

Intersectional Identity: Psychological Well-Being of Queer of Color Individuals  
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**Abstract**

Recent studies have focused on the ever growing field of identity development in specific cultural identifiers, such as sexual orientation and racial identity. By conducting a literature review of material pertaining to these areas of study, this article summarizes several key theories pertaining to the identity development of queer of color adolescents and emerging adults. By analyzing the potential combined effects of resilience, minority stress, identity development skills, and affirmation, new conclusions are drawn about what social interventions may help queer of color individuals develop social identities with greater ease. Potential conflicts of queer of color identity, such as sexual risk behavior and internalized homophobia, are discussed. The article ends by suggesting future directions of research so that more accurate, generalizable information may be gathered about this vastly expansive, under-examined field of anthropological and psychological study.

**Table of Contents**

I.	Intersectional Identity: Psychological Well-Being in Queer of Color Individuals ...	4
II.	Racial Identity Development .....	6
	i. Basics of Identity Development .....	6
	ii. White vs. POC Identity Development .....	7
	iii. Motivations toward Minority Racial Identity Exploration .....	11
	iv. Parental Racial Identity Modeling .....	16
III.	Sexual Identity Development .....	18
	i. Straight Identity Development .....	18
	ii. Queer Identity Development .....	22
	iii. Minority Stress Theory .....	29
IV.	Examining the Queer of Color Social Experience .....	31
	i. Impact of Internalized Homophobia .....	32
	ii. Minority Stress Theory Colorfully Applied .....	38
	iii. Coming Out in Color .....	40
	iv. Sexual Risk Behavior .....	44
V.	Progress for the Future .....	47
	i. Directions for Future Research .....	47
	ii. Equal Representation .....	51
	iii. Therapies and Interventions .....	52
VI.	Conclusion .....	56
VII.	References .....	58

### **Intersectional Identity: Psychological Well-Being of Queer of Color Individuals**

The field of cultural psychology has been expanding for decades. Through the years, cultural psychologists have created and tested several theories pertaining to ethnic identity development and sexual minority identity development. These theories suggest that, for people who identify with some cultural minority group, identity exploration may lead to a greater, healthier sense of belongingness to one's group (Phinney, 1993). This sense of belonging is then theorized to somehow help minority individuals achieve greater identity formation in other social contexts and facets of their own identities (Grotevant, 1987). When these theories are applied to the development of sexual identity for queer people of color, a sexual minority group within racial minority groups, the conclusions drawn tend to become confusing or somewhat conflicting.

Many psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists have long theorized that, for queer people of color, coming out of the closet and developing a positive affect around one's queerness is particularly difficult (Aranda et al., 2014). Though psychologists propose that this may be the case for various reasons, such as less access to education, greater religious commitment, strong family ties, or traditional values, empirical evidence supports the idea that there is simply more homophobia within people of color communities (Durell et al., 2007; Balsam et al., 2013). Due to this greater homophobia and lack of acceptance within their racial communities, cultural psychologists predict that queer of color individuals may suffer from greater psychological distress than their White queer counterparts (Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999). Not all evidence may support this finding, though a collection of various studies testing for different measures of psychological well-being, identity achievement, and healthy behavior provide a collage of what healthy identity development for queer of color individuals may look like.

In order to best understand the mural of theories pertaining to queer of color identity, first theories of general identity development, particularly in adolescence and emerging adulthood, are discussed. Next, the specific theories surrounding racial identity development, such as the importance of identity affirmation, and sexual identity development, such as minority stress theory, are brought forward. Finally, the specific research pertaining to queer of color adolescents and emerging adults are analyzed. Though this in depth analysis of the existing literature, proposals are then made for directions of future research and for methods of social and academic reform which may prove beneficial to queer of color youths as they embark on the process of identity development.

In this article, it is important to note the distinction between socially defined terms and the meanings of those terms when used by the authors of the various studies analyzed herein. First, though person of color (POC) in a social context may describe essentially anyone who is not Caucasian or European, within this study, a person of color refers solely to a Black, Latino, or Asian individual living in the United States. A White person here refers to someone of European descent who was born in the United States and who usually has had several generations of their family living in the United States. In a social context, “queer” may describe anyone who is not straight, cis gendered, or completely certain of their attraction to the opposite sex. Here, queer refers solely to cis-gendered lesbian, gay, or bisexual individuals who have in some way made their non-straight identity public. Collective identity refers to an identity shared by a group of people, like being lesbian or Latino. Though in specific studies this may vary, adolescent generally refers to a youth between the ages of 12 and 17. Similarly, though this may differ across studies, emerging adult refers to individuals from ages 18 to 24, usually around college age who are in between being dependent upon their parents and forming adult selves.

Each of these terms are used throughout this article in order to analyze queer of color identity development.

### **Racial Identity Development**

In order to understand the identity development of a queer of color youth, one must first understand racial identity development. Racial identity development is difficult and complex. By using general theories regarding how an individual develops as a complex, social being as a structural framework, more may be understood about racial identity development. Due to social pressures, the persistence of racism, and systematic oppression, there are vast differences between racial minority identity and White identity, and these differences may lead to dissimilarities with regard to what phenomena may aid healthy identity development. The following section describes first the main basic theories of identity development. Next, the differences between majority and minority racial identity development are discussed as a means to address what factors may motivate achievement and psychological well-being in each.

### **Basics of Identity Development**

The majority of theories surrounding identity development as a social human being are predominantly based upon two different theoretical frameworks: the Eriksonian model of identity development (Erikson, 1968) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). According to the Eriksonian model, during adolescence, individuals face the “crisis” of identity development and are prompted to explore different potential identities until they commit to a more integrated, adult self-concept (Erikson, 1968). Social identity theory proposes that humans have a fundamental need to belong to a group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). When an individual categorizes themselves as part of a specific group, like their racial group for example, then that sense of belonging is most commonly accompanied with attitudes and feelings about that group

and their own group membership. Through this emotional process of understanding their group membership, a person may experience their group identity as a vital aspect of their self-concept from which they may derive a sense of connectedness and self-esteem.

Developmental psychologist Harold Grotevant (1987) agreed with Erikson's theory in that he also believed that adolescents explore different identities in order to become their adult selves. More specifically, Grotevant theorized that the different social contexts in which an individual lives their lives as well as their own personalities inform how they move from exploration of alternate identities to commitment to a specific identity. Grotevant theorized that a person seeks constancy in their personality such that they do not act like two completely different people according to the social context they find themselves in. Instead, they strive toward a consistent, integrated adult self. This led Grotevant to the conclusion that, when a person experiences identity development in one aspect of their identity, such as their race for example, this development should have positive effects on or otherwise aid in the further development of other aspects of one's identity, such as for example their sexual identity. Grotevant, Erikson, and Tajfel and Turner's theories each describe identity development in broad terms, though in order to understand identity development for queer of color individuals in particular, it is important to understand the differences between majority group and minority group identity development in particular with regard to race.

### **White vs. POC Identity Development**

In the United States at least, the racial group which is considered to hold the social power of the majority is White whereas Black, Asian, and Latino peoples are considered to be the minority. Cultural psychologist Jean Phinney utilizes the Eriksonian model of identity development (Erikson, 1968) to propose two different models of identity development dependent

upon racial group: the ethnic identity development model for people of color (Phinney, 1993) and the White identity development model for White individuals (Phinney, 1996).

The ethnic identity development model occurs in three stages (Phinney, 1993). During the first stage, the POC is unaware of how their race impacts their daily lives. Next, after exposure to societal racism and personal experiences of discrimination or prejudice, a POC may enter into a stage of exploration during which they attempt to learn more about their racial group identity. The POC may for example seek out more experiences with other people from the same racial or ethnic group, learn their ancestors' native languages, take courses discussing the history of their people, or in some other way attempt to learn about the culture of their racial group. This explorative process leads to the final stage of ethnic identity development: identity achievement. Generally, identity achievement refers to the point at which a person integrates one aspect of their identity into their greater self-concept (Erikson, 1968). When a POC successfully arrives at a stage of identity achievement with regard to race, though they may not necessarily hold race as their most fundamental aspect of their self-concept and it might not be consistently salient, they still develop an understanding of how their race impacts their daily lives and commit to their expression of their racial identity (Phinney, 1993).

Obviously, it is not likely that White adolescents would themselves suffer from racism; in most contexts in the United States, White individuals simply hold too much social power over POC for this to ever be the case. Thus it goes without saying that White individuals may experience a different path toward racial identity development and may be launched into this identity formation process by different motivators than their POC counterparts. Jean Phinney (1996) theorizes that, for White individuals, racial identity development occurs in two obligatory stages potentially followed by three discretionary stages. First, similar to people of color in the

initial stage of ethnic identity development, White individuals are unaware of the impact that their race may have on their daily lives. However, after observing others experience racism and prejudice, White individuals become marginally aware of the effects of race and the systematic oppression of people of color. White individuals then feel guilty for their privilege and, to protect their self-esteem, avoid blame, and/or resolve any cognitive dissonance that this racial awareness may cause, White individuals begin to misdirect the blame for their discomfort about racism toward people of color. This usually subconscious scapegoating process eventually leads to an irrational fear of people of color, which ultimately leads to the internalization of racism in aforementioned White individuals.

