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Identity as Resistance: Identity Formation at the Intersection of Race, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation

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Abstract

Although the concept of intersectionality has gained widespread attention in psychological research, there remains a significant gap related to the impact of intersectionality on identity formation for persons negotiating multiple minority statuses. This gap is especially pronounced among sexual and gender expansive women of Latinx and African American descent—two groups that face disparate personal and public health risks but are largely ignored in the research literature. In response to this gap, we carried out a qualitative study using constructivist grounded theory with 20 Latinx and African American sexual minority, gender expansive women to understand participants' experiences of forming an intersectional social identity. Following an exploration of identity formation related to the specific domains of race, gender identity, and sexual orientation, we prompted participants to consider how each of the specified identity domains impacted the formation and experience of an overall intersectional identity (e.g., how racial position impacted gender identity and/or sexual identity formation). Findings revealed four major themes that were critical in identity formation: (a) family and cultural expectations, (b) freedom to explore identity, (c) the constant negotiation of insider/outsider status, and (d) identity integration as an act of resistance. Implications for future research and psychological services are discussed.

Keywords

Researchers have made important strides in expanding knowledge regarding identity formation in the areas of race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender, respectively. However, scholars have also made clear the importance of expanding identity research to address intersectional lived experiences for multiply marginalized individuals, such as sexual and gender diverse persons of color (SGDPOC; Bowleg, 2008; Greene, 1996; Morales,

1989). To date, there is a significant gap in the research literature on empirical investigations of identity formation in SGDPOC. As a result, many practitioners and scholars are applying commonly held assumptions about identity formation and mental health—rooted in White male cisgender samples—to the lived experiences of SGDPOC. This gap is especially prevalent among Latinx and African American sexual and gender expansive women, two communities that report significant social and health disparities as compared to women from other racial and ethnic backgrounds (Jeong, Veldhuis, Aranda, & Hughes, 2016; LaVaccare et al., 2018; Zahnd & Wyn, 2014). In this article, we use the term "gender expansive women" to describe participants in our sample who identified in a manner that falls outside United States culture's commonly held notions of gender, such as non-binary gender identities (see Baum et al., 2014).

Intersectionality theory was used to inform the research methods for this article (Bowleg, 2008; Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991; Hancock, 2007; McCall, 2005). The concept of intersectionality gained traction in feminist spaces beginning with the groundbreaking work of Beale (1969) and Bambara (1970) who wrote about the intersectional challenges faced by Black women in the United States. Several years later, the Combahee River Collective (1977) and hooks (1981) published well received written works on intersectionality in Black women's lives, followed by several Latina scholars that included Moraga and Anzaldua (1981), who covered topics related to migration, sexual orientation, and sexuality. Intersectionality scholarship provided thoughtful critiques of how the larger feminist movement excluded and marginalized women of color. Scholars pointed out how the central, often sole, focus in feminism at the time was sex and patriarchy, without consideration of other historically marginalized positions women of color held. Indeed, the sexism and patriarchy women of color face is deeply intertwined with race, racism, and the economic and social implications of their multiply marginalized lives.

While intersectional approaches were being regularly used in feminist scholarly spaces in the 1970s and 1980s, Crenshaw's (1991) "Mapping the Margins" refueled attention to intersectionality in a manner that became more popularly embraced in the social sciences. In her 1991 piece, Crenshaw provided a case example to highlight how structural and political intersectionality have real, long-term effects on the lives of women of color. Ultimately, Crenshaw, among other intersectionality focused scholars, set out to illuminate how women of color are rendered invisible, and thus further marginalized, when analytical models of diversity and multiculturalism are applied to their lived experiences. More recently, feminist psychology scholars have made cogent arguments detailing how intersectionality stands to deepen research to more accurately reflect and address the social and health needs of multiply marginalized individuals (Bowleg 2008; Cole, 2009; Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016). As described by Bowleg (2008), an intersectional approach involves careful consideration of how inequality based on ethnicity, sexual orientation, sex, and gender occurs at every level of the research process to include measurement, analysis, and interpretation. Thus, the adoption of an intersectional lens requires attention to how social identity and inequality function interdependently and, as such, must be treated as overlapping and connected.

Identity Formation at the Intersection of Race, Ethnicity, and Sexual Orientation

Thirty years ago, Morales (1989) argued that, "most of what we know about human sexuality today and the acquisition of sexual identity has been studied within the context of a White American mainstream population" (p. 218). This sentiment rings true in present sexual and gender diverse (SGD) research. In fact, Boehmer (2002) found that approximately 85% of SGD published health research omitted demographic information on race and ethnicity. Boehmer's findings revealed the overwhelming trend in SGD research to over-look the importance of intersectionality. Furthermore, the 2011 report on "The Health of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People," published by the Institute of Medicine noted that SGD Americans have unique health experiences and needs that remain unknown to the greater medical community. Furthermore, the committee emphasized the dire need for SGD empirical research on communities of color.

Although attention to intersectionality has gained meaningful attention in the SGD psychology research literature, there remains a dearth in empirical investigations of identity formation among SGDPOC. Sexual identity development models are typically rooted in two processes: identity formation and identity integration (see Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994). Identity formation involves a period of exploration wherein an individual comes to understand their sexual orientation, including navigating distal (heterosexist messages from the outside world) and proximal (internalized heterosexist messages) stressors. Identity integration involves coming to terms with one's sexual orientation, marked by achieving certain milestones common to SGD life, like coming out to one's family and friends. Absent in SGD identity development models is the role of intersectionality in how one comes to understand their social position in the world, including consideration of race and ethnicity.

Speaking to the importance of intersectionality in SGD psychology, particularly among women of color, Greene (1996) expanded Beale's (1969) work on "double jeopardy" when she introduced the concept of "triple jeopardy" to describe the challenges faced by African American lesbians who live in a society that devalues women, people of color, and sexual minorities. As argued by Greene, an intersectional perspective was absent in identity formation psychology literature; scholarship did not account for the social and psychological stressors faced by women of color in their lesbian identity development. Greene argued that cultural factors are central to identify formation among women of color. Specifically, Greene noted that family, racial community, religion, and spirituality provide avenues of support and protection from the historical (and contemporary) realities faced by women of color in the United States. Similar sentiments have been shared by Espín (2011) who described how Latina lesbians' identity development is impacted by the potential loss they face upon coming out from family and community—social relations that are critical to learning how to navigate the world as women of color.

Researchers have illuminated the pivotal role of mothers in Black women's gender and sexual identity formation. Hill Collins (1990) described the significance of the Black mother-daughter bond in fostering a Black feminist framework. Namely, Hill Collins argued that Black mothers teach their daughters survival skills to navigate a racist and sexist world

while also fostering their daughters' ability to not internalize messages rooted in gendered racism. Exploring the Black mother-daughter bond in lesbian identity development, Miller and Parker (2009) contend that it is through this bond that Black lesbian daughters understand and embrace their lesbian identity development as a personal liberatory experience. Namely, Black lesbians learn important skills about Black womanhood from their mothers that they apply to their sexual orientation identity development, including the promotion of self-reliance and independence in their decisions of how and with whom to be vocal about their lesbian identity. Speaking to the protective role of family among Black lesbians, Parks, Hughes, and Matthews (2004) found that Black lesbians were more likely to be out to their family members than White and Latina lesbians, and to be out to family at a younger age. As hypothesized by the authors, findings indicate a sense of connection and support within Black families for lesbian daughters.

