I know in the drama department I've heard lots of stories about that…pretty much the band room and the drama room are two safe havens. I know that there are a lot of groups getting together, like gay youth choirs and stuff, which I'm actually interested in trying to join cause it's just a good way for people in the LGBTQ community to get together… (Fuzzer)

Some clubs, even though they are not explicitly for LGBTQI students, are more welcoming to students who identify as "different" such as students with disabilities or LGBTQI students because they foster individuality and uniqueness rather than conformity. These clubs can often act as havens for LGBTQI youth with disabilities where they can find others that challenge the normative culture at the school. For example, Artemis joined anime club, where people are LGBTQI friendly, and met a majority of her friends and support system there. For some participants, participation in clubs let them explore their differences in a supportive way, especially for the ones that had difficulty establishing and maintaining supportive friendships. Luna enjoyed participating in the freestyle poetry activities because it lets him express his feelings and emotions. Although he thought this was helpful, he also felt that his speech and language disabilities keep him from full participation. He participated in a competition last year where he read one of his poems about his romantic interests. He worked with his speech and language pathologist (SLP) for a while beforehand to prepare. The judges gave him a low score because of his speech issues, but Luna was proud of what he accomplished and reported that his peers approached him after saying that he should have received a higher score. His participation in the poetry slam was also supported by another club that he belongs to named ReachOut, which is designed to support at-risk youth

93

through leadership and mentoring. For Luna, it is what helped him overcome his suicide ideation, depression, and grief that he experienced his first year in high school. It has given him a higher self-esteem and allowed him to feel comfortable openly identifying as transgender and pansexual. He stated that he is "proud to be in [ReachOut] just because I barely have a voice in general." It was because of this extracurricular club that Luna started "expressing myself and talking to people. Actually being comfortable with who I am."

Desired Staff Characteristics. Throughout our in-depth conversations, the youth described supportive relationships that they had with adults who worked in their schools. The data revealed the characteristics of school staff that participants deemed as desirable for supporting young adults with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority. These characteristics came from both from the participants' experiences of positive relationships with adult allies as well as their beliefs about what they look for in a prospective adult ally in their school. There were eight main characteristics of staff that the youth believed made them a potential positive ally for young adults with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority that can be divided into two categories: 1) personality characteristics and 2) skills and beliefs.

These eight youth discussed the types of personality characteristics that they believed made a supportive staff member and adult ally. The traits that all students agreed on were being trustworthy, honest, and dependable. They wanted to be able to feel secure knowing that the staff member would not disclose their identity to others without their knowledge and that they could depend on them when needed. The second characteristic discussed by most of the participants was that staff had to be non-judgmental. The youth wanted to know that they could discuss any topic with their staff ally without them being critical or disapproving. This included not making assumptions about the youth. The third

94

characteristic that they looked for in a staff ally was that they needed to be proud of their

own unique identities. Some of the participants appreciated when staff members were open

and proud of their disabilities, sexual orientation, or other aspects of their identity that

challenged the normative culture of their school (including just being "weird"). Finally, some

participants discussed the importance of just being kind. For Elijah, a teacher at his second

school (the behavior program) who joked around with him turned out to be the only

individual in his life at the time who treated him with kindness. He remembered, "mainly she

was a very important person in my life then. We got along, more than I've ever been with

anyone else at the time."

All of the participants also described desired skills, behaviors, and beliefs that staff

possessed that would mark them as a support or ally. First, a supportive staff member would

allow students to have autonomy over their own identities. This means that they would

understand that the youth would be the experts on their own experiences and identity. As

Luna explained:

> I can't stand how people and psychologists tell us how we feel when they
> can't even relate (…). They think they are right, but they don't know what it's
> like to have a disability, or different genders, or sexuality. So you have no way
> of saying that. If you are going to say it, you should at least know, that state
> of being transgendered or bisexual, or whatever the case maybe, I have
> ADHD. They should at least have one of those symptoms or listen to the
> people who do. Instead, they just say, "students like this should get this kind
> of treatment." (Luna)

Second, some participants stressed that although it is difficult, supportive staff know how to

balance helping students not stand out as different without encouraging them to be normal.

Purple stated, "Make sure they don't stand out, like I'm different from all of you. Try to let

them blend in a bit but don't make them bend towards everybody else's view. Let them be

themselves." They agreed that this is not an easy balance, but one that is critical. Third, the

youth discussed how a supportive staff member would be aware and active concerning social

95

justice issues. This included being inclusive in classrooms of issues concerning disability

rights, sexual orientation, gender orientation, and other issues of equity. For example, Fuzzer

stated, that he'd "look for them to be very open minded, you know open to everything,

support of gay rights and civil rights and stuff." An example he gave was asking his history

teacher to teach a lesson on Bayard Rustin or his sexual education teacher to not just focus

on heterosexual or able-bodied sex throughout the whole class. Fourth, the youth discussed

the need for staff to have the ability to support youth through personal matters, especially

peer victimization or family victimization, without making them feel like a victim any further.

Beliefs About the Future. Throughout the interviews, the eight participants

discussed the ways in which their personal and group identities affected their beliefs about

the future across three post-secondary transition domains: a) post-secondary education, b)

employment, and c) independent living. See Table 7 in Appendix C for a summary of major

findings related to the participants' beliefs about the future. Data in this section answers

Research Question 3 that asks, "How do personal and group identities affect beliefs about

the future for LGBTQI adolescents with disabilities across the three post-secondary

domains?" There was a spectrum of beliefs about the future, with some students' beliefs

about the future being pessimistic, and others more optimistic.

Independent Living. Each student discussed their beliefs about their future personal

and social conditions. The three themes that emerged concerning independent living were a)

relationships, b) children and family, and 3) location.

Relationships/Marriage. Most of the participants desired a relationship in their near

and distant future. Certain barriers, such as legality of gay marriage, stigma, limited

opportunities to meet LGBTQI partners/friends, lack of knowledge about non-heterosexual

relationships/intimacy, limited social skills, other aspects of their disability, and internalized

biases were discussed. For example, Purple Panda was planning on spending 5-15 years in the Army after graduation, and did not plan on having a relationship because he believed that disclosing his sexual orientation in the military would not be desirable. He described how because his family holds a "strong Christian belief that a man and a woman should get married and that is the definition of marriage," so he does not plan on marrying a man in the future. Instead, he believes that if he gets married, he will marry a close female friend and have a purely platonic relationship. This is related to his belief that while he is in the army (for 6-15 years), he will not engage in a romantic relationship so that his sexual orientation will remain undisclosed. For Cylis, he described how his disability affected his belief that both his future partner and himself should behave in ways that do not challenge society's gender norms.

> For me, I really don't want to sound like have that girlish tone in my voice, like they talk…I think that's also when my IEP kicks in because It's like things should be how they were originally… because if you want to be accepted in society, shouldn't you first live up to society's standards just a tad? I think that's why I won't date anybody who is like really feminine because it's like they are almost like breaching that limit. Like, they have actually like hit that border between like girl and boy and so it's like, I'd rather not date you because they are almost crossing the border from boy to girl…There are those clear, clearly labeled, nice filed boxes (labels) and then I feel like I'm that one person who is, you know, when you go up to see it, it makes absolutely no sense. It's like AJLMNOPJQLOL… I believe it's both [my sexual orientation label and my disability label]. I can't be identified as either/or because I keep up another persona that I guess is a security measure. (Cylis)

Cylis pointed to his disability as the reason why he wanted to maintain normative gender roles for himself and for his future partner(s), even though this demonstrated a fear of deviation from the norm, which is at the root of the internalized homophobia that he presents. Concerning both his disability label and his sexual orientation, he feels like he tries to play the role of "normal" so often to protect himself that he often forgets who he really is.

Family. Most of the youth in this study discussed wanting to have children and family when they were older. This included both biological children and/or adopted children. Because most of the youth had experienced rejection from their families, they discussed how important it was to provide a safe and accepting family for children. They stressed the importance of wanting to let their children be themselves. For example, Cylis discussed how he wanted to adopt a child because of the feeling of self-rejection and confusion that he felt due to his sexual orientation and his disability. He felt that he would help a child deal with similar type of issues.

> So it is something that I might do, because what if I was in that same situation and I was never taken out of it and I have this cold, cold heart and never understood anything and I hate myself because I didn't know what I was or how come I felt this way about some things… like just not understanding why I have feeling towards the same sex people and about males and not understanding why I don't understand things like people do and why sometimes I don't get things like people should or shouldn't do….I don't feel normal because I like males and I won't have kids. I can't have kids so it's like that weird thing. So I'm not that perfect picture. I'm not the white, the four family members, the dog and the white picket fence…I get myself thinking, I could adopt, foster care or you know whatever, I can have like 10 kids, four dogs and a rainbow picket fence. You know? It doesn't matter. I pep myself up, which is kind of sometimes hard but you know, but I try. (Cylis)

Several of the youth also brought up how although adopting would be a desired option, it is a costly one that they might not be able to afford.

Geographic location. Many of the participants discussed how, because of their identities, they are cognizant of the political climate of different locations and this will affect where they would like to live in the future. Fuzzer discussed how the political climate was important to him as he was figuring out which colleges to apply to since his identity as a gay man with a disability is closely tied to his political beliefs.

> There are several locations I would not like to move to. I believe a northern place actually yeah…. Probably somewhere liberal, not republican... Well being of the LGBTQ I'm afraid of being someplace that's highly

98

conservative that night not be gay friendly… [As far as my disability] It's
going to be along the same lines, as they might not be as accepting. My
political views are very different than conservatives, I'm not conservative.
I'm not democrat but I'm definitely not republican. (Fuzzer)

Cylis described how in other locations (such as California or Mexico), it is "a dangerous

place to be gay," where he could get hurt if he acted too flamboyantly. He would like to stay

in the area, because as a whole, people are accepting of his identity, although there is still

some negativity regarding non-heterosexual identities. Elijah stated that he planned to move

to Australia as soon as he saved enough money because he has friends from the online social

network Facebook there and he felt like he would have a gay community there.

Postsecondary Education. Although all of the students planned on attending some

sort of post-secondary education institution (community college or four-year), the older

students seemed to have a more clear idea of how their identities would affect their

experience there. For example, Fuzzer discussed how he was applying to colleges and

actively sought out institutions that were looking for students who "don't think like the

norm." This uniqueness is something that he was encouraged to write about in his college

application essays because it would make him desirable.

For most of the participants, post-secondary education was the location where they

expected to make and maintain future friendships. Some of the participants discussed how

they hope to make meaningful social relationships at their community college or four-year

institution. Luna thought that because of stigma associated with his disabilities and sexual

orientation, making friends in a new environment would be difficult. He hopes to access

different student groups and other community resources to help him. Fuzzer, was hopeful

that his future college environment would be more suitable for meeting peers who share his

interests as well and environment where it would be easier to meet other gay students.