According to Jean Phinney (1996), in order to be prompted into a stage of racial identity exploration, White individuals would be required to have experiences which force them to reexamine their previously held attitudes and beliefs toward people of color. The reexamination of racial attitudes would lead to the challenging of the White individual's own racial privilege. This type of exploration, in theory, is also associated with a sense of alienation from other White individuals, who are by consequence of the exploration process perceived to be racist and/or tools of racial systematic oppression. In the last stage of White identity formation, a White individual may further immerse themselves into different racial cultures, which would lead to greater awareness of how their own race impacts their daily lives and experiences. During this final stage of identity development, though a White individual may be achieved in their identity integration, they might not necessarily feel a sense of connectedness or affirmation toward their own racial group. As the process of White identity formation is difficult to be prompted into pursuing and requires significant self-sacrifice and feelings of alienation from one's racial group, something which directly counters humans' need to belong as described by social identity theory

(Tajfel & Turner, 1986), a significant percentile of the White population remains in the second stage of purposeful unawareness and scapegoating, thus internalizing and perpetuating societal racism (Helms, 1993). Phinney's model does not necessarily apply to those who actively adopt familial attitudes of blatant racism (Phinney, 1996). Instead, her theory pertains more to the sort of obviously racist White majority who say or do racist things and act due to a lack of information or unawareness of the subconscious prejudice which motivates their actions. Thus, this theory may help to explain, on a more macro level, why racism is cross generational and ever persistent in society today. If the White majority holds the greatest social power and it takes so much energy for that majority to progress into a stage of racial awareness, chances are that it will take decades and years of social reform before that majority can be prompted to challenge their subconscious prejudice.

Phinney's models racial identity development are supported by empirical research. In one study, experimenters selected subjects from grades 6 to 8, so the average age of participants was approximately 13 years of age, who identified predominantly as White, Black, or Mexican American (Roberts et al., 1999). Subjects completed the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure, or the MEIM (Phinney, 1992), as well as different measures to test psychological well-being and salience of ethnicity (Phinney, 1999). Results indicated that, especially for Black and Mexican American subjects, a strong sense of ethnic identity was related positively to measures of psychological well-being, such as coping ability, self-esteem, and optimism, and negatively correlated to measures of psychological distress, such as loneliness and depression (Roberts et al., 1999). Black and Mexican American self-identified subjects scored higher than their White counterparts in salience of ethnicity, ethnic identity exploration, and senses of belonging to one's racial group. These three factors were also all inter-correlated. This result shows support for the

ethnic identity development model, as higher scores in identity exploration predicted higher scores of ethnic identity salience. Here, identity salience may be interpreted similarly to identity commitment, the final stage of racial identity development. Though they scored lowest on identity salience, however, White subjects scored higher on average than Black and Mexican-American subjects in psychological well-being. These results indicate that, for White subjects, racial identity exploration and commitment are simply not as important for their psychological well-being. Unlike their POC counterparts, White individuals are able to stay at the second stage of unawareness and subconscious racism without it having a negative effect on them. People of color may simply have stronger, more important motivations toward their racial identity achievement.

### **Motivations toward Minority Racial Identity Exploration**

People of color are, as a group, more likely to be prompted into racial identity exploration than their White counterparts. Though psychologists have spent many years theorizing about racial identity exploration, it was not until more recent years that cultural psychologists made a substantial attempt to understand the specific motivators which lead a POC to explore their racial identity. In a recent, longitudinal study, several Black college students (mean age at start of experiment was about 19 years,  $SD = 0.44$  years) were asked to fill out a survey and provide race-related narratives on two separate occasions 18 months apart (Syed & Azmitia, 2010). The survey, a revised version of the MEIM (Phinney, 1992), was used to establish subjects' progress toward ethnic identity exploration. With regard to the narratives, subjects were asked to write about a time when they were particularly aware of their ethnicity since coming to college (Syed & Azmitia, 2010). Experimenters then coded subjects' narratives as thematic of one or more of four different racial awareness related motifs: awareness of difference, awareness of

underrepresentation, experience of prejudice, and connection to culture. Results indicate that individuals who told a different story from time 1 to time 2 were more likely to ultimately have more identity exploration than those who told the same story during both administrations of the prompt. Furthermore, as a within subjects result, all subjects who achieved a significant increase in identity exploration during the course of the study told a different story during each narrative interview session. Additionally, subjects who had told a narrative coded with a different racial-awareness related theme during each session were more likely to have experienced increased greater ethnic identity exploration. The themes of experience of prejudice and connectedness, which both have greater elements of personal experience or values, were tied to greater identity exploration. These results suggest that ethnic identity exploration may be motivated by a variety of factors. Furthermore, utilization of more diverse lenses of identity exploration, particularly those which emphasize personal experience or values, may actually predict greater identity achievement. This finding may come into play when considering other realms of identity, such as sexual orientation or the integration of queerness and race into one self-concept for queer of color youth.

It is important to note that the previously described study was conducted using college-aged subjects (Syed & Azmitia, 2010), though Erikson discusses identity exploration through the lens of adolescents (Erikson, 1968). However, research suggests that emerging adulthood, or the time when someone is college-aged, is a time of greater cognitive ability and, consequentially, greater identity exploration (Grotevant, 1987). Furthermore, college is a time when new environments and challenging experiences may prompt further racial identity exploration (Maramba & Velasquez, 2012). The opportunities to meet people of the same racial group in an educational setting, take classes about one's racial group's history, and discuss and be aware on a

more advanced level of the way one's racial identity impacts their daily lives all become significant motivators toward racial identity exploration. Furthermore, during emerging adulthood, youths are experiencing a drive toward separation and individuation from their parents (Floyd et al., 1999). During this phase, as youths attempt to explore, create, and commit to their adult selves separate from their parents, it seems only logical that the creation of a complex adult self would include greater identity development and achievement worth studying in specific collective identity realms, such as race. Thus, the use of college-aged subjects is acceptable and should theoretically yield similar results in terms of identity exploration as when adolescent subjects are selected. Therefore, the results of the previous study regarding differences in racial identity exploration may be generalized across adolescents of different racial backgrounds.

When examining the differences between the White racial identity development and ethnic identity development models, it seems to be significantly more important for people of color to explore and commit to their ethnic identity than it is for White people. Previous studies show that within POC communities, racial identity exploration better predicts psychological well-being (Roberts et al., 1999). In another study, a sense of belonging to, positive attitudes surrounding, involvement in, and commitment to one's racial identity for students of color were all strongly correlated with higher scores in global self-esteem (Phinney et al, 1997). Coincidentally, in the same study, as subjects were high school students from predominantly non-White schools, White students also showed similar correlations between greater awareness and exploration of racial identity and self-esteem. This result suggests that being part of the minority group within a social context, as these White students were in predominantly POC schools, feeds into one's propinquity toward and need for ethnic identity exploration. This may

be important in particular for queer of color individuals, who are in effect a minority within a minority group and thus may feel the need for identity exploration and affirmation in as additive need.

The effects of ethnic identity achievement may be felt on a conscious level. In one study, students of color attending college at a predominantly White institution were interviewed throughout their college careers in order to assess their knowledge of their ethnic identity, the salience of their ethnic identity, and their understand of how their ethnic identity impacts their lived experiences (Maramba & Velasquez, 2012). Subjects self-reported sentiments that development of their racial identity had a positive impact on their sense of belonging to their racial group as well as to their feelings of competence, their interpersonal relationships, and their other commitments. These subjects also reported that having a clearer sense of racial identity positively impacted their academic performance and the clarity of or commitment to their plans after graduation.

There are some limitations to the positive effects of ethnic identity exploration. In one study, experimenters tested ethnic minority adolescents and emerging adults in their levels of racial identity achievement, racial identity affirmation, and psychological well-being (Ghavimi et al., 2011). In line with the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1987), identity affirmation refers to the affective process of developing positive feelings and a sense of connectedness to one's racial group. For subjects of both age groups, identity achievement and identity affirmation were tested for using revised versions of the MEIM (Phinney, 1992). Psychological well-being, on the other hand, was tested for using two different measures across different age groups: a Satisfaction with Life scale for adolescents and a Global Self-Esteem scale for emerging adults. Though all three factors showed significant correlations with one another

across both age groups – in particular, identity achievement and identity affirmation were strongly correlated – when these factors were put through a multiple-regression analysis, results indicate that identity affirmation mediated the association between identity achievement and psychological well-being. Thus, results support the hypothesis that identity exploration and commitment may only be beneficial to psychological well-being so long as an individual also experiences identity affirmation. Essentially, even if a POC explores their racial identity and commits to their expression of that identity, unless they feel positively about their POC-ness, they are less likely to experience any of the psychological benefits associated with that identity achievement.

A more recent study gave further support to the hypothesis that ethnic identity affirmation is the key to greater psychological well-being for racial minorities (Fisher et al., 2014). In this experiment, Black and White adolescents were examined for their levels of ethnic identity exploration and affirmation using the MEIM (Phinney, 1992). They were also tested for psychological well-being by examining their self-reported symptoms of depression and anxiety. Results indicated that Black subjects more identity exploration than White subjects (Fisher et al., 2014). The same results occurred for identity affirmation. However, while ethnic identity affirmation was negatively correlated with depression and anxiety, ethnic identity exploration was positively correlated with depression and anxiety. This may explain why, despite their low levels of racial identity affirmation, White subjects had the lowest average of psychological distress. Thus it seems that, in order for people of color to experience the benefits of ethnic identity achievement, they first must go through the somewhat painful part of identity exploration which includes experiencing and being aware of racism and then develop positive

affect surrounding their race. Otherwise, they may be stuck experiencing feelings of depression and anxiety.