Fewer empirical investigations are available on the protective role of Latinx family in sexual and gender identity formation. The existing literature demonstrates the vital role of family in helping SGD individuals navigate the world as women of color (Espín, 1987, 2011). Pastrana (2015) found that family support was the most powerful predictor of SGD Latina/os decisions to come out about their sexual orientation. In fact, family support was more than 2 times as powerful on participants' decision to come out than the belief that sexual orientation is an important part of one's identity. Speaking to the importance of family support for SGD Latinas, Cerezo, Morales, Quintero, and Rothman (2014) found that family members were instrumental in providing survival supports for transgender women. Namely, family was essential in helping several participants migrate to the United States—often, with heavy financial burden—for fear that they would be targeted in their home countries as transgender women.

Social community has also been identified as an integral factor in positive identity formation experiences among SGDPOC (Breslow et al., 2015; Cerezo et al., 2014; Hwang et al., 2019; Jackson & Brown, 1996; Kubicek, McNeeley, Holloway, Weiss, & Kipke, 2013). Social community has been shown to encompass the sharing of resources and access to socio-emotional supports not found in the larger SGD community (Cantù, 2009; Hwang et al., 2019). Kubicek, McNeeley, Holloway, Weiss, and Kipke (2013) found that African American men who have sex with men sought out the House/Ball community to receive social support and to feel validated—an experience unique to the intersection of race, sexual orientation, and gender expression. In a sample of 27 lesbians of African descent, Jackson and Brown (1996) found that the overwhelming majority of participants described relying on the social support from other African American gay men and lesbians to cope with feelings of isolation they experienced in relation to their sexual orientation. While there is a need for research on identity formation among SGDPOC, existing research demonstrates the key roles of family and social community in promoting positive identity formation experiences.

Current Study

The overarching goal of the present study was to apply an intersectional lens to the identity formation processes of 20 sexual minority, gender expansive women of Latinx and African American descent. Namely, we were interested in exploring how identity is formed at the

intersection of race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity with a particular focus on how each of these processes (e.g., racial identity formation) intersect to inform one another (e.g., gender identity formation).

Method

Participants

Twenty participants comprised the sample for this study (see Table 1). The mean age of participants was 30.8 years old (range: 21–61). All participants self-identified as Latinx and/or African American descent with several participants noting a Multiracial ethnic, racial background. Ethnic breakdown was as follows: Six participants identified as Black or African American, including one individual who wrote Black and in parenthesis Mixed, six identified as Mixed Race, and eight identified as Latinx. With respect to gender identity, four participants identified as cisgender woman, six as woman, two as cisgender female, six as female, and six as non-binary (some participants used more than one descriptor). With respect to sexual orientation, twelve participants identified as queer, four as lesbian, three as pansexual, two as bisexual, and one as gay (some participants used more than one descriptor). Twelve of the participants identified as working class and/or working poor, four identified as poor, and four as middle class. Twelve participants completed a bachelor's degree, two completed a master's degree, and six completed no college or some college.

Procedure

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at San Francisco State University. Recruitment occurred online via Facebook and Craigslist in the San Francisco Bay and Sacramento areas. We chose these areas given their proximity to the research team as well as their diversity in relation to racial/ethnic composition and differing economic landscapes (median household income is $78,378 for San Francisco county and $55,615 for Sacramento county; U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). We targeted queer online groups with advertisements that included a brief description of the study and the contact information of the first author. An initial phone screening was used to assess eligibility to participate. Inclusion eligibility included self-identification as (a) 18 years of age or older, (b) woman and/or woman experienced, (c) Latinx and/or African American descent, (d) sexual minority (lesbian, gay, queer, bisexual, same-gender loving), and (e) regularly consuming alcohol on three or more days per week (corresponded with the goals of the original study). Upon establishing eligibility, details about the study were shared and interviews were scheduled. Participants were given a $50 Visa debit card for their participation.

Data in the present study were part of a larger study exploring alcohol use in Latinx and African American sexual minority, gender expansive women. The demographic questionnaire was comprised of open-ended questions to allow for participants to self-identify in the manner that corresponded to their cultural and linguistic preferences. As part of data collection, we carried out a semi-structured interview where participants engaged in a thorough exploration of identity formation with the goal of priming participants to consider minority stress from an intersectional framework. This section of the data was collected prior to any inquiry related to stigma or alcohol use. However, it is possible that

the recruitment for women who engaged in regular drinking impacted the research findings such that participants were more likely to endorse alcohol use than the general Latinx and African American SGD women community. Findings from the stress and alcohol study are published elsewhere (Cerezo, Williams, Cummings, Ching, & Holmes, in press). The focus of the present study was to explore the section of data that covered identity formation in relation to race and ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation. This section of the data is original. Data were not analyzed for any other paper.

Research Team

The research team was comprised of a counseling psychology faculty member, a clinical psychology doctoral student, a marriage and family therapist, and a sociology undergraduate student. The first author was a mixed-race Latinx cisgender queer female, the second author was a White cisgender heterosexual female, the third author was a mixed race pansexual non-binary individual, and the fourth author was a cisgender heterosexual African American woman. The interviews were conducted by Authors 1 and 4, and data analysis was carried out by the entire research team. Prior to initiating data analyses, we discussed our social identities and lived experiences and how these factors might influence the research process. Namely, we identified assumptions and biases that we each brought to the data analysis process that included: (a) the belief that sexual minority, gender expansive women would face disparate rates of stigma-related stress than their White and/or heterosexual counterparts and (b) identity formation would be greatly impacted by family and religious values espoused by one's family of origin. These assumptions were born from our personal lived experiences as well as our knowledge of extant research on SGDPOC.

We also discussed issues of power and positionality during the interview process related to differences in lived experiences across race and ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation and how these differences may present when participants described instances of stigma and social stress. For example, the interviewers were cognizant that participants regularly asked about their racial identity and sexual orientation as a means to find shared connection. Author 4, a self-identified heterosexual cisgender woman, noted that several participants asked about her sexual orientation. Sharing that she identified as heterosexual prompted additional questions from participants about her interest in exploring minority stress related to sexual orientation. Author 4 discussed the importance of intersectionality and allyship with participants during these instances and also shared in the research team meetings how self-disclosure of her heterosexual privilege may have impacted participants' level of comfort and depth of sharing. We actively engaged in an ongoing reflexive process that we maintained during each weekly data analysis meeting. This included keeping notes of our conversations and revisiting these notes on a bi-weekly basis in an effort to minimize subjectivity and maintain a degree of flexibility when analyzing the data (Creswell, 2012).

Research Design

We were principally focused on the role of intersectionality in identity formation of sexual minority, gender expansive women of Latinx and African American descent. As such, constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2008, 2014) and intersectionality theory (Bowleg, 2008; Cole, 2009; McCall, 2005) guided the methodological process as we aimed to

understand the complexity of identity formation at the intersection of race and ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Related to grounded theory, we relied on Charmaz's (2008, 2014) constructivist approach given its attention to the way social conditions—both within and outside of the research process—directly impact interviews (and other data collection practices) such that theories become co-constructed by the participant and researcher.