It's taken me a while but now for these last few years in high school I'm starting to realize the value of friendship and I actually do want to talk to people now. I put down the book. And it feels nice to talk to people and make friends, even though it's hard, I just don't have too much in common with most kids at the school. I'm hoping that when I go to college I'll meet more people who are into my interests… I heard my first college choice has a high, I mean it's very open, so they, and also apparently in college a lot more people know who they are by then so a lot of people are out in general. [Especially males who] really closet themselves. (Fuzzer)

Some participants stated that they would try to join a LGBTQI group on campus to find a supportive community. Some voiced that they would also join a support group for students with disabilities. None of the participants reported a strong desire to disclose their disability in post secondary education environments or seek out other students with disabilities. Sexual orientation was an identity that some students wanted to disclose. Cylis, however, said that he would not necessarily seek out LGBTQI social groups because he did not want to disclose his sexual orientation in community college. He said that being identified as gay might be a possible barrier for him because he doesn't "want to step on anyone's toes." In order to protect himself in community college, he plans on "probably just like keep friends that are that know and you know just kind of test the waters with people and see if it is ok and if it is, then I will know and just be careful."

Employment. There were several disability related issues that the participants discussed that could act as barriers to them accomplishing their employment goals (speech, testing, ability to network/build relationships, etc). Some of these barriers intersected with their sexual orientation and gender identity and affected their beliefs about future employment. The two emergent themes concerning how their identities affect their beliefs about future employment included employment choices and encountering discrimination.

Identity affecting employment choices. Because of past experiences with homophobia and ableism, participants described ways in which their identities affect their employment

100

choices/goals. For example, several participants described how because of past victimization from peers or adults, they had the desire to work with things, rather than people. For example, Cylis wanted to work with plants, Elijah wanted to work with minerals, and Purple wanted to work with computers. Luna described how he would look for an initial job where he would not have to talk to people like a janitor or a costumed character at a theme restaurant. This also included choosing jobs with specific working conditions that they are uniquely adept for because of their disability. For example, Fuzzer discussed how, because of his Autism, he was skilled at focusing on one task for an extended period of time. He believes that this would be beneficial for his employment goal of writing music. He said, "for writing music you really have to sit down for a long time or practice for a while… Most people after sitting down for a long time need to get up and run. I don't really need to."

Another way the participants projected that their identity could affect their future employment choices was how encountering rejection shaped their aspirations to help other people. Sarah wanted to be a firefighter or an EMT, Luna's long-term goal included being a therapist or an English teacher, and Ron wanted to be a political activist or work in environmental restoration. Artemis's old school environment was not accepting of her identity, but when she changed schools to a more accepting environment, that changed her beliefs about her future aspirations. She believes that she began wanting "to help with people and stuff, that was mostly when I came up here and I got all these better friends and all these people who understood me and I'm like 'I actually really like spending time with people. People aren't so bad." She stated that, "coming into my own as being not straight, being LGBT helped [shape my future beliefs], I guess because I was different and I didn't want to be treated any differently than anyone else just because I was different." Some participants also described how their identity affected their desire to work in an environment that does

not have strict, professional demands for behavior. For Sarah, her post career goal of being a firefighter and an EMT was shaped by the fact that her personality would be supported by the non-gender conforming expectations of the job.

Facing future discrimination on the job. Most participants talked about being concerned with future discrimination in their place of employment. They were not just worried about direct or overt homophobia, but also concerning about being open with their identities because they were not sure of the response. . This uncertainty caused them to worry about navigating heteronormative spaces without marking themselves as different. For Sarah, one of the main reasons she wants to work as an EMT and firefighter was because of the close knit community that is created at a firehouse. She fears that homophobia could disrupt that. All of the participants also discussed the strategies that they planned on using to cope with possible future discrimination on the job. These strategies include quitting their job, staying quiet, or even blackmailing the boss. Several of the participants said that if they faced discrimination from their employer or co-worker, they would want to advocate for themselves, but would most likely stay quiet if they felt like they really needed that position.

> [If my boss was homophobic, I would] I keep it [my sexual orientation] to myself to earn a lot of money then eventually find a way to blackmail him. Get him fired. [If my coworker was homophobic] I'd ignore him for the time being. I'd be a little upset but I'll manage for the time... It's either that or I quit the job and look for a different assistant or geologist... Yeah, I wouldn't want to work if it's going to be hostile. (Elijah)

Luna described a similar sentiment, but elaborated by stating that he might limit his aspirations in order to avoid the potential for discrimination.

> I would be upset. I would have to go look for another job. Although if I am desperate, like very desperate, I would lie. Only if I was desperate for a job. I would potentially lie about my gender and sexuality and those kind of things... I'm not prepared for that. Also, just my speech. Often I just think that I would be happy just cleaning things. It's just more simple.

This quote is poignant because not only does this speak to how he navigates which strategy

to use, including "passing" or avoidance by quitting, it also shows how Luna is prepared to limit his own vocational aspirations just to avoid facing discrimination.

Summary

The themes that emerged from this research helped to address the three research questions in order to understand the experiences, identity, and beliefs about the future for young adults with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority. First, to answer Research Question One, this chapter examined the within-case findings of each of the eight participants before describing the cross-case findings concerning the social context of the self, home, and school. The salient experiences for these youths affected the individuals' sense of self by shaping their identity development, positive beliefs about their identity, navigating labels, facing discrimination, and relationships. The experiences in their home context that shaped their identity focused on the key areas of support, rejection, and religion. Concerning the school social context, the themes that emerged were the overlap of queerness and disability in the schools, GSAs and extracurricular clubs, and desired staff characteristics for an adult ally in school. These findings contributed to the participants' descriptions of their beliefs about the future, focusing on independent living, postsecondary education, and employment. Although salient to individual participants, this research did not find any salient themes concerning the social context of the community. In the next chapter, I will discuss my interpretation of these findings.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

After analyzing the experiences, identity, and beliefs about the future for these eight young adults with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority, it became clear that there were several themes that emerged that allow me to answer to my three research questions. Concerning Research Question One, I investigated the themes that emerged regarding the salient lived experiences across three of the four explored social contexts of the self, home, and school. To answer Research Question Two, I explored how those salient experiences affected their sense of self and their identity. Finally, to answer Research Question Three, I analyzed the ways in which the participants' personal and group identity affected their beliefs about the future across the three postsecondary transition domains of independent living, postsecondary education, and employment.

In this chapter, I summarize the findings, unique contributions, and existing research support/contradiction for each social context (self, home, and school) for adolescents with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority. Second, I summarize the findings, discuss the unique contributions of this research, and discuss the literature confirmations and contradictions concerning the participants' beliefs about the future as related to independent living, postsecondary education, and employment. Then, I describe the study's limitations. Finally, I explore the implications for practice and make suggestions for future research.

Self

In my analysis of the lived experiences that were salient across the self, five main themes emerged: identity development, positive beliefs about identity, navigating labels, facing discrimination, and romantic or intimate relationships.

Identity development. This research explored the ways the eight participants situated themselves within the labels of disability and sexual orientation. They described a variety of identity development stages (from rejection to pride) concerning the multiple dimensions of their identity. There was not only variation between participants, but also within, with their identity development shifting over time and environmental context. Often, their understanding of their own sexual orientation identity was influenced by either their impairment or their disability identity, demonstrating that these identity development processes are not independent of each other. The presence or presumed presence of homophobia and ableism in our culture made the formation of an identity as a sexual or gender minority with a disability complex and onerous for participants in this study. Consistent with previous research describing identity development for adolescents with disabilities (Mpofu & Harley, 2006; Whitney-Thomas & Moloney, 2001), I found that participants benefited from gaining an understanding of their experiences and knowledge of systemic oppression. For example, Fuzzer seemed to have a very strong sense of identity, recognizing that the challenges he faces are not because of his own identities, but because of the cultural and societal assumptions of "normal." This helped him gain a positive sense-esteem and self-concept. Likewise, because positive identity development provides a number of important functions and is related to positive outcomes (Harper, Brodsy, & Bruce, 2012; Higgins, Raskind, Goldberg, & Herman, 2002; Mpofu & Harley, 2006) developing knowledge of systemic oppression and how to cope effectively with oppression and discrimination may serve as a protective factor for young adults with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority. For example, Mpofu & Harley (2006) found that increased

levels of disability identity development have a positive relationship with career development skills including understanding and overcoming potential employment barriers.

Additionally, most of the participants described the ways they understood and navigated the concept of "normality." This construct also fell along a spectrum, ranging from participants expressing the desire for to the rejection of normality. Again, this was an aspect of their identity that fluctuated based on personal and environmental factors. Rejection of normality appeared to be related to more positive identity development. The participants who were more comfortable challenging these binaries and rejecting the construct of normal seemed to be more at ease with their various identities. This usually included students who were taught to be accepting of their disability label and who were more comfortable accepting their identity as a sexual or gender minority. Levy (2009) discussed how identity development includes how the individual situates themselves within known sexual orientation categories, with those who have more positive and fluid understandings of themselves as further developed (Levy, 2009). As queer theory deconstructs conventional understanding of sexual and gender binaries (Butler, 1993) and disability studies deconstructs the conventional understanding of disabled/non disabled binaries (Sherry, 2004), this finding supports the research rooted in disability and queer studies because it confirms the theory that normal/abnormal, straight/queer, and abled/disabled binaries are socially constructed and manifested (Levy, 2009; Thompson, Bryson, & De Castell, 2001). Scholars in the disability studies in education community are calling for critical reconceptualization of disability identity within an intersectional framework (Erevelles, 1996; García & Ortiz, 2013) that deconstructs these identity binaries.

Positive beliefs about identity. These study findings demonstrated a number of ways participants developed positive beliefs about their identities as LGBTQI youth with a disability. Because an overwhelming proportion of the research and discourse focusing on youth with disabilities and youth that identify as LGBTQI examines negative factors and outcomes (Harper et al., 2012; Savin-Williams, 2001), this was a notable finding. In summary, these positive beliefs were related to increased access to identity knowledge (personal and group) and more inclusive and accepting environments, supporting previous literature documenting that students with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority are more likely to develop a strong positive identity and critical consciousness in an environment that is safe and supportive (Bertram, Crowley & Massey, 2010). These positive beliefs from my research include possessing a unique viewpoint, having the ability to challenge gender norms and preconceived notions of normality, possessing the characteristics of kindness and tolerance, establishing more meaningful cross-gender friendships, and having the opportunity to practice political activism. For example, Artemis relates the positive personality characteristic of wanting to help people to be interwoven with her pan sexuality, not just because of understanding what it feels like, but also because of the innate characteristic of *"liking people."* These findings are also similar to a previous study by Harper, Brodsky, & Bruce (2012), that conducted in-depth interviews with adolescent males who identified as gay or bisexual to explore the positive beliefs about identifying as gay or bisexual. Harper found that identifying as a sexual minority allowed young men to reject stereotypes, participate in activism, establish relationships with females, and challenge gender norms. These researchers also found that identifying as gay or bisexual allowed their male participants to develop the positive personality traits of flexibility, connectedness with the

107

gay community, resiliency in the face of homophobic discrimination, self-acceptance, and emotional and physical self-care (Harper et al. 2012).