### **Parental Racial Identity Modeling**

When considering racial identity development, it is also important to consider what the effects that having parents of the same racial group might be. It is obvious that humans learn certain skills and habits from their parents. By observing their parents carry out their daily lives, babies are able to passively learn amazing, complex skills like how to speak a language. It follows logically that a child's relationship with their parent may inform their racial identity development process as well. One particular study, which examined how the acculturation styles of an adolescents' parents might affect their child's own acculturation style and psychological well-being, brought the effects of parental racial minority identity integration styles to light (Farver et al., 2002). In this study, American-born Asian Indian adolescent subjects and one of their immigrant parents completed questionnaires assessing their acculturation style, ethnic identity, and family conflict. Acculturation in this context refers to the cultural socialization of minority individuals to mainstream culture. There were four major acculturation styles which parents or their children could have adopted: integration, assimilation, marginalization, and separation (Berry, 2001). The integration style is characterized by the preservation of minority cultural integrity while also participating as an integral part of larger society. The assimilation style is more defined by participation in larger society without maintaining any connection to minority cultural values. On the other hand, the separation style is characterized by no connection to majority society and all connection with one's minority group culture. The last acculturation style, marginalization, also avoids connection with mainstream society. However, this style is further distinguished by a rejection of not just majority culture but also one's

minority group culture as well. To further understand the psychological impact of the relationship between adolescents and their parents' acculturation styles, experimenters asked that the adolescent subjects also completed anxiety and self-esteem measures.

Results of the study indicated that adolescents tended to match their parents in acculturation styles. Adolescents reported higher self-esteem, less anxiety, and less conflict with their parents when they shared the same acculturation style as their parents. Furthermore, parents who had either separated or marginalized styles of acculturation reported greater conflict with their children than the parents who had integrated or assimilated acculturation styles. In other words, these results indicate two main concepts: Firstly, parents model acculturation styles for their children, and consequentially their children tend to approach adapting to being part of a minority group while living in a majority dominated society similarly. Second, parents who had acculturation styles which did not address the majority culture had worst relationships with their children. Lastly, both directly and indirectly, it seems that parents' acculturation styles did have an impact on their children's psychological well-being. It should be noted that, while this study focuses on immigrant identity acculturation, the theories the results of this study support should be able to generalize over to racial minority identity integration. The main defining factor for identity acculturation style is the distinction between minority and majority culture and how an individual and their parents attempt to, as minorities, face the pressures and expectations of majority culture. Both racial minority groups and immigrants share this defining factor in their pursuit to create complete, integrated self-concepts.

Thus, racial identity is informed by ones membership in a majority or minority group, so POC and White individuals experience racial identity development differently. As members of a minority group living in a majority-oriented society, POC are provoked into identity exploration

during their adolescence and emerging adult years. For POC, identity achievement and in particular identity affirmation are crucial for psychological well-being. White individuals, due to their collective seat of power within society, are not easily pressured into racial identity exploration and are not as dependent on identity achievement in their racial identity for their psychological well-being. POC parents influence their children's ways of addressing their racial minority status, and this may have a significant effect on their children's psychological well-being as well. These findings may be pertinent to the greater topic of identity development in queer of color youths in that they are a minority group within a minority group and as such it seems that similar mechanisms may inform the identity development processes and psychological well-being of these youths. In order to further understand what factors may influence queer of color identity development, however, it is also important to understand the other side of their dual identity, their queerness.

### **Sexual Identity Development**

As queer of color individuals are minorities in both their racial identity and sexual orientation, it is important to understand how sexual orientation is integrated into the self-concept. The following section begins first by examining sexual orientation and identity development for the straight majority and then by the queer minority. Through the comparison of these two different identity development processes, the difficulties of queer identity achievement are highlighted. Finally, the difficulties of being part of a minority group for a collective identity which is not initially visible on a first impression as well as the benefits of knowing others of the same collective identity are discussed.

### **Straight Identity Development**

The psychological field of sexual identity development is rather new and based predominantly on theory as opposed to more empirical evidence. This may be due to the fact that, for those who abide by the social norm, the process of sexual identity development can be completely subconscious and almost never explicit. For others, the process of sexual identity development means unlearning and directly contradicting all previously held, widely normalized ideas of sexual identity and behavior. Thus it seems almost impossible to compare straight identity development to queer identity development. In fact, little if any research has been done to analyze the integration of straight sexual identity into the self-concept at all (Morgan, 2012a). This is not necessarily because straight identity integration is a horribly bland process not worth studying. This is more due to the idea that, from a psychological perspective at least, it is difficult to delineate the difference between internal preference and the pressures of the assumed social norm, making the process of sexual identity integration nearly invisible and of little importance until someone begins to actively challenge those norms for themselves. From the moment a child is born, even younger than the age at which they begin to experience sexual urges, they are exposed to a wide variety of social pressures and media suggesting that they should follow gender expectations and become sexually and romantically attracted to people of the opposite gender. Despite this invisibility of identity, some psychologists have attempted to make the process of straight identity development the subject of theoretical and empirical work.

Around the start of the new millennium, Roger Worthington and his colleagues (2002) began to theorize about what makes straight identity interesting and potentially unique from the more visible sexual minority identity development process. Basing his theories on Eriksonian identity development (1968), Worthington speculated that straight identity development was dependent upon a person's exploration of and commitment to their sexual identity. Sexual

identity was defined both on an individual level in terms of a person's sexual needs, values, behaviors, and modes of sexual expression and on a social level in terms of a person's understanding of one's membership in a group and becoming aware of how their group membership in the majority group impacts their experiences.

To address the previously noted issues regarding social pressures versus active exploration and commitment, Worthington asserted that sexual identity development occurred in five flexible, fluid stages and statuses: diffusion, unexplored commitment, active exploration, deepening and commitment, and synthesis. Identity diffusion occurred when a person neither explored nor committed to their identity. Though a person experiencing sexual identity diffusion may still be sexually experimenting and interacting sexually with others, they do not actively or consciously pursue that sexual experimentation or exploration (Konik & Stewart, 2004). By contrast, unexplored commitment is the stage characterized by commitment to straight identity without exploration of that identity (Worthington et al., 2002). Others have called this status straight identity foreclosure to emphasize how it is characterized by following the status quo and thus adopting the ideals and behaviors of authority figures around oneself without question or hesitation (Konik & Stewart, 2004). In each of these statuses, a person does not experience an identity crisis as Erikson would describe it, here meaning that they would not experience the process of identity exploration (Erikson, 1968).

The third straight identity status is active exploration (Worthington et al., 2002). This stage is distinguished by purposeful exploration of sexual identity, preferences, and needs, though there is still uncertainty and a lack of commitment to one's sexual identity. This high exploration, low commitment status has also been called identity moratorium in other literature (Konik & Stewart, 2004). Next, there is the deepening and commitment status (Worthington et

al., 2002). During this stage, a straight person has engaged in either passive exploration, when they explore inadvertently or in a way which is socially acceptable, or active exploration, which may lead to either passive or active greater commitment to straight identity. Finally, the fifth possible status for straight identity development is synthesis. During this stage, a straight person is thought to have congruent individual and social sexual identity components which are achieved through a conscious process. This highly beneficial identity integration status is also associated with identity achievement in other realms of identity, such as occupation or race, which ultimately helps to create a highly synthesized, organized self-concept.

Though the theoretical process of straight identity development is fluid and variable, empirical evidence has been used to support the existence of these five distinct statuses. In one study, straight college students from two different parts of the country were instructed to write narratives about their sexual identity development (Morgan, 2012a). Experimenters coded subjects' narratives for their levels of sexual identity exploration and commitment in order to determine which of the five stages of straight identity development they fell into. Results revealed that a majority of the subjects experienced identity commitment with passive exploration, meaning that they were in the deepening and commitment stage (65%). A significant portion of the subjects, however, experienced identity commitment with active identity exploration, meaning they were closer to an identity synthesis status (24%). An even smaller portion of subjects were of the diffused sexual identity status (1%), the active exploration phase (5%), and identity foreclosure stage (5%). These findings indicate that active identity exploration was experienced by less than 30% of the straight participants. Thus less than 30% of subjects were likely to have identity achievement in sexual identity positively impact identity development in other aspects of their self-concepts. This is remarkably similar to the results one

would predict for subjects undergoing White identity development (Helms, 1990). Similarly to straight identity development, White identity development also has had little research dedicated toward its understanding. Thus, it is no surprise that when psychologists refer to sexual identity development in the literature, they tend to be speaking solely of queer identity integration (Morgan, 2012b).

### **Queer Identity Development**

Research and theories regarding sexual minority identity development seem to be conflicting and not entirely corroborated by empirical research (Morgan, 2012b). It is generally agreed upon that queer youth achieve the same developmental milestones as their straight counterparts during adolescence and emerging adulthood (Calzo et al., 2011). For example, around the ages 12-14, both straight and queer youth will on average begin to feel sexual urges. However, the steps with regard to queer identity development are a bit more numerous than in straight identity development. On average, queer individuals seem to flow from experiencing sexual urges to self-identifying as queer, followed by same-sex sexual experiences. This process seems to, for the average queer youth, culminate in their coming out at around age 20. However, the study detailing ages for achieving these sexual milestones did not differentiate between coming out to one's parents versus their peers, which has been shown to potentially yield different results (Diamond, 2008). Though the majority of queer identified people tend to come out around age 20, there are significant subgroups who come out from ages twenty to forty three (Calzo et al., 2011). A significant subset within this group of later bloomers specifically waited until they arrived at college in order to avoid parental judgement as they explored their sexual identity. This study which these findings are from did not, however, address the potential consequences of coming out so late nor did it stress the importance of coming out as a process of

asserting one's queer identity. As predicted by the effects of identity affirmation in racial minority identity, it seems that waiting until college to affirm one's sexual identity may have negative effects on psychological well-being.