McCall (2005) argues that research methodology grounded in intersectionality should allow for the consideration of how a participant's life includes multiple dimensions of social life and categories of analysis. In this study, we were specifically focused on capturing identity formation in an intersectional versus additive or interactionist approach (see Szymanski & Henrichs-Beck, 2014). Thus, data collection processes reflected the assumption that each participant's life included unique and conflicting instances of power and sub-ordination. Research methods grounded in intersectionality should not falsely assume that various categories of difference (e.g., race and gender) play equal roles in identity formation or that it is possible to simply add these categories together to arrive to a final, comprehensive understanding of an intersectional experience. Rather, it is the intersections of the multiple dimensions of one's social life that are themselves dynamic and hence "more than the sum of their parts" (Hancock, 2007, p. 251).

The overarching goal of the present study was to be open-ended in our inquiry, to explore the phenomenon of intersectional identity formation in a manner that allowed for diversity and complexity. Specifically, we asked participants to describe (a) their social identities, (b) how they came to embrace the titles and/or descriptions of their social identities, and (c) the ways their social identities intersected.

Data Collection and Analysis

Demographic questionnaire.—The demographic questionnaire was comprised of two main sections: (a) direct questions about participants' backgrounds and (b) open-ended questions to explore participants' cultural identities (see Appendix). Questions included, "How do you describe your gender identity?" followed by, "When did you begin using (term used by participant)?" In the first section, participants were asked about their age, country in which they were born, highest level of education achieved, employment status and average annual income, the years and/or months they have lived in the United States, and whether they were in a romantic relationship at the time of participation. For those participants in a romantic relationship, we asked about the gender of their romantic partner(s) and length of the relationship(s).

Interviews.—Interviews were primarily completed in person ($n = 14$) at reserved rooms of public libraries in San Francisco, Oakland, and Sacramento and at a research office at San Francisco State University. The remaining interviews were conducted over Skype ($n = 5$) and phone ($n = 1$) for those participants who could not travel to the interview site due to work conflicts and economic barriers. The phone interview was not planned. The participant alerted the interviewer 1 hour prior to the scheduled interview that she did not have the economic means to travel to the interview site nor Internet connection for a video

conference. A private company was used to transcribe all of the interviews verbatim. The first author reviewed each interview and found no inconsistencies with the audio recordings. Interviews were an average 66 minutes in duration (range: 42–99 minutes).

Two major sections comprised the interview protocol for the original study: (a) cultural identity questions and (b) lifeline completion to trace minority stress and drinking across the life span. For the present study, we only analyzed data in the first section of the interview protocol on cultural identity. The semi-structured interview scripts focused on participants' identity formation processes. Namely, how participants forged their identities in relation to race and ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

The culminating questions in the identity section of the interview protocol were, "When you think about your identity, how do these different parts—race, gender, and sexuality—overlap or relate to one another for you? In other words, how does being Latina (whichever term used by participant) impact the ways you understand or experience your sexuality or gender?" and "How about the ways your gender and/or sexuality impact the way you think about being Latina (whichever term used by participant)?" We initiated the intersectionality questions by prompting participants to first consider how race and ethnicity shaped their experiences related to gender and sexual orientation. This approach was consistent with extant empirical research on SGDPOC where researchers argue for the centrality of racial, ethnic experience in how SGDPOC form identity consciousness related to gender and sexual orientation (Espín, 1987; Miller, 2011; Nadal & Corpus, 2013). We followed the first intersectionality question with asking participants to also consider the role of gender and sexuality in shaping racial, ethnic experience to ensure that no aspect of intersectional identity formation was lost. Furthermore, we followed participants' leads in expanding on these questions to ask details regarding particular words and/or phrases used that spoke to nuanced aspects of identity.

Analysis.—The principal investigator (Author 1) trained the research team in grounded theory data analysis, which involved open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Building the team's skills to engage in inductive analysis was critical so that themes identified were strongly linked to the data collected during the interviews. Furthermore, an inductive process was essential given the dearth of empirical investigations on the topic of intersectional identity formation, particularly with Latinx and African descent gender expansive women. We wanted to ensure that the theories generated were truly reflective of the data. Next, we revisited the first three interviews using Charmaz's (2008, 2014) constructivist approach to grounded theory. The overarching goal at this point was to analyze data with the understanding that we were generating a theory about intersectional identity formation that was grounded in our data. Our mission was to understand how intersectional identity formation was shaped by the places and people that comprised the participant's social life, including the interview itself.

Major themes were identified during open coding from the first three interviews. Each team member independently coded the first three transcripts and brought their findings to the weekly full team meeting for discussion. This process involved line-by-line coding to ensure that the major themes were explicitly reflected in the data (Charmaz, 2008, 2014). After we

coded the first three interviews, we then met on a weekly basis where two team members would pair up to analyze one interview each. It was at this point that Author 4 discontinued her involvement to prepare for the final trimester of her pregnancy. A coding manual was developed based on the first three transcripts.

In the second step of data analysis, we carried out axial coding to refine the major themes and to create subcategories that helped illuminate nuances across the data. This process led to the identification of broad categories that captured the unique themes identified in open coding. Together, during our weekly team meetings, we created a brief description of each theme that was paired with direct quotes to solidify the suitability of the theme to explain the data. Two interviews were being coded per week (four analyzers). We met each week as a full team to discuss interpretations and to make augmentations to the coding manual when existing categories needed to be revised to better capture the data.

The last phase of data analysis was comprised of selective coding to determine how categories were interrelated to arrive at a final story line about intersectional identity formation (Creswell, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). We employed selective coding to arrive at a final theoretical focus about the connections between marginalization and resistance as core features of participants' intersectional identity formation (see Figure 1). During this phase, the research team noted a difference in the data with respect to how familial influences played a more pronounced role in Latinx identity formation, a factor that was not as strong among the African American or Mixed participants (see Results).

Reflexivity

An overarching goal of our study was to highlight how social position impacted participants' intersectional identity formation. It was therefore critical that we, as a research team, limited the role of our own biases and assumptions during the research process. In an effort to achieve trustworthiness, we bracketed our assumptions at the outset of data analysis to reduce the subjectivity we brought to the data (Creswell, 2012; Morrow, 2005). For the present study, we were particularly aware of how our social positions related to race and ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation took an active role in the research process, dictating how we came to ask about identity formation as well as how we interpreted participants' responses to questions and prompts that led to the construction of theories about their experiences. Our assumptions were informed by personal lived experiences as persons of color, as members and allies to the SGD community, and our previous research efforts with sexual minority women of color (Cerezo, 2016; Cerezo et al., 2014). We identified our assumptions at the outset of data analysis and maintained an ongoing reflexive process during each weekly team meeting. This included keeping a running collection of notes on our conversations and revisiting these notes at the beginning of each meeting in an effort to maintain a degree of flexibility when analyzing data (Creswell, 2012).

In addition to discussing the potential impact of assumptions on our research activities, we also relied on memoing throughout data collection and analysis (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). Memos were developed organically by the interviewers during data collection as well as by the full team during data analysis. Memos were regularly brought to the full team meeting to capture aspects of the data not accessible in the transcripts of interviews alone,

such as a participants' non-verbal behaviors (e.g., avoiding eye contact). We also relied on operational memos for the ordering of the identity exploration questions in the interview protocol. The interviewers noted how race functioned as the primary identity point for the majority of the sample and was therefore the initial question in this section of the interview.