Navigating labels. The participating adolescents revealed the ways in which they navigated the use of labels, including both how they understood other's use of labels as well their own. For some participants in this study, such as Artemis and Luna, learning about language provided them with better ways of expressing themselves and their identities. For both of these students, when they learned about the word, "pansexual," they felt freed from the constraints of having to describe their attractions and feelings to just two genders. This knowledge of language and labels had a positive effect on the participants and gave them the ability to develop a stronger and prideful identity. However, this analysis found two ways in which students with disabilities might have difficulty accessing knowledge and identity development. First, for students with disabilities, segregation from their general education peers in the classroom and social environments could be a barrier for accessing the development of knowledge and language concerning sexual orientation language and labels, as Fuzzer noted when he was removed from his general education classroom with his only friends who identified as gay. Additionally, for those students with disabilities who need more explicit instruction on developing language and social skills, without a teacher or mentor to expose them to these liberating concepts, their ability to develop this knowledge could be limited, as Luna discussed in regards to his mentors in his ReachOut program.

Participants varied how they claimed or rejected identity labels both between participants as well as within, depending upon time and social context. Several of the participants discussed how claiming these labels could be empowering and that the claiming of multiple marginalized labels made them feel unique and strong. At other times, these labels made the individual feel outcast and vulnerable. For example, Cylis does claim the

108

label of different, but does not want to claim any other identity label because he says, "the other ones are just so negative." He also rejects labels because he wants to avoid stereotypes that he does not want to be associated with/does not represent him. Alternatively, Purple discussed how gaining friends gave him a more positive self-image, giving him courage to reject labels for himself. What seemed to differentiate these beliefs was the amount of support they felt from those around them (peers, family, teachers, the media, etc.) as well as the political climate of their immediate surroundings.

Several of the participants discussed the utility of how and why people use labels. Overall, they believed that these labels harmed more than they benefited people. For example, Luna described how he believed that all labels, including gender and religious labels, causes divisions between people and causes some to be designated as outcasts. This belief aligns with critical theories (such as disability studies and queer theory) that question these binaries and examine the social manifestation of labeling those as the "other." For example, a study by Savaria, Underwood, & Sinclair (2011) explored how young adults with disabilities understood the construction of their disability labels. They found that labeling individuals creates a mechanism for reproducing and maintaining hegemonic structures as some labels carry power and privilege while others carry stigma. Additionally, a study by Ingesson (2007) that conducted semi-structured interviews with adolescents with dyslexia found that disability labels (and group labels in general) are inaccurate representations of individual potential.

Facing discrimination. Students who identify as LGBTQI report higher rates of peer victimization, rejection, and discrimination than do their peers who identify as heterosexual (Espelage, Aragon, Birkette, & Koenig, 2008; Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2010). This research found several themes regarding the ways youth with disabilities who identify as

109

a sexual or gender minority understand and react to the discrimination they encountered. Although this research demonstrates a larger systemic need for eradicating discrimination, homophobia, and ableism as well as challenging heteronormativity and normalization in our schools and communities, it also provides us with an important glance into the ways in which these participants have come to understand and respond to the discrimination that they face. Participants discussed issues concerning homophobia and ableism, but more often, they divulged the ways in which their disability identity interacted with their reaction to homophobia. Some of the participants described how, because of social skills impairments, they were unable to cope with discrimination, exclusion, or rejection due to their sexual orientation in an effective manner (like Elijah and his reaction of writing in the bomb threat).

Even though the high rates of heterosexism and homophobia that LGBTQI youth face is well documented, there is a dearth of research that focuses on the strategies they employ to cope with the discrimination they face (McDavitt, Iverson, Kubicek, Weiss, Wong, & Kipke, 2008). This research identified eight strategies that participants discussed regarding to how they respond to discrimination. These eight strategies are direct response, ignoring, avoidance, distancing themselves from the stereotype, anger, self-harm, finding an outlet, and thinking positively. The participants discussed how the strategy of avoidance could cause their academic and social status to suffer. For example, Ron's truancy due to peer rejection caused his academic standing to suffer. This aligns with research from the Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) that found in a national sample, about 30% of youth who identify as LGBTQI reported skipped class and 32% have skipped school due to fear of victimization (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2011).

110

Since school attendance is a protective factor for students with disabilities (Murray, 2003), we need to be especially attentive to this overlap.

The responses to discrimination that included internalizing and externalizing anti-social behaviors, anger and self-harm, seemed to be the two strategies that produced the most direct negative effects for the participants. This finding of self-harm as a reaction to discrimination is consistent with previous research findings that students with disabilities and students who identify as LGBTQI have an increased risk of internalizing anti-social behaviors, such as self-injurious behavior and suicide/suicide ideation (Robinson & Espelage, 2011). Concerning the reaction of anger that is manifested through externalizing anti-social behavior, participants reported facing punitive measure for their heated response as the teacher would often respond to the reaction, not the discrimination, creating a more violent and treacherous environment for youth who already feel marginalized. This is of particular concern for LGBTQI youth with disabilities because of increased barriers to achieving positive school belonging, especially those students who have been diagnosed with a label of EBD. Finally, responding to discrimination through finding an outlet and thinking positively were examples of positive coping mechanisms which may help students express their emotions, gain insight, and are related to a variety of positive physical and psychological outcomes (Smyth, 1998). Participants reported finding strength and support in participating in various activities and communities to help them process the aggressive language and/or behaviors. These actions also helped them develop the strategy of thinking positively about themselves and their future, increasing their self-esteem and self-reliance. Participants who had a stronger positive identity as related to disability and sexual orientation/gender orientation were able to employ the strategy of thinking positively and incorporate it into their global understanding of themselves.

In a unique and relevant study focusing on strategies used by gay and bisexual young men, McDavitt et al. (2008) found that, similar to this study's findings, the 43 young men (ages 18-22) all utilized multiple strategies to cope with heterosexism and homophobia, sometimes even in a single situation. Their findings indicated that the young men utilized five categories of coping strategies: a) situation selection, b) situation modification, c) attentional deployment, d) cognitive change, or e) response modulation. The present study found similar strategies in the way participants educated others as a direct response, set boundaries to protect themselves from heterosexism, avoided the topic of sexual orientation in order to pass, ignored discriminatory language or actions, thought positively about themselves and their level of self-reliance, and vented through anger, finding an outlet, or self-harm. As an example of the strategy of ignoring, Purple describes how hearing homophobic/ableist language upsets him, however he ignores it because he does not feel confident enough in himself to stand up to his peers. This dissertation research also presents some unique findings as participants also employed the strategy of distancing themselves from the stereotype as a cognitive change strategy. The specific strategies described by McDavitt et al. (2008) that were not confirmed in my study were the intentional seeking of gay affirmative support, seeking informational support (using ideas to offset the stigmatizing language or behavior), and deconstructing heterosexist assumptions, all which have been shown to have positive effects for a young adult.

Relationships. A theme that emerged from the data was the salience of romantic or intimate relationships and barriers to relationships due to the overlap of sexual orientation and disability. The two types of barriers concerning romantic and intimate relationships were limited options and restricted access to skill and knowledge development. Findings indicated that not only were there a limited number of LGBTQI students in the participants' social

112

contexts, but often their disabilities limited their social abilities to connect with the other LGBTQI youth. This was especially true for students who identified as being on the Autism Spectrum. Alternatively, for students who identified as having Attention Deficit Disorder, their disability identity seemed to help them be more outgoing and social, allowing them increased access to other LGBTQI youth, even if they had difficulty maintaining those relationships.

This study also found that online social networks provided participants a wider access to relationships in a way that was not impacted by social skill difficulties. Previous research has found that online social networks provide LGBTQI youth access to health and sexuality information, social support, and civic participation (Palmer, Kosciw, Greytak, Ybarra, Korchmaros, & Mitchell, 2013). Although online social networks are an option for increasing one's social access, these connections could also pose an increased risk for students who might not have the capability for safely navigating these sites. For example, Elijah planned on moving to Australia, away from his established support network, in order to seek out the relationships he made online. He also discussed an online application where gay men post their location and desire to meet others in their area. Although this increases access, it also opens users up to vulnerability (such as being targeted, intimate partner violence, or just non-mutual understanding of the entered relationship). Research by GLSEN found that youth who identify as LGBTQI were more than three times more likely to experience bullying or harassment online as opposed to their heterosexual peers (Palmer et al., 2013). Without support, students with disabilities could have difficulty navigating these experiences.

With a dearth of LGBTQI relationship and intimacy models in our media, a lack of direct and applicable social skills instruction, and difficulty establishing and maintaining

friendships, I found that students with disabilities (especially ASD) who identify as LGBTQI faced restricted skill and knowledge development opportunities concerning relationships and intimacy. Several participants explicitly discussed how cultural stigma and heteronormativity has limited their ability to find and use models or receive direct instruction on how to engage in same-sex relationships and intimacy.

Home

Several themes emerged concerning the participants' salient experiences at home. . Participants all discussed how various aspects of their home lives made them feel supported and at other times rejected, although some of those experiences were more salient than others. Disclosure to family members was a salient experience to participants; it provided an example of either support or rejection depending on how the individual family members reacted and how this event affected their relationships over time. Religion was also a salient experience in the home context, whether it was participation in an organized religious community or individual spiritual beliefs (including atheism).

Support. For adolescents with disabilities, family support is an important protective factor concerning positive outcomes (Murray, 2003). Parents and family members are often the principal support system for youth with disabilities, providing them with crucial guidance, advocacy, management and guidance (Carter & Lunsford, 2005). Family support can also be an important protective factor against such anti-social behavior as depression and drug use for youth who identify as LGBTQI (Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008). In this study, I found that this support often came from members of their family (not usually immediate family living with them) who also identified as a sexual or gender minority, providing them with strength to navigate family relationships as well as an outlet for having honest conversations. Although some findings described ways in which disability and sexual

114

orientation overlapped in their home environments, family support was not always directly related to sexual orientation and disability simultaneously. However, youth that felt support concerning one aspect of their identity could apply that to other aspects of their identity, positively affecting their global sense of self. For example, Artemis had not disclosed her sexual orientation to her father (because of religious reasons), but she applied his overwhelming support of her disability ("don't ever fit their cookie cutter") to her positive/prideful beliefs about her sexual orientation and her quirky personality. This finding contradicts previous research that demonstrated that non-sexuality–specific social support was unrelated to the positive sexual orientation identity development of LGBTQI youth (Bregman, Malik, Page, Makynen, & Lindahl, 2013; Doty, Willoiyghby, Lindahl, & Malik, 2010).

Rejection. Students with disabilities face the risk of experiencing isolation if their home life does not support their disability identity and needs. This is even more true of youth who identify as LGBTQI as research shows that up to 36% of homeless youth identify as a sexual or gender minority (Dunne, Prendergast, & Telford, 2002; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2012). This study found that familial rejection concerning sexual orientation took the form of either direct aggression or micro-aggression. These findings contribute to the existing literature about the home context by exploring the intersectionality of sexual orientation and gender.

Youth who identify as LGBTQI face increased risk of home rejection and expulsion and this can be specifically problematic for youth with disabilities since as a group, they are particularly dependent on family support (Carter & Lunsford, 2005). Additionally, sexual orientation and disability overlap when adolescents with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority have difficulty coping with rejection after facing homophobic,

115

transphobic, or heteronormative language or behavior in their home environment. For example, Cylis's difficulty communicating in and processing social contexts contributed to his decision to move out of his parents' home and live on friends' couches. For Artemis, her Operational Defiant Disorder contributed to her poor relationship with her mother after her mother's negative comments regarding her sexual orientation.