Vivienne Cass (1979), a clinical psychologist and sexual therapist, suggests that sexual minority identity integration into the self-concept occurred in six stages: identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis. These six stages seem to function similarly to the stages of ethnic identity development. Queer individuals begin identity development in a stage of identity confusion, during which they experience feelings of lack of fit with their peers or social norms. These feelings cause sexual minority individuals to explore their identities, bringing them to the stage of identity comparison. Next, after a period of exploration, queer individuals commit to their sexual identity and enter into a stage of identity tolerance. However, the positive effects of queer identity achievement on psychological well-being may not take effect until a queer individual achieves identity affirmation, thus entering the identity pride stage of queer identity development. Finally, identity synthesis here means the same for queer individuals as it does straight individuals: the effects of identity achievement in sexual identity are felt across the individual's self-concept (Cass 1979; Worthington et al., 2002). This model of sexual minority identity development would work perfectly if the empirical evidence corroborated it. However, when empirically tested, queer self-identified subjects did not appear to be in more than two of the distinct stages that Cass suggested (Morgan, 2012b). This means that perhaps sexual identity development does not necessarily occur in as linear or conscious of a pathway as suggested, or perhaps six distinct stages are too numerous.

There has been empirical evidence to support the hypothesis that coming out as queer occurs in three main stages (Cass, 1984; Chapman & Brannock, 1987). First, there is awareness of being different, as Cass suggested. Next, there is the exploration of same-sex or other sex-attraction and behaviors. Finally, there is the acceptance of queerness and coming out from self and others, thus achieving identity development and affirming that identity as a means to integrate it more thoroughly into a healthy, positive self-concept (Morgan, 2012b). This framework seems more similar to racial minority identity development except that acceptance of sexual minority identity requires admittance of being a sexual minority whereas there is no ethnic identity admittance needed as that identity is perceived to be more visible and thus inescapable. In fact, both racial and sexual minority identity development are motivated by a feeling of lack of fit which leads to identity exploration and ultimately identity achievement and affirmation. The only difference between these two theories are the motivations which prompt identity exploration and the process of identity affirmation. For ethnic minorities, whose races are visible to the world, motivation to explore identity comes from a need to belong as well as feelings of being discriminated against. For sexual minorities, exploration is less socially motivated and more motivated by a need to be loved and to be happy or else a lack of fit with the compulsory heterosexual behavior framework.

With regard to identity affirmation, similarly to ethnic identity, for sexual identity, identity affirmation mediates the relationship between identity achievement and psychological well-being (Ghavimi et al., 2011). However, unlike ethnic identity where minority group membership for people of color is compulsory and socially assumed, sexual minority individuals are assumed to be straight until they state otherwise (Konik & Stewart, 2004). Thus, the sexual minority identity affirmation stage is further defined by embracing the coming out process, when

a person actively, consciously announces and thus affirms their sexual minority group membership to others, usually who do not belong to aforementioned sexual minority group (Morgan, 2012b). Not every queer person comes out. There are many queer individuals, for example, who may be out to themselves but not their coworkers or out to their friends but not their family (Moradi et al., 2010). The pressure of concealment and fear of coming out to one's friends and family have been theorized to cause a negative psychological effect on those who suffer from this type of stress (Konik & Stewart, 2004).

Needless to say, there are several factors which effect sexual minority identity development. Subjects from the one study who were more achieved in their sexual minority identity stressed the power of having someone who they admired or respected model their sexual minority identity (Konik & Stewart, 2004). This did not mean that a parent had to be queer in order for their queer child to be achieved in their sexual minority identity. Rather, the individuals who had access to or were part of queer groups in college or had more queer friends were able to view others of the same sexual minority, and this had a positive impact on their psychological well-being. This finding was unintentional, therefore it was not thoroughly analyzed or explained. In theory, however, this result may indicate one of two things: either sexual minority identity affirmation is fostered by a sense of belonging to a group of similar individuals or sexual minority identity achievement is bolstered by viewing other achieved sexual minority individuals model positive identity commitment. In either case, this finding becomes useful when attempting to understand the integration of ethnic and sexual minority identities into one self-concept as modeling of some variety seems to be beneficial for both.

Another interesting finding from the Konik and Stewart study (2004) is that the queer subjects, all of whom were in emerging adulthood, also had more advanced identity development

in global, political, religious, and occupational identity. This means that those who identified as some form of queer also had further explored, were more certain of, and were committed to other, seemingly unrelated aspects of their identity and self-concept. This suggests that perhaps, as suggested by Grotevant (1987) and Cass (1979), by utilizing their identity development skills for their sexual identity when their straight counterparts did not, queer subjects were able to hone their identity development skills to a greater degree and therefore utilize those skills more thoroughly in other realms of identity as well. Though similar research has yet to be performed on ethnic minority individuals, due to the significant similarities between sexual and ethnic minority identity, it should be possible for ethnic identity development to help promote identity development in other unrelated domains as well. If this were not the case, then at the very least it should also be possible that sexual minority identity development should help promote ethnic identity development as well. This suggests that queer of color youth in particular should have fairly strong and established identity development skills.

As being a sexual minority may be difficult at times on a social level, it seems that queer individuals should develop, on top of excellent identity development tools, greater coping mechanisms in order to face harsh social climates. On the surface, this idea makes sense. After years of being tormented based on one's sexual orientation, a person should be able to practice their ability to maintain self-esteem regarding that resolute aspect of themselves despite external pressures. However, according to several previously described articles, the pressure of coming out should cause for individuals to remain without affirmation in their sexual minority identity, causing for them to suffer from greater psychological distress and thus not develop the proposed coping skills required to survive the social climate (Morgan, 2012b; Ghavimi et al., 2011). Nonetheless, there has been empirical evidence supporting the notion that queer youth after years

of bullying may develop a sort of psychological, emotional buffer to help survive the stress of not being accepted due to one's sexual orientation (Konik & Stewart, 2004).

The same is true for ethnic minority individuals. For example, in one slightly older study, ethnic identity achievement was positively correlated to measures of psychological well-being such as coping ability, mastery of conflict, self-esteem, and optimism, and negatively associated with loneliness and depression (Roberts et al., 1999). This finding has been generalized across other studies conducted as recently as within the past year (Romero et al., 2014). What is more, more recent studies also indicate that ethnic identity affirmation specifically has protective effects on depressive symptoms and has the ability to enhance self-esteem and stabilize high discrimination-related stress. Though research pertaining to resilience primarily uses sexual minority identity, as both sexual minority identity and racial minority identity are associated with discriminatory behavior and prejudice from larger society, the results supporting resilience should hold true for both types of minority identity.

Unlike ethnic identity, it is unlikely that queer youth would share the same sexual orientation as their parents. Thus, it is significantly less likely that queer youth would look toward their parents to model positive sexual minority identity integration as racial minority children observe their parents and often inherit their acculturation styles. However, it goes without saying that parents indeed play a key role in sexual identity integration for queer youths. For example, in recent studies where there was an emphasis on understanding who a queer person chooses to come out to, one of the groups which is very often solicited is that person's parents (Floyd et al., 1999). This is because children simply seem to care about what their parents think and what they think about them.

Around the same time that queer youth tend to have their “sexual awakening” and become self-aware of their sexual orientation, they as adolescents moving toward emerging adulthood are also going through a key period of development: separation-individuation (Floyd et al., 1999). During this stage of ego development, adolescents establish an autonomous adult identity separate from their parents. Close emotional bonds between adolescents and their parents help the adolescent feel validated during the process of identity development, which is associated with positive adjustment. However, youths who are either too dependent on their parents and fail to individuate from them at the appropriate time or youths who feel resentment toward their parents and sever ties with their parents before they create a positive adult self tend to be more neurotic and anxious than their counterparts with healthy relationships with their parents. These adolescents also tend to fair lower in self-esteem. As adolescents transitioning into emerging adulthood tend to be so influenced by the relationship they have with their parents when creating their adult selves, it follows that the relationship queer adolescents have with their parents as a result of their sexual orientation should impact the integration of their sexual identity into their adult selves as well.

Empirical evidence supports the hypothesis that parents’ attitudes toward their children’s sexual orientations may have effects on their psychological well-being. In one study, queer emerging adults were asked to describe how they had come out to their parents and the repercussions of that coming out process within their relationships with their parents (Floyd et al., 1999). Youths who indicated that they were estranged from their parents or had suffered a loss in the quality of their relationship with their parents due to their sexual orientation also indicated lower levels of self-esteem and higher levels of depression and anxiety. Meanwhile, the children whose parents had been supportive of their sexual orientation showed greater self-

esteem, lower levels of anxiety, and lower levels of depression. Furthermore, having parents with more approving attitudes toward queer youths' sexual orientation was correlated with being in the separation-individuation phase of ego development, meaning that children who had supportive parents with regard to their sexual identity were more likely to be further along in the process of becoming well-adjusted adults with their own identities. A major problem with this study, however, is the fact that it was conducted over fifteen years ago, meaning that the social climate surrounding queerness might have since changed. For example, after fifteen years of social justice and human rights movements, the climate may have improved such that disapproving parents may either be less common or may not have as significant of an impact on the new, more accepting generation. Nonetheless, these findings still speak to the importance of having supportive, approving parents when it comes to sexual orientation and sexual identity integration. Parents serve as one of the greatest social pressures queer youth face when exploring and integrating their sexual identity.

### **Minority Stress Theory**

Needless to say, there are a great deal more social pressures working against queer identity development than straight identity development. To encompass a better understanding of how these issues may impact the integration of identity, psychologists may turn to the minority stress theory. Minority stress theory is based on the idea that a specific type of stress is caused by identifying with a minority group (Meyer, 2003). In general, minority stress theory summarizes how difficult social situations may lead to chronic stress and poor health among minority individuals. When applied specifically to sexual orientation, minority stress is defined by four specific criteria: experiences of prejudice, internalized homophobia, expectations of rejection, and discomfort caused by the pressure of concealment (Balsam et al, 2007).