Results

The findings from our study centered on the process by which participants arrived to an established integrated identity, which they described as being shaped by repeated, ongoing experiences of marginalization and exclusion in relation to their multiply marginalized social identities. Participants shared how their identity formation was informed by (a) having to resist family and cultural expectations regarding gender and sexual orientation norms, (b) arriving to new systems and/or environments (e.g., college) that allowed for the freedom to explore identity free from familial pressure, and (c) the ongoing negotiation of insider/outsider status in important spheres of their lives (e.g., family, ethnic/racial community, feminist, and SGD community). The themes identified were not mutually exclusive but instead overlapped and informed one other and contributed to the fourth theme, (d) identity integration as an act of resistance (see Figure 1).

Family and Cultural Expectations

A primary theme in our sample involved the strong influence of family members on participants' identity formation. Namely, participants shared how the pressure they faced from family members was centrally focused on their (a) decisions to come out about their sexual orientation to other family members and their larger ethnic, racial community as well as (b) identity expression, including conforming to familial expectations that participants strictly adhere to gender norms and presentation. It is important to note that while family pressure was noted by the Latinx, African American, and Mixed participants, the subtheme involving gender identity expression was particularly noted by the Latinx participants.

Family pressure and coming out.—Eight participants discussed the strong impact of family pressure on their decisions to come out to the social community connected to their family of origin. Participants noted that they felt a high degree of pressure to remain silent about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity for concern that being publicly out would negatively affect their parents' social standing in their family and home communities. The decision to prioritize familial needs over one's own desire and/or need to be out about their sexual orientation and gender identity was shared across the sample. Furthermore, these decisions were linked to gender norms that were unique to our sample. In the quote below, Participant 7, a 27-year old Indigenous Latina queer cis woman, shares how her coming out process was especially difficult on her biological father who primarily raised her following the death of her biological mother. The participant's coming out as queer resulted in the dissolution of her father's second marriage when his wife demanded he break communication with his daughter for fear that her being out would negatively impact her younger siblings.

> I think growing up in this type [Latinx] of culture, a lot of pride comes with the man and if you respect the man, you won't challenge their pride. For me, it was

> really hard for me because I've always been a daddy's girl and I'm his only daughter. I never realized the effect it was having on my dad. Everybody would go to him and tell him how they felt about it and tell him how disappointed they were in how he raised me.

Four participants noted that within their community of origin, parents were regarded as responsible for their child's sexual orientation. As a result, parents were reprimanded and/or shunned by other family and community members. Participant 11, a 24-year old Mexican/Latino pansexual non-binary individual, shared how their parents' negative reactions to their sexual orientation kept them from publicly coming out to others for long periods of their early adulthood:

> My mom, I remember, when she found out, she would make statements about, "What are your cousins going to think? What is your family going to think?" She was adamant that I wouldn't be able to get a job or I wouldn't be able to go to college for some reason. As far as she was concerned, my future was just done. Aside from the handful of people that I was closest to, I didn't really feel compelled to come out to anybody.

Participant 6, who self-identified as 25 years old Guatemalan queer and "somewhere between woman and non-binary," noted similar family pressures:

> I didn't actually talk to my family about it. Once my mom found out that I had a girlfriend (age 19), being a Latino family we all lived together so the whole family was involved with my "rehabilitation." I didn't get to talk to them much. It wasn't until I was 25 that I actually had a conversation with one of my tias (aunts), who is actually like a second mom to me, basically coming out yet again and that was actually like the pivotal point where I was just out at that point.

Participants were chiefly aware of how being out as a sexual and/or gender minority would negatively affect their parents' social standing, resulting in the potential loss of critical supports that were key to parents' quality of life. Furthermore, participants' coming out processes were greatly impacted by their family's beliefs that same-sex attraction and behaviors would impede participants' ability to work and live a productive life. This belief compounded the structural challenges they already faced in relation to their ethnic, racial, and gender makeup.

Familial influences on identity expression.—In addition to impacting participants' decisions to be open about their sexual orientation, four participants in our sample shared how family members influenced their gender expression. Gender presentation was not specifically prompted in the interview protocol. Rather, participants described how their masculine gender presentation via clothes, hairstyles, and other gendered visual cues "outed" them to family and community. Participants shared that family members expressed a strong desire for them to conform to a traditional feminine gender presentation that was unique to their racial and ethnic experience in the United States. Participant 5, a 35-year old Latina queer female, described her experience:

> Family do force that I'm supposed to be a feminine woman and I'm actually a lot more masculine than they would like. I guess I'm masculine presenting … it's taken me a really long time to get to this point, actually. I mean, I have very, very short hair. Almost like a crew cut. That took me years and years to get to.

As mentioned in the passage above, participants expressed a drawn-out process in arriving at a gender presentation that was authentic to how they saw themselves in the world. Participant 8, a 37-year old non-binary queer Mexican-American woman, described the need to physically remove herself from her family's home to reduce the pressure to be feminine.

> Being that I did come from a Latino family, it's very taboo to be gay, and definitely spent most of my youth trying to conform to the ideals of my family that I should be feminine, I should have long hair, you know I should wear make-up, I should date boys. But, when I moved out of my home when I was 22 to move in with a partner, I felt that I didn't have to follow those norms of my family anymore because I was kind of out on my own and started to identify as more butch, kind of more masculine of center identity and started to feel more comfortable. But even as I felt more comfortable in that process, and as I got older, I still felt the pressure from my family to be more feminine.

It is important to note that the pressure participants experienced in presenting in a more traditional feminine demeanor was directly tied to their ethnic, racial experiences in the world as gender expansive women of color. In the passages above, participants made clear references to the pressure felt from family that was rooted in Latinx ideals of an acceptable gender presentation for women. This pressure was consistent with the Latinx cultural value of Marianismo wherein Latinx women are expected to espouse feminine aspects congruent with virtues of the Virgin Mary.

Freedom to Explore Identity

For the majority of participants ($n = 12$), access to physical spaces where they could explore portions of their cultural identity was a critical factor in identity formation. This process was often juxtaposed against stifling family environments where participants had to remain silent about their sexual orientation and/or faced pressure to wear gendered clothing that was not consistent with how they saw themselves in the world. Thus, access to new, freer spaces was a topic mentioned by participants in relation to identity expression. Outside of gender identity and sexual orientation, racial identity expression was discussed by five participants who identified as African American and Mixed raced. Participants noted the pressure from parents to dress and present themselves in a manner believed to be more "acceptable" by individuals outside of the African American community. Participant 18, a 21-year old African American queer cisgender woman, described her experience:

> They (parents) would almost try to shield me from … certain ways that I could fall into stereotypes of Blackness. They were really hard on me about school. They wouldn't really let me do sports. They were obsessed with my outer appearance … because when you are read as Black you're automatically read as a bunch of other things. Once I got to college and stepped away from that and realized I can be wearing the nicest clothes, I can have straight hair, I can have a 4.0. I can do all

these things, and people actually see me as Black and treat me differently. Maybe trying to distance myself from that is not helping me or my community. It's actually hurting my community. For sure. I had to figure that out, which I did. College was the big thing for me.

New, freer spaces included attending college and joining the armed services. These spaces provided access to transformative experiences that informed a more complex, layered understanding of the intersectional nature of identity. In the next quote, Participant 5 shared how intentional distance from family was a pathway toward embracing her sexual orientation and gender identity:

I fought it for a very long time. It wasn't until I joined the army and I got rid of the environment that I was in that I allowed myself to explore. I tried with all my heart and soul to make it be a phase. … I was aware of it (lesbian identity) when I was 14, but I allowed myself to explore in the Army.