This study found various forms of family rejection concerning sexual orientation. Specifically, participants described two forms of family rejection: rejection of participant's performance of gender and usurping control over disclosure. Findings from this research also demonstrated that the ability to have control over who does and does not know about their sexual orientation was also salient to the experiences of young adults with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority, however disclosure of their disability was not. Several participants discussed the feeling of rejection, loss of control, and fear when a family member took it upon himself/herself to disclose their sexual orientation to other people without their consent. Even though participants did not believe that disclosure of their disability to their families was a salient experience, several described their disability identity being a source of isolation and rejection from their family. This study expands upon past research by finding that the participants described their experience of rejection concerning their disability identity only as micro-aggressions while experience of rejection concerning their sexual orientation both manifested as micro and direct aggression. This supports the need to understand how both direct aggression and micro-aggression is manifested within the home context as well as its affect on youth across a variety of social categories of difference.

Religion. All of the participants revealed ways religion and spirituality affected their identity and experiences within the social context of the home. One of the most salient

experiences for participants was the association of homophobia with some organized religious communities. This was true for the participants who participated in organized religious communities (or had family members who did) as well as for students who were not affiliated with any organized religion. This belief was a barrier for several participants as it was the reason they would not disclose their sexual orientation to certain family members who were religious, which in turn, had a negative impact on their overall relationships with those family members.

This study found that the participants who were raised in households that practiced organized religion did not reject the idea of a religious community, but did actively seek out a more inclusive one. Both of these participants (Cylis and Panda) also communicated the most internalized heteronormativity, aligning with existent research (Kubicek, McDavitt, Carpineto, Weiss, Iverson, and Kipke, 2009). This finding supports the existent research rooted in disability studies and queer studies about the emancipatory nature of critical theories and individual's experiences, identity, and beliefs (Hooks, 1992; Hudak & Kihn, 2001). This demonstrates the powerful nature of religion in affecting an individual's identity and beliefs and highlights the importance of understanding how religion affects the family environment of young adults with disabilities who identify as LGBTQI.

School

My analysis of the social context of school for the eight adolescents with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority identified a number of findings concerning the salient experiences, identity, and beliefs within the school context. Besides being a space for gaining academic knowledge, schools can be a particularly crucial environment for establishing sense of self and independent relationships for adolescents. For those who identify with historically marginalized group identities, schools can also be a divisive place

where they experience rejection, bias, and violence (Kumashiro, 2002; Sadowski, 2008). This research explored a variety of ways in which students with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority described their salient school experiences concerning the overlap of disability and queerness. This included participation in GSAs and other extra-curricular clubs, as well as the identification of desired characteristics that made or would make a staff member particularly supportive of students with disabilities who identify as LGBTQI.

Disability and queerness. Because a major part of identity development in adolescence occurs in schools settings, it is important to understand the creation of supportive and safe environments for all students to explore their individual identities (Morgan, Mancl, Kaffar & Ferriera, 2011). This research explored how the participants described their disability and sexual orientation overlapping within the social context of the school, making unique contribution to the Disability Studies in Education (DSE) literature that usually focuses on the intersection of race, ethnicity, language and/or SES with disability (Garcia & Ortiz, 2013). By examining the ways sexual orientation and disability overlap concerning the schooling experience of youth, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of the intersectional nature of identity within the field of special education. Findings indicate that there are specific issues concerning special education placement and services where understanding the overlap with sexual orientation are of particular importance. These issues include students having to navigate labels and ideas of "otherness," and limited opportunities. Because the school context is where most of these students first experienced being explicitly labeled as different (when they received their disability referral, testing, diagnosis, and placement), much of their relationship with feeling "othered," deficient, or labeled is situated within the school context. They reported that this belief increased as they became older and relationships with their peers became more influential in

118

their lives. Often, this desire to fit in influenced their rejection of classroom accommodations because they did not want to bring attention to their differences. When students were already fearful of peer rejection due to their sexual orientation, this became even more salient.

Special education placements often place students in an environment with peers with similar academic, social, or behavioral impairments. For students labeled with an EBD, they are more likely to be placed in a self-contained classroom with other students exhibiting externalizing anti-social behavior. For students who identify as a sexual or gender minority, this can be a problematic placement that leaves them more open to perceived and real harassment, discrimination, and violence. This study also found that participants were frustrated not only by being marked as different, but also given less access to academic and social opportunities. For example, Fuzzer was resentful that his IEP made him take study skills classes that kept him from taking classes with his limited number of friends in general education who identify as gay as well. Since his IEP and personal goals included increasing his social skills, this was counterproductive as previous research has found that friendship with other sexual minority youth was a strong protective factor against emotional stress for LBTQI youth (Doty et al., 2010).

GSAs and extracurricular activities. Because the most significant intersection of disability and sexual orientation was located in the participants' social interactions with peers, it was not surprising that participating in extra-curricular clubs and Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) were highly salient experiences for the adolescents in this study. Involvement in extra-curricular activities has been demonstrated to have a positive influence on the lives of adolescents (Martin & Dowson, 2009) as they provide a sense of relatedness and belonging.

Participants described GSAs as providing a community of safety and supportive peers as well opportunities for personal and group identity development, activism, and education, supporting existing research on the positive impacts of GSA membership for youth who identify as LGBTQI (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewiez, 2010; Lee, 2002). For some students, such as Cylis, this was the only space and time in his school experience that allowed him to feel supported by his peers. Some participants who had an active GSA also described this as the only space/time where all aspects of one's identity were fully accepted, making it a liberating and transformative space/time. This transformative and liberating space/time was also desired by some students, such as Elijah, whose school did not have a GSA.

Although some participants discussed the GSA as being globally accepting, others believed that disability acted as a barrier to full participation. Several students in the study with social impairments had difficulty participating in GSAs. It is also telling of the overlap of disability and queerness that in School two, the tolerance club meeting location was changed from the special education classroom in order to avoid spaces marked with disability. By doing so, it further limited the access to a club that is supposed to be supportive for adolescents with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority.

The presence of a GSA, although overwhelmingly described as supportive and beneficial, was not desired by the two students who attended School two, arguably the most politically conservative school environment. This was the school whose tolerance club was not allowed to specifically mention sexual orientation to avoid negative pushback from the school's community. Sarah stated that the existence of the GSA would mark its members as queer and would make them vulnerable to targeting. Although they both desired a community that was more accepting, neither of the students discussed issues of systematic

homophobia that were the cause of the projected targeting or club limitations. Even though their tolerance club faced the mentioned barriers and did not provide them a universally safe space, it did assist them with finding allies and other friends who they feel comfortable disclosing their identity to and gave opportunities to develop (limited) activism skills. These findings contribute to the research on the meaning and experience concerning GSAs in schools specifically concerning young adults with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority.

Involvement in other extracurricular activities and clubs (such as band, youth firefighting, anime club, and poetry slam club) was a salient experience that affected their sense of identity and beliefs for this study's participants. First, these clubs and activities gave students the opportunity to connect with peers over a shared interest, which blurred the lines of difference (including disability and sexual orientation). For example, Fuzzer described his ability to connect and communicate with his peers through the poetry slam club, an act that he often finds difficult due to both his sexual orientation and his disability. Second, this research also found that there are certain clubs or activities that, although not explicitly designated as such, are inclusive of students who identify as "different" (such as students who identify as LGBTQI or students with disabilities). These "safe havens" give students with disabilities who identify as LGBTQI the opportunity to meet peers whom also challenge the normative culture of the school. Some of these activities and clubs, such as Luna's participating in slam poetry competitions, also provided members with a way of practicing the strategy (described above) of responding to discriminatory language or behavior by finding an outlet to express and process their experiences and beliefs. Finally, clubs designed to support at risk students through positive peer and mentor relationships, personal characteristic building, and academic and/or social support were positive salient

experiences for participants concerning their intersecting identities. These findings relating to key elements of extracurricular clubs and activities uniquely contribute to knowledge about the experiences, identity, and beliefs of adolescents with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority.

Desired staff characteristics. Close and caring teacher student relationships have been demonstrated to be one of the most powerful protective factors for adolescents with disabilities (Murray, 2003). Having an adult staff ally in the school has also been shown to increase school engagement and academic success for students with disabilities (Wehmeyer, 2008) and to increase school belonging, academic success, and educational aspirations for students who identify as LGBTQI (Kosciw, 2011). This study revealed the characteristics of school staff that participants reported as desirable for supporting young adults with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority. The two categories of desired staff characteristics for potential adult allies were 1) personality characteristics and 2) skills and beliefs. The desired staff personality characteristics include being trustworthy, non-judgmental, proud of their individuality, and kind. The desired staff skills and beliefs, which are more malleable characteristics, include allowing students control over their identities, ability to balance helping students fit in without encouraging normality, awareness and engaged in social justice issues, and the ability to support youth through difficult situations effectively. These findings concerning the personal characteristics, skills, and abilities of school staff that would position them as a potential adult ally contribute to the research on ways in which we can best support LGBTQI youth with disabilities in schools.

Beliefs About the Future

This study also revealed how the personal and group identities of the eight participants affected their beliefs about the future concerning the three postsecondary

domains of independent living, post secondary education, and employment. There were clear across case themes that emerged in all three postsecondary domains concerning the overlap of the participants' sexual orientation and disability identity and its effect on their beliefs about the future.

Independent living. This study found three main themes related to the ways that sexual orientation and disability impacted beliefs about future independent living. These themes include beliefs about future relationships, raising children and having a family, as well as potential geographic location. Although most of the participants expressed the desire for an intimate relationship, similar to past research (D'Augelli, Rendina, Sinclair, & Grossman, 2006), they described a variety of barriers stemming from their disability and sexual orientation that could act as a barrier to obtaining this goal. These barriers include limiting laws and policies, stigma, limited opportunities for accessing same-sex relationships, lack of knowledge, limited social skills, and religious beliefs. In their 2006 study on future aspirations concerning marriage and family for LGB youth, D'Augelli et al. found that youth who supported future LGB marriage demonstrated increased knowledge of the LGB community, self-esteem, and low levels of internalized heteronormativity. Several participants, including Cylis, expressed doubts about raising children due to the internalized heteronormative beliefs concerning what constitutes a family, even though he believed he should ignore that bias. Fostering and adopting children was an option raised by some participants that might challenge these normative expectations of a future family and could also empower them to transgress assumptions of normality in their future. Finally, this study found that the overlap of identities made them more cognizant of a community's political climate, causing them to limit possible future residential locations to climates that are accepting of all aspects of their identities. This ranged to a desire to live in a place where

there was an established LGBTQI community to a fear of being in a community where they would be targeted with violence and direct aggression. Although there has been much research focused on "gay migration" to urban environments in the 70's and 80's (Weston, 1995), no previous studies have been conducted on LGBTQI youth's geographic aspirations.