Experience of prejudice may be objective, though the literature regarding sexual orientation does not designate how bad discriminatory actions must be in order to be defined as additive to minority stress. The other three aspects of sexual minority stress are more internal and to an extent privately experienced. Internalized homophobia describes the negative effects of social pressures on identity affirmation. Expectations of rejection stem directly from humans' inherent need to belong as well as their fear that they will not be able to belong to the desired group. Finally the pressures of concealment also directly counter, not only identity achievement as they hinder a person from being able to explore their identity for fear of being discovered, but also their identity affirmation because queer individuals are not able to as sexual minorities come out and integrate their sexual identity into their consistent behavior and self-concept. Research shows also that sexual minority individuals simply come out as queer less often per capita than straight individuals (Konik & Stewart, 2004). Thus sexual minority individuals alone suffer from the pressures of concealment and fear of rejection which motivate them to keep their sexual identity closeted and without affirmed, something which their straight counterparts do not suffer from. If minority stress theory as a general theory pertaining to the development of a minority collective identity in a majority oriented social context holds true for ethnic identity development, then it is likely that queer of color youths would face this stress as for the combined effects of their racial and sexual minority identities.

In a society oriented toward compulsory heterosexuality, queer youths face significant social pressures which inhibit their sexual identity development. Queer youths navigate similar identity development processes as racial minority youths in that they move from exploration of their identity to commitment to their identity. In order to affirm their identity, queer youths must come out as a member of their sexual minority group. Similarly to racial minorities, identity

affirmation proves necessary for queer youths' psychological well-being. Parents have a profound impact on the identity development of their queer children, though children who have both approving parents and a source of positive identity integration modeling are more likely to experience psychological well-being. Minority stress theory suggests that certain pressures which stem from minority group membership may particularly inhibit queer youths' identity development. As there are so many similarities between the needs of queer youth and POC for healthy identity development, it follows that queer of color youth would also have the same needs and would experience identity development the same way, though the combined difficulties of both minority identities may prove doubly challenging to counter.

### **Examining the Queer of Color Social Experience**

The previous sections of this article have provided a framework for identity development across two different minority identities based on race and sexual orientation. In the following section, these two minority identities are examined to analyze their combined effect. First, difficulties pertaining specifically to queer of color youth in their racial communities, such as greater internalized homophobia, are discussed. Next, minority stress theory is repurposed in order to understand specifically how queer of color youth may suffer from greater minority stress than their White queer counterparts. Afterward, the phenomenon of coming out and how a lack of outness in the queer of color community impacts queer of color youth identity development is highlighted. Finally, sexual risk behavior as a result of all of these stressors is discussed in order to provide a fuller picture of exactly what the psychological distress resulting from queer of color identity may look like on a behavioral level. This discussion highlights the importance of following the guidelines laid down by queer identity development and racial minority identity development as both greatly define the needs of queer of color youths' identity integration.

### **Internalized Homophobia in POC Communities**

In order to better understand queer of color identity development, it is first important to understand the discrepancies between the communities White queer and queer of color individuals develop in. As previously discussed, children tend to share the racial identity of their parents and thus are more likely to be raised in consistent direct contact with others of the same racial group. Thus, different racial groups' attitudes toward queerness become particularly important for the queer youths who belong to those racial groups. For whatever reason, it seems to be assumed within the literature that racial minority communities have greater internalized homophobia than the White community, and this internalized homophobia is passed from generation to generation regardless of the individuals within those racial community's own sexual identity. Several psychologists have conducted research on the assumption that Black, Latino, and Asian communities would be less accepting of queer individuals (Durell et al., 2007). Results suggest that the assumption of greater internalized homophobia in POC communities is accurate, though the motivations toward homophobic ideals may vary across different racial minority groups.

Across several different studies, it seems that of the three major racial minorities, the Black community has the most stable, if not consistently the highest, internalized homophobia (Durell et al., 2007; Balsam et al., 2013). In one study, psychologists tested for correlations between social/cultural factors and internalized homophobia using an entirely Black sample. Results indicate that there were significant, strong correlations between greater homophobia and lower socioeconomic class, greater religious commitment, more traditional gender rolls and ideals, and less education (Battle & Lemelle, 2002). These findings may suggest that less education, greater religious commitment, and more reinforced gender rolls could all correlate to

greater internalized homophobia across different racial groups. In fact, results from a separate study suggest that greater commitment to gender roles is correlated to greater internalized homophobia across different the White community and the three main racial minority groups, though POC communities had higher commitment to gender roles than their White counterparts (Durell et al., 2007). Perhaps the reason that racial minorities and the Black community in particular have such high levels of internalized homophobia is because gender roles and other homophobia-correlated factors apply significantly more to them due to systematic oppression. If less education, for example, is correlated with higher internalized homophobia, and due to systematic oppression, Black individuals have less access to education, then perhaps systematic oppression becomes an overarching third variable which connects less education to internalized homophobia across the Black community and racial minority groups.

Another interesting result found using this all-Black sample was that Black men had a significantly more negative view of gay men than Black women (Battle & Lemelle, 2002). However, experimenters did not ask subjects about their opinions of lesbian women, so it is not known for certain if Black women would respond to lesbian women the same way Black men responded to gay men or not. It is true that in previous research, women as a whole seem to score lower in internalized homophobia than men, though a major flaw with these studies is that they do not necessarily differentiate between gay men and lesbian women when asking subjects of their opinions toward homosexuality (Balsam et al., 2013). Regardless, speculations regarding the gender difference exemplified by this finding may lead psychologists to infer that perhaps men are harder on other men when they break gender roles (for example by dating other men instead of women), and perhaps the same could apply to women's sentiments about lesbians (Battle & Lemelle, 2002). This may speak to the power of social powers as perhaps Black

subjects became more critical and judgmental about a person's queerness when they had more in common (for example gender). Their higher levels of internalized homophobia may be a subconscious attempt to distinguish themselves from that queer body and thus avoid greater social stigmatization themselves.

Similarly to when psychologists used an all-Black sample, several cultural factors commonly associated with systematic oppression were correlated to greater internalized homophobia when using an all-Latino sample. Among these factors, less education, participation in a more fundamentalist religion, greater commitment to any religion, having more children, and lower socioeconomic class were all significantly associated with greater internalized homophobia (Herek & Gonzalez-Rivera, 2006). Similarly as well to the Black community, internalized homophobia was strongly correlated with greater commitment to gender roles. As anticipated by the previous results regarding homophobic attitudes toward gay men by Black men, Latino men demonstrated greater internalized homophobia toward gay men than Latinas, and Latinas indicated higher internalized homophobia toward lesbian women than Latino men (Battle & Lemelle, 2002; Herek & Gonzalez-Rivera 2006). As commitment to gender roles are considered to predict internalized homophobia, and there is a statistically greater level of homophobia within POC communities, these findings suggests that perhaps the same results could have been found with the Black community and even perhaps the Asian community if these statistical analyses had been completed (Durell et al., 2007; Balsam et al., 2013). This also indicates that perhaps people of color tend to police those closer in cultural comparison to themselves and take a more negative view of those who, by way of sharing similar cultural identifiers such as gender, may challenge what little social power they may have.

Another reason why queer Latino individuals specifically are theorized to have greater internalized homophobia than their White counterparts is that the Latino community may have a greater emphasis on family and interdependence. Thus, a queer Latino person may put great emphasis not only about their own experience facing homophobia, but also of how their queerness impacts their families (Aranda et al., 2014; Diaz et al., 2004). In one longitudinal study, Latino lesbian youths were questioned about their first experiences coming out. Similar to Black youths, Latinas were less likely to come out to their parents, predominately out of a heightened fear of their judgement or the impact their queerness may have on their parents' lives. However, coming out to peers was more common for subjects and also had positive effects on depressive symptoms, suggesting that perhaps this may be a helpful alternative option for Latinas who feel particularly closeted when around their family.

In another series of interviews with gay Latino men, several older subjects explained the circumstances of their coming out to their families (Tajon, 2009). Of these subjects, numerous had lived lives of repression. Several had been married with children when they chose to come out. They described the years of depressive symptoms and the traumatizing experience of coming out after so long only to, in most cases, lose all contact with their families. However, several of them indicated that they felt more content after coming out, so there is still hope that, with time and proper identity exploration, they may experience the benefits of coming out as well. Nevertheless, the finding of being out to family members less often was consistent for Latinos across all age groups, suggesting that perhaps this tendency is not something which changes with age (Moradi et al., 2010; Aranda et al., 2014). Perhaps the fear of family members' reactions and sentiments is persistent across other queer of color communities as well.

Another factor which applies specifically to the Latino community which may be correlated with greater internalized homophobia is machismo. Machismo, a cultural ideal rooted in old Latin American tradition, is the learned, reinforced idea that men are domineering and must be considered to be above women in social contexts (Estrada et al., 2011). Not only is greater commitment to machismo-rooted ideals greatly correlated to, and oftentimes even equated with, greater connection to gender roles in the Latino community, but both put together have significant, strong correlations to internalized homophobia in Latino samples. This is because queerness almost directly challenges machismo; when socially analyzing the potential reasoning behind this phenomenon, a gay man challenges gender norms and “gives up” his social power by dating another man, which goes directly against the ideals of machismo. Again, as Latino men have so little social power, when someone in their group is perceived to be giving some of that social power away, the Latino men may respond by policing or distancing themselves from the offending party.

This is not to say that to be less homophobic means to be less committed to Latino traditions or ideals. Conversely to machismo, caballerismo is a similarly socially learned and reinforced ideal that men are supposed to be gentlemen and value and support their families (Estrada et al., 2011). Unlike machismo, however, this factor was negatively correlated to internalized homophobia. Here is an example of a traditional Latino value which one may embrace as a means of staying connected both to their Latino roots, which may actually help to achieve a more integrated identity for both racial identity and sexual identity. It seems that the key to combining these two factors could be that the specific elements of queer culture and racial minority group culture must not directly conflict or else there may be identity development conflict. However, in order to better understand this, more research must be completed

regarding what specific traditional racial factors would not correlated with internalized homophobia across different racial groups.