Participant 4, a 25-year old Latina indigenous Afro-descent non-binary femme woman, also noted the importance of distance from family:

When I went to Wyoming, that's when I started being more authentic to myself. I had relationships with folks who identified as women but I never really considered it queer or lesbian or bisexual, that just wasn't my narrative at the time. It wasn't until I started going to the LGBT Resource Center in Wyoming where I started like learning all these terms and that's when I started being more intentional about how I identified. Because I wanted to know who I was, and that included being brown and then also Latinx.

Intentionally creating physical distance from family of origin was critical to identity exploration for the majority of participants ($n = 12$). Formative experiences in the army, in college, and at gay bars allowed participants to more deeply understand the various facets of their identities and in ways that were cognizant of the intersectional nature of those identities. Furthermore, exploring their identities in a physical space away from family and outside of their ethnic, racial home community meant that participants were not weighed down by the worry that coming out would negatively impact their family's social standing.

The Constant Negotiation of Insider/Outsider Status

Several participants ($n = 11$) noted how their identity formation was shaped by the constant negotiation of insider/out-sider status in a number of important spheres that included family, educational settings, and community spaces. This domain encompassed two subthemes: (a) prior experience with being "othered" and (b) feeling like an outsider in community spaces. The first subtheme involved adolescent experiences related to racial, ethnic identity and immigration that were transformative in how participants understood the complexity of identity and sense of belongingness. It was from these early experiences that participants began to formulate a conceptualization of an intersectional experience unique to their lives as sexual minority, gender expansive women of color. The second subtheme involved participants' adulthood experiences, particularly the challenges faced with negotiating SGD spaces as gender expansive women of color. As demonstrated by the quotes in the second subtheme below, adult experiences of being othered fueled a desire for participants to live

according to their own social standards, including creating spaces that affirmed all aspects of their identities.

Prior experience with being "othered."—Eleven participants discussed how being othered with respect to their racial, ethnic identity during early, formative years of their lives was instrumental in how they understood and approached their identity formation in their adult years. This process was especially noteworthy among participants who self-identified as racially Mixed, racially ambiguous, and who migrated to the United States. Early experiences with otherness were useful in helping participants recognize there was no clear or standard process of arriving to a stable identity but rather, that identity formation was shaped by context and shifted over time. Participant 2, a 39-year old Mixed gay female, described her experience with being othered:

> It's so complicated. I was raised in a White family so I was always othered. Not purposefully, just by the situation. So, I was always very aware of my Blackness, even though I was being raised culturally White and suburban. I feel like I'm some weird confluence, like I understand that the world sees me as Black first, and I understand everything that comes with that, and I wear that, I love my brown skin, I'm all for it, but I also know that the nuances of any individual, there's a lot going on.

For the participant above, racial identity was a salient feature of their early social formation. The formative years of their life involved repeated experiences of being othered as the only non-White member of their family who resided in a predominately White area. This experience helped illuminate the complexity of identity and how outward appearance only constituted one aspect of an individual's identity formation. Participant 3, a 24-year old bisexual cisgender female who identified as half Black and half White, noted how she resisted being labeled by others from a young age, a process that has remained constant to the present day:

> I found that people had a lot of trouble sometimes dealing with my ethnicity, because they often wanted me to just identify as Black, and because I didn't. Again, I was raised by a White mother, and because I didn't just fully dive into that, people were like, "Oh! You think you're too good?" All these different racial stereotypes which I think created a certain resistance, even more of a resistance to me to identify as one thing or another.

For this participant (#3), speaking to the Mixed status of her racial identity was met with resistance by others, particularly individuals who regarded her identification as Mixed as an attempt to negate her Black ancestry. As described by Participant 3, past experience with negotiating others' appraisals of her ethnic, racial identity was helpful to her developing a strong sense of self that she then applied to her identity formation related to sexual orientation. Specifically, the participant noted how she came into her sexual orientation in a lax manner, not feeling phased by societal pressures to claim a "classic" coming out experience or hard fast sexual identity label: "Outwardly, I never really labeled anything. I never felt like I had to backtrack or explain anything, because I never explained anything to begin with. Socially, it was not really ever a big deal."

Among those participants who self-identified as racially Mixed and/or racially ambiguous, the repeated messages they received about their ethnic, racial identity informed their process with integrating queerness into their sense of self. Participants shared how they often received strong messages from family members and social community about the ways their outer appearance should dictate their identity titles as persons of color (i.e., Black vs. Mixed). As noted by both participants in this section, the ongoing process of contesting societal pressures formed a natural resistance to being labeled by others, which was vital to their sexual orientation and gender identity formation.

Feeling like an outsider in community spaces.—While the continual process of being othered was considered an opportunity to resist societal pressures, participants also noted the pain brought on by the persistent experience of having an outsider status in communities that were important to their sense of self. In the next quote, Participant 10, a 29-year old queer/bisexual woman, mentions the experience of feeling othered in SGD and feminist spaces in relation to her racial identity as Black/African American:

> For me, it was always a little bit harder because sometimes it feels like the African American community and the LGBT community can be at odds. It feels that African Americans as a whole are slower to adopt like that same-sex marriage really is equal and things like that. A lot of times I feel like mainstream feminism has kind of forgotten women of color.

Participant 14, a 22-year old Mixed Native Chicanx non-binary queer woman, noted how SGD community spaces are often centered on the lived experiences of White men. In response, she forged her own social community that was affirming of her intersectional experiences in the world.

> I was never in spaces with queer women. I was always in spaces with White gay, like very Dan Savage, White gay men. I don't identify with that. Even in San Francisco it's hard to find community. The Castro wasn't the spot for me to go to even though that's what I was made to believe. All of the queer narrators have always been White. You learn about Harvey Milk. You learn about the gay rights movement. You don't hear about Stonewall.

Feeling excluded from the cultural history and current social concerns of the greater SGD community in the United States was a theme shared by our sample. Although participants spoke positively about the social communities they developed that were affirming of them as sexual minority, gender expansive women of color (e.g., friend groups, sports teams), it was clear that feeling like an outsider in valued community spaces was a painful experience that they regularly had to negotiate. An important aspect of the ongoing experience of being othered, as noted in the section below, was that these experiences drove participants' motivation to selectively remove themselves from non-affirming community spaces. Participants instead created community spaces on their own terms.

Identity Integration as an Act of Resistance

Identity integration involves the process wherein individuals arrive to a "state of harmony" that allows for the positive integration of both their ethnic, racial identity and sexual

orientation (Operario, Han, & Choi, 2008, p. 451). For the participants in our sample, identity integration was described as both (a) developing a positive self-concept as a sexual minority, gender expansive woman of color and (b) intentionally living at the intersections of those identities. Participants described that arriving to an integrated self-concept was a deeply personal process, shaped by the resistance they faced from family members in relation to their sexual orientation and gender identity. Participant 13, a 22-year old Latina/ Mexican queer cis woman, describes her experience:

> Growing up in such a traditional household, you don't really have the option to decide who you want to be, what you want to be, who you want to date, what do you want to do. It's just assigned to you. You could question it and you could be rebellious, or you could just go along with it. I feel like a lot of parents do make their children choose and a lot of their kids end up choosing their parents. Then that's where the whole being in the closet and being so unhappy begins.