Postsecondary education. One main theme emerged relating to the overlap of participants' identities and the effect on their beliefs about their future postsecondary education. Although all of the participants planned on attending some type of postsecondary education program in order to achieve their employment goals, the prominent way that their identities intersected concerned their social relationships. Many of the students discussed how they would develop meaningful friendships after high school. For students who experienced higher levels of peer rejection, they believed that their postsecondary education environment would include more students who identified as LGBTQI as well as more students who challenged the norm. For some, experiences with rejection, social impairments, and a fear of disclosure were perceived barriers to developing and maintaining future friendships in a postsecondary setting. Most discussed how accessing LGBTQI student groups or groups for students with disabilities would help overcome these perceived barriers. These beliefs about post-secondary education contribute to the scarce amount of research conducted on postsecondary education for young adults with a disability who identify as a sexual or gender minority (Harley, Nowak, Gassaway, & Savage, 2002; Henry, Fuerth, & Figliozzi, 2010).

Employment. This study also produced two main findings concerning beliefs about future employment for adolescents with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority. First, participants described ways in which identity affected employment choices,

and second they discussed their beliefs about encountering future discrimination on the job, both findings extending previous research.

Previous studies have shown that adolescents with disabilities experience limited occupational aspirations compared to their non-disabled peers (Ingesson, 2007; Rojewski, 1996) as adolescents often compromise career aspirations because of perceived social barriers (Howard, Budge, Gutierrez, Owen, Lemke, Jones et al., 2010). This study contributes to the literature by exploring how the overlap of sexual orientation and disability may affect occupational aspirations. Participants described four different ways that experiences and identities have shaped their beliefs about their post-school employment goals and occupational aspirations. First, for some, past traumatic experiences with rejection and discrimination, fear of judgment, and limited confidence in their social skill abilities caused them to desire a career with limited human interaction. Second, other participants believed that their disability, although limiting their potential career options, also uniquely qualified them to be successful in certain employment roles and environments. Third, several of the participants described how their experiences with being excluded influenced their desire to pursue a helping profession. Finally, many of the participants described how their identities affected their desire to work in an environment without strict professional behavioral demands (including professions with non-traditional gender roles). For example, Sarah discussed how she appreciated being an athlete and working at a firehouse because those two places were normal spaces for wearing the clothes that she likes to wear. This way, she avoids standing out and being labeled as non-heterosexual. She also appreciates how people assume that she passes for non-disabled because of her achieving and hard working personality.

This research also included findings concerning participants' beliefs regarding facing future disability or sexual orientation discrimination at the workplace. Participants reported being concerned with the possibility of encountering overt discrimination as well as fear of potential negative reactions to their identity disclosure. Similarly, a study conducted by Parnell, Lease, & Green, (2012) found that projected barriers associated with sexual orientation were highly anticipated and perceived to be especially hindering. These participants indicated several potential strategies for coping with future discrimination on the job including remaining quiet, lying about their identities, limiting career aspirations to avoid possible discrimination, quitting, and blackmailing the offender to have them removed from their position. These strategies seem to represent a variety of reactions that would have negative effects on the individual. Interestingly, none of the participants discussed positive strategies such as self-advocacy, legal proceedings, educating others, or finding an ally. In a study focusing on career aspirations, barriers, and coping strategies, Howard et al. (2010) found that urban adolescents projected using behavioral strategies including seeking resources, seeking social support, speaking up, and avoiding negative situations. These positive coping strategies were not discussed by the participants in the current study demonstrating the strong need to support job related self-advocacy and self-determination skills and knowledge specific to issues of sexual orientation and disability.

Limitations

Although this research produced a number of important findings, there are several limitations that need to be taken into account. These include both methodological limitations and sample biases that need to be explicitly described.

Methodological limitations. There were several methodological limitations that are important to explicitly describe. First, all of the participant in-depth interviews were conducted over a short time frame, which does not give us a longitudinal understanding of the participants' experiences, identity, and beliefs. The longest time span from the first to the last interview was 5 months. Findings from the eight individual participant profiles across the four sampled schools represent the variability of personal characteristics, family and school experiences, and identities that are represented in this study's sample. Although this sample represents a diverse group that will allow us to explore the experiences, identity, and beliefs of adolescents with a disability who identify as a sexual or gender minority, its purpose is not to be able to generalize to all individuals who inhabit the intersection of these identities. Because each individual is represented by the personal and group identity labels that they claimed during our in-depth interviews, it would be unreliable to be able to make generalizing claims about how the experiences, identity, and beliefs differed by label. Additionally, because I did not ask systematically ask about issues directly pertaining to race, ethnicity, language status, socio-economic status, religious affiliation, or immigration status, it is beyond the scope of this research to include these significant aspects of individual and group identity into my analysis or conclusions. Issues of race and ethnicity (as well as other categories of difference and privilege) were not explored in a way that would give justice to the intersection of the various dimensions of their personal or group identities.

Sample bias. Due to both the homogeneity and heterogeneity of the sample, it is important to acknowledge several limitations of the final sample. That is, my final sample was homogenous in that included only adolescents in high school with disabilities who identified as LGBTQI from the state of Oregon. Although there is a spectrum of political beliefs dependent on geographic location of the adolescent's community, all of the data was

collected from one state that, as a whole, is known for possessing liberal political views and policies. The sample also does not include youth from middle school or young adults post high school. Finally, due to my own limited language abilities, my sample only consisted of students who were comfortable having in-depth conversations in English, making my sample not representative of the experiences of LGBTQI adolescents with a disability who are English Language Learners (ELL). However, the final sample was diverse or heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity and community context (urban, suburban, or rural). The final within disability (Autism, EBD, ADHD, Speech Impairment, SLD, developmental disability, and mental health impairment) and within sexual minority (transgender, pansexual, gay, and bisexual) diversity of my sample was more heterogeneous than initially expected, however, since my sample was recruited through my professional network of special education professionals, it is not surprising that my sample primarily consisted of students with high incidence disabilities. It is important to note that I did not have any representation of physical, vision, or hearing impairments within my sample.

There were also several sample biases that most likely had an effect on the study's findings. First of all, since it was necessary to obtain parental permission from participants under the age of majority, only students 18 years or older or those who felt comfortable and were able to obtain their parents approval to participate in this study were included. The voice of adolescents who have not disclosed their sexual orientation to their families or whose sexual orientation is rejected by their families are not represented in this research. Second, due to the approved sampling procedures used in this research, only students who have previously disclosed their sexual orientation and disability to their teacher were able to participate, excluding students who have not disclosed their sexual orientation and disability in the school context. Third, this research sample was limited to adolescents who felt

comfortable and safe talking to an unfamiliar researcher about their disability and sexual orientation. Like the issue with parental permission and staff nomination, the voice of adolescents who fear targeting and victimization or do not feel safe disclosing or discussing their identities is an important missing voice from this research. Finally, only adolescents who self-identify as LGBTQI participating in this study, ignoring the voices of same-sex attracted youth who are not out to themselves or not out to others (Savin-Williams, 2001).

Implications

      Implications for practice. A review of themes and findings from the 25 interviews with eight adolescents with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority revealed several key elements that seemed to impact experiences, identity, and beliefs about the future in a positive manner. These key elements include positive and strong personal and group identities, increased skills and knowledge about identities, family support, and supportive school climate and staff. In this section, these key elements are further explored in the form of recommendations for professionals working with adolescents with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority and their families. I present the findings in three sections focusing on a) youth, b) families, and c) teachers/schools.

      Implications focusing on youth. Adolescents with disabilities who identify as LGBTQI may be especially vulnerable to societal stereotypes, stigma, and targeting (Thompson et al., 2001). As noted, these experiences may lead them to internalize these negative beliefs, question their own identities, and face peer rejection, discriminatory language and behavior without the tools necessary to cope effectively. Since this study found that positive identity development was intersectional and related to experiences of discrimination and knowledge of systemic oppression, the development of certain characteristics could be a critical protective factor for young adults with disabilities who

129

identify as a sexual or gender minority. Focusing on strengths and the development of personal and group identity knowledge, self-advocacy skills, and self-determination skills is likely to help LGBTQI youth with disabilities feel empowered in their own multidimensional identity development process.

Although focusing on personal and group identities could be beneficial to all students, it is important for special education professionals to be aware of their classroom climate. Special education is a location where there are more opportunities for students' personal lives to be the focus of course content. This leaves LGBTQI students vulnerable to homophobia, being excluded, etc. Although a curriculum focused on developing the social skills and skills related to transition has been demonstrated to be beneficial for students with disabilities, it is important for teachers to be cognizant of the potential impact and possess knowledge and skills to be able to respond effectively in both supporting the targeted student while supporting the development of acceptance for the student who demonstrated discriminatory language or behavior.

This research also suggests various ways that special education professionals should be aware of how disability and queerness overlap in the schools and how it affects their students. For example, when Ron faced peer rejection and chose to employ the avoidance strategy by skipping school, his academic standing declined. As professionals, it is important to be sensitive to the cause of similar externalizing behaviors as students with disabilities might not possess the capacity to express that fear or rejection was the real cause.

Some students with disabilities have difficulty connecting with peers and adults as well as establishing and maintaining friendships. Direct social skill instruction for students with disabilities is often included in a student's IEP or 504 plan; however, integration of sexual orientation identity in these accommodations and supports is highly unlikely in most

130

school settings. Social skills that are specifically beneficial to students with disabilities who identify as LGBTQI should be included in annual functional goals, transition goals, and/or related service provider annual goals of their IEPs (Duke, 2011). This could include the explicit teaching of skills such as finding and establishing an appropriate ally relationships, locating and using safe spaces, participating in GSAs, practicing self-advocacy, using safe and reliable transportation to LGBTQI friendly events and spaces, and understanding how to disclose sexual orientation and disability identity in current and future environments. For example, Fuzzer described how he did not learn about disability or queer issues within the school setting. He discussed how he would have benefitted from learning about the Queer Rights Movement or LGBTQI or disability related sexual education in school, as would his heterosexual and non-disabled peers. Fuzzer also discussed how his school's blood drive (as a rule) does not accept blood donations from gay men. When he tried to rally other individuals to challenge this discriminatory rule, he was unable to build momentum among his peers and/or teachers. These examples could inform valuable and constructive goals for a student's annual IEP to allow them to develop the skills and knowledge needed to participate in their communities in ways that are meaningful to them.

This research found that participants regularly encounter homophobia and heterosexism in their schools, homes, and communities and employ a variety of coping strategies in response, some helpful and some hurtful. The strategy that individuals choose can affect their sense of self, their relationships, their health, and their future opportunities. Special educators should support their students' ability cope with discrimination/harassment safely and effectively by providing direct instruction focused on understanding options and employing positive coping strategies. Instruction could include deciphering when to use a direct response strategy versus when to find an ally/safe space or how to deal with anger

131

effectively. For example, a student that is fearful of future discrimination on the job would benefit from the implementation of transition goals related to self-advocacy and positive coping strategies. As this has not been explored within the literature, this is a future direction for both research and practice. In the example of Elijah, if he had been provided with the accommodation of accessing a safe space when feeling threatened or had annual goals relating to positive coping strategies, he might not have written and delivered a bomb threat to the school, leading to his expulsion. Although it is important for teachers to make sure students do not feel at fault for being targeted, by teaching the explicit skills needed to cope with homophobia and heterosexism, we can further empower students to take control of their environments and increase their self-efficacy.