With Asian communities, there has been very little research regarding cultural ideals which may correlated with internalized homophobia. Even in samples which discuss the differences between POC homophobic leanings and White internalized homophobia, Asian subjects are often excluded (Rosario et al., 2004; Parks et al., 2004; Aranda et al., 2014). This is perhaps because in Asian communities it is frowned upon to discuss sexuality as a general concept (Durell et al., 2007). Nonetheless, what few studies that do test for cross-racial internalized homophobia which include Asian subjects indicate that Asians have higher levels of internalized homophobia than their White counterparts, though perhaps not as high levels of internalized homophobia as their Black or Latino counterparts. Beyond commitment to gender norms, little is known about the specific cultural factors may motivate Asians toward greater internalized homophobia. Despite this lack of research, Asians are often treated as part of a homogenous POC sample in studies pertaining to homophobia (Moradi et al., 2010). This is an area where proper empirical research and fact checking would be highly beneficial.

Not only are certain factors which are highly correlated with internalized homophobia highly correlated with POC identity, but rejection of internalized homophobia seems to be heavily correlated to several factors which apply significantly less to people of color as well. Resulting from persistent social prejudice and systematic oppression, factors such as lower socioeconomic status, less education or access to education, and more commitment to stereotypical gender roles, apply to people of color more than White communities. Thus, it falls to reason that, because the social phenomena which correlate significantly with homophobia affect POC so much more heavily than White communities, people of color should, in theory,

suffer from higher levels of internalized homophobia and heterosexism. Several studies have attempted to study this issue empirically, though they seem to have significant flaws or to be invalidated by any replications of the same study (Durell et al., 2007). However, for the purposes of this argument, it is necessary to follow the simple assumption that, as a result of systematic oppression and other social phenomenon which apply to people of color, POC have higher levels of internalized homophobia, regardless of their sexual orientation, than their White counterparts.

### **Minority Stress Theory Colorfully Applied**

When running with this theory that POC communities have greater levels of internalized homophobia than their White counterparts, the minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) may help to predict what effects this internalized homophobia may have on queer of color youth. According to the minority stress theory when it is applied to queer identified individuals, all four criteria which predict greater stress would theoretically apply significantly more to individuals who identify as queer of color. Firstly, queer of color individuals should experience more instances of discrimination based the significant combined effects of being a queer person of color. Theoretically, queer of color individuals should experience significantly more discriminatory treatment since they would face discrimination, not only from White individuals regardless of their sexual orientation due to their race, from straight people regardless of their race due to their sexual orientation (Choi et al., 2013). When examining recently televised hate crimes, it seems that more violent instances of prejudice seem to apply especially to queer people of color more so than any racial or sexual minority group.

The second criteria of sexual minority stress, that a person experience greater levels of internalized homophobia personally, should apply significantly to queer of color individuals

(Meyer, 2003). This is simply due to the fact that people of color in general tend to have higher levels of homophobia, and this homophobia is consequentially internalized by queer of color individuals. This would cause more stress and less of a desire to come out as queer for people of color, which in turn should mean a smaller community and fewer individuals to model a queer of color integrated self-concept. This would lead to a self-perpetuating cycle of internalized homophobia within queer of color communities. Next, expectations of rejection, which may be fed by experiences of prejudice within the social or even family context, may be particularly pronounced for queer of color individuals (Meyer, 2003). Queer individuals and racial minority individuals already form such small communities on their own by comparison to the greater context and normative culture. To be afraid of further limiting that community to only those who are accepting of both types of minority, especially when the group they were raised into shows negative attitudes toward the group they do not share with their family, must be a fairly isolating, terrifying experience. In fact, when examining studies which tested queer adults' perceptions of homophobia from the greater community, from their heterosexual friends, and from their families, queer of color individuals each scored alarmingly high (Choi et al., 2013).

Each of these factors – experiences of prejudice, internalized homophobia, and expectations of rejection – take their toll on the psychological well-being of queer of color youths. In several studies, for queer of color youths, expectations of rejection by both the straight community due to their queerness and the gay community due to their racial identity were tied to symptoms of depression and anxiety (Choi et al., 2013; Diaz et al., 2004). Though not every study specifically correlated internalized homophobia negatively with factors of psychological well-being directly, the results of several studies have shown that non-statistically analyzed correlations between internalized homophobia and psychological distress exist (Aranda

et al., 2014; Diaz et al., 2004). Lastly, though it is difficult on a psychological level to prove who experiences more discrimination, in studies for which one of the recruiting qualifications was experiences of discrimination within the past six months, there were more queer adults per capita than there have been of White queer subjects in other studies pertaining to queerness (Aranda et al., 2014; Balsam et al., 2013; Kertzner et al., 2009). This may simply be a coincidence or due to some other factor of recruiting in the specific studies in question. However, when combining this coincidence with the fact that queer of color adults are simply more likely to experience prejudice as they have two whole identities for which they may experience such prejudice, this coincidence becomes more compelling. Thus, it can be argued that these individual components of sexual minority stress theory each apply significantly in a more additive way to queer of color adults.

### **Coming Out in Color**

If experiences of prejudice, internalized homophobia, and expectations of rejection should apply as extensively as expected to queer of color youths, then the last factor in minority stress theory, stress associated with concealment, should be significantly high for queer of color individuals as well. In fact, several studies have shown that queer of color individuals, though they match or even at times surpass their White counterparts in terms of commitment to their sexual minority identity, are less likely to come out to their peers or families (Rosario et al., 2004; Szymanski & Sung, 2010; Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999; Moradi et al., 2010). Queer of color individuals even on average come out at the same age as their White counterparts, though studies have shown that there is a significant subset of the queer of color community which may take years past their identity development prime to come out for fear of rejection (Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999; Tajon et al., 2009). This could help explain the discrepancy in the number of

subjects from each racial group for queer-related studies; there are simply fewer out queer of color subjects to recruit, and if the relatively few out queer of color individuals fear rejection as much as anticipated, they may also choose not to participate. However, though it is very clear that queer of color individuals are less likely to come out, it is not clear if this actually directly adds to their stress and experiences of worsened psychological well-being.

Some studies have attempted to directly test the outcomes of coming out as queer person of color. Several studies indicate that queer of color youths who had come out were more committed and achieved in their sexual minority identity than their queer White counterparts, who were less certain of their queerness when they came out (Rosario et al., 2004; Parks et al., 2004). This gives support to the idea that perhaps having two minority identities which require such extensive identity development may lead to the advancement of greater identity development tools, leading to greater identity achievement in both minority identities (Grotevant, 1987). However, though these results indicate identity achievement, they do not necessarily indicate identity affirmation. Identity affirmation, as previously discussed, mediates the relationship between identity achievement and psychological well-being such that, without identity affirmation, there can be no psychological well-being on the basis of identity achievement for both sexual and racial minorities (Ghavimi et al., 2011). For White queer individuals, it has been made clear that coming out is part of the identity affirmation process because, by affirming one's queer identity, they are able to gain a sense of connectedness to other queer individuals and achieve greater identity synthesis (Aranda et al. 2014, Rosario et al., 2004). However, when coming out does not necessarily lead to sentiments of connectedness to the sexual minority community or identity affirmation, this it may lead only to greater psychological distress due to persecution by one's own peers.

When psychologists studied the relationship between coming out as a queer of color individual and psychological well-being, results indicated that coming out only in specific circumstances was correlated with psychological well-being. In one study, symptoms of depression were not positively or negatively correlated to coming out to family members for queer of color youths, a result which counters conclusions made by studies which used White queer subjects (Aranda et al., 2014; Kertzner et al., 2009). This finding has been extended to queer Asian adults such that coming out as queer at all to the greater community had no correlation with improved psychological well-being (Szymanski & Sung, 2010). In one study, however, coming out to friends was shown to have a positive relationship with alleviating symptoms of depression over time for Latina lesbians (Aranda et al., 2014). Though it is unclear why these findings did not generalize to other queer of color racial groups, they suggest that perhaps coming out to family, though they may be a key factor in identity development, is only beneficial if they are likely to affirm one's sexual minority identity (Floyd et al., 1999). When there is no affirmation, potentially due to cultural factors which enhance homophobic ideals, the positive effects associated with coming out are lost. Instead, coming out to others who will affirm one's sexual minority identity may be beneficial, but perhaps only if they prove to be as significant a source of identity affirmation as familial affirmation could have been. Thus developing strong ties to other members of one's racial sexual minority group who will affirm both aspects of identity may prove highly beneficial for queer of color youth.

For queer of color individuals, connectedness to the queer community does not appear to be a benefit gained by coming out. Studies which utilized out queer adults indicated that White queer subjects showed significantly greater senses of connectedness to the queer community than their queer of color counterparts (Choi et al., 2013; Kertzner et al., 2009). Furthermore, this

sense of connectedness was negatively associated with symptoms of depression and anxiety. Coming out is supposed to affirm one's membership in the queer community, and that membership is not meant to be contested by those within the community but rather met with acceptance and support. White queer individuals do not necessarily face this qualification or rejection process from the rest of the queer community. However, queer of color individuals often feel that they are met with racism and prejudice by the greater queer community. These feelings of rejection have been directly correlated with greater symptoms of anxiety and depression and may potentially explain why coming out and attempting to become an integrated part of the queer community does not have as positive effects for queer of color youths (Choi et al., 2013).

There is one unforeseen circumstance which may promote coming out to the greater population for all racial minority groups: modeling. In ethnic identity development, parental modeling of positive acculturation styles lead to more beneficial psychological outcomes in their children (Farver et al., 2002). In more qualitative research surrounding queer identity development, subjects emphasized how important it was to them that they had a positive role model who also identified as some form of queer (Konik & Stewart, 2004). It seems only logical, then, that having individuals who specifically modeled the integration of these two often contradictory identities into a healthy self-concept would be beneficial for queer of color youths as well. Though there has been little if any research in this area, having individuals model this specific type of identity integration would, in theory, address several minority stress theory related stressors such as internalized homophobia, expectations of rejection, and, of course, pressure of concealment. In fact, by simply knowing more individuals who identify as queer, Latinos were less likely to internalize homophobic values (Herek & Gonzalez-Rivera, 2006).