In another example, Participant 1, age 38, describes how the resistance she faced from loved ones was critical in her commitment to forge a social community that was affirming of all of the facets of her identity as a Mixed, African American genderqueer lesbian woman:

> It definitely has been a struggle trying to figure out how all of these pieces of me intersect and what I believe, and it's led to some really interesting conversations, but I do think it's enabled me to be able to form tighter relationships because there have been people that haven't gotten it, and a lot of those people are no longer in my life because if you can't understand to some degree … you don't have to agree, but I need you to understand where I'm coming from. They definitely have informed each other.

Speaking to the pros and cons of navigating the world as a multiply marginalized individual, Participant 10 described how identity integration involved recognizing both the oppression and resilience that was commonly faced as a 29-year old Black/African American queer/ bisexual woman:

> How many marginalized identities can you have on top of each other? And there's strength in all those identities that I think have made me really resilient and have compassion for people and think about things a little differently. But it can also really suck, as far as safety. I think, in particular, I feel very aware of my queer identity, about being a woman and Black, for sure.

Although participants described the pain experienced from facing resistance of their sexual orientation and/or gender presentation from loved ones in their communities, they also made it clear that countering resistance made them more steadfast in honoring the intersectional nature of their cultural experience. Thus, identity formation was an act of resistance born from the marginalization participants confronted from important persons and social spaces in their lives.

Discussion

The overarching goal of our study was to explore the role of intersectionality in identity formation in sexual minority, gender expansive women of Latinx and African American

descent. Our data yielded four major themes that captured participants' identity formation: (1) family and cultural expectations, (2) freedom to explore identity, (3) the constant negotiation of insider/outsider status, and (4) identity integration as an act of resistance. The order of the themes presented here mirrors the identity formation process described by participants: Arriving to an integrated identity that was inclusive of their lived experiences was achieved in the face of repeated, ongoing experiences of marginalization and exclusion in the most important social spheres of their lives. In response to this marginalization, participants continuously carried out small and large acts of resistance to attain the freedom to express themselves in a manner that was congruent with their authentic sense of self.

Summary of Findings

Family, community, and silence.—Our findings are consistent with previous research concerning the pivotal role of family in Latinxs' (Decena, 2011; Delucio, Morgan Consoli, & Israel, 2018) and African Americans' (Greene, 1996; Miller, 2011; Miller & Parker, 2009) disclosure decisions. For our sample, family pressure was uniquely connected to the gendered pressures participants faced as gender expansive women in their ethnic, racial communities. This is similar to findings in extant studies with sexual minority women of color (Espín, 2011; Jackson & Brown, 1996; Miller, 2011; Miller & Parker, 2009). As explained by Greene (1996), sexual minority women of color face unique socio-historical factors in their sexual orientation identity development, including a long history of racist and sexist societal messages and traditions. Within the family system, Miller and Parker (2009) describe how Black lesbians' access to social capital via relationships with other Black women is essential to their identity formation. It is through relationships with Black mothers that Black lesbians learn how to navigate the United States as Black women. Espín (2011), reviewing her scholarship on Latina lesbian identity over the past 20 years, speaks to the unique gendered pressures faced by Latinas in relation to their sexual orientation. Namely, many sexual minority women face the threat of being marginalized in Latinx spaces upon coming out, jeopardizing family ties as well as their potential to devote a career working for the betterment of the Latinx community. Furthermore, Espín (1987, 2011) argues that Latinas face considerable psychological burden when confronted with the potential loss of ethnic, racial community versus rejection from mainstream society. It is within Latinx community spaces that Latinas access shared linguistic and cultural experiences that are central to their sense of self.

In discussing the critical role of culture in disclosure decisions, it is important to keep in mind the vast ingroup variability within Latinx and African American communities. With respect to Latinxs, Pastrana (2015) argues that certain cultural traditions related to sexuality are often ignored in SGD research. Namely, Pastrana notes how many Latinxs abide by a "code of sexual silence" wherein sexuality is a topic not openly discussed in Latinx families (p. 108). Associated with this code is the decision to not verbally disclose one's non-heterosexual sexual orientation. Guzmán (2006) tested the code of sexual silence among Puerto Rican gay men residing in New York, which he described as *lo bien latino*—a cultural phenomenon wherein certain topics (i.e., sexuality) are not openly discussed in Latinx families given their obvious, already assumed nature. The origins of this cultural tradition are difficult to pinpoint, but the heavy influence of Spanish/Catholic colonization

throughout Latin America has been traced to a number of culturally laden values and behaviors among Latinxs, including the common adherence to marianismo and familismo (Campesino & Schwartz, 2006; Rodriguez, 2010), as well as other cultural traditions thought to represent observance of Catholic traditions.

The historical tradition of sexuality silence has also been noted among Black women (see Hill Collins, 2004). Hammonds (1994) describes how silence has functioned to protect Black women from a long history of racial and sexist oppression beginning with slavery where Black women were used to uphold a false narrative of White women as sexually pure and righteous. Thus, sexual silence has been employed by many Black women as a strategy to shield themselves from an objective gaze heavily rooted in racist beliefs and systems. Similar notions of silence have been reported among Asian lesbians (Chan, 1997). Chan (1997) described the common use of non-verbal disclosure strategies employed by Asian sexual minorities to signal to their families a non-heterosexual identity. Applying Jackson and Brown's (1996) "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" model to two Black lesbians, Miller (2011) found that participants in her sample also relied on non-verbal disclosure strategies to negotiate family and community dynamics, which included bringing partners to family events but never verbally confirming the existence of the relationship as romantic and/or sexual (p. 207). Although the topic of silence among SGDPOC has important socio-historical considerations that are often ignored in SGD research, it is important to note that feminists of color (Greene, 1996; Hammonds, 1994) have made the case for sexual minority visibility among Black women, noting how visibility is integral to self-liberation.

Participants in the present study noted how they remained silent about their sexual orientation and gender identity for several reasons, including fear that being open and/or vocal would negatively affect the social standing of their family members. This experience is unique to the inter-sectional experiences of our sample where social standing in one's ethnic, racial community is intricately linked to access of resources that are critical in building one's social and economic mobility (see Hardaway & Mcloyd, 2009). Our findings are also consistent with the concept of conflict of allegiance (Sarno, Mohr, Jackson, & Fassinger, 2015) wherein an SGDPOC experiences their ethnic, racial identity and sexual orientation as incompatible. Several participants in our study expressed concern with how publicly expressing their sexual and gender identity would detrimentally impact their families, thus demonstrating a conflict of allegiance in being able to live authentically as an SGD woman while upholding the social demands of their ethnic, racial community.

Insider/outsider status and identity formation.—Feeling a sense of connection to the SGD community has been linked to social benefits among SGDPOC (Jackson & Brown, 1996; Masked Author, in press; Pastrana, 2015). However, SGDPOC consistently report facing marginalization within SGD spaces, including invisibility (Cerezo et al., in press; Giwa & Greensmith, 2012), exclusion (Kudler, 2007; Ward, 2008), and outright discriminatory treatment (Han, 2007). Furthermore, women of color report daily experiences of gendered racism (see Lewis & Neville, 2015; Otiniano Verissimo, Gee, Ford, & Iguchi, 2014), while sexual minority women of color report racism in the SGD community (Boulden, 2009; Loiacano, 1989). In fact, a large-scale study of lesbians by Parks et al. (2004) found that African American women reported less access and support in SGD spaces

than White women. Exploring the challenges faced by SGD Filipino Americans, Nadal and Corpus (2013) found that participants reported isolation and tokenization in SGD spaces that included the pressure to conform to a White ideal. Consistent with existing research (Giwa & Greensmith, 2012; Jackson & Brown, 1996; Nadal & Corpus, 2013), participants in our study discussed feeling like an outsider in general SGD spaces that were either (a) dominated by gay White men or (b) catered to White gay women. Participants also described experiencing exclusion in predominately White feminist spaces in relation to their ethnic, racial background.