This study also found that young adults with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority benefit from opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge to engage in healthy and satisfying friendships and romantic/intimate relationships. Special educators need to support adolescents to develop social, relationship, and intimacy skills and knowledge through explicit instruction. This could include sexual and relationship education that is inclusive of the spectrum of sexual and gender orientations (without prominently focusing on heterosexuality as the norm) that utilizes explicit examples and direct instruction or teaching of social skills necessary to acquire and maintain relationships. Another example of how teachers can help young adults with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority develop and maintain healthy relationships would be to provide their students with explicit instruction on how to navigate online social spaces safely and effectively. This will help youth with disabilities establish more positive relationships with their peers.

Implications focusing on families. This study supports previous research establishing the important role family support plays in the pro-social development of both

132

adolescents with disabilities and LGBTQI youth (Bregman et al., 2013). These findings as well as the increased risk of family isolation and rejection due to an adolescent's sexual orientation or disability (Sherry, 2004) indicate a heightened need for special education professionals to focus on support for parents and families.

This research demonstrates the need to include parents and families in special education practices carefully and thoughtfully. For students with disabilities, parents are included and consulted in their educational experiences more than their typically developing peers as parental participation is one of the six defining principles of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA). When taken out of cultural context of the individual, full parental participation of decision-making seems like a beneficial collaboration (Trainor, 2010). Students who identify as LGBTI have an increased risk of experiencing family tension if the family possesses homophobic beliefs. This overlap between disability and sexual orientation leaves some students more vulnerable to conflict. Teachers who work with students with disabilities need to be aware of their student's family dynamic in relation to their sexual orientation and possess the ability to support all parties without blaming while simultaneously encouraging the development of positive identity beliefs and communication skills of the student.

As this study suggests, family support can be a valuable asset for LGBTQI adolescents with disabilities, yet participants also experienced a spectrum of family rejection, micro-aggressions, and direct aggression. Special educator teachers can help support the skills and knowledge of parents by encouraging them to have open and supportive conversations about disclosure, the youth's identity, and the ways in which they can support their child. Strategies for parent education concerning issues of sexual orientation often falls outside of the jurisdiction of the special education teacher, however, it would be beneficial

133

for parents to have access to resources are available in their community such as mental health providers who can support the dialogue between students and families or local chapters of organizations such as Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). These resources can also be found online, such as on the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) website, allowing both teachers to expand their knowledge and skills concerning working with sexual or gender minority youth as well as providing education to their families. This research demonstrates the ways family rejection can build over time, creating a more aggressive living environment for the youth with disabilities who identifies as a sexual or gender minority, suggesting the importance of early intervention with parents to help reduce heterosexism in the home context, and therefore limiting the level of rejection the youth may face (McDavitt et al., 2008).

Implications focusing on teachers. This study demonstrated that is important to focus on developing teachers who have the knowledge, skills, and beliefs necessary to support adolescents with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority.

Preservice special education teacher programs are uniquely positioned to provide educators with the skills and knowledge necessary to embody inclusive practices (Dykes, 2010; Morgan, Mancl, Kaffar & Ferriera, 2011) by incorporating sexual and gender diversity as a component of inclusive practices. First and foremost, special education teacher education programs need to include critical thinking and the exploration of issues pertaining disability and diversity. Teacher education programs need to incorporate teacher reflexivity throughout their curricula in order to train culturally competent educators who possess the skills, knowledge, and beliefs to be able to meet the needs of every student's multidimensional identity. Specifically, teacher education programs need to redirect our focus from the deficits and differences of the individual student and shift towards an

134

integrated understanding of how their students with disabilities experience the world (Jones, 2011) and make meaning of their labels of difference (Dykes, 2010). This focus on teacher reflexivity would benefit from a deep concentration on adopting an intersectionality framework and the overlap of multiple hegemonic and systematic forms of oppression. By adopting an intersectional framework, we can train teachers to be more critical of multiple ecological influences on their classroom practices and the ways in which labels affect their students' identity and beliefs. Specifically, engaging preservice special education teachers in analyses of multiple identities, including disability, will allow them to think more critically about the complexity of the lived experiences of their students and the instability of identity categories of social difference. For example, a transition specialist in a high school who was educated to adopt an intersectional lens will likely be more aware of issues pertaining to sexual orientation (and possibly race, ethnicity, etc.) when placing a student with a disability at a job site. Transition professionals could conduct an environmental assessment to measure jobsite climate concerning homophobia and disability inclusion and then incorporate the skill development and support necessary for an individual student to be successful in that placement by teaching the youth about their legal employment rights concerning disability and sexual orientation discrimination or workplace disclosure. This recommendation supports the call for deliberate consideration of cultural, political, and cultural contexts by developing multidimensional instructional strategies and supporting the implementation of systemic changes that promote positive post-school outcomes for all marginalized students with disabilities (Trainor, Lindstrom, Simon-Burroughs, Martin, & Sorrells, 2008) including sexual or gender minorities.

Overall, there is a need to focus on developing special education professionals' knowledge and skills about supporting LGBTQI students with disabilities. Previous research

has found that special education professionals often hold a negative bias towards non-heteronormative identities and do not feel confident in their ability to work with students who identify as LGBTQI (Blanchett, 2002; Morgan et al., 2011; Thompson et al., 2001). School administrations should provide professional development opportunities for special education teachers that focus on knowledge and skills regarding the LGBTQI student population and how these issues may overlap with their special education practice. Special education teachers should expand transition instruction to include a focus on topics related to personal and group identities This implies that special educators and other related service providers have unique opportunity to support the development of strong and positive personal and group identities as special education and transition classes are commonly the location for instruction that focuses on independent living, social skills, self-determination, career exploration, and self-advocacy for students with disabilities.

This research also found that there were various individual characteristics, skills, and behaviors that marked a school staff member as a potential adult ally. Special education professionals need to be supported in their development of the malleable desired staff skills and knowledge. These include the knowledge and skills to be able to a) allow students control over their identities, b) balance helping students fit in (not be targeted) without encouraging normality, c) demonstrate awareness and engagement in social justice issues, and d) have the ability to support youth through difficult situations effectively.

Participants in this study discussed their desire a curriculum that was more inclusive of the various aspects of their identities. In order to establish and maintain inclusive practices, it is crucial for special education teachers have the knowledge and skills to be able to recognize and respond to heterosexism, homophobia, transphobia, or ableism. This includes setting and implementing rules for behavioral expectations and adopting

136

consistently inclusive curriculum, instruction, and materials. Although inclusion of LGBTQI and disability focused content (literature, history, health, etc.) throughout the course is valuable aspect of an inclusive curriculum, it is not enough. Instructional practices should also include strategies for discussing issues of heterosexism and ableism in the classroom (Blackburn & Smith, 2010).

Implications for research. The present dissertation study has revealed several key elements that appear to positively impact the experiences, identity, and beliefs for young adults with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority. The findings from the in-depth interviews with eight participants highlight the intersectional nature of their multidimensional identities and the mutually influential nature of the multiple ecological social contexts (home, school, and self) impacting youth. However, additional research is needed in the areas of the overlap of sexual orientation and disability.

First, it is clear that disability and sexual or gender orientation are not homogenous populations. This exploratory research gave us a broad understanding of these participants experiences, identity, and beliefs, however it would be beneficial for future research to understand the lived experiences of the intersection of specific subgroups of disability and sexual/gender orientation as there are a variety of themes that are unique to sexual minority individuals with specific disabilities or specific sexual or gender minorities with disabilities (Duke, 2011). In order to understand the intersectional nature of sexual orientation and disability within the lived experience of specific disability and/or sexual orientation categories, further research should be conducted by purposefully sampling individuals who identify with that specific label (e.g. individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder who identify as transgender or individuals with physical disabilities who identify as LGBTQI). In order to continue situating disability in it social, cultural, and political contexts within special

137

education research and practice, it would also be valuable to continue looking at other social categories of difference intersecting with disability and sexual orientation (racial, ethnic, linguistic, and economic diversity). Although it is beneficial to gain knowledge about the lived experiences of the unlimited intersections of marginalized identities, understanding who is left out is not enough. As Kumishiro (2002) posits, if we want our research and practice to be antioppressive, we need to understand the ways the systems perpetuate inequity as well as how our own experiences are privileged within the intersecting structures of oppression, troubling our assumptions about identity and power.

Second, future research is needed that explores the experiences and beliefs of other stakeholders concerning sexual orientation and disability of young adults with disabilities who identify as LGBTQI. This could include conducting interviews or focus groups with family members, school professionals, or community members. Another option would be to conduct ethnographic research on the environments that these adolescents interact to observe the ways in which disability and sexual orientation interact across multiple environments and events. For example, a critical ethnography in a school setting could illuminate the ways homophobia and ableism intersect and affect the culture and practices across social and instructional settings. These research directions would also allow the researcher to examine how various stakeholders perpetuate biased and oppressive practices. Finally, in order to gain broader knowledge of the experiences, identity, and beliefs of individuals occupying the intersection of sexual orientation and disability across the lifespan, future research should either utilize a longitudinal design in order to understand the intersectional effects on various post school outcomes, or collect similar data at various developmental stages (adolescence, immediately post-secondary, ten years post-secondary, etc.). These current findings concerning identity development also support the need for

utilizing an intersectionality framework when conducting research on identity development in the field of disability studies and multicultural special education (García & Ortiz, 2013; Erevelles, 1996).

Summary and Conclusion

My dissertation research analyzed the narratives of eight adolescents with disabilities that identified as a sexual or gender minority to gain a better understanding of their experiences, identity, and beliefs about the future. This study contributes to a sparse body of research on the overlap of sexual orientation and disability in the lives of youth and young adults. These findings support important implications for changes to how educators work with students with disabilities who identify as LGBTQI as well as how to train and support teachers to work with all students and engage in anti-discriminatory practices. More research is needed to illuminate the experiences of adolescents with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority as well as the ways in which homophobia and ableism overlap within our community and educational systems.

Recruitment Flyer

Interested in voicing your opinions, beliefs, and experiences? Want to participate in research on the identity, beliefs about the future, and experiences of young adults with a disability who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, or another identity?

Most often research that is done on adolescents with disabilities and adolescents who identify as LGBTQI is often done from the perspective of the adults in their lives: teachers, parents, doctors, policy makers, etc. This study wants to hear YOUR voice and stories. Designed to empower young adults, the questions that you will be asked will be strengths-based, focusing on your experiences and beliefs. This means that you will have control over the conversation, tell your story from your perspective, and even provide feedback on how your story is told.

FAQs:

What would I have to do?
Participate in 3 audio-recorded interviews with open-ended questions asking about your own experiences and beliefs. The interview will be guided by you, so you are welcomed to talk about whatever you want and can skip any question you don't want to answer. You can even review what you had previously said and let me know if you think it is a good reflection of your voice. Since this is completely voluntary, you can also choose to leave the study at any point for any reason.

Will I need my parent's permission?
If you are under 18 years old, your parent or guardian will have to sign the consent form, so it is important that you have spoken to your parents about your identity. You or your parents are welcomed to contact me if you or they have any questions or concerns at all. My email is lkahn@uoregon.edu and my phone number is ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. Parents, teachers, or anyone else will not be given information about what was said during these interviews because that is confidential, unless you or someone else is currently in significant danger.