These results should be generalizable to, not only other racial minority individuals, but also to White individuals and other queer of color individuals from different racial groups as well. Simply talking to others who understand the specific struggles of being a queer of color individual in this racist, heteropatriarchal society may help with regard to developing coping skills and greater senses of connectedness in this small group. Essentially, by examining the specific minority identity related stressors, psychologists may see the many potential benefits for queer of color adolescents and emerging adults coming out to fellow queer of color individuals and taking strides toward creating a supportive queer of color community.

### **Sexual Risk Behavior**

When the many stressors involved in queer of color identity are not addressed using well-developed identity development and affirmation skills, it follows that these chronic stressors would manifest themselves as harmful behavior. For queer youth, one such notable harmful behavior is risky sexual behavior. Sexual risk behaviors have been associated with struggling queer youths and adults for years. However, it is not entirely clear if this assumed association is due to cultural stigmatization or a genuine discrepancy in sexual risk behavior between queer youths of different racial backgrounds. It would make sense that a person's struggle with their identity or else their fear of being discovered would lead to more sexually risky behavior; if a person is too afraid to talk about same-sex activities, how will they be able to seek out the resources they need in order to protect themselves during same-sex encounters? In one study, psychological distress caused by internalized homophobia was correlated to sexually risk behavior in Latino queer men (Diaz et al., 2004). However, it is unclear as to whether or not that result may be generalizable across other queer of color groups. In fact, the results of one study indicated that queer of color men were less likely to engage in sexual relationships with other

men than their White queer counterparts, though it is true that one's propinquity for engaging in sexual relationships does not necessarily indicate how often they engage in sexually risky behaviors when they do choose to participate in sexual encounters with other men (Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999).

In one international study, less internalized homonegativity, greater education, and being out were all negatively associated to sexual risk behavior (Ross et al., 2013). Though this study was not conducted in the United States, because the same correlations were found to be significant when using anonymous, internet based surveys across 38 European countries, it is likely that similar results would have been found in the United States. Each of these factors listed above in one study or another have been previously statistically correlated to queer of color individuals (Durell et al., 2007; Battle & Lemelle, 2002, Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999). Thus it may be inferred that, within the queer community, queer of color individuals in particular are impelled into sexual risk behavior.

Other domestic studies have attempted to use internalized homophobia as a predictor for sexual risk behavior (Newcomb & Mustanski, 2011). By performing statistical analysis on fourteen different studies pertaining to internalized homophobia and sexual risk behavior, as well as by executing an original survey study, experimenters were able to statistically correlate internalized homophobia to sexual risk behavior. In a separate study, experimenters went a step further and correlated internalized homophobia to psychological distress and psychological distress to sexual risk behavior, indicating that the psychological distress caused by internalized homophobia led to a greater likelihood of performing sexually risky behaviors (Diaz et al., 2004). However, the results of the meta-analysis of various studies across ten years also indicate that this correlational relationship has become less significant over time (Newcomb &

Mustanski, 2011). This suggests that perhaps society as a whole is becoming less sexually risky and more educated on healthy sexual behaviors. These results might also indicate that resources to protect people from sexually risky behaviors, regardless of their sexual orientation, are becoming more accessible over time as society treats sex as less and less of a taboo subject. However, should this be the case, then those resources are more likely accessible to the White queer population than to their queer of color counterparts, who on average have less access to education and live in more religious households. Ultimately, this lack of accessibility would make it difficult for queer of color youths who would be more prone to experiment with sexual risk behaviors to reap the benefits of society's greater emphasis on sexual education and resources.

Queer of color individuals are at greater risk for suffering from several factors which would considerably impede them in the integration of their race and sexual orientation simultaneously into their self-concept. These factors include less access to education, being brought up in environments which emphasize more homophobic ideals, facing discrimination for both their sexual orientation and their race from other minority communities, and fears of their parents' reactions to their queerness. These factors result in the decreased outness of the queer of color community, which in turn makes it difficult for the next generation of queer of color youths to connect with or observe queer of color adults with healthy identity integrations. If left to face these minority stressors without the ability to achieve identity affirmation, queer of color youths may fall into psychological distress and harmful behaviors such as risky sexual behaviors. Each of these findings greatly stress the importance of the utilization and revamping of the same identity development processes used during sexual minority identity development and ethnic identity development for queer of color youths.

### **Progress for the Future**

The majority of theories pertaining to queer of color identity development are rooted in ethnic identity and racial identity frameworks. In order to create studies with results which better support their hypotheses, cultural psychologists must better utilize theories specifically pertaining to queer of color identity development. Once further research has been conducted, the results may be used to create beneficial social reform and educational programs specifically tailored to the identity affirmation and healthy identity development of queer of color adolescents and emerging adults. First, however, the research conducted in this area must be significantly in order to become more consistent and generalizable across different racial and sexual minority groups.

### **Directions for Future Research**

First and foremost, in order for the research in this field to have a more positive impact on social reform, it must become more consistent in its findings. According to the theories previously listed in this article, results should indicate firstly that both ethnic identity and sexual minority identity should predict greater identity development in other realms of an individual's self-concept (Grotevant, 1987; Ghavimi et al., 2011), secondly that there is in fact a statistically significant greater level of internalized homophobia in people of color than in their White counterparts (Durell et al., 2007), third that this internalized homophobia should cause minority stress to negatively affect queer of color youth significantly more than their White queer or straight person of color counterparts (Meyer, 2003), and finally that if a queer person of color experiences greater identity affirmation, then they may experience greater development in each of the other realms of identity, which would in turn have a greater impact on their psychological well-being (Ghavimi et al., 2011). However, often within this field of study, the same theories

which psychologists hope to provide evidence for are the ones which they counter with their results (Durell et al., 2007). By understanding certain assumptions within the data collection process and working to counter them, results may prove more supportive of their theoretical frameworks.

Several confounds with regard to sample selection may have affected the results regarding queer of color identity development. With the emerging adult samples described in this article in particular, subjects were usually recruited through colleges or other academic institutions. Oftentimes they were even selected through organizations specifically for queer youth (Ghavimi et al., 2011; Syed & Azmitia, 2010; Maramba & Velasquez, 2012). This means that subjects were usually of a higher educational background and were even sometimes out to some of not all of their peers and families. This means that at least two of the factors having been shown to be significantly correlated with internalized homophobia - contact with other queer individuals and less access to education - would apply significantly less to the sample selected (Battle & Lemelle, 2002; Herek & Gonzalez-Rivera, 2006; Balsam et al., 2013; Ross et al., 2013). Thus if two of the key reasons why people of color would have higher levels of internalized homophobia do not apply in this sample, the difference between people of color and their White counterparts would be we artificially decreased particularly with regard to results for internalized homophobia, sexual minority stress, and identity affirmation.

Furthermore, if college life is truly an environment which bolsters identity exploration, then a sample made entirely of college students should have particularly refined skills in identity development. This should make it extraordinarily difficult to see a statistical difference between the skills honed through ethnic minority identity development and sexual minority identity development or the identity development that simply is heightened during the college

experience. Thus perhaps by recruiting using internet based programs which do not specifically target people who are out may yield less biased results. Having subjects fill out surveys in person requires that they come out to the researchers, thus making it difficult to attain results from truly closeted queer youth. This is yet another confound as much of the research surrounding sexual minority identity is framed on the basis of the coming out is the greatest form of identity affirmation (Cass, 1979). Furthermore, by using anonymous internet surveys and extending recruitment beyond college campuses, perhaps results may show greater variety between groups of various levels of education and socioeconomic background, as there are fewer people who have access to institutions of higher education than people who have access to the internet.

If college students were recruited through an LGBT group or forum, this means that most likely those subjects had already come out and also had a peer group which they could rely upon to discuss their queerness. If the previously noted correlation between having queer peers and achieving greater sexual minority identity development generalizes across all queer emerging adults (Diaz et al., 2004), then this sample should have reached greater sexual minority identity development than their counterparts who did not attend the same queer groups. Furthermore, participating in these groups may increase sentiments of connectedness to the queer community as a whole, which studies have previously indicated should apply less to queer of color individuals possibly due to a lack of representation in the queer community, and which also has a positive impact on psychological well-being and internalized homophobia (Choi et al., 2013). If this is the case, then the results of these studies should be nearly insignificant and impossible to generalize across all queer youths. In fact, being a part of such a group should directly counter queer youths' expectations of rejection and stress related to remaining closeted. Thus, if we

analyze these samples with comparison to the theories the research is based upon, each aspect of minority identity which would yield the strongest and most significant results in support of these theories would be eliminated due to these sampling errors and the utilization of anonymous online surveys.

As another means by which to further increase the validity of queer of color research, studies should be formatted in such a way that they do not ask individuals about their own identity or sexual behaviors prior to their participation in the experiment. Doing so primes individuals with regard to their demographics and may affect the results of the study. For example, a person may score differently in internalized homophobia when they are forced to recall the fact that they are a person of color or that they come from a large, religious family than when they are asked about their opinion of queerness before they fill out a sheet describing their demographics. In fact, one empirical study indicated that when subjects were primed by receiving questions in Spanish, they scored higher in internalized homophobia and lower in salience of queer identity (Herek & Gonzalez-Rivera, 2006). In order to combat this, studies should ask subjects to describe their demographics, particularly those which are associated with greater internalized homophobia, after filling out measures for internalized homophobia. It would, however, be interesting to test what happens when a person of color is primed by their racial identity before they describe their attitudes surrounding queer identity. This would, of course, have to be a separate empirical study and would have slightly a different purpose than the survey analyses previously conducted. However, for all the research which has been conducted on the presumption that there is a greater level of internalized homophobia in POC communities than in White communities, there are very few if any studies which actually provide evidence to

support this theory. Thus, before any more research is done in this area, the assumption that this that queer of color research is based on should be given evidence to support it.