SGDPOC must often create their own social spaces that affirm their full lived experiences (Cerezo et al., 2014; Hwang et al., 2019). Cantú (2009) carried out a case study of Latino gay men in Los Angeles and found that men intentionally built a social system among themselves that they relied upon to access social and tangible supports, like work opportunities and healthcare. Similarly, Latinx transgender women in San Francisco (Cerezo et al., 2014) and New York City (Hwang et al., 2019) heavily relied on community systems of support within their trans immigrant community to access work, guidance with seeking asylum in the United States, and basic needs like food and shelter. In the present study, participants discussed the importance of creating physical spaces where they could fully express their identities as they developed a sense of self. Participants engaged in major life shifts to be able to live in a more open, out manner that included removing themselves from their family of origin by joining the armed forces, moving away to college, and moving to San Francisco, a safe haven for the SGD community. Several participants reported moving away from their families and into queer hubs for the desire to live without family pressure and rejection (Chan, 1997; Guzmán, 2006; Miller, 2011). Furthermore, San Francisco and Sacramento were seen as sites with a high degree of ethnic, racial diversity, which was important to participants as sexual minority, gender expansive women of color.

The final major theme in our study was that participants' identity integration was rooted in resistance against social pressures from family of origin and valued community spaces. Specifically, participants noted the importance of community resilience and how they created their own social support networks upon facing marginalization in their home, SGD, and feminist communities (see Cantú, 2009; Cerezo et al., 2014; Hwang et al., 2019; Jackson & Brown, 1996). The importance of finding affirming community was a topic discussed by participants in Ikizler and Szymanski's (2014) study on Middle Eastern/Arab American sexual minority persons. In fact, participants suggested that they would have experienced a smoother transition with integrating their multiple identities had they built community with other Middle Eastern/Arab American sexual minority persons who reflected their unique lived experiences. Similarly, for the participants in our sample, arriving at an integrated self-concept was a deeply personal process that required them to develop community with other sexual minority, gender expansive women of color and allies who could affirm all aspects of their identities and the particular ways intersectionality impacted their lives.

Strengths and Limitations

A strength of our study was the methodological approach used to explore the nuanced, intersectional nature of identity formation in our sample. Via constructivist grounded theory, we gathered data that were rooted in participants' own subjective understandings of identity and intersectionality (see Charmaz, 2008, 2014). First, we prompted participants to consider identity formation in relation to each of the major domains of race and ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Second, we prompted participants to consider (a) whether and how their racial experience impacted their sexual orientation and gender identity formation, followed by a question about (b) whether and how their gender identity and sexual orientation impacted their racial experience. By engaging in a thorough process with each of the five prompts, participants were able to speak to the nuanced and deep-level ways their identity formed in relation to their intersectional experiences in the world. This included how racial and ethnic experience led to certain expectations around gender role and gender expression not typically described in the SGD psychology research literature.

Another strength of our study was our recruitment efforts, which resulted in a diverse community sample. We consulted with community members to ensure that terminology and cultural identifiers used in all of the recruitment materials and during data collection were relevant to the target sample (e.g., "same gender loving"). This also included asking participants to disclose their pronouns at the start of the interview. Six participants reported identifying as both women and non-binary, as well as using gender neutral and/or mixed pronouns. Finally, our sample was diverse with respect to age, educational attainment, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

The geographic location from which we recruited our sample was a limitation. Each participant resided in the San Francisco Bay and Sacramento regions. As a result, their cultural experience was shaped by access to SGD community agencies not available in other regions of the United States. Furthermore, these areas have a long history of civil rights movements for both racial equality and SGD equality (e.g., Black Panther party, Compton Cafeteria Riots) that create a social atmosphere different from other parts of the United States.

Another limitation in our study was the order in which we asked participants about their intersectional identity formation. Each participant was first asked to consider how race and ethnicity impacted their gender identity and sexual orientation identity formation. This was followed by a second question about how participants' gender identity and sexual orientation impacted their racial, ethnic identity formation. Although this order of questions was consistent with findings from other studies exploring identity formation with SGDPOC, particularly the centrality of race in SGDPOC's identity formation (see Chan, 1997; Espín, 1987; Jackson & Brown, 1996; Miller, 2011; Nadal & Corpus, 2013), our methods likely impacted participants' responses by assuming that race and ethnicity were the most salient aspect of their identity formation. Thus, we may have lost important data about intersectional identity formation had questions been asked in a different or mixed order. It is also possible that our questions prompted participants to consider intersectionality in an additive manner.

Future Directions

As demonstrated by the participants in our sample, identity formation is a complex, multifaceted process that is heavily shaped by social context. It is therefore critical that researchers consistently rely upon open-ended methods to capture identity labels and experiences. For example, several participants in our sample identified as both women and non-binary and spoke to how they understood gender identity to be an expansive process that was captured by one sole identity label. We recommend that researchers inquire about gender presentation when exploring family and community dynamics as well as the unique barriers faced when one does not conform to culturally prescribed gender presentations (see Rothblum, 2010). For example, four participants in our sample reported unique stressors in relation to masculine gender presentation that resulted in major life decisions like joining the army and moving out of state to present in a manner that was authentic to them. This finding was only present among masculine identified participants. It is important to keep in mind that ethno-cultural spaces may demand adherence to strict gender roles that make participation in these spaces especially difficult for masculine of center women and non-binary individuals. Thus, when exploring how SGDPOC navigate social spaces, attention should be given to the important role of gender presentation—an element of identity not typically captured in demographic questionnaires and/or the larger bodies of SGD and feminist research.

In addition to open-ended questions and prompts related to identity formation, future research should rely on methodological tools that accurately capture intersectional experiences related to race and ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation, among other important background characteristics. Although not an explicit prompt in our interview protocol, prompting participants to describe how they arrived at their cultural identity labels revealed the importance of language and immigration in their identity formation and experiences. Participants described a connection between language and identity such that certain labels, and conceptualizations of identity, cannot be fully captured in the English language (see Espín, 2011; Miller, 2011; Pastrana, 2015). Several studies with SGDPOC note the importance of cultural, historical, and linguistic factors in the decision to come out as a sexual and gender minority in one's ethnic, racial community of origin (Guzmán, 2006; Hammonds, 1994; Hill Collins, 2004).

Practice Implications

Findings from the present study highlight important practice implications. First, participants in our sample described the conflicts of allegiance they struggled with determining whether and how to be open about their sexual and gender identity. A mixed Chicana and White queer participant shared how she faced eviction upon disclosure of her sexual orientation to other Latinxs in her home community. Similarly, an Indigenous Latina queer cis participant reported the dissolution of her father's second marriage upon coming out, noting how the physical removal of her younger siblings from their home was especially painful to the participant and her father. An African American lesbian participant shared how she did not disclose her sexual orientation to close friends in her African American community for fear that important systems of social support would be lost. Stories of loss shared by participants in our study carried significant consequences (e.g., eviction) that were central to their ethnic,

racial experiences within their communities of origin. It is therefore critical that clinicians be cautious when assessing SGD identity formation, particularly the assumption that coming out is a typical part of healthy development for sexual and gender minorities (see Delucio et al., 2018; Villicana, Delucio, & Biernat, 2016).