If I want to find out more information, what should I do?
We can set up a meeting with an adult in the school (someone you feel comfortable with) and me to go over the process. Here, you can get a chance to meet me, ask me any questions, and I will tell you about all the details of this project.

Will this be a private conversation? Will people know what we are talking about? Will anyone know that it was me participating in these interviews?
All information will be kept confidential. This means that only I will hear the recordings of the interviews and I will transcribe them to a transcript. Right after the interview, all information that is identifying (like any names, places, etc.) will be changed with a pseudonym or a codename. All transcripts or anything with your name on it that is paper will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office and any digital document will be kept under a password-protected file on my personal computer. When we are doing the interview, no one besides the school staff member who we met with will be aware of what we were talking about.

What can I gain from the study?
You will have the chance to tell your story and talk about yourself. **You are the expert in these conversations**. You will also be given a gift certificate to a local store and a light meal for every interview you participate in.

Where will these interviews take place?
We will decide together to make sure the place is private and safe. We could use an office in school, my office at the University of Oregon, or another place that is private and comfortable.

How can I start?
First we can set up an information session with you, me, and another adult in the school you feel comfortable with. You can email me at lkahn@uoregon.edu or call me at ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇ if you want to contact me directly, or you can tell the school professional to contact me to set up this meeting. We will meet to go over the study and answer any questions you have. As soon as we get permission from your parents (if you are under 18), we can set up a time and place to have our first interview!

Thank you for your interest in my project! I am very excited to meet you and hear your stories and beliefs!

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

College of Education

Confidentiality Agreement
Experiences, Sense of Self, and Beliefs About the Future for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Queer, and Intersex Adolescents with Disabilities
Investigator: Laurie Gutmann Kahn, MSEd

Introduction
- You are being asked to participate in this study on the experiences, identity, and beliefs of young adults with disabilities who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, or intersex (LGBTQI).

Why have I been asked to take part in the study?
- Because you are a high school student who has an IEP or 504 plan who identifies as LGBTQI.

What do I do first?
- Read this form
- Ask any questions that you may have

If I agree to take part, what will I be asked to do?
- Take part in 3 audio-recorded, one-on-one interviews about your experiences, beliefs, and identity. These interviews will take place in a private location and last 45-60 minutes each interview.
- Allow us to record the interview
- If you do not wish to answer a question, you can chose to skip it.

What are the risks of being in the study?
- The study has no direct risks.
- Because the conversation could be sensitive, it is possible to experience anxiety or embarrassment.

What are the benefits of being in the study?
- There are not any direct benefits to participating in this study.
- Doing these types of interviews can be a rewarding experience. It gives individuals time and space to reflect on and describe their experiences, as well as helping to improving services to other students with disabilities.

What will I be given to compensate me for my time?
- A meal (about $7)
- A gift card to a local store of your choice (Target or Fred Meyer) for each interview. You will receive a $10 card for the 1st, $15 card for the 2nd, and a $20 card for the 3rd interview.

How will things I say be kept private?
- The records of this study will be kept private (lock and key or password protected)
- In any type of report we write, we will not include your name or anyone else's or any other identifying information such as hometown, school, etc. We will create code

names instead.

- Only the main researcher (Laurie Kahn) will have access to the audio recording. She will be only one who will hear or read the transcripts with any identifying information.
- Research records will be destroyed within three years.

What if I choose not to take part or leave the study?

- Your participation in these interviews is voluntary. You have the choice to do the interviews or not. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect your relationship with the University or the researcher.
- You are free to stop participating at any time, for whatever reason.
- There is no penalty or consequence for not participating or for stopping your participation.

Who can I contact if I have any questions or concerns?

- You may contact Laurie Gutmann Kahn who is the researcher in charge of this study. Her email is lkahn@uoregon.edu and her phone number is ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
- If you would like to contact Laurie's supervisor to make any comments or ask any questions, you can email Lauren Lindstrom, PhD at lindstrm@uoregon.edu.
- If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact: Research Compliance Services, University of Oregon at (541) 346-2510 or ResearchCompliance@uoregon.edu

Statement of Consent:

- I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form.
- I have been encouraged to ask questions.
- I have received answers to my questions.
- I give my consent to take part in this study.
- I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form.
- I am willing to have the interviews audio-recorded

☐ Yes, I give permission   ☐ No, I do not give permission

_____
Study Participant (print name)

_____
Participant or Legal Representative Signature   Date

_____
Parent/ Guardian (print name)

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview Protocol 1

Experiences, Sense of Self, and Beliefs About the Future for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Queer, and Intersex Adolescents with Disabilities

First Interview: Focus on Experiences

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in these three interviews with me. Today we are going to talk about your experience. To give you some information about my background, I am a former special education teacher and am very interested in your opinions, perspectives and opinions as a young adult with a disability who identifies as LGBTQI. *Remember what we just discussed with the consent, that your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, meaning that if you do not want to answer any questions, you do not need to give me a reason. Just go ahead and say skip it and we'll move on. Any questions before we start?*

1. Before we begin with the questions, is there anything you would like to share about how you are feeling about participating in these interviews with me?

2. Let's start off with you telling me a little bit about your experiences in high school.

    a. Where do you go to school?

    b. What type of classes are you taking?

    c. What do you like best about high school?

    d. What are some of the things that you are good at in school?

    e. What are some of the things that are difficult for you?

3. How about your school mates? Tell me a little bit about your relationships with your peers?

    a. Tell me about how your peers have supported you

b. What do you look for in a friend?

c. Have you had any conflict with any of your peers?

4. How about teachers and other school staff? What are some of the experiences you have had with your teachers?

a. Is there any one who you feel has been especially supportive?

b. Have you had any difficulty with any of your teachers or other school staff?

5. Let's talk a little bit about your family –

a. Tell me a little about your parents.

b. What is your relationship like with them?

c. Do you have any siblings? Tell me about your brother(s)/sister(s)

d. What is your relationship like?

e. Who do you live with?

6. I would also like to know about your experiences in the community. What type of resources do you use in your community?

a. What types of things do you do when you are not in school or at home?

b. Do you have any important relationships outside of the school and home?

7. Now we are going to talk a bit about you and your sense of self.

   a. What are some of your favorite parts about yourself?

   b. Tell me about experiences that make you feel that way about yourself?

   c. What are some things that you would like to work on?

8. What has been the biggest (most important?) decision of your life so far?

   a. How did your identity affect how you made that decision?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me that we haven't talked about?

Interview Protocol 2

*Experiences, Sense of Self, and Beliefs About the Future for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender,
Questioning, Queer, and Intersex Adolescents with Disabilities*

Second Interview: Focus on Beliefs and Plans for the Future

In the first interview we talked a lot about your life in school, with your family and in the community. Today we are going to talk about your beliefs about the future and identity as a young adult with a disability who identifies as LGBTQI. Remember what we just discussed with the consent, that your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, meaning that if you do not want to answer any questions, you do not need to give me a reason. Just go ahead and say skip it and we'll move on. Any questions before we start?

I am going to start by asking you questions about your beliefs about the future.

1. What job/career would you most like to have in the future?

    a. What do you need to do to get there?

2. Why are you interested in becoming _____? Did someone influence that interest?

3. What do you think might get in the way?

    a. How might _____ get in the way?

    b. When it comes to _____ how would you deal with that?

    c. What strengths and supports do you have that would help you overcome _____?

4. Realizing that not everything is possible, what job do you think you might actually have in the next few years after high school -

    a. (Why do you think you are likely to have that job)?

5. Do you want to go to college or some type of vocational training after you leave high school?

   a. Why do you want to _____?

   b. Is there anything that might get in the way?

   c. What strengths and supports do you have that would help you

      overcome _____ and help you achieve your educational goals?

6. Tell me more about how you see your life after you leave high school.

   a. Living

   b. Social life

   c. Community

7. What type of help (supports) did you have in high school to help you reach your goals? (transition services)

Now we are going to switch to talking about your identity and how you see yourself.

8. What are some important aspects of your identity?

   a. How do you think those aspects of your identity will affect you after you leave high school?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me that we haven't talked about?

Interview Protocol 3

Experiences, Sense of Self, and Beliefs About the Future for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Queer, and Intersex Adolescents with Disabilities

Third Student Interview: Disability Identify, Sexual identity, and How these Overlap and Influence Beliefs.

Last time, we talked about your beliefs about the future. Today I am going to ask you to discuss your identity as young person with a disability who also identified as LGBTQI. Remember, your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, meaning that if you do not want to answer any questions, you do not need to give me a reason. Just go ahead and say skip it. Does that make sense?

1. Last time, we talked about your identity and we're going to continue that conversation a bit. Can you tell me a little bit about the parts of your personality and identity that are important to you?

2. How did you come to identify that way? (What experiences/Who influenced your identity?)

3. You did/did not mention disability as a part of your identity. Tell me about having a disability

   a. When were you given your diagnosis?

   b. How has having a disability impacted your feelings about yourself?

   c. What are some of the positive aspects of being a person with a disability?

4. You did/did not mention your sexual orientation as part of your identity. Tell me about that.

   a. How has your sexual orientation impacted your feelings about yourself?

   b. What are some of the positive aspects of identifying as _____?

5. What are some of the day-to-day challenges you experience in terms of your identity?

6. What are some of the day-to-day positive things you experience in terms of your identity?

7. How does your sexual orientation affect your experiences as a person with a disability?

   a. What are some of the good aspects of identifying as _____ with a disability?

8. Do you have any role models or mentors?

   a. If yes, tell me about them? How did they become your role model or mentor?

   b. If no, what qualities would you want in a role model or mentor?

Follow-up questions:
   1. If they bring up Disability or LGBTQI as a social group, ask:
      a. Where did you learn about disability as a social group?
      b. How do you participate in the disability community?
      c. Where did you learn about LGBTQ as a social group?
      d. How do you participate in the disability community?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me that we haven't talked about?

Member Check: Now, I will describe to you what I think I have heard about your experiences and perspectives, and I want you to tell me what you think of my interpretation.

   1. This is how I heard what you said:

   2. What do you think about my interpretation of your experiences and perspectives?

   3. Would you like to elaborate on your previous comments?

Participant Debriefing:
1. Is there anything that you think I have missed that would be important?
2. How do you feel about your participation in these interviews?
3. Do you have any more questions or concerns that you would like to follow-up on?

Thank you so much for participating in these interviews. Your contributions have been very helpful and these interviews have been very informative. Please keep a copy of the informed consent so you have my contact information. Let me know if you have any more questions or comments.