### **Equal Representation**

Regardless of the various confounds in the current literature, one thing that can be agreed upon is that queer of color individuals are less likely to come out (Durell & Savin-Williams, 1999). Be it due to worse treatment by family members or peers, fear of experiences of discrimination, or other cultural factors which make discussing sexuality less commonplace, queer of color adults are simply less visible in the queer community than their White queer counterparts. This occurs within the media, on college campuses, and in the greater community as a whole. Several benefits to knowing other queer individuals have been previously discussed; for the greater community, it reduces internalized homophobia (Diaz et al., 2004). For queer of color youth, it may help teach them coping mechanisms to face discrimination and systematic oppression as well as improve their sense of connectedness to their intersecting identities and the queer community at large (Konik & Stewart, 2004). However, due to racism and prejudice, the current attitude of those in power within the queer community has been to silence and make these individuals who dare come out as queer and of a racial minority group appear invisible.

There is no excuse for racism in the queer community or in any other community for that matter. However, there are ways to circumvent challenging the queer community for its racism by using the media. In recent years, every time a person in a movie or commercial is queer, they are almost always White and male. If queer of color individuals cannot be prompted on their own to come out and face the harsh cultural exclusion that is likely to follow suit, perhaps using famous examples of queer of color individuals, such as Wanda Sykes, a popular Black lesbian actress and comedian, or BD Wong, a famous gay Asian actor from the series *Law and Order:*

*Special Victims Unit*, would inspire a sense of connectedness and belonging for queer of color youths nationwide. No longer should the media continue to propagate the idea that one can be either queer or a person of color but never both. No longer should the media perpetuate this single story of race or of sexuality by only ever having the one token gay White or Black straight character in television series or movies. Furthermore, queer campaigns, such as “It Gets Better” should utilize more narratives from a wider variety of queer individuals so that a greater variety of different racial groups and different types of queer may be represented. After all, it should be a lot easier for things to “get better” as a White cis (when one’s gender matches their biological sex) gay man than as an insert-any-other-minority-here. This change would further complicate what it means to be queer and provide greater exposure both for queer communities, racial minority communities, and the greater community as a whole. This complication would simply make internalized homophobia and racism harder to sustain, making queer of color identity development an easier process as a whole. However, society informs the development of its members as individuals create the rules of their society. Thus the pressure for change cannot be solely concentrated in social reform but rather should also work toward the greater psychological well-being of queer of color youths.

### **Therapies and Interventions**

In order to help queer of color youths better develop into more integrated adult selves, there must be psychological interventions or therapies which aid their minority identity development. Affirmation therapy, a therapy growing in popularity among clinical psychologists, uses the affirmation of one’s sexual minority identity to help queer youths and adults cope with their minority status. Though this therapy has proven effective in the past, mechanisms which affirmation therapy relies on do not necessarily always apply for queer of

color individuals (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004). Affirmation therapy often includes the use of patient-parent or patient-family interactions in order to help affirm the queer individual in their sexual minority identity. However, if the person's parents or family are the greatest source of homophobic attitudes or behaviors in the patient's life, little can be gained from depending on their input. Furthermore, affirmation therapy takes money, time, and the added requirement that a person come out to their doctor, their doctor's receptionist, and every other patient in the doctor's waiting room. These circumstances are simply not as likely for queer of color individuals, who come out less often and by comparison to their White queer counterparts are not financially able to access a therapist (Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999). Thus system, though effective, tends to help those who already have the resources to help themselves and whose circumstances are simply not as dire. As previously noted, the use of the internet in this realm of study has not reached its greatest potential. Using the internet as a mechanism to reach queer of color youths for not only the purpose of recruiting a greater diversity in subjects but also in order to give them access to therapies which would be beneficial for their identity affirmation could help a significantly larger group of individuals.

In recent years, psychologists have attempted to create such an internet affirmation therapy for queer individuals. To test this therapy, psychologists recruited 290 college students from a variety of student organizations so as to ensure the sample varied in religious commitment and race (Lin & Israel, 2012). Participants were subjected to one of three interventions: challenging stereotypes, identifying the source of homonegativity, and group identity affirmation. In the challenging stereotypes intervention, participants were presented with a statement about bisexual or gay men or about homosexuality and asked to indicate whether they believed it was true or false. After the participant selected an answer, instant

feedback was provided about whether their answer was correct or incorrect with easy-to-read evidence supporting the answer. In the identifying sources of homonegativity intervention, participants began by reading a paragraph explaining how socialization might contribute to heteronativity. Next, the participant was provided with a list of negative messages often connected to bisexual and/or gay men and asked to check the ones that he personally had heard. The participant was asked to identify the main sources of the messages. Finally, participants were asked which of the messages previously listed they had learned to reject, was prompted to pondered why he had come to reject those messages, and read a brief paragraph reinforcing the idea that heterosexist beliefs are developed and maintained through socialization.

Lastly, in the group identity affirmation therapy, participants were asked to listen to a short personal narrative about a man's experience of heterosexism during his early life and his process of coming to terms with his sexual minority identity. Afterwards, the participant read about a young man who was currently struggling with his awareness of same-sex attraction. The participant was asked to write a succinct note comforting the young man by providing some positive aspects of being attracted to men from their own perspective. Next, the subject was presented with a list of positive statements about being a gay or bisexual man. Finally, the intervention ended with the subject watching a slideshow of LGBT-affirming images. Results of the study indicated that each of the interventions improved subjects' sexual minority identity affirmation and reduced their internalized homonegativity (Liu & Israel., 2012).

The intervention proposed in this study is highly accessible, inexpensive, and effective. If this intervention could be made accessible to public high schools and different google search boards nationwide, the potential for internalized homophobia reduction in queer of color youths would be astronomical. The intervention could be modified to include aspects not just of

addressing sources of homophobia but sources of racism as well so as to address the dual aspects of queer of color identity. For example, during the true and false portion, one prompt could be “90% of the queer community identifies as White”. The prompt would be followed by the correct answer as well as an accurate statistic as well as a note about how there is a growing awareness surrounding racial minorities in the queer community. Another alteration which may prove beneficial for queer of color youth is the alteration of narrative used in the group affirmation exercise. Instead of using a White queer character in the group identity affirmation stage, if experimenters used a character struggling with racism in the queer community, this may show similar effects for queer of color identity affirmation. The proposed therapy may also be modified based on age group such that each age distribution is able to meet the cognitive and emotional criteria to think through the questions and material provided, as the interventions seem to rely heavily upon introspective thought in order to succeed. If the interventions were modified to address queer of color crises and concerns, the benefits are astronomical. All it would take is for accessibility and circulation to become more substantial and for experimenters to become more aware of the specific implications of queer of color identity.

Thus, if empirical studies are improved in order to increase the variety of their samples, results may better describe what specific mechanisms are necessary for identity affirmation for queer of color youths. In both social and clinical realms, psychological research has the ability to improve the quality of the lives of queer of color youth. Socially, greater representation of queer of color role models in the media may help promote queer of color connectedness and coming out. Clinically, the revamping of certain therapies typically designed for White queer patients in order to address racism as well as homophobia may prove beneficial for queer of color youths. Future efforts should utilize resources which are more accessible for queer of color

youth, such as the internet. If each of these recommendations is considered, there are excellent chances for the improved quality of life of queer of color individuals.

### **Conclusion**

This article was written with the intention to increase awareness of the struggles faced by the queer of color community. Queer of color youth, like all adolescents and emerging adults, must integrate their multifaceted identities into one cohesive self-concept. The creation of a cohesive self-concept is informed by several factors including identity development in all social identities, environment and social climate, one's relationship with their parents and peers, social influences which model expected behaviors and social archetypes, and the age of developmental milestones (Erikson, 1968; Grotevant, 1987; Cass, 1979; Phinney, 1993). However, due to racism and homophobia disempower queer of color youths, identity integration becomes unnecessarily difficult for queer of color youths.

As queer of color identity is defined by racial background and sexual orientation, in order to better understand queer of color identity development, ethnic minority identity and sexual minority identity development were each discussed in depth. In general, both processes occurred such that membership in a collective minority group prompted an individual to explore their minority identity during their adolescence and emerging adulthood until the individual committed to the expression of their minority identity and established feelings of connectedness and affirmation with their minority identity (Ghavimi et al., 2011). Unlike racial identity, sexual identity is not initially visible. Therefore, an aspect of identity affirmation and commitment for queer identity specifically is coming out as queer (Cass, 1979). However, as queer of color youths are less likely to be out, this makes it difficult for certain mechanisms which proved beneficial for minority identity development, such as modeling of identity integration style to

one's children or peers, the psychological well-being associated with coming out, and the benefits of greater identity achievement in sexual minority identity, to take effect (Durell et al., 2007; Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999). The additive stress generated by greater levels of internalized homophobia in POC communities manifests itself in psychological distress and other harmful behaviors which, unless addressed, may prove detrimental to queer of color adolescents and emerging adults (Ross et al., 2013).

There is hope that more research in this field may help queer of color individuals better integrate their racial and sexual identities into their self-concept. By addressing certain sampling errors and confounds within the way survey data is collected, results may show greater support for the theories proposed by psychologists. These results may then be used for the improvement of the impact media and on queer of color youths as well as the refinement of existing therapies. Once these measures are taken, there is a great chance that the development of queer of color identity may be greater understood and easier to achieve.

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