Given the dearth of empirical research on SGPOC, practice guidelines for working with SGD individuals are typically rooted in the lived experiences of White samples. As a result, clinicians are rarely provided with training and education specific to sexual minority gender expansive women of color. Clinicians motivated to improve access to mental health supports for this community should be cognizant of the ethno-racial and gender makeup of their clientele and staff members and determine whether this makeup reflects potential barriers to accessing psychological services. Latinx and African American women face health disparities as compared to women from other racial and ethnic backgrounds (Jeong et al., 2016; LaVaccare et al., 2018; Zahnd &Wyn, 2014). To ameliorate disparity, clinicians should advocate for ongoing evaluations of their programming, whether access to services are equitable, and carry out outreach efforts to underrepresented communities.

Our research indicates that many sexual minority, gender expansive women of color regularly negotiate insider/outsider status in valued social spaces that impact their sense of self. For example, an African American woman may rely on social support from her family of origin to negotiate academic and/or work places in relation to race and gender. However, this individual may also be masculine of center and unable to discuss the added layer of social stress brought on by navigating a workplace that is threatening to her in response to her gender expression. It is therefore critical that clinicians inquire about the social spheres identified by individuals as important to them and how each of those spheres responds to the intersectional layers of the individual's identities.

Conclusions

Our research indicates that intersectionality played a key role in identity formation for the participants in our sample. Participants described how the process of arriving at an integrated identity was shaped by the marginalization they regularly faced in important social spheres, including ongoing pressure to conform to prescribed gender norms. As a response to this marginalization, they distanced themselves from families and/or communities of origin that did not allow for the expression of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity as well as from SGD and women-centered spaces when their race and ethnicity were disregarded. Identity formation became a process rooted in resistance and self-definition wherein participants forged their own social circles that were affirming of their full intersectional experience as sexual minority, gender expansive women of color. Advocacy and policy efforts intended to serve gender expansive women, persons of color, and SGD individuals must be cognizant of the importance of considering intersectional lived experience or risk being oppressive toward the most vulnerable individuals in our society.

Acknowledgments

Appendix

Identity Questions Used During Semi-Structured Interviews.

Part 1: Demographic Questions about Identity

Prompt: **Okay, first I'm going to start with asking you some questions about your background.**

   1   How would you describe your racial and/or ethnic identity?

   2   How would you describe your gender identity?

   3   How would you describe your sexual orientation?

Part 2: Cultural Identity Questions

Prompt: **For the next few questions, I'm going to ask you about your identity.**

   1   Can you tell me about how you identify with respect to race and ethnicity?

   •   When did you begin describing yourself as (*term used by participant*)?

   2   Can you tell me about your gender and gender identity?

   •   When did you begin describing yourself as (*term used by participant*)?

   3   Can you tell me about your sexual orientation?

   •   When did you begin describing yourself as (*term used by participant*)?

   4   When you think about your identity, how do these different parts—race, gender, and sexuality overlap or relate to one another for you? In other words, how does being Black (whichever term used by participant) impact the ways you understand or experience your sexuality and gender?

   5   How about the ways your sexuality or gender impact your racial, ethnic identity?

Note. Demographic questions also inquired about age, income, educational level, and other pertinent background characteristics not included in this appendix.

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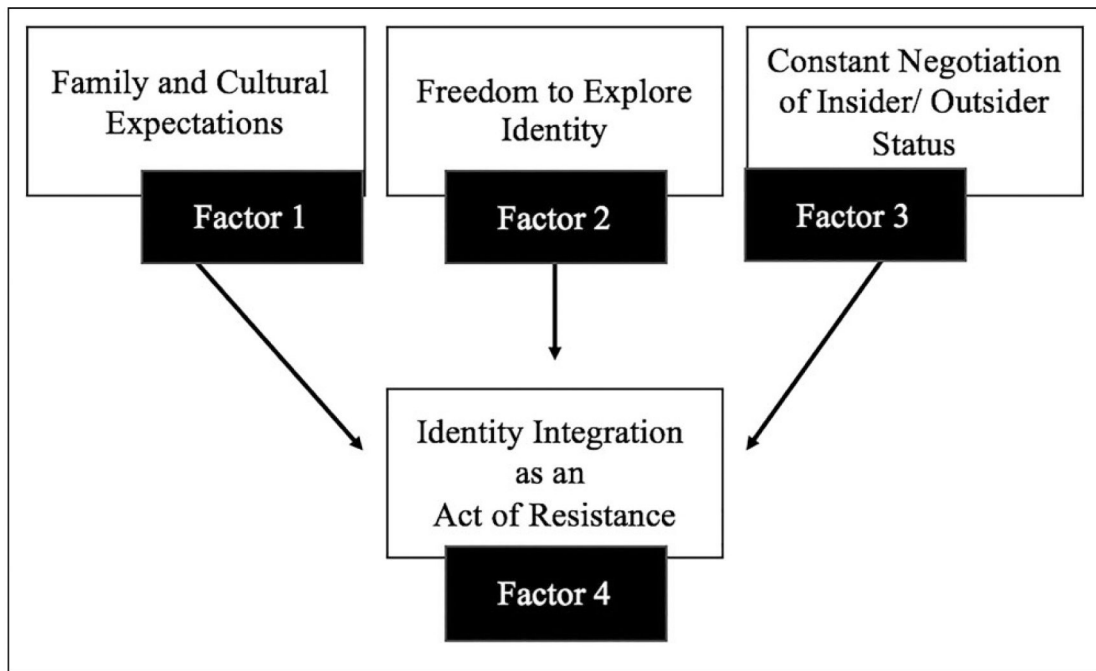
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Figure 1.
Grounded theory of identity formation among sexual minority, gender expansive women of Latinx and African American descent.

Table 1.

Participant Demographic Information.

Participant	Racial, Ethnic Identity	Age	Gender Identity	Sexual Orientation
1	Black (Mixed)	38	Genderqueer; woman	Lesbian
2	Mixed—Black, White, Hispanic	39	Female	Gay
3	½ Black, ½ White	24	Cisgender female	Bisexual
4	Latina Indigenous, Afro-descendant	25	Non-binary femme woman	Queer
5	Latina	35	Female	Queer
6	Guatemalan	25	Between woman and non-binary	Queer
7	Indigenous or Latina; Mexican and Salvadorian	27	Cis woman	Queer, more on lesbian spectrum
8	Mexican-American	37	Non-binary gender queer; woman	Queer
9	Black	21	Woman	Queer
10	Black/African American	29	Female	Queer; Bisexual
11	Mexican, Latino	24	Gender fluid; non-binary; woman	Pansexual
12	Biracial—White and Chicana	37	Woman	Queer
13	Latina, Mexican	22	Cis woman	Queer
14	Mixed; Native Chicanx	22	Gender non-conforming; woman	Queer
15	Mexican and Filipino	35	Cisgender female	Pansexual
16	Latinx, Mexican-American	27	Cisgender woman	Pansexual
17	Black	61	Female	Queer Lesbian
18	African American	21	Cisgender woman	Queer
19	Mexican-American	39	Female	Lesbian
20	African American	28	Female	Lesbian