RESULTS SUMMARY TABLES

Table 4

Cross-Case Findings on Self Presented by Participant

	Identity Development	Positive Beliefs	Labeling	Facing Discrimination	Relationships
Artemis	- Strong queer identity -Developing disability identity -Understood how disability and queerness overlapped	- gaining knowledge helped her understand all aspects of herself -makes her desirable by peers -tolerant, wants to help others	- uses labels to help people understand her -claimed disability and sexual orientation labels	-direct response -thinking positively	- had relationship with peer in school -ADHD increases social options
Cylis	- developing queer identity -Developing disability identity -Understood how disability and queerness overlapped	- gives him a unique perspective -able to challenge gender norms - able to have positive cross-gender friendships	-fearful of other's use of labels. -reluctantly claimed disability and sexual orientation labels	-anxiety attacks -ignoring -avoidance (sarcasm) -distancing from stereotype -finding outlet	-never had relationship -limited options -ADHD increases social options -lack of role models -lack of education
Purple	-developing queer identity -low disability identity	- makes him a unique person -able to have positive cross-gender friendships -tolerant, wants to help others	- reluctantly claimed sexual orientation label -questioned disability label	-wishes he could employ direct response -ignoring -distance self from stereotype -thinking positively	-had relationship with someone in community -online options to romantic relationships - lack of role models - lack of education
Sarah	-developing queer identity -Understood how disability and queerness overlapped	-able to challenge gender norms -tolerant, wants to help others -brave	-fearful of other's use of labels. -reluctantly claimed disability and sexual orientation labels	- direct response -thinking positively	- had relationship with peer in school -lack of role models
Fuzzer	- strong queer identity - strong disability identity -Understood how disability and queerness overlapped	- gaining knowledge helped him understand all aspects of himself - able to challenge gender	-claimed disability and sexual orientation labels	-finding outlet - direct response (blogging)	-never had relationship -social skills as a barrier to romantic options -lack of role models -lack of education

		norms -able to have positive cross-gender friendships			
Luna	- strong queer identity - developing disability identity -Understood how disability and queerness overlapped	-able to challenge gender norms -tolerant, wants to help others	- uses labels to help people understand him - Labels are at the root of other's exclusion, but will claim them for himself	-self-harm -finding outlet -thinking positively -direct response (performing poetry)	-previous relationship prior to current sexual orientation identity -social skills as a barrier to romantic options -lack of knowledge/education
Elijah	- strong queer identity -low disability identity		- claimed sexual orientation label. - rejected disability label	-Avoidance (school bomb threat) -Ignoring -self-harm - direct response (creating student group)	-had relationship with someone in community -social skills as a barrier to romantic options -online options to romantic relationships -lack of education
Ron	- strong queer identity -developing disability identity -Understood how disability and queerness overlapped	-able to challenge gender norms -desire to be politically active/ make change	- claimed sexual orientation label -questioned disability label - Labels are the root of exclusion, but will claim them for himself	-Direct and anger when manic -ignoring when not manic -finding outlet -avoidance (skipping school)	-had relationship with someone in community -ADHD increases social options -online options to romantic relationships

Table 5

Cross-case Findings on Home Presented by Participant

	Support	Rejection	Religion
Artemis	- Father supports disability identity (active) - Grandmother would have been LGBTQI if born in current generation	- Micro aggression from mother (disability and sexual orientation) -Direct aggression from mother (sexual orientation)	- Father's religiousness as reason for not disclosing sexual orientation to him.
Cylis	- Aunt is bisexual and provides support. -Friend's parents (whom he lived with after leaving home) are same-sex and provide support. (active)	- Micro aggression from mother and father (disability and sexual orientation) -Direct aggression from mother (sexual orientation) -Mother publically discusses personal identity issues. -Feels parents do not support him to have an autonomous identity, causing him to leave home. -Abusive birthmother	-Raised Catholic but no longer feels like a part of that community. -Sought out Unitarian Church with friend's family and feels at home there. -Also relates to Wiccan religion
Purple	-Twin brother supports sexual orientation identity -Twin brother shares disability identity (because of shared experiences with trauma) - Parents support sexual orientation and disability identity (passive)	-Micro aggression from mother (sexual orientation) - Abusive birthparents	- Christianity causes his parents to believe that marriage is only between a man and woman. Purple shares belief -Wants to seek out a more inclusive religious community
Sarah	- Father supports sexual orientation and disability identity. (passive) -Mother supports sexual orientation and disability identity -Sexual orientation provides common experience for her and her father and step-father.	- Mother forced disclosure of sexual orientation to step-father before she was ready.	- Family's religiousness as reason for not disclosing sexual orientation to family.
Fuzzer	- Mother supports sexual orientation and disability identity (active) - Bisexual aunt and lesbian cousin provide support	- Father disclosed sexual orientation to his side of the family, causing rejection from extended family. - Micro aggression from father (sexual orientation), specifically on gender performance.	-Identity as Atheist shapes beliefs on identity
Luna	- Mother supports sexual orientation and disability identity (active)	-Hasn't seen father since he was 12. - Micro aggression from father (sexual orientation and disability)	-Identity as Atheist shapes beliefs on identity
Elijah	- Father supports sexual orientation and disability identity. (passive)	-5 siblings all out of home (incarcerated, homeless, drugs, or rehab) -Father battling substance abuse. -Mother abandoned as an infant	- Family's religiousness as reason for not disclosing sexual orientation to family.
Ron	-Mother supports sexual orientation and disability identity - Brothers and father support his disability identity	- Micro aggression from outside family members (disability). - Has not disclosed sexual orientation to anyone but his mother because they use derogatory terms. Ron thinks they are not "mature" enough. -Would not wear female clothing in front of brothers or father's side of the family.	-Identity as Atheist shapes beliefs on identity -Meditates (supports disability and sexual orientation identity)

Table 6

Cross-Case Findings on School Presented by Participant

	Queerness and Disability in School	GSAs and Extra-Curricular Activities	Desired Staff Characteristics
Artemis	- Encountered homophobia and ableism -Reports heteronormative culture -SPED first time being marked as different	-GSA (family) -support, knowledge, activism, fun -Animee club	-Understands boundaries -Open minded and non-judgmental (no assumptions) -Genuine and embraces own weirdness/uniqueness -Interactive -Appreciates students for their uniqueness. -Allow students to have autonomy over their identity
Cylis	- Encountered homophobia and ableism -Reports heteronormative culture -SPED first time being marked as different	-GSA (Family) -support, knowledge, leadership, activism, fun -Environmental club	-Trustworthy (can keep secrets) -Trustworthy (to support if needed) -Down to earth -Help them blend in without enforcing normality. -Open minded and non-judgmental (no assumptions) -Easier with female individual
Purple	- Encountered homophobia and ableism -Reports heteronormative culture -Better than his previous school -Would get into trouble with teachers for responding to homophobia.	-Tolerance club -Participates in as many activities as possible, but none salient.	-Trustworthy (to support if needed) -Help them blend in without enforcing normality. -Kind -Easier with female individual
Sarah	- Encountered homophobia and ableism -Reports heteronormative culture -Navigating marked spaces -SPED first time being marked as different (easier when younger)	-Tolerance Club -GSA would target her - Clubs that are non-gender conforming and team oriented: Junior Firefighter club & sports	-Trustworthy (can keep secrets) -Help them blend in without enforcing normality.
Fuzzer	- Encountered homophobia and ableism -Reports heteronormative culture -SPED classes keep him from other LGBQI students. -Difficulty making and keeping friends -Activism (disability and sexual orientation) -PE Class targeting -Can't relate to peers (disability & sexual orientation)	-Passive participation in QSA -Music as a form of communication that crosses divisions -Orchestras (in school and community) -sporadic involvement in LGBTQI and disability focused organizations	-Aware and active concerning social justice issues. -Allow them to be the experts about their own experiences.
Luna	- Encountered homophobia and ableism -Reports heteronormative culture -Difficulty making and keeping friends -Activism (disability and sexual orientation)	- Passive participation in QSA -ReachOut -Spoken word club and competitions -Disability as a barrier for QSA participation	-Allow students to have autonomy over their identity -Help them blend in without enforcing normality. -Allow them to be the experts about their own experiences.

155

Elijah	- Encountered homophobia and ableism -Reports heteronormative culture -Bomb threat -PE Class targeting	-Wants to start a GSA but there are disability barriers -provides community and support	-Kind (teacher at EBD school first positive relationship)
Ron	- Encountered homophobia and ableism -Reports heteronormative culture -Response in school (dress and to derogatory remarks dependent on disability. -Navigating marked spaces -Truancy due to homophobia	-Would like to be a part of a GSA -Environmental Restoration	-Allow them to be the experts about their own experiences. -Allow students to have autonomy over their identity -Open minded and non-judgmental (no assumptions) -Aware and active concerning social justice issues.

Table 7

Cross-Case Findings on Beliefs about the Future Presented by Participant

	Independent Living	Postsecondary Education	Employment
Artemis	- Move out of her mother's house (roommate, etc.). -Unsure about relationship -Wants children -Possible barrier: finances -Remain in the area	-Unclear postsecondary education goals.	- Exploring careers: Graphic designer or book store owner. -Identity makes her want to help other people. -Moving to a more accepting school environment increased her occupational aspirations.
Cylis	-possible barriers: discrimination -Finding love might "save him from this hell" -Wants to adopt because of his own negative experiences. - Location depending on political climate (wants to stay in OR)	-Community college -Would not seek out an LGBTQI student group because he was fearful of disclosure. -Possible barrier: testing	-Experiences with homophobia makes him not want to work with others (goal = work with plants). -Would not disclose sexual orientation out of fear of rejection -Employment discrimination: put up with it if needed money.
Purple	-Will not disclose sexual orientation or disability for the 5-15 years he is in the military. -If marries, it will be platonic (to a woman) -Chose the Army because of financial incentives -Ideally would like to move to a place that was accepting	-Online BA in information technology through the Army	-Will be joining Army to learn information technology -Experiences with homophobia makes him not want to work with others -Moving to a more accepting school environment increased his occupational aspirations.
Sarah	-Unclear IL goals -Wants to travel -Possible barrier: finances & discrimination	-Community college (firefighter or EMT, both)	-Firefighter or EMT -Identity makes her want to help other people. -Employment goal supported by non-gender conforming expectations of the job. -Because of experience with rejection, her employment goals include being a part of a "family." Sexual orientation disclosure could disrupt that.
Fuzzer	- Wants close friends and a relationship (never had either) - Location depending on political climate -participation in orchestras (preferably one in the LGBTQI community). -Political activism	- College choice depending on political climate (schools that sought students who think differently) and music program. -College opportunity to meet others who can talk about his interests and more gay men.	-Disability would increase his ability to perform his employment goal (write music for film/television). -Employment goal supported by non-gender conforming expectations of the job -Only one to discuss legal protections
Luna	-Possible barriers: making and keeping friends because of stigma surrounding his disability and sexual orientation -Wants to live with a roommate, but would stay with mom until he can -Possible barrier: mom's boyfriend	- Would want to participate in a group for LGBTQI students. -Unclear postsecondary education goals	-Most likely work in janitorial services because of disability -Dream job: English teacher or therapist because of how they have helped him. -Identity makes him want to help other people. -Employment discrimination: try to pass (if desperate for money) or limit aspirations

Elijah	-Live with father until he can afford to move to Australia. -Possible barrier: finances	- Go to college for geology (first community college then a 4-year institution)	-Experiences with homophobia makes him not want to work with others (goal = geologist) -Employment discrimination: ignore it, blackmail, or quit
Ron	-Wants a long-term partner, but does not want to get married. -Would have or adopt children (if he can afford it). -Live independently (apartment or mobile home) -Possible barrier: incarceration	- Community college - Unclear educational aspirations (political activism, environmental restoration, political activism)	-Unclear occupational aspirations (political activism, environmental restoration, political activism) -Identity makes him want to help other people/ be a political activist. -Would hide his disability

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159

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